

Article

Divination Disclosure, Cosmological Unfolding and Human Transcendence: The Religious Dimension of “Manifestation” (*Xian* 顯) in the *Yijing*

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Abstract

This study tries to fill the gap on the lack of a systematic analysis of the concept “manifestation” (*xian* 顯) in the *Yijing*. The idea of revealing the invisible *dao* permeates the *Yijing* text, but contemporary scholarship tends to subordinate *xian* to other categories such as image (*xiang* 象), word (*ci* 辭), or the complementary dynamics of *yin-yang* 陰陽 and substance-function (*ti-yong* 體用). This brings up a fundamental question: does *xian* have a consistent logic, as is often asserted, that links the practical, cosmic and human dimensions of the *Yijing*? And the study says it does. It understands three intertwined perspectives: the *xian* of divination, the *xian* of Heaven and Earth, and the *xian* of transcendence. Therefore, this study describes the necessary evolution from the revelation of divination to cosmological ground to human achievement. The *xian* of divinatory affairs explains how subtle and imperceptible cosmic principles are translated and manifested into readable hexagram judgments through the *Yijing*. This mechanism has its deeper ground in the *xian* of Heaven and Earth, which shows that the cosmos itself functions in terms of the mutual implication of *xian* and hidden. But the cosmological manifestation is still external; it is not human realization itself. The *xian* of transcendence ends the argument by showing that the ultimate meaning of *xian* is realized only when human beings internalize it and embody it through virtuous conduct. These three perspectives together form a coherent framework for understanding the *Yijing*'s connection of the transcendent *dao* and the empirical human world. They also show us the transcendence and immanence of the Heavenly *dao* in the human world, that sharing the *xian* and hidden of Heaven and Earth, and participating in their achievements and realization are possible through self-cultivation.

Keywords: *Yijing*; manifestation (*xian*); cosmology; transcendence; divination; virtue

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1. Introduction

The present study is intended to tackle the central problem of the absence of a systematic account of “manifestation” (*xian* 顯) in the *Yijing*¹. The thought of making the hidden *dao* visible is pervasive in the *Yijing*'s text, but *xian* has never been studied as an independent concept with its own internal structure. In current scholarship, *xian* is generally viewed as a derivative concept, one that is subordinate to other concepts such as image (*xiang* 象), word (*ci* 辭), or the pair of *yin-yang* 陰陽 and substance-function (*ti-yong* 體用) dynamics. One fundamental question remains unanswered: Is there a coherent logic to *xian* which connects the practical, cosmic and human dimensions of the *Yijing*? If so, what is that logic and how does it work?

This study addresses the problem by distinguishing three interrelated perspectives of *xian* and their necessary progression. The first perspective, that of the *xian* of divinatory affairs, relates to the operational mechanism: how the *Yijing* transforms the imperceptible cosmic principles and divinatory guides into readable hexagram judgments and verbal statements. But this mechanism needs something more profound. This brings us to the second perspective, the *xian* of Heaven and Earth: the cosmological structure that makes *xian* possible, demonstrating how the cosmos itself functions through the mutual implication of the *xian* and the hidden. Yet the externalism of cosmological manifestation does not of itself secure human response. The third level, the *xian* of transcendence, completes the argument by showing that *xian* reaches its ultimate meaning only when it is internalized and embodied in human beings through virtuous conduct. These three perspectives form a coherent progression from method to ground to existential fulfillment. These three perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how the *Yijing* bridges the *dao* and the empirical human world, and discusses human transcendence. The following section begins with the introduction.

In the concluding remarks to the Sima Xiangru Liezhuan 司馬相如列傳 (Biography of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如) in the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*), Sima Qian 司馬遷 left behind an incisive comment on the *Yijing*: “The *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals) pushes from the manifest to the hidden, while the *Yijing* takes the hidden as its basis and proceeds to the manifest.” (*chun qiu tui jian zhi yin, yi ben yin yi zhi xian* 春秋推見至隱, 易本隱以之顯) (Sima 2014). This short sentence accurately reveals the fundamental difference in method between the two classics. The *Chunqiu* searches for hidden meaning from visible historical facts. The *Yijing* does the opposite. It starts from the hidden and imperceptible *dao* 道 of Heaven and Earth. Through hexagram images and verbal judgments, it transforms the *dao* of Heaven and Earth into visible and readable judgments of good and bad fortune. Therefore, one of the *Yijing*’s fundamental purpose lies in “moving from the hidden to the manifest”: it translates the unfathomable changes in Heaven’s *dao* and the subtle intentions of spirits into a symbolic system and value judgments that can be grasped by human reason.

“Manifestation” (*xian* 顯) occupies a crucial position in the *Yijing*. This can be revealed from two perspectives. From the textual perspective, although *xian* does not appear directly as an independent concept in the *Zhouyi* proper (*Zhouyi gujing* 周易古經), its idea can be found across the text of the *Yijing*. Expressions such as “Heaven hangs down images, the good fortune and misfortune become visible” (*tian chui xiang, jian ji xiong* 天垂象, 見吉凶) with its term “become visible” (*jian* 見), “the sages established images to exhaust meaning” (*sheng ren li xiang yi jin yi* 聖人立象以盡意) with its term “image” (*xiang* 象), “that which moves all under Heaven is preserved in the words and phrases” (*gu tian xia zhi dong zhe cun hu ci* 鼓天下之動者存乎辭) with its term “words and phrases” (*ci* 辭), and even the eight trigrams’ making of images in the *Shuogua* 說卦 which presents all things under Heaven as a visible symbolic system. In other words, the *Yijing* as a classical text, from divinatory operations to hexagram and line judgments, from symbolic system to linguistic expression, reveals the entire structure for one of its fundamental purposes: to turn what is invisible, unrepresentable, and unfathomable into something visible, presentable, and fathomable.

From the perspective of intellectual history, discussions of “manifestation” (*xian* 顯) and “concealment” (*yin* 隱), “hidden and bright” (*you ming* 幽明), and “substance and function” (*ti yong* 體用) run throughout the history of Chinese philosophy. Cheng Yi 程頤 proposed that “substance and function share a single source, and manifestation and concealment are without separation” (*ti yong yi yuan, xian wei wu jian* 體用一源, 顯微無間) (X. Wang 2011). Zhu Xi 朱熹 inherited Cheng’s idea of “substance and function” (*ti yong* 體用) and

interpreted the mutual presence of manifestation and concealment through the principle that “the principle is one but it can be particularized into many to manifest” (*li yi fen shu* 理一分殊) (J. Li 1986). Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, from the perspective of “hidden and bright” (*you ming* 幽明) and “concealed and manifest” (*yin xian* 隱顯), elaborated the ceaseless generation of the *Yijing*’s *dao* thus explained the unity of Heaven and humanity without separation (F. Wang 2021). All these discussions in later philosophy can find their classical prototype in the concept of *xian* in the *Yijing*.

However, considering existing research, there is a clear gap that scholars have not yet systematically examined *xian* as an independent concept². In Western scholarship, research on the *Yijing* has mainly followed two paths. The first one refers to the philological and archaeological approach, which focuses on interpreting or reconstructing the formation, compilation, and early transmission history of the *Yijing* text. In this vein, Edward L. Shaughnessy’s meticulous studies, including his examination of recently discovered manuscripts, have illuminated the textual formation and early reception of the *Yijing*, yet his approach does not extend to a systematic philosophical analysis of its key operational concepts (Shaughnessy 1997, 2014). The second refers to the philosophical and religious historical approach, which concentrates on interpreting the *Yijing*’s cosmology, symbolic system, and divinatory practice. Andrew Schöter, for instance, has probed the metaphysical and physical implications of the *Yijing*’s correlative system, demonstrating how its cosmological framework is integrated with observable natural processes (Schöter 2011). Tze-ki Hon has further examined the ontological underpinnings of change, focusing on Wang Bi’s interpretation of the *Yijing* and revealing how “principle” (*li*) serves as the subtle ground for phenomenal transformations (Hon 2020). Although these two paths, to varying degrees, have touched on questions involving *xian* such as how hexagrams “present” meaning and how the *dao* of Heaven is “manifested,” neither has systematically examined “manifestation” (*xian* 顯) as an independent philosophical concept. The burgeoning field of *Global Yijing* studies, as surveyed by John Tsz-pang Lai, attests to the text’s worldwide reception and interpretive diversity, but also reveals that a focused conceptual study of *xian* remains notably absent in the Western scholarship (Lai 2025). For instance, Richard Wilhelm points out that the function of hexagrams in the *Yijing* is “to make the invisible visible,” but he does not further examine *xian* as a separate concept (Wilhelm 1967). Edward L. Shaughnessy also examines the historical process of “meaning” being presented (manifested), but likewise does not analyze the concept of *xian* itself (Shaughnessy 1997). Richard J. Smith discusses the function of “images” (*xiang* 象) as to express and manifest meanings within the *Yizhuan*’s 易傳 cosmological framework. However, he does not develop the detailed structure of *xian* (Smith 2012). A. C. Graham builds up a model of “correlative thinking” based on *yin-yang* 陰陽, and finds out the correspondence between “manifestation” (*xian* 顯) and “concealment” (*yin* 隱, Graham translates it as *cang* 藏) in the *Yizhuan* (Graham 1986). Yet his discussion remains subordinate to the *yin-yang* framework and is not a study specifically focused on the concept of *xian*.

