

**THE CONCEPT OF I CHING IN CHOONG KAM
KOW'S ARTWORKS**

SAHAR AMIR KHANSARI

**CULTURAL CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

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SAHAR AMIR KHANSARI

RGB140005

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Matric No: RGB140005

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ABSTRACT

Choong Kam Kow is one of the senior prominent contemporary artists in Malaysia. He obtained his Bachelor degree in Fine Arts from The National Taiwan University in 1961 and his Master of Fine Arts from The Pratt Institute, New York in 1968. He received the Honorary of Doctorate of Arts from The Robert Gordon University in Scotland due to his achievement and contribution in fine arts. What is interesting in the historical context of the Malaysian arts is the fact that Choong Kam Kow seems to be the only artist who incorporated Chinese symbols in his artworks. This research demonstrates that his use of Chinese symbols serves to convey the unity of macrocosm and microcosm in his selected artworks as well as moral values of Chinese philosophy.

In addition, the artworks selected have not been previously analysed, so the researcher has selected these artworks to identify their symbols and interpret them to reveal possible meanings in order to get a deeper understanding of his art. Thus, this research is beneficial for Malaysian art due to limited studies about Choong Kam Kow's artworks and contemporary Malaysian abstract artists. This research is also useful to the local or international art students, historians and experts who have an interest in Choong Kam Kow's thoughts and attempt for Malaysian art progress.

This research interprets ten artworks of Choong Kam Kow using Panofsky's theory of Iconology. This approach has not been employed in previous studies and will, therefore, give us a novel explanation of the concept of the artworks and intent of the artist in relating moral values through a combination of Chinese symbols and western approaches to colour.

ABSTRAK

Choong Kam Kow merupakan salah satu pelukis kontemporari yang terkemuka di Malaysia. Beliau meraih Sarjana Muda dalam Seni Lukisan dari Universiti Nasional Taiwan pada tahun 1961 dan Ijazah Sarjana dalam Seni Lukisan di Institute Pratt, New York pada tahun 1968. Beliau meraih Kehormat Doktor Falsafah Kesenian dari Universiti Robert Gordon di Scotland atas pencapaiannya and sumbangannya dalam bidang seni lukisan. Apa yang menarik dalam konteks sejarah kesenian di Malaysia ialah Choong Kam Kow merupakan satu-satunya pelukis yang menggabungkan simbol-simbol Cina dalam hasil lukisannya. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan simbol-simbol Cina ini bertujuan untuk menyampaikan perpaduan makrokosmos dan mikrokosmos serta nilai-nilai moral dan falsafah Cina dalam hasil kerja-kerja lukisannya.

Sebagai tambahan, hasil kerja-kerja lukisan yang terpilih sebelum ini belum lagi dianalisis, oleh itu, pengkaji telah memilih hasil kerja-kerja ini untuk mengenal pasti simbol-simbol dan mentafsir serta mendedahkan makna-maknanya bagi pemahaman yang mendalam mengenai hasil kerja lukisannya itu. Dengan itu, kajian ini amat bermanfaat bagi seni lukisan di Malaysia memandangkan pengajian tentang hasil-hasil kerja lukisan dan kesenian Choong Kam Kow serta pelukis-pelukis abstrak kontemporari Malaysia sangat terhad. Kajian ini juga amat bermanfaat bagi para pelajar kesenian setempat dan antarabangsa, para pengkaji sejarah kesenian serta para ahli seni yang tertarik dengan pemikiran dan percubaan Choong Kam Kow demi kemajuan kesenian Malaysia.

Kaji ini mentafsir sepuluh hasil kerja-kerja lukisan Choong Kam Kow yang menggunakan teori ikonologi Panofsky. Pendekatan ini belum lagi digunakan dalam kajian sebelum ini dan oleh itu ia akan memberi penjelasan yang novel mengenai konsep

dari hasil kerja- kerja kesenian serta niat pelukis untuk mengaitkan nilai moral menerusi gabungan simbol-simbol Cina dan pendekatan Barat dalam penggunaan warna.

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As an Iranian Artist, I have always envisioned in understanding and exploring the evolving nature of art in different regions. My artistic journeys around the world have broadened my perspective in art and culture in various settings. Art in Malaysia is a wonderful hub which glimpses diverse arts in the east and south Asia. Through this thesis, I intend to create an outside perspective on an artist in Malaysia. It is hoped to create a mutual art platform between Malaysian and Iranian artists in the future.

During the course of this thesis, many individuals have supported me, and therefore deserve my deepest gratitude. First and foremost, I am indebted to my academic supervisor Dr. Ong Ian Li, who expertly guided me throughout my degree and whose unwavering enthusiasm for artistic exploration has been valuable for the development of the research contents. Her unique way of thinking and understanding of diverse issues makes her my academic role model.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Malaysia is a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. Due to its ethnical diversity, the people individually attempt to represent their cultural values and the essence of their notion by adopting more influences from the society. In a similar way, to achieve art development, some artists leave their country to pursue education abroad in the western countries and encounter various art movements such as abstract expressionism, pop art, geometric abstraction, minimalism, OP art and photorealism. Choong Kam Kow is such an artist. In 1957, Choong Kam Kow went to Taipei and obtained his bachelor degree in fine arts at National Taiwan Normal University. His stay in Taipei acquainted him with the post-impressionism and expressionism. In 1960, he went to the United States for further education, where he was surrounded by artistic events and art movements. Subsequently, each change of style was the result of his observations and response to the social and cultural circumstance that he confronted, so the changing procedure qualified him to seek new series. Therefore, in 2015, his 268 artworks among 15 series were represented as “Retrospective” in the National Visual Arts gallery of Malaysia, which conveyed and expressed his pioneering thoughts about the world that he was living in during the journey (Masjak, 2015).

He was awarded the honorary doctorate of Arts from the Robert Gordon University in Scotland due to his artistic achievements. Moreover, he contributed to approximately 90 local and international exhibitions around the world such as Germany, the United Kingdom, China, Singapore, Denmark, United States, Malaysia, Japan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Macau, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Bangladesh (Choong, 2004, 2006; Masjek, 2015).

In January 2015, the researcher visited the Retrospective Exhibition of Choong Kam Kow in the National Gallery for the first time. The artworks have impressed and

encouraged the researcher to pursue their meaning, which lead to the attempt by the researcher to identify and examine the Chinese symbols in his artworks and interpret the symbols by applying the Erwin Panofsky's theory of iconography and iconology.

Related data were collected during the research process from diverse sources about the artist and Chinese symbols to support the findings. The aim of the study is to analyse ten of his artworks to clarify their meaning and interpret the artists' endeavour. This research is aimed at analysing each production of art based on Panofsky's theory to demonstrate how he employed Chinese symbols to convey moral values through his art.

1.2. Background

In 1934, Dr. Chong Kam Kow was born in the Kinta Valley of Ipoh which is a place of natural beauty and vast and fertile land. His family had the opportunity to attain a piece of land near Bercham for plantation. Due to this farming activity, he had a close connection with the Mother Nature, which he mentioned during an interview as the best part of his childhood memories. Since he had to do hard work in his childhood, discipline became part of his personality. For instance, riding a bike 11 km from home to school every day is an example of his determination towards a brighter future. In other words, between 1941 and 1945, the incident of Japanese occupation of Malaya happened and shortage of rice forced his family to replace vegetables with tapioca. Later in 1950, they were forced to leave their village and moved to a new village. Due to new prohibitions and regulations, less productive life became tougher for rurality. Pursuing secondary school and 40 km cycling led him to attend teaching courses for 2 years, so snatching teaching post in the Chinese primary school in Termoh was the first position that he obtained. His motivation and frequent sketching and drawing maintained his enthusiasm in art and made him keener in getting formal art education (Masjak 2015).

In 1957 after the Independence celebration, he went off to Taipei. He also explained in the interview that there was no academic university for fine arts during that

time in Malaysia and his English was not good enough to get a better opportunity to study art, so National Taipei Normal University was the best choice for him to obtain academic education. In addition, he started writing Chinese classical literature poetry as one of his interests (Choong, 2015).

In 1961, Taipei sojourn led him to observe new styles of painting. Therefore, being influenced by Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Cezanne, he was encouraged to incorporate the Post Impressionism and Expressionism in his artworks, although he was fond of Picasso (Choong, 2015).

In September 1965, he started his Master of Fine Arts at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, while staying in the United States. This was a flash point in his artistic life. Since 1945, New York had become the centre of modern art with many great sophisticated artists from Europe migrated to the U.S. Due to this, contemporary art movements like abstract expressionism, pop art, geometric abstraction, minimalism, installation, op art, and photorealism were formed in New York. Hence, being involved with those art movements in particular geometric abstraction and conceptual minimalism, a few years later Choong Kam Kow was able to produce Sea – Thru, New York, and shaped canvas series in order to start the new chapter of his artistic life.