Moreover, the relevance of *xian* extends beyond cosmology and divination into broader cultural domains. As Jing Hongmei has argued, the *Yijing*’s philosophical categories, such as *you* (being) and *wu* (non-being), have profoundly shaped the aesthetic construction of *yijing* (artistic conception) in Chinese classical aesthetics (Jing 2023). This observation underscores the need for a systematic investigation of *xian* as a philosophical concept in its own right, one that can illuminate not only the *Yijing*’s internal logic but also its resonance with wider patterns of Chinese thought.

The situation in Chinese scholarship is similar. Although Chinese scholars have used or discussed the concept of *xian* more often, they either focus on the interpretation of the principles such as “substance and function” (*ti yong* 體用) and “hidden and bright” (*you*

ming 幽明), or the numbers, hexagrams, and statements. Yet a systematic discussion that takes *xian* as the main thread remains absent. For example, Chen Guying 陳鼓應, drawing on contemporary Western discussions of “thematization”, interprets *xian* as the manifestation of the intellectual development between the *Zhouyi* proper, the *Laozi* 老子, and the *Yizhuan* (Chen 1996, 2001, 2010). However, Chen focuses on the “process of the thematization of the philosophical concepts” rather than an analysis of the concept of *xian* itself. Yang Qingzhong 楊慶中 sorts through the human moral teachings in the *Yijing*, touching on the issue of “hidden and bright”, *xian* and “concealment” (Yang 2005). But Yang does not examine the meaning of *xian* in detail. Xu Rui 徐瑞 reexamines the problem of “signifying what is not signified” in the *Yijing* symbols, and aims to return to “what the sages originally intended in creating the *Yi* 易” (Xu 2013). Xu’s study touches on how the hexagram symbols manifest meaning and how they present the principles of affairs. But his central concern is the referential relationship between symbol and meaning, not a detailed analysis of *xian* itself. Lin Zhongjun 林忠軍, in his discussion of images in the *Yijing*, has argued that the essential characteristic of hexagram symbolic thinking is its dynamic nature. Through looking up and observing and looking down and examining, the sages created hexagram symbols, then compared them with other things, and thereby manifested and exhausted the meaning (*jin yi* 盡意). This line of research has laid an important foundation for understanding how hexagram and line symbols generate meaning and how that meaning is manifested. Yet it does not take *xian* as an independent concept and subject it to in-depth analysis (Lin 2026).

The current state of research has touched on issues related to *xian* from various perspectives, yet there has not been sufficient systematic discussion focused on the in-depth structure of the concept of *xian* in the *Yijing*. In light of the above gap, this study takes *xian* itself as the research focus. It proceeds directly from the textual context of the *Yijing* proper and its commentaries, distinguishing three perspectives of *xian*: the *xian* of divinatory affairs, the *xian* of Heaven and Earth, and the *xian* of transcendence. The aim is to elevate *xian* from a descriptive concept used implicitly to an in-depth concept that involves two deeper dimensions: the cosmological basis that makes *xian* possible (the manifestation of Heaven and Earth) and the ultimate grounding of *xian* in human virtuous practice (the manifestation in virtuous conduct). It is also to respond to a fundamental question in Chinese religions: how can a transcendent principle appear in the empirical world? How can the hidden Heavenly *dao* be transformed into a visible order of human affairs?

2. The *Xian* of Divinatory Affairs: From Hidden to the Manifest

This section examines the *xian* of divinatory affairs: how the *Yijing* translates the hidden *dao* into readable hexagram judgments. It analyzes the transformation from Heaven’s self-display to the sage’s codification, concluding with the unresolved questions that lead to Section 3.

The ancient text *Yijing* was originally a book used for divination. Its central function was “to serve the people’s use.” That is, to resolve doubts by means of divination through milfoil and tortoise, when people faced choices or the path ahead was unclear. The *Xici* 系辭 records this clearly:

“The sages established the images to exhaust their meanings; set up the hexagrams to exhaust the state of true and false; appended the statements to exhaust their words; made changes and fully master and attain the change to exhaust the benefit; stirred and animated them to exhaust the profoundness, inscrutableness and wondrousness.” (*sheng ren li xiang yi jin yi, she gua yi jin qing wei, xi ci yi jin qi yan, bian er tong zhi yi jin li, gu zhi wu zhi yi jin shen* 聖人立象以盡意, 設卦以盡情偽, 繫辭以盡其言, 變而通之以盡利, 鼓之舞之以盡神).

and

“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)... Unfathomable and inscrutable *yinyang* is called *shen*.” (*yi yin yi yang zhi wei dao, ji zhi zhe shan ye, cheng zhi zhe xing ye. yin yang bu ce zhi wei shen* 一陰一陽之謂道，繼之者善也，成之者性也.....陰陽不測之謂神).

The *Yijing* presents and manifests the meaning in between Heaven and Earth, the state of the myriad things, and the profound, inscrutable and wondrous changes that are difficult to state directly. This reveals the original and basic form of the concept of *xian* in the *Yijing*: to transform the hidden and unfathomable *dao* into visible hexagram images and readable statements, thus cultivate oneself into goodness and nature. It is in this sense that Sima Qian summarized as “the *Yijing* takes the hidden as its basis and proceeds to the manifest” (*yi ben yin yi zhi xian* 易本隱以之顯) (Sima 2014). The “hidden” here refers to the deep and obscure way of *yin* and *yang* interaction, the yet to be symbolized and not directly perceptible principle of cosmic operation. The “manifest” refers to the clear display of this deep principle through hexagram and line images and statements. Without the procedure of *xian*, the *Yijing* would remain in the mist of mysticism and could not become a public knowledge that can be studied and transmitted.

The concept *xian* as to manifest divinatory affairs is most obviously presented by “become visible” (*jian* 見) in the *Yizhuan*: “Heaven hangs down its images, and good and bad fortune become visible (*jian*). The sages image (*xiang* 象) them” (*tian chui xiang, jian ji xiong, sheng ren xiang zhi* 天垂象，見吉凶，聖人象之). The movement of Heaven presents various celestial images. Through these images one can see the trend of good and bad fortune. The sages observe Heaven’s images and then image them with hexagram and line images. This reflects the sages further manifest the visible images of celestial movement into the arrangement of hexagram lines and the judgments of line statements. Bao Ba 保巴 explained this passage clearly:

“The sun, moon, and stars: when they keep to their courses (normal orbits), good fortune follows; when they deviate from their courses, misfortune follows. These are the images (*xiang* 象) of Heaven. The *yin* and *yang* lines: when they are in their proper positions (*dang wei* 當位), good fortune follows; when they are not in their proper positions, misfortune follows. These are the images of the *Yi*. Therefore, the sages took these as their images.” (*ri yue xing chen, xun du ze ji, shi du ze xiong, tian zhi xiang ye. yin yang zhi yao, dang wei ze ji, bu dang wei ze xiong, yi zhi xiang ye. shi gu sheng ren xiang zhi* 日月星辰，循度則吉，失度則凶，天之象也。陰陽之爻，當位則吉，不當位則凶，易之象也。是故聖人象之). (Bao 2009)

This reflects the Heavenly *dao*, the proper positions, the normal orbits of the sun, moon, and stars that are invisible directly can become visible (*jian* 見) and manifested (*xian* 顯) by images. Moreover, Yu Fan 虞翻, in his commentary on the *Xici*, made a further elaboration in detail:

“Making the *dao* manifest and making virtuous conduct profound, inscrutable and wondrous: the second and fifth lines of Qian 乾 go to Kun 坤, forming the sun of Li 離 and the moon of Kan 坎. The sun and moon are in the heavens, moving and illuminating things. Therefore, it is said, ‘Making the *dao* manifest and making virtuous conduct profound, inscrutable and wondrous’” (*xian dao shen de xing, qian er wu zhi kun, cheng li ri kan yue. ri yue zai tian, yun xing zhao wu, gu xian dao shen de xing* 顯道神德行，乾二五之坤，成離日坎月。日月在天，運行照物，故顯道神德行). (D. Li 2011)

What Yu Fan calls “the second and fifth lines of Qian go to Kun” refers to the interaction between the second and fifth lines of the Qian 乾 hexagram and the Kun 坤 hexagram. Through line changes, this interaction produces the sun symbolized by Li 離 and the moon symbolized by Kan 坎. The sun and moon move and shine upon each other in the cosmos, illuminating all things in the world. The principle of change in *yin* and *yang* thereby becomes clear and obvious. Yu Fan’s commentary grasps the crucial point: the reason why *yin* and *yang* can “make the invisible *dao* manifest as visible” is precisely because their mode of operation has a structure that can be captured by hexagram images. The movement of the second and fifth lines of Qian to Kun appears to be an exchange of line positions, but it is the interweaving operation of *yin* and *yang* in nature. This interweaving “manifests” (*xian* 顯) the originally subtle and unfathomable principle of change, just as the sun and moon illuminate each other in the Heaven and light up things in the dark.