1.3. Statement of Problem

Although Choong Kam Kow had a retrospective exhibition at The National Visual Art Gallery in 2015, the accompanying catalogue of the exhibition did not fully explain his use of Chinese symbols in many of his artworks. The researcher is of the opinion that understanding these symbols is the key to understand his works and artistic direction particularly in the later years of his life as an artist. Furthermore, the artworks highlighted in this research will show how much Choong has developed as an artist over the years and successfully merged his western art education with his knowledge of Chinese philosophy. Consequently, after this development, art historians, researchers, and

students began to investigate certain artworks of Malaysian artists in order to interpret by analysing and revealing the artist's intent. However, due to the lack of attention from the government, weak marketing for the art productions, locally and globally and lack of general information, Malaysian artists are not famed enough. As an artist and researcher, the author would like to convey the artist's messages and help the art society of Malaysia by analysing certain artworks of Choong Kam Kow to represent his endeavour and vision to the art world.

1.4. Research Objectives

- To identify and examine Chinese symbols in Choong Kam Kow's artworks
- To interpret of Choong Kam Kow's artworks based on the concept of I Ching

1.5. Research Questions

The following questions can lead the researcher to gain awareness and understanding of Chinese symbols and explore possible meanings of the artworks using Panofsky's theory.

- Why did Choong Kam Kow incorporate Chinese symbols into his artworks?
- What is the possible interpretation of Choong Kam Kow's artwork according to the concept of I Ching?

1.6. Scope of Research

The analysis is limited to ten artworks of Choong Kam Kow from the SEA Thru series in 1973 and Dragon series which were produced from 1973 to 2012. All of these artworks were represented in the retrospective exhibition in early 2015 at the National Visual Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. The researcher focused on analysing these ten artworks based on the theoretical framework of Panofsky's theory of Iconography and Iconology.

1.7. Statement of Significance

Most scholars believe that Panofsky's theory of Iconography and Iconology was the primary methodology to study Renaissance art and it is not proper for contemporary art, but Unlike this believe I am going to do the analysis of Choong Kam Kow's artworks which includes Chinese symbols by Panofsky's theory. Choong Kam Kow was the first Malaysian artist who obtained Master of Fine Arts from the U.S. In addition, the most important fact is that he seems to be the only artist who used Chinese symbols in order to convey the unity of macrocosm and microcosm in his artworks to convey moral values of Chinese philosophy.

In addition, these artworks have not been analysed earlier. Therefore, the researcher has selected these artworks to identify the symbols and interpret them to reveal their Chinese symbols in order to get better perception of the Malaysian arts. In other words, it can be beneficial for Malaysian art because there are very limited studies conducted on Choong Kam Kow's artworks and contemporary Malaysian abstract artists. Hence, this research is beneficial to the local or international art students, historians, and experts of the present and future to be informed about Choong Kam Kow's thoughts and his attempt for the progress of the Malaysian arts.

This research focuses on ten artworks of Choong Kam Kow from the Iconology perspective of Panofsky's theory. This approach has not been employed in previous studies and will, therefore, give us a novel explanation of the concept of the artworks and intent of its creator in relation to the cultural and historical contexts.

1.8. Limitation of study

The limitation of the study was source deficiency and inadequate publication in the field of Malaysian art, in particular of Choong Kam Kow and I Ching philosophy

(even though an attempt has been made to translate some of the published materials from different languages mainly, Persian). Despite the prominence of Choong Kam Kow's artworks, these three series have not been analysed before and not many perspectives are available in the field. This research might be the first attempt to analyse his series and generate an external artistic perspective. Moreover, realizing the concept of I Ching philosophy as a Chinese wisdom and broader concept is a factor of time and expertise in the field.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into three main topics; abstract expressionism in cultural context of Malaysia, Choong Kam Kow's life and art, and investigation on Panofsky's theory.

Initially, to understand the concept of an artwork, is significant to be aware about its cultural context as emphasised by Pooke and Newall (2008) that by looking at social and cultural origins, the differences between conceptions in various artworks can be realized (Poke, 2008). In order to define a certain artistic style such as abstract expressionism, Abdullah (2013) argued that abstract expressionism has been one of the most effective art movements in Malaysia since 1950. Many Malaysian artists of that period produced artworks in this style due to its significant impact. Among those artists, Choong Kam Kow with his unique style and various methods of expression, was chosen for this research.

Furthermore, his artistic achievements had led him to expose different series such as Sea Thru and Dragon (Masjek, 2015) by historical background and awareness of cultural context that are fundamental information, but comprehensive interpretation needs to be studied by using Panofsky's theory. Erwin Panofsky's iconological theory describes the concept of the artwork within three phases of iconological description and interpretation.

2.1. Abstract expressionism in Malaysia

All explanations of art are reconciled through language, culture, and history. To realize these different art conceptions, we must look at their cultural and social origins (Pooke, 2008). In order to comprehend abstract expressionism in Malaysia, an art writer (Abdullah, 2009), explained that the word abstract expressionist is applied generally to describe the kind of work that moves to abstraction or non-objective art. The colours and shapes are functional in reflecting or connecting a provoking spiritual state about certain themes and subject matters practiced by the artists.

In the Malaysian context, adjusting the concept of giving in particular manner is significant. The whole obligation remains in the hands of artists and art planners. Malaysian artists love a condition of whole liberty, so by the time the eventual aim of independence contemporary aesthetics has been known worldwide, the spirit remained national. Moreover, in the contemporary sense, an artwork needs to be logically referential, culturally contextual, and archaeologically relational.

Abdullah (2013) argued that abstract expressionism has been one of the western art activities that have swayed Malaysian artists since the late 1950s until today. The abstraction and works that fall into the formalistic approach of abstract expressionism have been well acknowledged and produced more since the National Cultural Policy in 1971 and Islamization.

2.2. Choong Kam Kow's art

To understand Choong Kam Kow's art, the author has referred to the review written so far about him by various artists and experts who realized his vision about art professionally. Luo Yi Ping (2006) argued that the world under Choong Kam Kow's hands is symbolized in its unique character from the cultural symbol to art symbol. This means he observed the artist's artworks from the level of meaning and form of symbols.

The presence of such an attractive power is proven by his ability to definitely capture the important key by converting the cultural symbols to art symbols. Similarly, he used media and symbols as means of projecting the perception of life in nature. Once he captured the cultural symbols, he obtained the deep understanding of the reality. When he captured the art symbols, he obtained the division of mind-image and mind-will of life. In his works, there is a strong existence of dualistic symbols and features such as tradition and modernity, nature and humanity, and east and west co-existing. He has built up an organic entity of art with a content which is profoundly plentiful and philosophically eastern (Ping, 2006).

Huang Sheng (2004) argued that during the recent centuries, many Chinese have left their motherland and migrated to settle down in the Southeast Asia to pursue new adventures. The wave of migration and settlement have shifted and exchanged cultural values and mutual influences. In order to introduce Choong Kam Kow, he explained him as an artist who was born in a similar historical, geometrical, and cultural background with a successful academic, artistic, and educationist career with vast experience. In his artistic life, he went through the cultural impact and his approach was full of challenges. His art represents his constant investigations into culture, history and practice, humanity, techniques, media and the power of these aspects. His solo exhibition in Guangdong museum of art has represented almost 40 artworks from various and important series including the Festival, Dragon, Rack Space, and Earth Scape series. These artworks illustrate the aspects of culture and custom and secret and heritage of the nature. In other words, he found out that his art is deeply connected to its cultural values with profound meanings that have shaped important contents of his art (Masjak, 2015).

2.2.1. Iconography

First of all, Iconography is the description of symbols. Icon is a visual section identifiably related to its meaning and shared usually in public places for definite determinations. It performs as a device and can take the procedures of statues, paintings, preserved pieces or buildings. An icon communicates meaning beyond its exact context. Therefore, the philosophical and cultural principles and opinions lie behind icons. Overall, icons endeavour to explain the features of cultural structures which are spatial symbols for objects or places and give growth to the development of a confidence system and an identity. The word iconography is a combination of two Greek words, specifically “*eikon*” and “*graphein*,” that are interpreted as “image” and “writing”. Thus, the word can literally be interpreted as “image writing” or “image describing”. Iconography is the depiction or a set of depictions of an individual thing or a place, an image or an album of images. Similarly, iconography is a graphic illustration of a subject. It has been described as an attempt in search of social relations as well as cultural and political influences of images by describing and interpreting symbols or images (Kaboudarahangi, 2012).

Iconography, which may currently be defined as a system of types and motifs serves as pictorial symbols used by the artist to make traditional doctrine intelligible to his public and yet is highly conventionalized though it will be found to vary from one place to another. Whereas a general iconographic tradition prevails in larger centres, each region has its proper iconographic formulas and peculiarities. Hence, the iconography of a particular work places it by its local characteristics and differences within the region where it was created. Similarly, where the individual work is placed within its period is by the changes that occur in the body of iconography from one age to another (Vanderbilt, 1957).

2.2.2. Iconology

Iconology is the interpretation of symbols. The word "iconology" directs its completeness; "icon" and "logos" in short are the lore and language of visualization (Howard, 1996). Originally, iconology, in terms of art history was restricted to art alone. Today, it is the task of a new iconology to draw a link between art and images in general as well as reintroduce the body which has either been marginalized by our fascination with media or defamiliarized as a stranger in our world. The present mass consumption of images needs our critical response which in turn needs our insights on how images work on us (Belting, 2005).

Iconology is the interpretation of the total symbolic horizon while iconography involves a cataloguing of particular symbolic motifs. Iconological analysis is, therefore, used to reveal the 'code' of experience found in the Iconography (Eyles, 1990).