Song Zhong 宋衷 provided a more detailed elaboration. On the phrase “Heaven hangs down its images, and good and bad fortune become visible. The sages image them” (*tian chui xiang, jian ji xiong, sheng ren xiang zhi* 天垂象，見吉凶，聖人象之), he commented:

“Heaven hangs down the images of *yin* and *yang* to show good and bad fortune. This is to say, like the eclipses of the sun and moon and irregular movements of the five planets. The sages image them. They also set forth the gain and loss of the nine (*yang*) and six (*yin*) line positions to show people, thus there are judgments of good and bad fortune in divination” (天垂陰陽之象，以見吉凶。謂日月薄蝕，五星亂行，聖人象之。亦著九六爻位得失示人，所以有吉凶之占也). (D. Li 2011)

Song Zhong’s passage contains two important interpretations. First, he reveals Heaven’s own “hanging down of images”, including eclipses of the sun and moon and movements of the planets, provides images. Behind these images, it lies messages of good and bad fortune, and that waits for people to interpret and grasp. This refers to the initial form of the *xian* of the Heavenly *dao*. Second, the sage deepens this way of *xian*. By making judgments on whether line positions are proper or not and whether line statements are good or bad, “manifest the image to people”, allowing people to read directly from the hexagram and line images the conclusions of good and bad fortune. From Heaven’s “hanging down of images” to the sage’s “imaging them,” there occurs an intensification and transformation of *xian*. Heaven only “hangs down” its images there, requiring people to interpret and understand them themselves. The sage clearly writes out the hexagram and line statements, making gain and loss clear at a glance, without requiring people to guess and speculate. This understanding reveals the fundamental mechanism of the *Yijing* as “taking the hidden as basis and proceeding to the manifest.” It is not simply taking something hidden and making it visible. Rather, it transforms the subtle Heavenly *dao*, which originally required a very high level of understanding to grasp, into public knowledge that everyone can consult and learn through the judgments of hexagram and line statements.

Since “Heaven hangs down its images” and “the sages image them” constitute this basic mechanism of transforming the hidden into the manifest, “the *Yijing* takes the hidden as its foundation and moves toward the manifest” naturally attracted repeated discussion and elaboration by later scholars. Ban Gu 班固, in his *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han), offers a discussion:

“The writings of the Six Arts are as follows. The *Yuejing* 樂經 (Book of Music) harmonizes the spirit and is the outward expression of benevolence (*ren* 仁). The *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs, Book of Poetries) rectifies speech and is the functioning of righteousness (*yi* 義). The *Yili* 儀禮 (The Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial) illuminate the substance (*ti* 體); what is illuminated is clearly visible, therefore no explanation is needed. The *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents)

expands one's hearing and is the means of wisdom (*zhi* 智). The *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals) decides affairs and is the sign of faithfulness (*xin* 信). These five are the ways of the five constant virtues (*wuchang* 五常, namely benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness). They depend on one another and together form a complete whole. Yet the *Yijing* is their source. Hence it is said, 'If the *Yi* was not manifest to visible, then Qian and Kun would nearly cease to operate' This means that the *Yijing* begins and ends with Heaven and Earth." (*liu yi zhi wen: yue yi he shen, ren zhi biao ye, shi yi zheng yan, yi zhi yong ye, li yi ming ti, ming zhe zhu jian, gu wu xun ye, shu yi guang ting, zhi zhi shu ye, chun qiu yi duan shi, xin zhi fu ye. wu zhe, gai wu chang zhi dao, xiang xu er bei, er yi wei zhi yuan. gu yue yi bu ke jian, ze qian kun huo ji hu xi yi, yan yu tian di wei zhong shi ye* 六藝之文: 樂以和神, 仁之表也; 詩以正言, 義之用也; 禮以明體, 明者著見, 故無訓也; 書以廣聽, 知之術也; 春秋以斷事, 信之符也。五者, 蓋五常之道, 相須而備, 而易為之原。故曰'易不可見, 則乾坤或幾乎息矣', 言與天地為終始也). (Ban 2011)

According to Ban Gu, the Six Arts are defined by their purposes and functions. Prior to them all, the *Yijing* holds the paramount position as the origin of the Six Arts (Six Classics). This paragraph means that the *Yijing* provides an intellectual source for the Six Classics. It serves as the source because it completely changed from the hidden to the manifest within its method of doing so.

Sima Qian also applied this methodology to his own historical writing. In his *Taishigong Zixu* 太史公自序 (Autobiographical Postface) in the *Shiji*, he said that his purpose in writing the *Shiji* was "to continue the enlightened age, to put the *Yizhuan* in proper order, and to carry on the *Chunqiu*" (*chao ming shi, zheng yi chuan, ji chun qiu* 紹明世, 正易傳, 繼春秋) (Sima 2014). "To put the *Yizhuan* in proper order" reveals that Sima Qian consciously took the way from the hidden to the manifest established by the *Yijing* as his basic principle for organizing history.

Kong Yingda 孔穎達 further extended the principle of "taking the hidden as basis and proceeding to the manifest" to the level of political governance and education, as he stated: "The *Xici* says: 'Heaven hangs down images, good fortune and misfortune become visible, and the sages took images of them.' All this means that the ruler of men models himself on Heaven to establish offices, and follows Heaven to bring about good governance" (*yi xi ci yun: tian chui xiang, jian ji xiong, sheng ren xiang zhi. jie yan ren jun fa tian yi she guan, shun tian yi zhi zhi ye* 易繫辭云: "天垂象, 見吉凶, 聖人象之。"皆言人君法天以設官, 順天以致治也) (Kong 2007). The ruler does not govern the world arbitrarily. He must imitate the way Heaven manifests itself to establish official positions and issue decrees, so that communication between above and below flows as smoothly as Heaven's manifestation.

Zhang Zai 張載 explained "taking the hidden as its basis and proceeds to the manifest" from the perspective of his theory of *qi* 氣 (vital energy):

"If one knows that emptiness and void are none other than *qi* (vital force), then being and nonbeing, concealment and *xian* (manifestation), *shen hua* 神化 (profound, inscrutable and wondrous transformation) and *xing ming* 性命 (nature and destiny) are all unified as one without any duality. Consider the aggregation and dispersal, the emergence and entry, the formed and the formless: if one can trace these back to their source, then one is deeply versed in the *Yijing*." (*zhi xu kong ji qi, ze you wu, yin xian, shen hua, xing ming tong yi wu er, gu ju san, chu ru, xing bu xing, neng tui ben suo cong lai, ze shen yu yi zhe ye* 知虛空即氣, 則有無、隱顯、神化、性命通一無二, 顧聚散、出入、形不形, 能推本所從來, 則深于易者也). (Zhang 2000)

In Zhang Zai's view, the fundamental dynamic of the cosmos lies in the flow of the *qi* of great harmony. This flow has its aspect of *xian* to manifest, namely the visible and ceaseless generation of the myriad things. It also has its aspect of concealment, namely the latent state before things take form and manifest. The process of divination, in fact, establishes a felt resonance between human consciousness and the *qi* of Heaven and Earth, so that the originally hidden and imperceptible trend of the transformation of *qi* is to be *xian* through hexagram and line statements. Therefore, Zhang Zai also claimed:

“Showing people good fortune and misfortune, its way becomes manifest (*xian* 顯). Knowing the future and storing the past, its virtuous conduct becomes profound, inscrutable and wondrous (*shen* 神). This speaks of the use of the yarrow stalks and tortoise shells.” (*shi ren ji xiong, qi dao xian yi. zhi lai cang wang, qi de xing shen yi, yu shi gui zhi yong ye* 示人吉凶, 其道顯矣; 知來藏往, 其德行神矣; 語蓍龜之用也). (Zhang 2000)

and

“Receiving the mandate like an echo, therefore it can engage in reciprocal response (*chou zuo* 酬酢, the ritual exchange of toasts between host and guest, extended to mean appropriate interaction). Exhaustively comprehending the deliberations of ghosts and spirits (*gui mou* 鬼謀), therefore it can assist the divinities (*you shen* 佑神).” (*shou ming ru xiang, gu ke yu chou cu. qu jin gui mou, gu ke yu you shen* 受命如響, 故可與酬酢; 曲盡鬼謀, 故可與佑神). (Zhang 2000)

The reason milfoil and tortoise “receive the mandate like an echo” is that they can transform the hidden *dao* into visible and audible image number judgments. The reason the sage can “exhaustively comprehending the deliberations of ghosts and spirits” is that he understands this mechanism of transformation and can apply it to *xian* (manifest). The intermediary of milfoil and tortoise is that a relationship of reciprocity can be established between humans and divinities. This refers to the intermediary of *xian* as manifestation.

Then, how can the *xian* of divination be concretely realized? The *Xici* explains it by four steps:

“That which exhausts the deep and subtle complexities of all under Heaven is preserved in the hexagrams (*gua* 卦). That which stirs and animates the movements of all under Heaven is preserved in the words (*ci* 辭). To transform and adapt them is preserved in the changes (*bian* 變). To push forward and put them into practice is preserved in penetration (*tong* 通).” (*ji tian xia zhi ze zhe cun hu gua, gu tian xia zhi dong zhe cun hu ci, hua er cai zhi cun hu bian, tui er xing zhi cun hu tong* 極天下之赜者存乎卦, 鼓天下之動者存乎辭; 化而裁之存乎變; 推而行之存乎通).

The hexagram stores the deep and complex images of the myriad things. The statement stirs and animates this storage and makes it effective. Change refers to the flexible adaptation for hexagram images and line statements. Penetration is a comprehensive grasp and realization of the principle of these changes. These four links are indispensable and together constitute the complete process from “the hidden” to “the manifest.” This reveals the *Yijing* as a book of divination and a guide for people to make decisions, manifested and transformed the invisible Heavenly *dao* and the images of Heaven and Earth into visible hexagram and line statements and judgments of good and bad fortune. Some changes are very subtle, and some principles run deep and profound. Humans cannot perceive them directly. Yet through the use the yarrow and the tortoise, and the arrangement of hexagrams and lines, all of these become something people can read, understand, and judge.

The *xian* of divinatory affairs establishes a standardized mechanism for producing knowledge. The manifestation of the Heavenly *dao* no longer depends only on the personal inspiration of individual shamans or diviners. Instead, it can be achieved through

the symbolic representations (hexagram images, line positions, numbers and verbal statements) in the *Yijing*. The hexagram and line statements express judgments of good and bad fortune in clear language, allowing ordinary people to use them to pursue good fortune and avoid misfortune. This makes it possible for *xian* to extend from external knowledge to inner virtuous conduct.

Yet the *xian* of divinatory affairs has not yet answered two fundamental questions: What makes this “manifestation” possible? How can Heaven “hang down images,” and why can the sages “take images of them”? The *Yijing* provides a direct answer: the *xian* (manifestation) and concealment refer to the nature of Heaven and Earth themselves. This raises the discussion in the following section: the *xian* of Heaven and Earth.

3. The *Xian* of Heaven and Earth: The Unity of Manifest and Hidden in the *Yijing*’s Cosmology

This section grounds divinatory *xian* in cosmology. Heaven and Earth themselves operate through the mutual implication of the *xian* and the hidden: the hidden serving as the *xian*’s ground.

The previous section reveals *xian* as the practical function of the *Yijing* as a book of divination. This section suggests *xian* as the description and manifestation of cosmic operation. It needs to be pointed out here that the *xian* of Heaven and Earth is not a completely different and unrelated realm from the *xian* of divinatory affairs. Instead, it is precisely a deepening and expansion of the *xian* of divinatory affairs. As discussed in the previous section, the *xian* of divinatory affairs already contains the premise of “Heaven hangs down its images” (*tian chui xiang* 天垂象). The *xian* of Heaven and Earth universalizes this mechanism of “hanging down images” into a basic principle of cosmology. In other words, the reason why the sage can “manifest” the *dao* 道 through hexagram and line statements is that Heaven and Earth themselves are already “manifesting” their *dao*. The movement of the sun, moon, and five planets and the order of the four seasons are all expressions of Heaven and Earth’s “manifestation.” Therefore, moving from the *xian* of divinatory affairs to the *xian* of Heaven and Earth is not a leap to a completely different realm. Rather, it moves from the applied perspective of *xian* to the cosmological grounding of *xian*.

The *Xici* clearly states:

Look up to observe the patterns of Heaven, look down to examine the principles of Earth. Thus, we know the reasons for the dark and the bright. Trace things back to their beginning and return to their end, thus we know the theories of life and death. Essence and *qi* form things, the wandering soul makes change, thus we know the conditions and appearances of spirits and divinities (deities).” (*“yang yi guan yu tian wen, fu yi cha yu di li, shi gu zhi you ming zhi gu. yuan shi fan zhong, gu zhi si sheng zhi shuo. jing qi wei wu, you hun wei bian, shi gu zhi gui shen zhi qing zhuang* 仰以觀于天文，俯以察於地理，是故知幽明之故。原始反終，故知死生之說。精氣為物，遊魂為變，是故知鬼神之情狀).

The two characters “dark and bright” (*you ming* 幽明) are used to describe the hidden (*cang* 藏) and the *xian* (manifest). This passage says that the sage, by looking up to observe the patterns of Heaven and looking down to examine the principles of Earth, seeks the hidden principles behind the *xian* (manifest) phenomena of Heaven and Earth. Then he can infer the principles of life and death and understand the states of existence of ghosts and divinities. That is to say, the whole mode of existence of the cosmos is itself composed of “dark” and “bright,” the hidden and the manifest, interwoven together. The bright and dark parts, the visible and invisible parts, of the patterns of Heaven and the principles of Earth together constitute a complete world. Han Kangbo 韓康伯 inherited and developed this line of thought. He defined *shen* 神 (profoundness, inscrutableness and wondrousness)

as “the utmost of change and transformation, that which wonderfully animates the myriad things and is spoken of, and cannot be grasped by form” (*bian hua zhi ji, miao wan wu er wei yan, bu ke yi xing jie zhe ye* 變化之極，妙萬物而為言，不可以形詰者也) (Wang and Han 2013). It is precisely because change that is not directly visible to humans (hidden) reaches its utmost, even beyond what can be grasped by “form,” that it is called the *shen*. Han Kangbo further commented:

“Consider the movement of the two primal forces (*liang yi* 兩儀, *yin* and *yang*) and the activity of the myriad things. Is there something that causes them to be so? No, each transforms itself in the “great void” (*tai xu* 太虛), suddenly self-generating. The creation is not from me; the principle (*li* 理) itself responds in a mysterious and profound way.” (*yuan fu liang yi zhi yun, wan wu zhi dong, qi you shi zhi ran zai! mo bu du hua yu da xu, chua er er zi zao yi. zao zhi fei wo, li zi xuan ying* 原夫兩儀之運，萬物之動，豈有使之然哉！莫不獨化於大虛，歟爾而自造矣。造之非我，理自玄應). (Wang and Han 2013)

This indicates that the movement of the two primal forces, *yin* and *yang*, and the change in the myriad things are not pushed by any external force. Rather, everything transforms itself spontaneously in the “great void”. Kong Yingda explained this as “The substance of the myriad things has changing appearances that can be traced. As for *shen*, it is spoken of as that which is subtle and wondrous in relation to the myriad things, meaning it cannot be sought after” (*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* 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 1987). To Kong’s point of view, the substance of myriad things can be traced (*xian*, manifest) but the subtle and wondrous relation is not visible (hidden). Both Han Kangbo and Kong Yingda’s insights already point out that the cosmos itself is a mutual inclusion of the manifest and the hidden. The interchange of *yin* and *yang* is deep and unfathomable, yet their functions of activation and display are constantly appearing in the process of Heaven and Earth transforming and generating the myriad things. This means the visible results (*xian*) of Heaven and Earth transforming and generating the myriad things have their source hidden deep within the subtle operation of *yin* and *yang*.

When discussing the creation and transformation in between Heaven and Earth, the *Xici* puts forward an important viewpoint:

“It is manifest in those *ren* 仁 (benevolence), it is hidden in those functions. It stirs the myriad things but does not share the sage’s anxiety. Its abundant virtue and great enterprise are complete!” (*xian zhu ren, cang zhu yong, gu wan wu er bu yu sheng ren tong you, sheng de da ye zhi yi zai* 顯諸仁，藏諸用，鼓萬物而不與聖人同憂，盛德大業至矣哉).