2.2.3. Panofsky's Theory of Iconography and Iconology

According to the author's study, more than twenty approaches exist in the field of art and literature. All of them have several research methods and sometimes each method has several further research methods. Approximately, two hundred research methods exist in art and literature. Some of these methods for example the Max Müller mythology have become so out-dated that they have been replaced by newer methods. Other methods such as the contextual and structural approaches, despite history and oldness, are still beneficial and useful as the passage of time has not compromised their importance.

Panofsky distinguished three levels of meaning in renaissance art. He demonstrated them through equivalence with three phrases of the interpretation of an example of unrestrained performance. In the first phase, he split up the principle or natural meaning into the recognition of accurate meaning, and adopted the nervousness of expressional sense. The identification of visual facts derived from knowledge was

realistic, while understanding the mental shades of these facts contained a kind of expressional meaning. Gratitude of the act as a salutation expected a common cultural context. The second phase of interpretation is branded secondary or conventional by Panofsky. Though he reflected both of these layers of meaning to be extraordinary, a variance was highlighted among the two at the level of interpretive procedures. Where the main meaning was practical, Panofsky defined secondary meaning as comprehensible. Obviously, the smart interpretation of conventional meaning based on common data of the systematic association of the gesture with its message implies a notion of meaning that is in general "semiotic" way (Abdi, 2012).

In the third level, which Panofsky called intrinsic meaning or Iconological analysis is slightly diverse where its connection to semiotic notions of meaning is nowhere near to recognizable. Panofsky set it separately from the first two levels of meaning, by stating that intrinsic meaning was "vital" while ordinary and conventional meanings were extraordinary (Hasen Mueller, 1978).

Table 2.1: Fundamentals of Panofsky's Theory (Hart, 1993)

Object of Interpretation	Act of Interpretation	Equipment for Interpretation	Corrective Principle of Interpretation
1. Primary or natural subject matter (A) factual, (B) expressional - constituting the world of artistic motifs	Pre- iconographical description (and pseudo- formal analysis)	Practical experience (familiarity with Objects and events).	History of style (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, objects and events were expressed by forms).
2. Secondary or conventional subject matter, constituting the world of images, stories and allegories.	Iconographical analysis	Knowledge of literary sources (familiarity with specific themes and Concepts).	History of types (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific themes or concepts were expressed by objects and events).
3. Intrinsic meaning or content, constituting the world of "symbolical" values	Iconological interpretation	Synthetic intuition (familiarity with the essential tendencies of the human mind), conditioned by personal psychology and "Weltan- schauung"	History of cultural symptoms or "symbols" in general (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, essential tendencies of the human mind were expressed by specific themes

In the "Methods and Theories of Art History", Anne D'Allewa stated that Warburg argued that a given period of art is associated in numerous ways with its religion,

philosophy, literature, science, politics and social life. His student, Erwin Panofsky repeated Warburg's sentiment with a proverb "In a work of art, shape cannot be separated from content". Thus, in iconographic theory, two more elements can be added to the basic formal analysis in order to fully understand the work of art (D'Alleva, 2005).

Straten (1986) proposed a revised scheme of Panofsky by inserting the final phase, which is the iconological interpretation to find out how far "symbolic values" appear in a work of art that is were not explicitly intended by the artist. Thus, the work of art can be seen as a document of its time and in particular, a document of the artist as a person living in a certain period. For this phase, a profound knowledge of cultural-historical character varying from politics and level of scientific knowledge to religion and daily life at the time and place of the creation of the work of art is needed. For this phase of Panofsky's theory to draw a more logical boundary line between the meanings or definitions of the terms Iconography and Iconology, it seems that these terms have been interpreted. If such a development can be imagined and it is by no means unrealistic to do so, the masses of material that will come together, arranged according to subject (and possibly further subdivide according to country and/or period) can perhaps be anticipated (Straten, 1986).

Masood and Zain (2011) by using Panofsky's theory tried to analyse the perception of visual messages among 35 form-five students. By applying Panofsky's theory, they realized that the combination of text and vision makes it easier to recognize the perception of the messages. In other words, the evaluations represented among their respondents, female students observes and thought at a higher inherent level as compared to their counterpart. This demonstrates the usefulness of Panofsky's theory in the local visual art research (Masood, 2011).

Similarly, Hamid and Ishak (2008) examined over 110 certain artworks out of 770 collected artworks from all over Malaysia belong to two major Malaysian Muslim artists, Shakir Hassan Al-said and Dia Al-Azzawi, by using Panofsky's theory to evaluate

the features of those samples in order to make a new categorization and dimension of art styles in Malaysia, particularly in Islamic Calligraphy. The iconological interpretation of Panofsky led the researcher to divide artworks from their forms and content into five main styles that are: Traditional, Rudimentary, Abstract, Marginal and Gestural/Pseudo-Calligraphy (Hamidon, 2015).

2.3. Concept of Chinese symbols

2.3.1. Dragon

Jinchi (2008) described that the Chinese dragon stays between lands without a definite line as it is a mythical creature of God. Henceforth, there is no exact role of the dragon in the Chinese culture. The dragon can be a deity that exists in the village river, which villagers pray to so that it will bring rain to water the force or could be a protector of the local temple. Thus, the dragon is often a respected mythical being in many areas of the Chinese lifestyle. In the Chinese culture, child delivery, marriage and death are seen as important events in life where in these three areas, the Chinese dragon is very much elaborated but plays a diverse role in each area, for example as a guardian to the new born clothes. In marriage, the Chinese dragon is represented as playing the role of the male power, Yang while the phoenix is the elements of Yin; together they indicate the tie and togetherness of the married couple (Jinchi, 2008).

2.3.2. Yin and Yang and Bagua

A cultural anthropology and archaeology study reveals that Yin Yang's historical and philosophical origin is beyond Taoism and I Ching and closely related to the ancient totemic beliefs and shamanism which are widely shared among various cultural groups such as the ancient Chinese, Native Americans, or Native Mexicans (Fang, 2012). According to the Taoism, the Chinese culture can be summarized into two basic notions; one is a holistic, dynamic and paradoxical epistemology which views everything in the universe as interdependent and interactive process while the other is an ontology of

Familyism which believes that the most interdependent and interactive human relationship is family or family-like within group relationships (Li, 1998). On the other hand, Confucianism and Taoism are 2500-year-old indigenous Chinese philosophies. Confucianism deals with human relationships and how to handle them while and Taoism is about how to live one's life in harmony with nature. (M.-J. Chen, 2001, 2002; Fang, 2003, 2005-2006, 2012a, b; Li, 1998, 2008; Peng & Nisbett, 1999). These two philosophies; Confucianism and Taoism emphasize that human life which indeed the whole cosmos is formed and influenced by two interdependent powers called Yin and Yang which are a fundamental duality demonstrated in all phenomena (Cammann, 1985). The Yin and Yang thinking has had an enormous impact on the "Chinese philosophies, martial arts, medicine, science, literature, politics, daily behaviour, beliefs, thinking, and other areas for thousands of years which suggests that there exists neither absolute black nor absolute white; every universal phenomenon embraces paradox and change. Yin Yang can be summarized in terms of three principles; (1) Yin and Yang coexist in everything and everything embraces Yin and Yang, (2) Yin and Yang give rise to, complement, and reinforce each other, and (3) Yin and Yang exist within and interplay with each other to form a dynamic and paradoxical unity (Fang, 2014).

The Yin Yang is a symbol represented by a circle divided into two equal halves by a curvy line; one side of which is black (Yin) while the other is white (Yang). According to the Yin Yang philosophy, all universal phenomena are shaped by the integration of these two opposite cosmic energies. Yin represents the female energy such as the moon, night, weakness, darkness, softness, and femininity; while Yang stands for male energy such as the sun, day, strength, brightness, hardness, and masculinity. The white dot in the black area and black dot in the white area connote coexistence and unity of the opposites to form the whole (Fang, 2012).

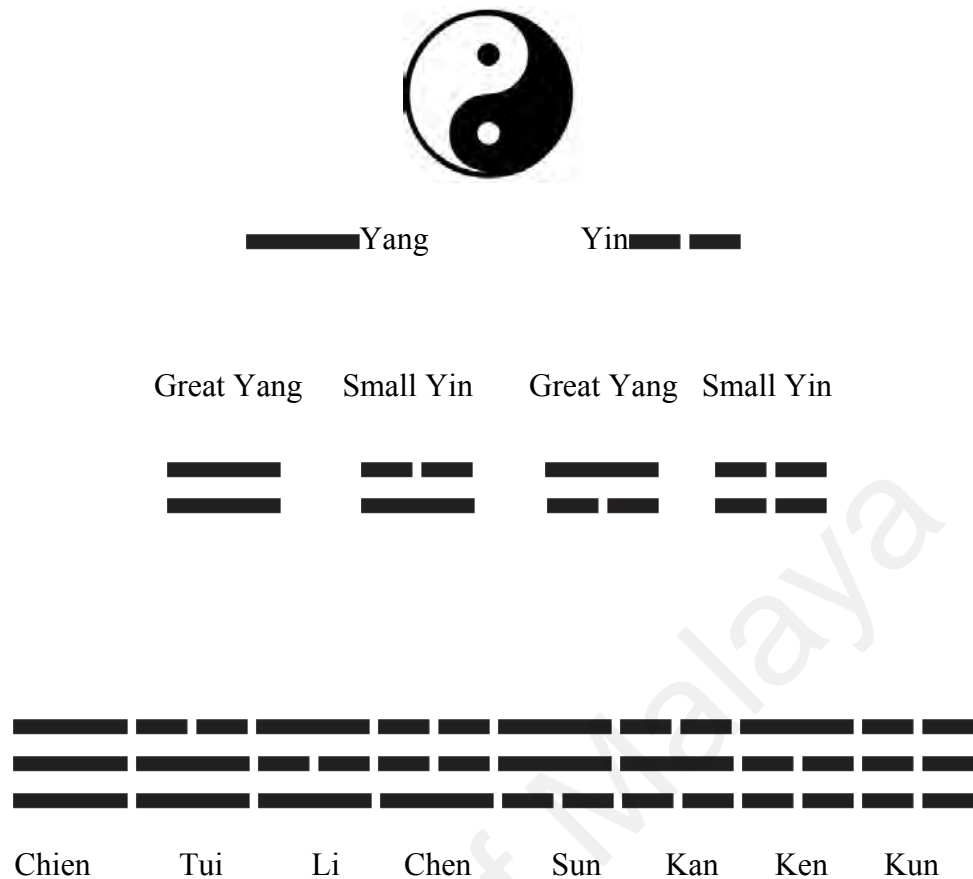


Figure 2.1: Formation of the Trigrams
Source: (Hayek, M,2011)

The early Chinese had imperceptible methods to symbolize the shared powers that work in the cosmos. The well-known limited offsets of linear figures called the Trigrams and Hexagrams composed of three or six horizontal lines. These lines were composed of solid or whole lines to picture the male code while the broken lines designate the female. In the formation of the Trigrams (Figure 2.1), the Chinese have used such lines in sets of three to create eight possible arrangements collectively called as the Bagua (Pa Kua). This octagonal shape of I Ching and sign of Taoist Cosmology is a product of a long evolution and includes eight Trigrams. Moreover, Hexagrams have been formed from Trigrams. The Chinese reflected solid lines as male or Yang and divided ones as female or Yin. Two is an obvious symbol for the female sex, while one and three are natural symbols for

males. However, since one was pre-empted in China to indicate the Supreme Unity (behind the Duality), three became the chief male symbol, Bagua (Figure 2.2).

To sum up, it seems suitable to use the words "male" and "female" when mentioning the two aspects of the Countless Duality in the early periods before the terms "Yin" and "Yang" were invented with the understanding that these terms should more appropriately; comprising those contrasts of dark and light, stable and yielding, and active and passive that were later indirectly used in the terms of "Yang" and "Yin" (Cammann, 1985).



Figure 2.2. Bagua
Source: (Nielsen,2014)

2.3.3. I Ching (the book of changes)

A living, breathing oracle, “the book of changes I Ching” in Chinese is one of the most significant books in the three thousand years of Chinese cultural history. Its derivation goes back to the ancient mythical times and has engaged the consideration of the most well-known scholars of the present day.

The I Ching itself along with the Bagua is also a base for metaphysical speculations. This particular side has been extensively developed as a part of the common culture of the various intellectual and religious traditions of China including Buddhism and Taoism. Thus, the formation of the Trigrams is often depicted as a generative process

resulting from a succession of combinations starting from the emergence of the two poles, Yin and Yang. As such this process can be considered as a symbolical expression of the creation of the cosmos itself. This cosmological aspect is not absent from the divinatory use of the Book of Changes; the Trigram and Hexagram randomly obtained work as a symbolization of the state of the macrocosm at the time of the consultation while the "changes" which might occur to the lines express the cosmic dynamics that should be caught by the diviner to foresee upcoming developments (Hayek, 2011).

The I Ching or classic of changes is an ancient divination text and considered as the oldest Chinese classics. Possessing the history of more than two and a half millennia of commentary and interpretation, the I Ching is an influential text read throughout the world, providing inspiration to the worlds of religion, psychoanalysis, business, literature, and art. Originally a divination manual in the western Zhou period (1000_750BC), over the course of the warring states period and early imperial period (500-200 BC), it was transformed into a cosmological text with a series of philosophical commentaries known as the "ten wings" (Kern, 2010).

The I Ching was the subject of scholarly commentary and basis for divination practice for centuries across the Far East and eventually took on an influential role in the western understanding of the eastern thought. The I Ching uses a type of divination called Cleromancy which produces apparently random numbers. The interpretation of the readings found in the I Ching is a matter of centuries of debate and many commentators have used the book symbolically often to provide guidance for moral decision making as informed by Taoism and Confucianism. The Hexagrams themselves have often acquired cosmological significance and parallel with many other traditional names for the processes of change such as Yin and Yang and Wu Xing (Peterson,1982; Smith, 2008).

The book of changes speaks to us not in abstract platitudes, but with direct advice about what to do now where in this situation, to bring about our own success and good fortune.

Therefore, the I Ching takes a definitely truthful view of the world. It does not deceive us into thinking that evil in ourselves and others, in the world at large, can be removed once and for all. It admits that we all have in our characters both the positive and negative features and teaches us to be led by our greater qualities so that our opinions and actions are free of inner influences. It also teaches us how to reply to negative effects outside ourselves in order to avoid harm and uphold our wellbeing (Walker, 1992).

2.4. Five Elements

An ancient system of healing encompasses five elements; the first of these is the Shen cycle or the cycle of the Spirit. It demonstrates how the Chinese regarded officials, organs and functions under the elements of fire, earth, metal, water, and wood. The second major cycle is the K'o Cycle which provides a unique view of the relationships of emotions and idea of emotional antidotes which can be helpful in our daily lives as well as in psychotherapy. The law of five elements chart is not only the map of the universe, nature and human beings but also an exquisite diagnostic system. The Chinese used all of the correspondences and associations such as colour sound of the voice, predominant emotions and dreams to diagnose any kinds of predisposing imbalance (Pachuta, 1991).

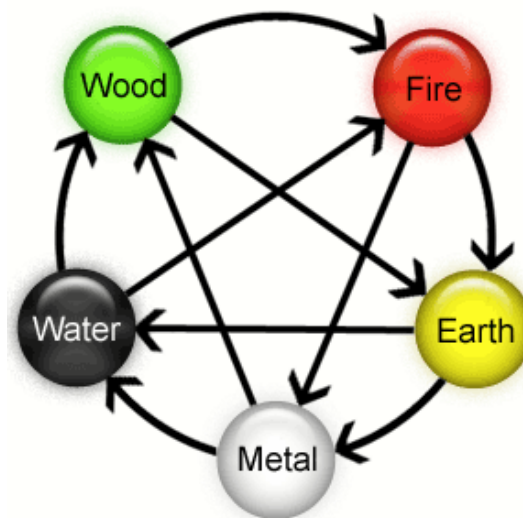


Figure 2.3: Five Elements

Retrieved from <http://fengshuibyjen.com/tips-educational/feng-shui-cure-6-metal-coins/>

Choong Kam Kow, a Chinese Malaysian sophisticated artist, applied Chinese symbols in his artworks in order to convey the message of unity. This research focuses on 10 artworks that have been chosen among 15 series of his art works to realize the concept of I Ching and Chinese symbols with reference to the Chinese culture. These symbols include Chinese calligraphy, Dragon, Bagua, Hexagram, Trigram, and Yin and Yang. Since, they are related to profound Chinese thoughts, the interpretation of the artworks will be made possible through the identification of these symbols.

University of Malaysia

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Methodology

This study has been organized to interpret 10 artworks of Choong Kam Kow through the iconology of Chinese symbols. In other words by the identification of symbols such as dragon, Yin and Yang, Hxagrams and Trigrams and the five elements, the perception and intent of the artist will be disclosed. Consequently, in order to get the concept of art works Panofsky's theory and its three levels of iconology have been chosen as a theoretical framework, which will be a helpful support for this research.

In addition, data were collected via interviews with the artist as the research instrument. The secondary source includes a review of related literature about the artist, Chinese symbols and Panofsky's theory in books, articles and brochures which are imperative in methodology.

3.2. Research Design

Primary data were gained directly from the respondent observations, semi-structured interviews, and first-hand viewing of the artworks. The researcher interviewed the artist by using prepared relevant questions about the artist's life to figure out his vision about art and enthusiasm into applying the Chinese symbols. The interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The second step includes gathering and accumulation of information about the artist and his artworks through secondary resources such as catalogues, brochures, books and articles in order to have a comprehensive overview of the artist. Subsequently, the Chinese symbols need identification and analysis, so Panofsky's theory has an impressive role in this part. The three levels of Panofsky's theory of Iconography and Iconology are the method for analysing artwork from its context and concept. Eventually, the researcher was able to interpret the artworks and clarify the artist's intention.