This passage elaborates the relationship between *xian* and hiding in the *Yijing*. “Manifest in those *ren*” means the merit and virtue (in terms of *ren*) appears in the processes that Heaven and Earth create and generate the myriad things and when the myriad things operates. That means, the growth and transformation of the myriad things, the alternating movement of the four seasons all refer to the *ren* in creation. It is manifested that people can observe and feel. Therefore, Zhu Xi 朱熹 interpreted *ren* as “the achievement of creation and transformation (*zaohua* 造化); it is the manifestation of virtue (*de* 德)” (*wei zao hua zhi gong, de zhi fa ye* 謂造化之功，德之發也) (Zhu 2010). “Hidden in those functions” means that the potential “function” that enables Heaven and Earth’s ceaseless generation and operation is hidden behind these visible traces and is not easy for people to perceive. Han Kangbo commented “It covers and nourishes the myriad things, therefore it is said ‘manifest in those *ren*’. People use it daily without being aware of it, therefore it is said ‘it is hidden in those functions’” (*yi bei wan wu, gu yue xian zhu ren. ri yong er bu zhi, gu*

yue cang zhu yong 衣被萬物, 故曰顯諸仁。日用而不知, 故曰藏諸用) (Wang and Han 2013). Kong Yingda further explained:

“As for ‘manifest in those *ren*’, this means that the *dao*, as substance, visibly displays the achievement of *ren* and *xian* (manifest), covering and nourishing all things. This is what is meant by “manifest in those *ren*.’ As for ‘hidden in those functions’, this means that it secretly stores away and hides its functioning, not allowing things to be aware of it. This is what is meant by ‘hidden in those functions.’” (*xian zhu ren zhe, yan dao zhi wei ti, xian jian ren gong, yi bei wan wu, shi xian zhu ren ye. cang zhu yong zhe, wei qian cang gong yong, bu shi wu zhi, shi cang zhu yong ye* 顯諸仁者, 言道之為體, 顯見仁功, 衣被萬物, 是顯諸仁也。藏諸用者, 謂潛藏功用, 不使物知, 是藏諸用也). (Kong 1987)

This reveals that Heaven and Earth are both *xian* and hidden. They present and manifest their *dao* in terms of the merit of *ren*, through the generation and formation of the myriad things. At the same time, they deeply hide their subtle and inscrutable function in an invisible state. That is to say, when people see the manifestations and results of the myriad things growing, they do not see the dynamic behind them. This grasps the complementary relationship between *xian* and hiding. Without *xian*, the *dao* of Heaven and Earth would have no way to be embodied or known. Without hiding, the function of Heaven and Earth would have no profound and subtle source and could not continue to operate. The two are two sides of one body and cannot be separated.

Then, what refers to the relationship between the hidden in the *xian* of Heaven and Earth and the *xian* of divinatory affairs? At first glance, the *xian* of divinatory affairs speaks of the transformation from “hidden” to *xian*, while the *xian* of Heaven and Earth speaks of the coexistence of *xian* and “hidden.” But when examined more deeply, these two are actually different expressions of the same structure. The “hidden” in the *xian* of divinatory affairs refers to the Heavenly *dao* that has not yet been revealed by hexagram and line statements, the state that human knowledge has not yet reached. The “hiding” in the *xian* of Heaven and Earth refers to the inherent profound and subtle hiddenness of Heaven and Earth’s operation. In other words, “hidden” is not the opposite of *xian*, nor is it the end of *xian*. Rather, it is the foundation that allows *xian* to occur continuously. As Zhu Xi later pointed out, “hiding in those functions are the bone (core) and foundation of manifesting in those *ren* 仁 (benevolence)” (*cang zhu yong shi xian zhu ren di gu zi* 藏諸用是顯諸仁底骨子) (Huang 2014). Without this hidden “bone (core) and foundation” to operate, there would be no base to *xian* (manifest). This suggests, the “hiding” foundation of Heaven and Earth provides an inexhaustible source for its *xian* (manifestation). Therefore, this provides the ground for sage to imitate and realize the *xian* from the Heaven and Earth (Heavenly *dao*) to human world.

Shao Yong 邵雍 explained the relationship between *xian* and hidden in a more intuitive way. When discussing “It is manifest in those *ren*, it is hidden in those functions,” he said:

“If the sun and moon shine upon and illuminate, and the four seasons complete the year, this is what is meant by ‘It is manifest in those *ren*.’ As for the fact that their regularity and numerological patterns are so, yet one does not know why they are so, this is what is meant by ‘hidden in those functions.’” (*ruo ri yue zhi zhao lin, si shi zhi cheng sui, shi xian zhu ren ye; qi du shu zhi ran, er bu zhi qi suo yi ran, shi cang zhu yong ye* 若日月之照臨, 四時之成歲, 是顯諸仁也; 其度數之然, 而不知其所以然, 是藏諸用也). (Shao 1990)

The sun and moon in the Heaven shine on the myriad things, and the order of the four seasons goes in order. These are clearly perceptible to people and belong to *xian*. However,

the reason why the sun and moon can move and the four seasons can alternate is not so easily understood by people. This belongs to “hidden.” In this case, the *xian* of sun and moon, four seasons, and the “hiding” of the principles or reasons behind do not refer to two different kinds of things. Instead, they refer to two aspects of the same cosmic process.

Cheng Yi 程頤 makes the similar argument as he states, “That which is most subtle refers to principle (*li* 理). That which is most manifest refers to image (*xiang* 象). Substance and function share a single source; the *xian* and the subtle are without separation” (*zhi wei zhe li ye, zhi zhu zhe xiang ye. ti yong yi yuan, xian wei wu jian* 至微者理也, 至著者象也。體用一源, 顯微無間) (Cheng 2018). Cheng points out the most subtle (hidden) things, and the most manifest (*xian*) things share one source without separation in the *Yijing*’s cosmology. Zhu Xi, based on Cheng Yi’s teaching, put forward an important insight:

“‘It is manifest in those *ren*’ refers to the visible aspect and we can trace its foundations. This is what is meant by ‘that which continues it is goodness’ (*ji zhi zhe shan ye* 繼之者善). ‘Hidden in those functions’ refers to the invisible aspect and we cannot trace its foundations. This is what is meant by ‘that which realizes and completes it is nature’ (*cheng zhi zhe xing ye* 成之者性).” (*xian zhu ren shi ke jian di, bian shi ji zhi zhe shan ye. cang zhu yong shi bu ke jian di, bian shi cheng zhi zhe xing ye* 顯諸仁是可見底, 便是繼之者善也。藏諸用是不可見底, 便是成之者性也). (J. Li 1986)

This passage applies the distinction between “visible” (*xian*) and “invisible” (hidden) to connect with the “good that continues” and “nature that realizes and completes” mentioned earlier in the *Xici*:

“The one-by-one alternation of *yin* and *yang* is called the *dao*. That which continues it refers to goodness (*shan* 善); that which realizes and completes it refers to nature (*xing* 性). The one with *ren* 仁 sees it and calls it *ren*; the one with wisdom (*zhi* 知) sees it and calls it wisdom.” (*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* 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).

“The good that continues” emphasizes the unfolding and continuation of the Heavenly *dao* in things. This can be observed and perceived, so it belongs to *xian*. “The nature that realizes and completes” emphasizes the completion and achievement of the Heavenly *dao* in the essence of things. This is internal to things and cannot be directly seen, so it belongs to hidden. Zhu Xi further explained “hiding in those functions are the bone (core) and foundation of manifesting in those *ren*” (*cang zhu yong shi xian zhu ren di gu zi* 藏諸用是顯諸仁底骨子). The phrase “bone (core) and foundation” provides a very vivid description. It is like the bones and sinews of a person supporting the body under the skin, that is hidden but not nothing. Rather, it is precisely the foundation and support of the manifest (*xian*). Without this “bone (core) and foundation,” the *xian* would have no support and would lose its root. On the other hand, without *xian* to manifest, “hiding in function” would lose its channel to achieve or prove its existence.

The above interpretations answer the philosophical question of which is more fundamental, the hidden or the *xian* (manifest). One cannot say that the *xian* is more fundamental than the hidden, nor can one say that the hidden is more fundamental than the *xian*. They must be understood together as one. This refers to what Cheng Yi summarized as “It is one while being two, and two while being one” (*yi er er, er er yi zhe ye* 一而二, 二而一者也) (Cheng and Cheng 2020). Consider the *Yijing*’s cosmological view on *xian* and hidden, the one refers to the whole cosmology, while the two refer to the *xian* and hidden.

Now the *xian* of Heaven and Earth has revealed its full meaning. It explains “the reasons for the hidden and the bright” (*you ming zhi gu* 幽明之故) and establishes “It is

manifest in those *ren*, it is hidden in those functions.” (“*xian zhu ren, cang zhu yong* 顯諸仁, 藏諸用”) within the cosmological dimension. It answers the fundamental question that the *xian* of divinatory affairs had left unaddressed: the ultimate basis for divination’s ability to proceed “from the hidden to the manifest” lies in the fact that the operation of Heaven and Earth itself is a mutual inclusion of *xian* and hidden, a co-generation of the hidden and the bright.

The *Yi* scholars from different periods started discussions from their own positions. Yet they mostly pointed toward a core conclusion: the *xian* of Heaven and Earth is not an isolated phenomenon but is rooted in its inner “hidden.” In the *Yijing*’s cosmology, *xian* and hidden are two sides of one whole, constituting the basic rhythm of cosmic operation.

It is worth noting that the discussion of the *xian* of Heaven and Earth does not remain at the level of cosmology. The *dao* Heaven and Earth operate through alternating *xian* and hidden already contains within its structure a possibility directed toward the human *dao*. Therefore, the following section turns to the discussion on the *xian* of transcendence.