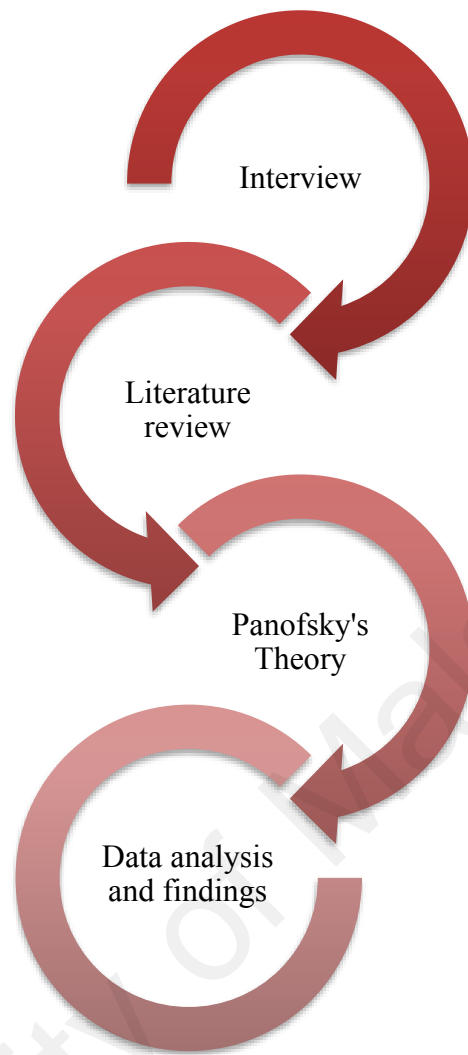


Figure 3.1: Research Design

3.3. Theoretical Framework

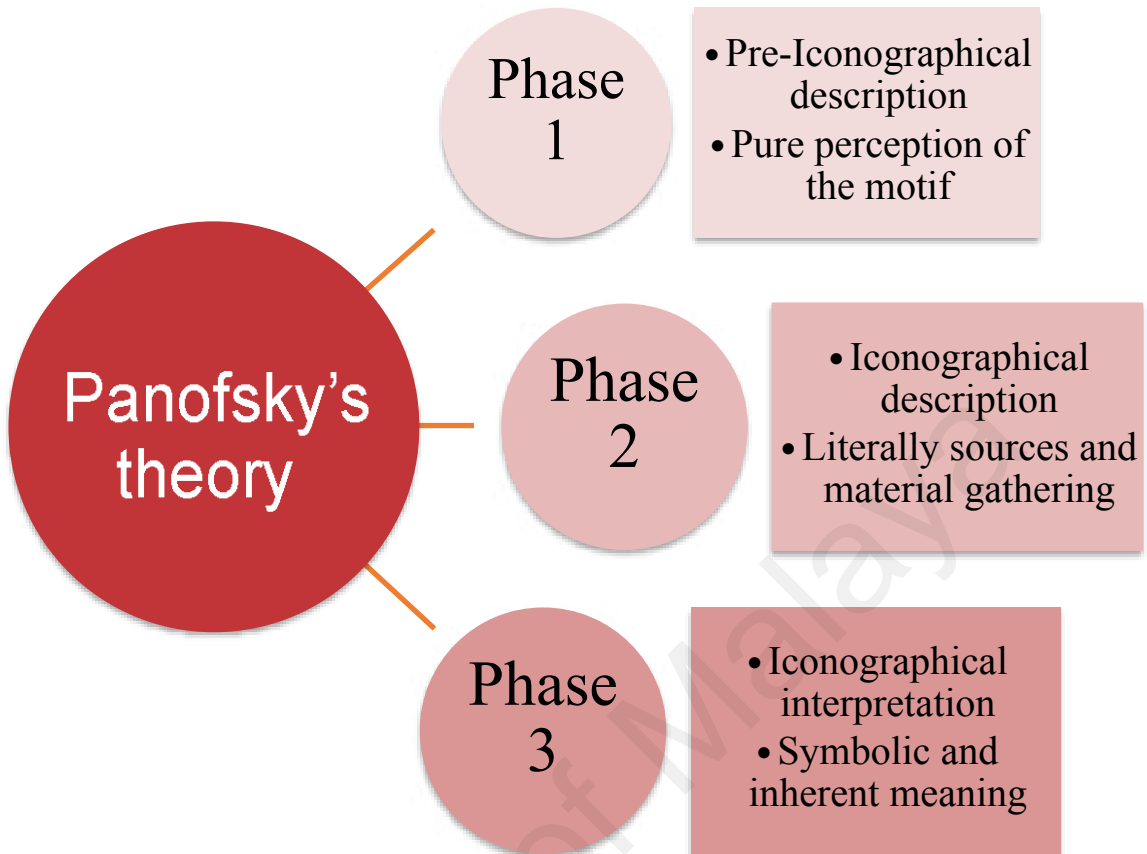


Figure 3.2: Panofsky's Theory

3.4 Conceptual Framework

3.4.1 Macrocosm and Microcosm

The author's conceptual framework was shaped through in-depth interviews with the artist and references to literary sources. The author suggests that the artist's idea for those series of painting was based on I Ching and the concept of Macrocosm and Microcosm. In order to understand I Ching, one needs to understand the Taoist philosophy.

Lao Tzu¹ is traditionally considered as the founder of Taoism which is closely associated in this context with the original or primordial Taoism. Taoism is a philosophy

¹ Laozi's name was Li Er was a native of Quren village like township, Ku country of the kingdom of Chu, and a keeper of the royal archives of the Zhou Dynasty. Laozi was around twenty years older than Confucius (551-479 BCE) and the two met when Confucius was about thirty years old, so Laozi must have lived, like Confucius, at the junction of two historical periods in Chinese history known as the spring and autumn period (770-476 Bce). those were the turbulent times when feudal states were at war with one another and the Zhou dynasty was in decline. In the intellectual history of chine two schools stood out due to having the most influential thoughts.one led by Confucius and the other by Laozi. Some say Laozi lived over a hundred sixty years and some say he lived over two hundred. Sinologists and translators have to this day tried hard to find an equivalent in English for Dao.'It

that emerged during the Huangdi (2697-2597) dynasty. According to the brilliant scholar Kuo Mo-jo, in Han time, Taoism was known as the doctrine of Huan-Lao, a combination of the names of Huang Ti, the yellow emperor and Lao Tzu. Huan Lao is a confusing term. By the second century A.D., it was being used to indicate Hsien Taoism but as late as the second century, it appeared to have still denoted the philosophical Taoism (Creel, 1956).

According to Tao Te Chin, without going outside, you know the whole world; without looking through the wisdom, you may see the ways of heaven; the farther you go, the less you know; thus, the sage knows without traveling, sees without looking, works without doing (Lao Tzu, n.d).

Tao stated that the Microcosm of the body (mind) recognizes how human experience can harmoniously exist and evolve within the Macrocosm of the earth and universe. This evolving human endeavour is called Tao Qigong (Schipper, 1993). The Taoist philosophy is the source of traditional Chinese medicine, Chan, (Zen) meditation, martial arts training, and the teaching of numerous relevant schools with emphasis on spirituality, healing, longevity and creativity.

The whole universe or world is called Macrocosm. There is a corresponding similarity in the pattern and nature between the human being and universe. The human being and cosmos are not separated beings.

Furthermore, the human being is like a temple of major and minor inner God. Likewise, this body is the microcosm of the earth while the earth is the microcosm of the universe. This relationship can be visualized in Figure 3.3.

is true that the literal meaning of "Dao" IS "way" or "road" On the other hand, Dao, according to Laozi, is the ultimate almighty, the mother of all things and not just a way. In addition, Tao which spelled Dao has been derived from Taoism and Taoist (Wu, C. Q, 2015)

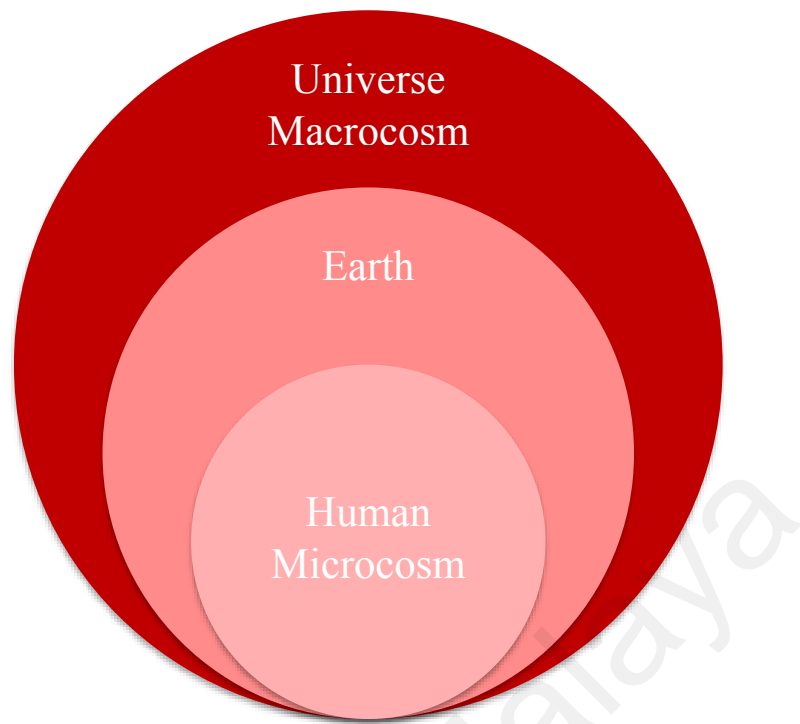
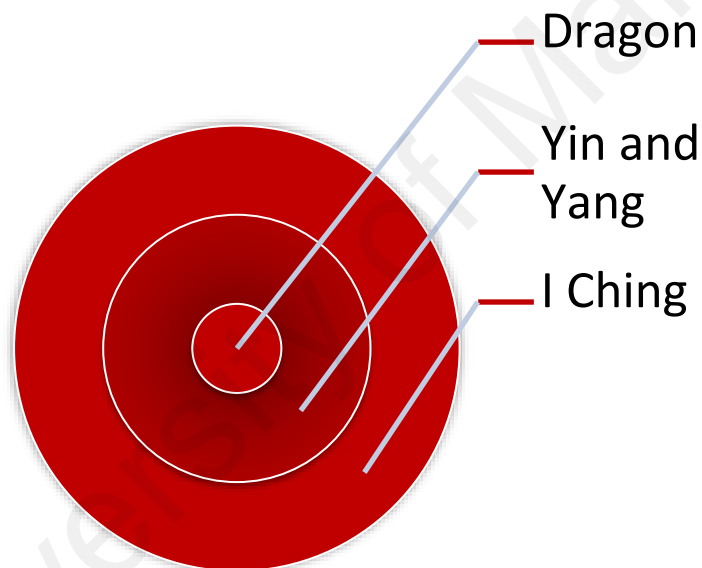