4. The *Xian* of Transcendence: Human Profoundness and Wondrousness as Divinities in Virtuous Practice

This section completes the argument: cosmological *xian* remains incomplete without human realization. Through silent cultivation and virtuous practice, the sage becomes the vessel through which the Heavenly *dao* illuminates the world, fulfilling the full meaning of *xian*.

The foregoing discussion of the *xian* and the hidden in Heaven and Earth has revealed a cosmological structure of “It is manifest in those *ren*, it is hidden in those functions” (*xian zhu ren, cang zhu yong* 顯諸仁, 藏諸用), thereby establishing a metaphysical foundation for the concept of *xian* (manifestation). However, although the *xian* of Heaven and Earth provides the cosmological ground for the possibility of manifestation, it is still objective and external. For instance, the sun and moon continue their course, the four seasons follow their cycles, yet human beings may remain entirely unaware of all this or may simply turn a blind eye to it. The *Xici* already states clearly in its discussion of *yin* and *yang*:

“The one-by-one alternation of *yin* and *yang* is called the *dao*. That which continues it refers to goodness (*shan* 善); that which realizes and completes it refers to nature (*xing* 性). The one with *ren* 仁 sees it and calls it *ren*; the one with wisdom (*zhi* 知) sees it and calls it wisdom. The common people employ and use it daily without knowing 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).

Even the *dao* of Heaven and Earth can be *xian* (manifested) in the function of sun, moon, and stars and in the succession of the four seasons, the common people can still employ and use the *dao* daily without knowing it. For common people, the manifestation of the *dao* has never occurred in effect since they cannot recognize and realize it. Therefore, here raises a fundamental question: how can the *xian* of Heaven and Earth truly and effectively manifest in human life? Or, to put it another way, how does the concept of *xian* achieve its final completion in the human being?

The *Yijing*’s answer points to the *xian* of transcendence. In the *Xici*, following the statement “to transform and adapt them is preserved in the changes (*bian* 變). To push forward and put them into practice is preserved in penetration (*tong* 通)” (*hua er cai zhi cun hu bian, tui er xing zhi cun hu tong* 化而裁之存乎變; 推而行之存乎通), the *Yijing* continues directly:

“Be profound, inscrutable and wondrous (*shen* 神) to grasp the ineffable, therefore to illuminate. This ability to apprehend the profound and make it clear depends on the individual. To fulfill in silence and inspire trust without speech, it depends on virtuous practice” (*shen er ming zhi, cun hu qi ren. mo er cheng zhi, bu yan er xin, cun hu de xing* 神而明之, 存乎其人; 默而成之, 不言而信, 存乎德行).

The statement reveals a crucial point: hexagram images, line statements, changes, and penetrative understanding are all ways of *xian* (manifestation), yet all these ways are merely external and instrumental. Whether they can ultimately play their role as *xian* (manifestation) depends entirely on “the person”: the subject (people) who is capable of “be profound, inscrutable and wondrous (*shen* 神) to grasp the ineffable, therefore, to illuminate.” In other words, the *xian* of Heaven and Earth constitutes the cosmological dimension of manifestation, providing its ground and principles. The *xian* of transcendence completes the *xian* in person from possibility to actuality. Without the *xian* of transcendence, the *xian* of Heaven and Earth would remain perpetually in the state of “the common people can still employ and use the *dao* daily without knowing it,” unable to truly manifest and illuminate in human life.

The *Xici* offers a specific formulation for how the *xian* of transcendence actually achieved:

“To draw it out and extend it, to touch upon similar categories and expand from them, the capacity to handle all things under Heaven is complete. To *xian* (manifest) the *dao* and make virtuous conduct *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious), therefore it can respond to all comings and goings (*chou zuo* 酬酢, the ritual exchange of toasts between host and guest, extended to mean appropriate interaction with all affairs and people), and can assist the divinities (*you shen* 佑神).” (*yin er shen zhi, chu lei er chang zhi, tian xia zhi neng shi bi yi. xian dao shen de xing, shi gu ke yu chou cu, ke yu you shen yi* 引而伸之, 觸類而長之, 天下之能事畢矣。顯道神德行, 是故可與酬酢, 可與佑神矣).

Here, “to *xian* (manifest) the *dao*” (*xian dao* 顯道) means bringing the hidden *dao* into appearance. To “make virtuous conduct *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious)” (*shen de xing* 神德行) means, through divination and the cultivation of one’s heart/mind (*xin* 心), one can acquire a quality that transcends the ordinary and approaches a profound, inscrutable and efficacious state, thus manifest it in form of virtuous conduct. There is a progressive relationship between the two: “to *xian* (manifest) the *dao*” refers to the precondition for “make virtuous conduct *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious)”: Only after the *dao* of Heaven has been *xian* (manifested) through the hexagrams and line statements can a person follow this manifested *dao* to guide their conduct, thereby enabling themselves to acquire a quality that transcends the ordinary and approaches a profound, inscrutable and efficacious state. Conversely, “make virtuous conduct *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious)” presents the ultimate purpose of “to *xian* (manifest) the *dao*”: The final goal of manifesting the *dao* is not merely to give people a body of knowledge about the *dao* of Heaven, but to enable them to transform such knowledge into actual human realization and wisdom, therefore manifested in form of virtuous conduct. This indicates that the *dao* is manifested not only in the hexagrams and line statements, but even more so in the living practice of human life.

Having cited Yu Fan’s commentary in Section 2, here invokes it again to illuminate a different aspect of the argument:

“Making the *dao* manifest and making virtuous conduct profound, inscrutable and wondrous: the second and fifth lines of Qian 乾 go to Kun 坤, forming the sun of Li 離 and the moon of Kan 坎. The sun and moon are in the heavens,

moving and illuminating things. Therefore, it is said, ‘Making the *dao* manifest and making virtuous conduct profound, inscrutable and wondrous’ (*xian dao shen de xing, qian er wu zhi kun, cheng li ri kan yue. ri yue zai tian, yun xing zhao wu, gu xian dao shen de xing* 顯道神德行, 乾二五之坤, 成離日坎月。日月在天, 運行照物, 故顯道神德行). (D. Li 2011)

Yu Fan’s commentary carries a profound implication: the *xian* (manifestation) of the Heavenly *dao* is like the sun and moon shining upon all things in the heavens: it is all-encompassing and unobscured. And the reason why human virtuous conduct can become *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious), and can assist the divinities, is that through cultivation the person has become a vessel for the *xian* of the Heavenly *dao*: Just as the light of the sun and moon illuminate all things, so too does one’s virtuous conduct illuminate the world in which one lives. This implies a natural transition from cosmology to self-transcendence: the *xian* of Heaven and Earth becomes the model for people to *xian*.

It should be noted that the term “virtuous conduct” (*de xing* 德行) manifested does not refer to morality or virtue in the sense of normative judgment of virtue ethics in the modern and contemporary philosophy. Rather, it denotes a state of self-transcendence that is spontaneous and naturally harmonious with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things, just as the sun and moon illuminate the world without conscious intention. In this sense, the *xian* of transcendence is not about conforming to externally imposed moral rules, but about achieving a condition in which one’s actions resonate with the cosmic order naturally and effortlessly, thereby realizing an “illumination” that is neither contrived nor deliberate. The *Yizhuan* has directly stated the nature of *Yi* 易:

“The *Yi* 易 is without deliberate thought, and without purposive action. It abides in tranquil, stillness and remains unmoved, yet when stirred, it responds, comprehends the principles of all things and thereby penetrates all affairs under Heaven. Were it not the most *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious) thing in the world, how could it achieve this?” (*yi wu si ye, wu wei ye, ji ran bu dong, gan er sui tong tian xia zhi gu. fei tian xia zhi zhi shen, qi shu neng yu yu ci* 易无思也, 无為也, 寂然不動, 感而遂通天下之故。非天下之至神, 其孰能與於此).

The *Yijing* as the book that “the sages established images to exhaust meaning”, refers to the *xian* of divinatory affairs and the *dao* of Heaven and Earth. However, the manifested words, phrases and principles are without deliberate thought and without purposive action. Regarding how the *dao* of Heaven and Earth can be manifested into human life, Cheng Hao 程顥 further commented that “Heaven and Earth have no deliberate intention (*wuxin* 无心, no heart/mind [*xin* 心]), yet they accomplish transformation and generation. The sage has a *xin*, yet practices non-purposive action (*wu wei* 无為)” (*tian di wu xin er cheng hua, sheng ren you xin er wu wei* 天地无心而成化, 聖人有心而无為) (Cheng and Cheng 2020). It reveals the Heaven and Earth *xian* (manifest) without deliberate intention. The sage images how the *dao* operates, avoids putting deliberate intention into action, therefore practices non-purposive action (*wu wei* 无為).