Figure 3.3: Interaction between Macrocosm and Microcosm

Body absorbs energy from the cosmos just as the earth absorbs energy of the sun, planets and other heavenly bodies and perhaps even more subtle energies of the cosmos. In fact, the body is a microcosm of the macrocosm. On the other hand, the universe cannot be experienced unless it has thoughts and experiences but it can be known by going inward. By experiencing the inner universe, the body in both motion and rest will be able to perceive the life around. Consequently, all the energies and forces in the universe are present within the body. In order to understand the unity and inter communication in the universe, the author illustrates the interaction between Macrocosm and Microcosm (Figure 3.3). The human body as a small universe (Microcosm) is surrounded by the energy of the earth and universe (Macrocosm). Therefore, to achieve unity and have influential interaction, the energy of the human body and earth should be connected and consequently by this oneness, the power of the earth and universe will lead the human to the right direction. The interplay between Macrocosm (universe) and Microcosm (human) can change destiny because there is no more separation.

Initially, based on the author's explorations, there is a cyclic process in the universe where each of the Chinese symbols used in the artworks represents part of this cyclic interaction. Based on the Taoist philosophy (Nielsen, 2014) and interviews with the artists, the author designed the structure to reveal this interplay (See Figure 3.4). Hence, a Dragon was centred as an inner power and God-like creature as well as the main source of energies, Yin and Yang as a male and female feature of each creature, and I Ching as a path to lead and direct these energies in the right way by its admonitions.

Figure 3.4: Symbols of Macrocosm and Microcosm in Taoist Philosophy



3.4.2 Colour expression

Another important aspect of the artist's artworks was his use of expressive colour. For this, it was necessary to refer to the western colour theory as Choong has mentioned that the use of colour in his paintings come from his understanding of colour from the western sources. Johannes Itten, a German-born artist and art educator was one of the first people who identified the strategies for successful colour combinations and published *The Art of Colour* in 1961. Itten proposed the notion of "subjective colour" which he discovered while teaching a class assignment on colour harmony in 1928. Many people

have inhibitions about showing themselves as they are but to Itten, subjective colour is "the aura of the person". Itten believed that subjective colour combinations are the key to the identification of the individual's natural mode of thinking. Moreover, subjective taste cannot suffice for the solution of all colour problems. Knowledge of objective principles is essential to the correct evaluation and use of colours. Colour whose effect is pleasing is called harmonious while harmony means order. Harmony also implies balance, the symmetry of forces. When people speak of colour harmony, they are evaluating the joint effect of two or more colours. Experience and experiments with subjective colour combinations show that individuals differ in their judgement of harmony and discord (Itten, 1997).

Besides that, the concept of I Ching is based on balance internally and with the universe while colour Harmony is a result of aesthetic art which beauty represents the cognition and balance of seeing.

By considering this data and evaluating the artworks, the author interpreted the colours based on Itten (year) in order to have better understanding of Choong Kam Kow's artworks.

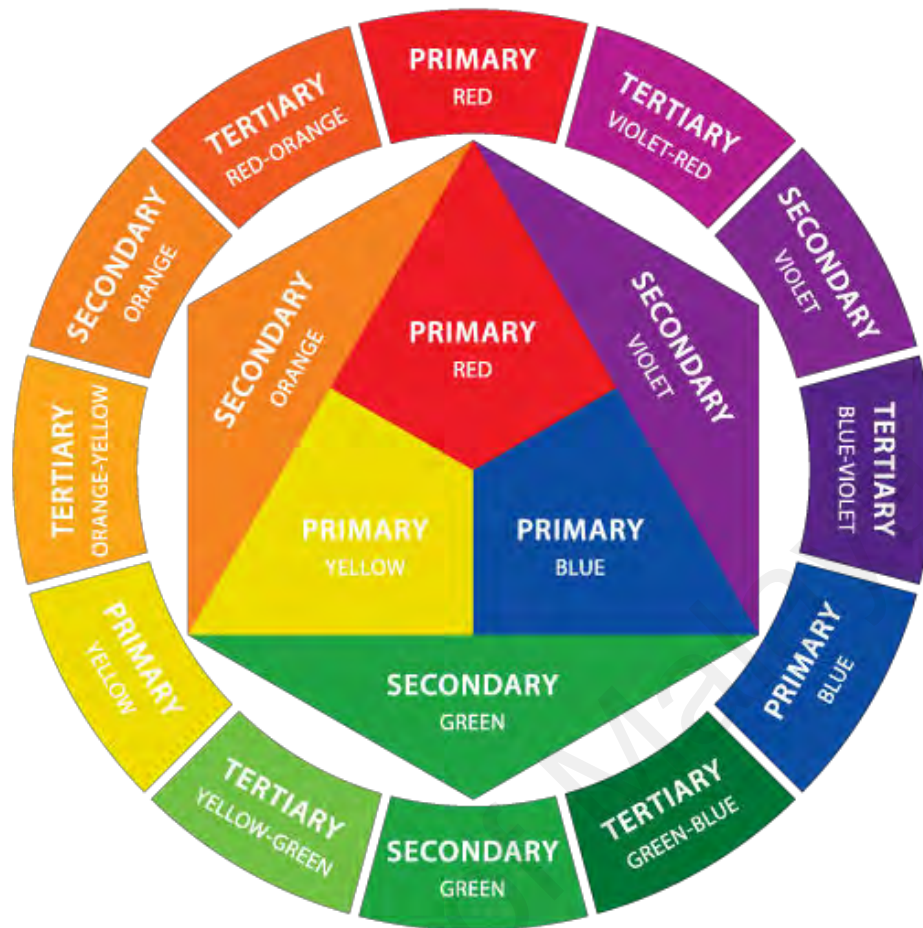


Figure 3.5: Colour Wheel, Source:(Itten, 1970)

3.5 Research Scope

This research focuses on 10 artworks chosen among 15 series of Choong Kam Kow's art works to realize the concept of these symbols with reference to the Chinese philosophy. These Chinese symbols include the symbols of Dragon, Yin and Yang, I Ching, and the five elements. Since they are related to the profound Chinese thoughts, the interpretation of the artworks was possible through identification of these symbols.

3.5.1 Chinese Symbols

The symbols analysed include the Dragon, Yin and Yang, and eight Trigrams (Bagua symbol) as well as the Hexagrams (see Figures 3.6-3.9).

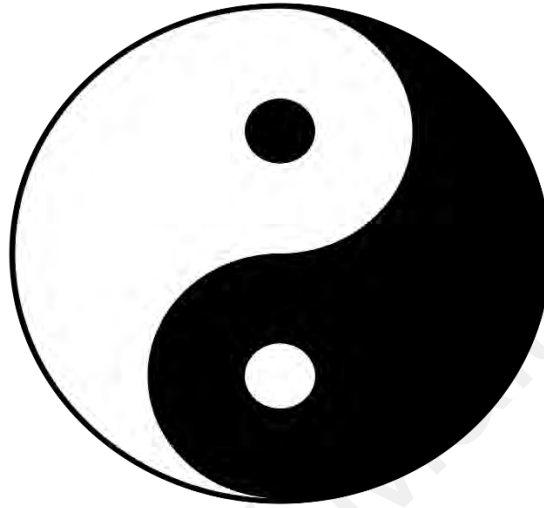


Figure 3.6: Yin and Yang



Figure 3.7: Dragon



Figure 3.8: Eight Trigrams (Bagua)
Source: (Nielsen,2014)

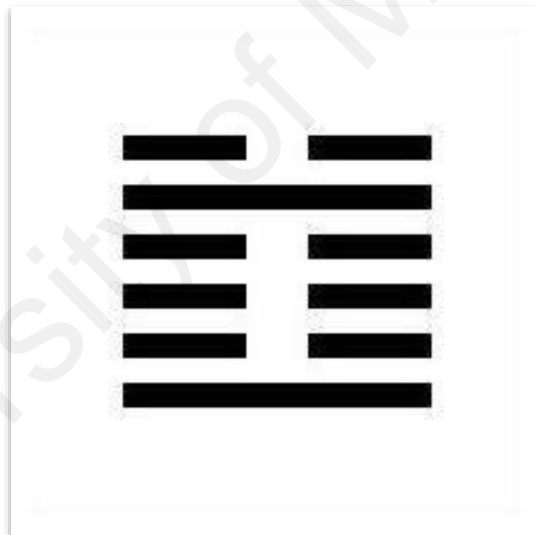


Figure 3.9: Hexagram
Source: (Wilhelm,1951)

Table 3.1: Key for Identifying I Ching Hexagrams

I Ching	CHI'EN Heaven	Che'n Thunder	K'an Water	Ke'N Mountain	K'un Earth	Sun wind	Li Fire	Tui lake
Trigrams								
	1	14	5	26	11	9	14	43
	25	51	3	27	24	42	21	17
	6	40	29	4	7	59	64	47
	33	62	39	52	15	53	56	31
	12	16	8	23	2	20	35	45
	44	32	48	18	46	57	50	28
	13	55	63	22	36	37	30	49
	10	54	60	41	19	61	38	58

Table 3.1 (Walker, 1992) was used for consulting the I Ching. The table shows the function of the hexagrams and their connections. For instance, Kun Hexagram is the result of combination of Trigrams of Earth where each other equals to 2.

As the current research focuses on interpretation, the numbers and their calculation were not required.

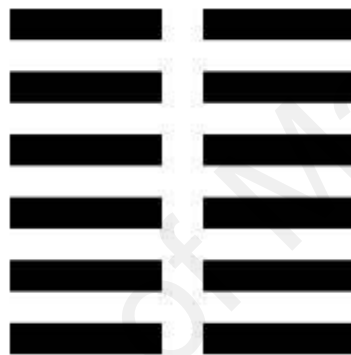
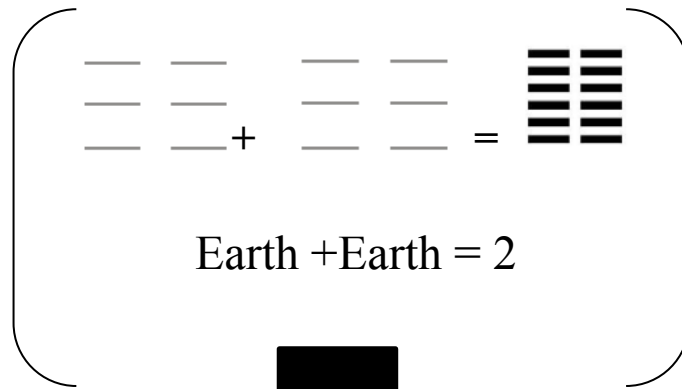


Figure 3.10: Kun hexagram/The Receptive
(Walker, 1992)

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Ten various artworks from diverse series (Dragon, Festive mood, Sea-Thru) were chosen to be interpreted. They were analysed based on the concept of I Ching, using Panofsky's iconological method of interpreting. The paintings that were studied in more details include the Rising Dragon, Emerging Dragon, Kun, Qian, Cruising Dragons, The Legend of Dragon 1, The Legend of Dragon 2, Festive mood, Connect, and Change. According to the artist, he wanted to convey the message of unity in microcosm and macrocosm based on his personal experience and therefore this chapter will pay particular attention to these concepts only.

The artworks were selected based on their common elements, such as Dragon, Hexagram, Eight Trigrams as well as Yin and Yang. Following the Panofsky's methodology, the author divides this chapter into three sections. The first section discusses the visual description of the series as well as some specific elements from different paintings; the second section explains the iconographical analyses of the symbols; and the third section elaborates the iconological interpretations of the paintings and series.

4.1 Selected Art works



Figure 4.1: Rising Dragon 2012

Acrylic on canvas

117 x 87 cm

Artist Collection



Figure 4.2: Emerging Dragon, 2012

Acrylic on canvas

117 x 87 cm

Artist Collection



Figure 4.3: Kun, 2011

Acrylic on canvas

86 x 117 cm

Artist Collection

University of Malaya



Figure 4.4: Qian 2011

Acrylic on canvas

86 x 117 cm

Artist Collection

University of



Figure 4.5: Cruising Dragons, 2012

Acrylic on canvas

107 x 122 cm

Artist Collection

University of



Figure 4.6: The Legend of Dragon I, 2000

Acrylic on handmade paper

108 x 78 cm

Artist Collection



Figure 4.7: The Legend of Dragon II, 2003

Acrylic on canvas

96 x 100 cm

Artist Collection

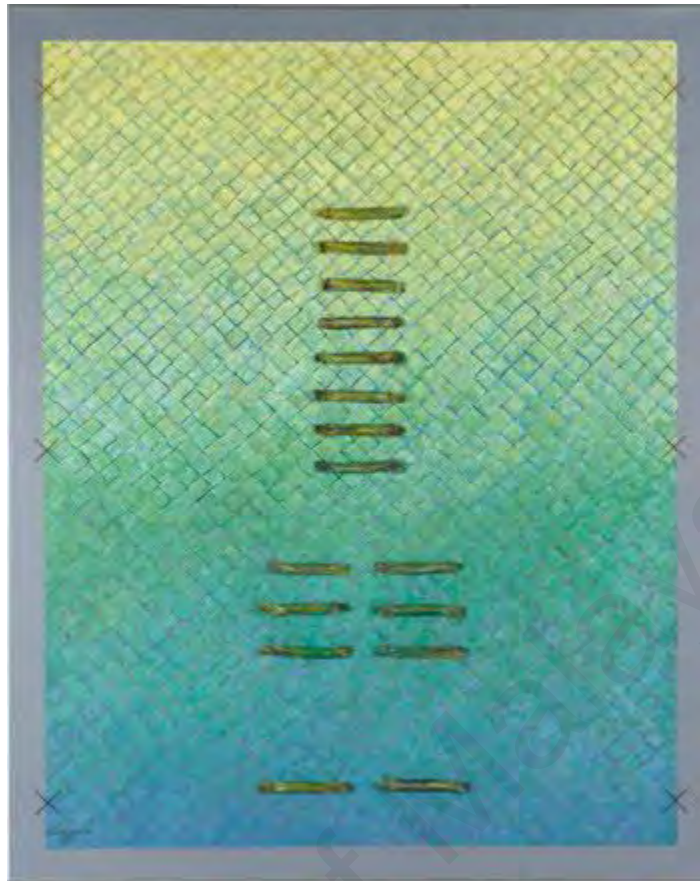


Figure 4.8: Festive Mood, 1987

Mixed media

148 x 118 cm

Artist Collection



Figure 4.9: Connect, 1975

Mixed media

152 x 98 x 10 cm (Triptych)

Artist Collection



Figure 4.10: Change (Five Elements), 1975-2003

Mixed media

92 x 152 x 18 cm

Artist Collection

Ten artworks were chosen from various series by Choong Kam Kow. These artworks are the Rising Dragon, Emerging dragon, Kun, Qian, Cruising Dragons, The Legend of Dragon I, The Legend of Dragon 2, Festive mood, Connect, and Change.

4.1.1 Phase 1: Pre-Iconographical Description

Choong Kam Kow's paintings are very complex, and although they include many important visual elements, the author will focus on specific ones that help the analysis, such as, material, colours, structural composition, lines, contrast between foreground and the lack of background.

Most of them are acrylic on canvas, except the Five Elements, Festive mood, and Connect. The paintings are also in different sizes. However, this section will focus on the similarities between the paintings and series.

4.1.1.1. Material:

Choong Kam Kow is a multimedia artist working with different materials in his series and his paintings are acrylic on canvas. Because of this, the author also chose two installations part of the Sea Thru series, namely Connect and Five Elements, which are played with wooden cubes of different colours (Connect uses bleu cubes, while in Five Elements, the cubes are multi-coloured). In Festive Mood, which is a collage, the background is made of woven banana leaves, an important material in Malaysian culture and craft heritage. These banana leaves are used for the background of the artwork, giving a very specific and interesting texture to it.

4.1.1.2. Structural composition

Focusing on the artist's paintings, we can safely say that his artworks are very complex, yet visually they are quite orderly and structured. For example, in Dragon series, each canvas is divided into clear sections, usually three, separated by different colours, location of symbols and the texture of the background. All textures are rendered through narrow and short strokes of paint. In most paintings, they create Chinese calligraphy, but in some paintings, like The Legend of Dragon II, they produce anchovies or also known as 'Ikan bilis', a small fish caught in the East Coast of Malaysia facing the South China Sea. It is also interesting to note that in his paintings, although there is a background, all the elements are pushed to the foreground. In other words, the background is close to the viewer.

4.1.1.3 Colour

Choong Kam Kow's artworks are very colourful. The first thing that strikes the viewer is their colour harmony. The artist plays with primary and secondary colours of rich intensity such as red, orange, and yellow in Qian or Yellow Blue and Green in Rising

Dragon and Festive Mood. Using analogue colours particularly in the backgrounds made the paintings attractive despite the intensity of the colours. There are some exceptions however, such as Emerging Dragon that uses lighter values of complementary colours of green and red-orange effectively creating a vibrant energy in the canvas.