Kong Yingda further interpreted this idea, as he stated:

“It manifests and illuminates the *dao* of non-purposive action, and makes virtuous conduct *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious) in its affairs. This is to say, the great void (*tai xu* 太虛) nourishes all things as presents them in the form of its virtuous conduct. Now the *dao* of the *Yi*, through its divinatory profoundness, inscrutableness and efficaciousness, assists the great void in nourishing things, this is what is meant by making their virtuous conduct profound, inscrutable and wondrous” (*xian ming wu wei zhi dao, er shen ling qi de xing zhi shi. yan da xu yi yang wan wu wei de xing, jin yi dao yi qi shen ling zhu tai xu er yang wu,*

shi shen qi de xing ye 顯明無為之道, 而神靈其德行之事。言大虛以養萬物為德行, 今易道以其神靈助太虛而養物, 是神其德行也). (Kong 1987)

Kong Yingda emphasizes what “to *xian* (manifest) the *dao*” (*xian dao* 顯道) manifests refers to a “*dao* of non-purposive action”: not artificially constructed rules, but the natural pattern of Heaven and Earth’s operation. The reason human’s virtuous conduct can become *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious) is precisely because such conduct does not originate from deliberate intention such as selfish motives or forced effort, but harmonizes with the no deliberate intention of Heaven and Earth’s nature.

Zhu Xi, in his *Zhu Wengong Yi Shuo* 朱文公易說 (*Master Zhu’s Discourses on the Yijing*), offered an elaboration that helps to understand the relationship between *xian* and *shen*. He attributed “to *xian* (manifest) the *dao*” (*xian dao* 顯道) to the use of “words” (*ci* 辭) and “make virtuous conduct *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious)” (*shen de xing* 神德行) to the use of “numeral patterns” (*shu* 數):

“The *dao* and principle are thereby made manifest. Virtuous conduct pertains to human affairs, yet it must depend on the yarrow stalks (divination). Once good and bad fortune are known, one can then respond to the changes of affairs.” (*dao li yin ci xian zhu, de xing shi ren shi, que xu qu jue yu shi, ji zhi ji xiong, er hou ke yi chou cu shi bian* 道理因此顯著, 德行是人事, 卻須取決於蓍, 既知吉凶, 而後可以酬酢事變). (Zhu 1989)

Here Zhu Xi reveals a functional relationship between “to *xian* (manifest) the *dao*” and “make virtuous conduct *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious)”: “to *xian* (manifest) the *dao*” presents the subtle *dao* through the language of hexagram or line statements and images, enabling people to know and understand it. “Make virtuous conduct *shen*”, by contrast, directs human conduct through the manipulation of yarrow numbers through divination, enabling people to respond appropriately in concrete situations. Zhu Xi further noted:

“Virtuous conduct is what the sage accomplishes. When it is inferred through numeral patterns, one knows that this is not something a person forcibly does on their own, but is all the work of the profound, inscrutable and efficacious divinities (*shen* 神)” (*de xing shi sheng ren zuo di shi, yin shu tui chu lai, fang zhi de zhe bu shi ren ying nen di zuo, dou shi shen zhi suo wei* 德行是聖人做底事, 因數推出來, 方知得這不是人硬恁地做, 都是神之所為). (Zhu 1989)

According to Zhu Xi, “forcibly doing on one’s own” (*ying nen di zuo* 硬恁地做) means human artifice, “the work of the profound, inscrutable and efficacious divinities” means the natural result that arises after a person achieves communion with the Heavenly *dao*. In Zhu Xi’s view, the reason why one can “make virtuous conduct *shen* 神 (profound, inscrutable and efficacious)” is not that the person has acquired some supernatural power. Instead, one’s conduct no longer arises from subjective arbitrariness, but accords with the rhythm of change in the Heavenly *dao*. Hence, he behaves and appears wondrously and unfathomably and responds to circumstances as they arise.

The practical fulfillment of “making the *dao* manifest and making virtuous conduct profound, inscrutable and wondrous” is expressed in the *Yijing*’s statement:

“Therefore it can respond to all comings and goings (*chou zuo* 酬酢, the ritual exchange of toasts between host and guest, extended to mean appropriate interaction with all affairs and people), and can assist the divinities (*you shen* 佑神).” (*shi gu ke yu chou cu, ke yu you shen yi* 是故可與酬酢, 可與佑神矣).

The term *chou zuo* 酬酢 originally referred to the ritual of response at ancient banquets. The host offers a toast and the guest returns it; this was later extended to denote proper

interaction between people and affairs. The *Jiujia Yi* 九家易 (Nine Schools' Commentary on the *Yijing*) offered a remarkably detailed explanation of this:

"The going of *yang* 陽 is called *chou* 酬; the coming of *yin* 陰 is called *zuo* 酢. The matching of *yin* and *yang* is called assist the divinities (*you shen* 佑神)." (*yang wang wei chou, yin lai wei cu, yin yang xiang pei, wei zhi you shen ye* 陽往為酬, 陰來為酢, 陰陽相配, 謂之右(佑)神也). (D. Li 2011)

And

"At a banquet, the host offers wine to the guest. This is called 'presenting' (*xian* 獻). The guest returns the toast to the host, this is called 'responding' (*zuo* 酢). The host then drinks and offers another toast to the guest, this is called 'returning' (*chou* 酬). The one who initiates is *zuo*; the one who responds is *chou*. *Chou* takes its meaning from response, symbolizing the pattern of *yang* initiating and *yin* harmonizing, by matching to the change, thereby assisting Heaven and Earth in making their profound, inscrutable and wondrous powers manifest." (*li yin jiu, zhu ren zhuo bin, wei xian; bin zhuo zhu ren, wei cu; zhu ren yin zhi, you zhuo bin, wei chou ye. xian ju wei cu, da bao wei chou, chou qu qi bao, yi xiang yang chang yin he, bian hua xiang pei, shi zhu tian di ming qi gui shen zhe ye* 禮飲酒, 主人酌賓, 為獻; 賓酌主人, 為酢; 主人飲之, 又酌賓, 為酬也。先舉為酢, 答報為酬, 酬取其報, 以象陽唱陰和, 變化相配, 是助天地明其鬼神者也). (D. Li 2011)

Jiujia Yi points out two closely related dimensions. From the perspective of *yin* and *yang*, "the going of *yang* is *chou*" refers to the active party issuing an action or giving, like the active dispersal of *yang*; "the coming of *yin* is *zuo*" refers to the responding party returning an equivalent action or recompense, like the compliant response of *yin*. When *yang* reaches its extreme, *yin* comes; when giving reaches its extreme, recompense arrives. Human responses and exchanges are essentially an embodiment of the pattern of *yin-yang* alternation and matching.

From the perspective of ritual custom, the sequence of presenting, responding, and returning at a banquet constitutes the basic form of reciprocal courtesy. In this back-and-forth exchange, human relationships and emotions are expressed and sustained through such interaction. Here the *Jiujia Yi* uses this model of banquet interaction to analogize the relationship between humanity and Heaven and Earth: Heaven and Earth reveal the *dao* of Heaven and present signs of good and bad fortune through the changes in *yin* and *yang*, this refers to Heaven and Earth "returning" (*chou*) or "responding" (*zuo*). The human being, through understanding and responding to this revelation, adjusts one's conduct and life. This refers to the human being responding to Heaven and Earth's manifestation. The fact that a person can "respond to all comings and goings" between Heaven and Earth means that one is no longer passively subject to the vicissitudes of fate, but can establish a correlative and resonant relationship of mutual response with the operation of Heaven and Earth: a relationship of mutual exchange and mutual response. Assisting the divinities (*you shen* 佑神) is a further elevation of this correlative and resonant relationship. The original meaning of *you* 佑 means to aid or complete. Here, "assisting the divinities" does not refer to a person helping some deity external to themselves. Instead, it states the person after apprehending the *dao* of Heaven and Earth (Heavenly *dao*), employs their virtuous conduct to assist and complete what Heaven and Earth have not yet accomplished. Heaven and Earth generate and nourish the myriad things, their merit is vast and supreme. Yet Heaven and Earth's creation and ceaseless generation is ultimately a macroscopic, cosmic process. Without the medium of human beings, it cannot directly produce the order and values of human society. The sage, through apprehension of the *dao* of Heaven and Earth, transforms the *xian* of Heaven and Earth into the human values including moral cul-

tivation (such as *ren*), the institutions of ritual and music, and the political applications and teachings (*zhengjiao* 政教). In this way, the sage assists Heaven and Earth in what Heaven and Earth cannot naturally accomplish in the human realm. This is precisely what the *Jiujia Yi* means by “assisting Heaven and Earth in making their profound, inscrutable and wondrous powers manifest.”

This provides an insight to understand the *Yijing*’s *xian* of transcendence: Through one’s practice of virtuous conduct, the *dao* of Heaven and Earth not only to be *xian* in nature, but also to be *xian* in human life and affairs. This refers to the deeper meaning of “assisting the divine.” Zhang Zai also pointed out: “When one has grasped the subtle meanings and entered the profound, inscrutable and wondrous state of divinities, affairs are prepared within one’s inner being, and one seeks to benefit what is external.” (*jing yi ru shen, shi yu wu nei, qiu li wu wai ye* 精義入神, 事豫吾內, 求利吾外也) (Zhang 2000). “Grasp the subtle meanings and entered the profound, inscrutable and wondrous state of divinities” refers to one’s inner cultivation, “seeking to benefit what is external” refers to one’s transcendence to external achievement in the realization in human affairs. People, by learning and realizing the manifested inner subtle meanings of the myriad things through cultivation, reach the state of entering the profound, inscrutable and wondrous state of divinities. Thereby, they naturally manifest outwardly as achievements that benefit the world.

This reveals in the *Yijing*, the final completion of the *xian* (manifestation) as self-transcendence in human life does not consist in outwardly displaying some extraordinary or supernatural ability, but rather in a return to the simplest cultivation of virtuous conduct. Immediately following “Be profound, inscrutable and wondrous (*shen* 神) to grasp the ineffable, therefore to illuminate. This ability to apprehend the profound and make it clear depends on the individual” (*shen er ming zhi, cun hu qi ren* 神而明之, 存乎其人), the Xici continues saying “To fulfill in silence and inspire trust without speech, it depends on virtuous practice” (*mo er cheng zhi, bu yan er xin, cun hu de xing* 默而成之, 不言而信, 存乎德行). When a person has, through the state of “be profound, inscrutable and wondrous (*shen* 神) to grasp the ineffable, therefore to illuminate,” achieved a profound comprehension of the *dao* of the *Yi*. There is no need to deliberately proclaim this comprehension with words, nor to use it to manifest oneself. One has only to practice it silently in daily human relations, allowing one’s conduct itself to become the witness to the Heavenly *dao*’s *xian*.

Han Kangbo’s commentary on this statement reads: “When one’s inner being is fully sufficient and in accordance with the Heavenly *dao*, one therefore accomplishes it in silence.” (*shun zu yu nei, gu mo er cheng zhi ye* 順足於內, 故默而成之也) (Wang and Han 2013). The sage’s inner cultivation has already reached fullness and completion, so there is no need to do or say anything deliberately: everything is accomplished naturally in itself. This suggests that the *xian* of transcendence is not accomplished through verbal debate, but through the silent practice of virtuous conduct.

This realm of “accomplishing silently” resonates deeply with the structure of “hidden in those functions” (*cang zhu yong* 藏諸用) within the *xian* of Heaven and Earth. As discussed, Heaven and Earth’s “hidden” provides the ground for *xian*. Likewise, the sage’s “silence” also provides the ground for *xian*: It does not abandon *xian* but transcends its shallow, ostentatious form, thus functions as “great manifestation develops from silence and invisible.” This reveals the inner consistency between the *xian* of transcendence and the *xian* of Heaven and Earth: true *xian* must have its opposite as its inner support. The *xian* of transcendence inherits the *xian* of Heaven and Earth to human life and surpasses the *xian* of divinatory affairs from divines to human accomplishments. But from the perspective of *xian*, the three perspectives of *xian* form a unified whole: The *xian* of divinatory affairs provides the source and method of “from the hidden to the manifest.” The *xian* of Heaven and Earth reveals the principle and the cosmological ground of “mutual implica-

tion of manifestation and hidden.” The *xian* of transcendence brings to the realization in the living practice and self-accomplishment of human life. This provides the way in which human existence illuminates itself by the Heavenly *dao*.

5. Conclusions

This study intends to fill a void in the *Yijing* scholarship, that is, the absence of a systematic exploration of *xian* 顯 (manifestation) as a concept in its own right. It starts with a simple but neglected question: Is there a coherent logic in the *Yijing*’s concept of *xian* that connects its divinatory, cosmic and human dimensions? The study has shown that the answer is yes. By differentiating three interdependent perspectives of *xian*, i.e., the *xian* of divinatory affairs, the *xian* of Heaven and Earth, and the *xian* of transcendence, this study not only clarifies how the *Yijing* serves as a manual of divination, but also reveals its deeper cosmological commitments and human transcendence. It indicates that *xian* is not an external supplement to the *dao*, but the very mode through which the *dao* discloses itself, and that human beings, through virtuous practice, become the living site of that disclosure.

The *xian* of divinatory affairs establishes the operational mechanism for how the hidden *dao* is transmuted into readable hexagram images and verbal judgments. This is the most immediate sense of *xian*, a making visible of the invisible, so that ordinary people may consult the oracle and discern good and bad fortune. But this mechanism is not self-sufficient. It indicates a more fundamental cosmological basis.

The *xian* of Heaven and Earth means that the cosmos (Heaven and Earth) itself is working through the mutual implication of *xian* and hidden. The unseen source is infinite but sustains the seen order of sun, moon and seasons. This hidden ground is not opposed to manifestation, but is the condition of its possibility. The *Yijing*’s cosmology is thus a dynamic cosmology, in which *xian* and the hidden are two inseparable phases of a single self-generating cosmos. This cosmology is the ultimate warrant for divination: the sage can image Heaven because Heaven is already imaging itself in the constant interplay of *yin* and *yang*.

The *xian* of transcendence completes the argument by showing that cosmological *xian* is external and incomplete without human realization. Only when *xian* is internalized and embodied in human beings through silent cultivation and virtuous conduct (*de xing* 德行) does it acquire its ultimate meaning. The sage is not merely a beholder of the *dao*, but is the *dao* embodied. By making the *dao* manifest and making virtuous conduct profoundly efficacious (*xian dao shen de xing* 顯道神德行), he enters into a reciprocal relationship with the cosmic process and helps the divinities complete what Heaven and Earth left unfinished in human affairs. His silent achievement is the secret operation of Heaven and Earth, his virtuous behavior is the visible trace of invisible *dao*.

These three perspectives reveal that *xian* is not an incidental notion but the central axis around which the whole *Yijing* system revolves. It links divinations, cosmic principles and human practices into a coherent whole. The *Yijing* begins with the hidden and progresses to the manifest because manifestation is how the *dao* basically manifests itself. The hidden is the cosmic ground of functioning and the *xian* accomplishes its manifest operation. They are not two different things but two aspects of one and the same thing. The *xian* of Heaven and Earth is united with the *xian* of transcendence: the sage’s virtuous practice is none other than the human realization of the cosmic rhythm of *xian* and hidden.

This study has therefore demonstrated that *xian* is not merely an epistemological, but a truly cosmological concept: it stands for the self-manifestation of being, the way the cosmic order manifests itself before consciousness and demands participation. The *Yijing* presents a vision of wholeness in which heaven, earth and humankind are engaged in a shared process of self-unfolding and self-realization. The manifest does not destroy the

hidden. It remains the silent ground of the manifest, just as the inner culture of the sage is the unseen support of his outward deeds. Thus the *Yijing* solves the religious problem of the presence of the transcendent in the world without loss of transcendence. The transcendent is present as the hidden ground of the manifest, and human beings, by cultivating their nature and fulfilling their destiny, become the bridge which makes this presence effective. It reveals the deeper logic of Chinese thought: the unity of Heaven and humanity (*tian ren he yi* 天人合一), and the nonduality of substance and function (*ti yong bu er* 體用不二). The Heavenly *dao* transcends and is immanent in the human world. Through self-cultivation one can share in the *xian* and hidden of Heaven and Earth, and participate in their achievements and realization.

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Notes

- ¹ This study draws heavily on many classical Chinese materials which lack published English renderings. Where English versions do exist, they tend to follow a sense-based approach that does not always preserve the precise lexical weight of individual characters. Whenever this occurs, we supply our own rendering. To facilitate verification, all key Chinese terms are given in their original graph form alongside an English gloss, and the full Chinese sentence is provided immediately after each translation. This study has repeatedly cited the *Yijing* from the edition of (Yang and Zhang 2011), this reference will not be repeated in subsequent citations. Moreover, this study adopts the term *Yijing* 周易 in accordance with the usage of this Special Issue. The term encompasses two historical layers: the foundational text *Zhouyi* proper (*Zhouyi gujing* 周易古經), and the appended exegetical writings known as the *Yizhuan* 易傳 (the Ten Wings). This manuscript’s textual analysis proceeds primarily from the received *Yijing* (*Zhouyi* proper and the *Yizhuan*), supplemented by key commentarial traditions from the Han through the Ming dynasties. The selection of these sources is guided by their historical influence and their relevance to the conceptual development of *xian*.
- ² The concept of *xian* has been touched upon in passing by several Western-language scholars of the *Yijing*, including Cyril Javary and Richard Bertschinger. However, none of these authors has treated *xian* as an independent concept with its own internal structure, nor have they pursued the systematic analysis that the present study undertakes.

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