Still on his paintings and following his interest in structured representation, there is generally a contrast between the opacity of the paint at the top of the canvas, which is lighter and the bottom of the canvas, with more opaque colours. The values of the colours also change with colours of lighter values as the top and getting progressively of darker values at the bottom.

In his installations, colours are also important. The colours in the installations however are much simpler, with solid background colours of pink, brown, blue, yellow, and green. He also added small elements of colour contrast at the top of as well as on the side of the boxes.

4.1.1.4 Symbols and characters

Generally, in the painting series, there are two main characters and/or symbols; the Dragon, Hexagram and Bagua. Generally, the Bagua and Hexagram are in the central section of the paintings with the Bagua in the lower section while the Hexagram on top. However, there are a few exceptions.

There are often two dragons on each canvas, generally facing each other in a mirror effect. Each dragon is represented quite organically with sinuous bodies. The paired dragons are also flanking the main elements (Hexagram and Bagua) in the side sections of the canvas. When an individual dragon is represented, it is in the middle section of the canvas, either at the top or bottom of the other elements (Bagua and Hexagram).

The colours of the dragons have been limited to the colour combination found in the background. However, the dragons are generally opaquer than the background. The artist

also used similar symbols in his installations and collage, in a simpler way. For example, in his collage Festive Mood, he has created a very simple series of lines made out of 16 stems, without any representations of dragons or Bagua on top of a coloured and textured background mentioned earlier. These stems resemble, but not exactly copy, the hexagrams on his paintings. They are separated in three sections in the middle of the artwork. The top section is a series of six stems atop each other in the vertical line. The second section is a series of six stems organized as a Trigram. The third section is two stems next to each other.

His installations vary in simplicity. For example, in Sea Thru, some installations are more complex than others when it comes to symbols while in Five Elements, he used a greater variety of symbols than in his paintings, adding natural elements, readable Chinese words, as well as the hexagrams and Yin Yang, which the last two are in more prominent positions, therefore highly visible places in the installations. On the other hand, in Connect, all the boxes are of the same light blue colour, with contrasting red Hexagrams. The Hexagrams are the only symbols in this particular artwork.

4.1.2 Phase 2: Iconographical Description

This section will focus on six different iconographical subjects which are Chinese calligraphy, Dragons, Eight Trigrams (Bagua), Trigram, and Hexagram, Colour interpretations. The author only focus on these eight concepts because as mentioned in the previous section, they are the most often recurring ones in the artist's artworks under study.

4.1.2.1. Chinese Calligraphy

Calligraphy means beautiful writing and it is one of the most important art forms in China. Calligraphy is not only the art of beautiful handwriting but also a cultural

heritage and tradition that reflect the culture and history of a society, race, nation, and country. In addition to its utilitarian function, calligraphy is the most fundamental element for the practice of other art forms such as painting and seal-carving. It is also closely connected to many subject disciplines such as literature, history, and philosophy.

From an artistic perspective, Chinese calligraphy is considered for centuries as one of the highest forms of art in the Far Eastern region. Although the full appreciation of Chinese calligraphy necessarily requires an understanding of the meaning of the text, there is no question that this brilliant art form can be appreciated and understood purely for its abstract value. Traditional “*Chinese writers on the art of calligraphy focused their remarks on the composition of the page, the formal structures of the characters, and the individual brushstrokes as reflections of the degree of the technical skill and the inner psychological state of the artist*”. Besides conveying the meaning of words as expressed in Chinese characters, calligraphy is seen as approaching the untrammelled forces of nature itself in its purity.

Indeed, there is a significant connection between philosophy and brushwork in either calligraphy or traditional Chinese painting. Brushwork, especially for calligraphy is related to Taoism, which was founded by Lao Tzu (Hu, 1995). While practicing the art, there is an emphasis on mindfulness, the unification with *Nature*, and revelation of the *Tao* (Ming-Tak Hue, 2010). Calligraphy as an art form reflects the discovery of the self that indicates personality and temperament that are discernible in the expressiveness of the brush strokes.

China has different calligraphic scripts which not all of them have the same significance when it comes to self-expression. The earliest one was the seal script (Figure 4.11) used first in the pre-imperial dynasties of Shang (16th-11th c BCE) and Zhou (11th-3rd c BCE) on oracle bones. The clerical script (Figure 4.12) then started in the Qin Dynasty followed by the regular script (206 BC–220 AD) (Figure 4.13) which is still used

today for most regular publications. The most artistic scripts however are known as cursive and running scripts (Figure 4.14) which were very popular with the Chinese literati in Han dynasty. These two scripts are very energetic and expressive and the most appreciated for their aesthetic values.

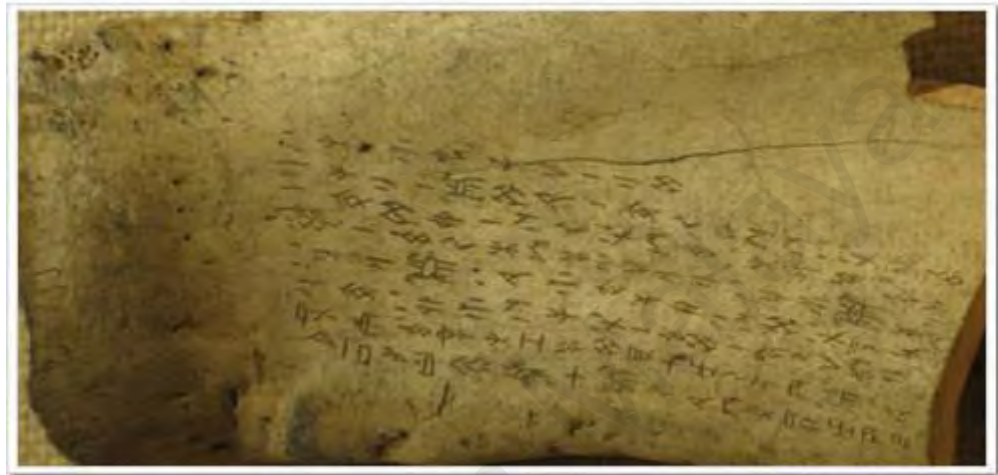


Figure 4.11: Bronze inscriptions appeared in the Shang dynasty (16th -11th century BC) and became fully developed in the western Zhou Dynasty
Retrieved from <http://www.china-tour.cn/Chinese-Arts/Chinese-Calligraphy.htm>



Figure 4:12: Lu xiao wang keshi (魯孝王刻石), stone inscription from 56 B.C.E. in ancient clerical script (古隸)

<http://www.ink-treasures.com/history/calligraphy/chinese-calligraphy/calligraphy-scripts/clerical-script/>

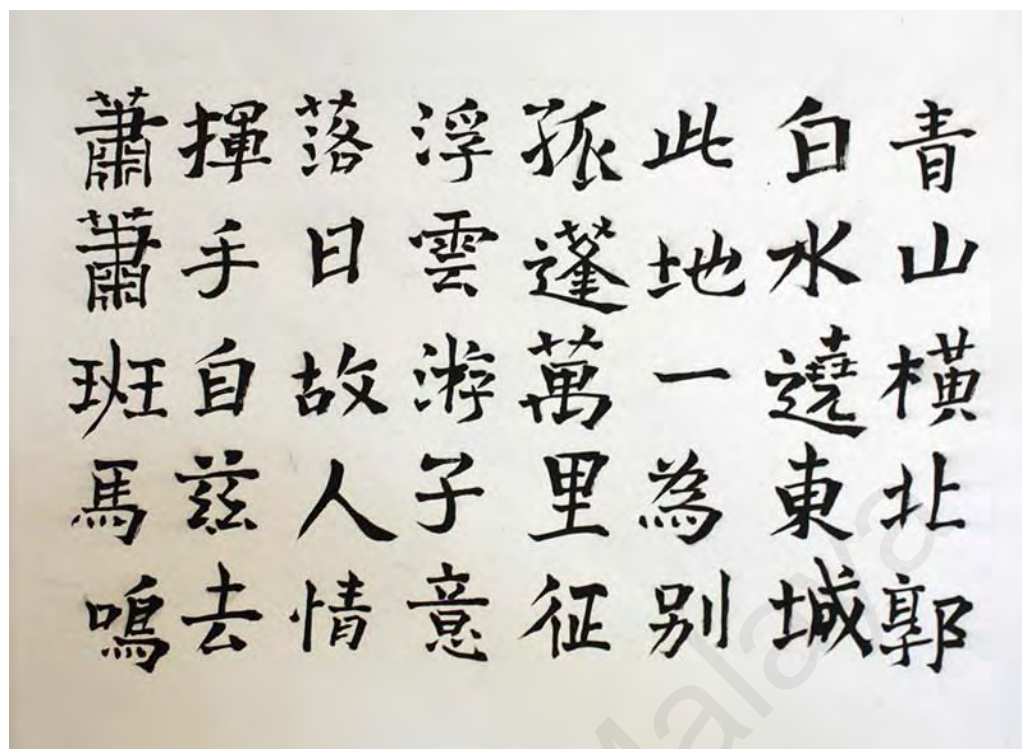


Figure 4.13: Regular Script Calligraphy of Anna Murphy, Hite Art Institute
Retrieved from <http://www.china-tour.cn/Chinese-Arts/Chinese-Calligraphy.htm>

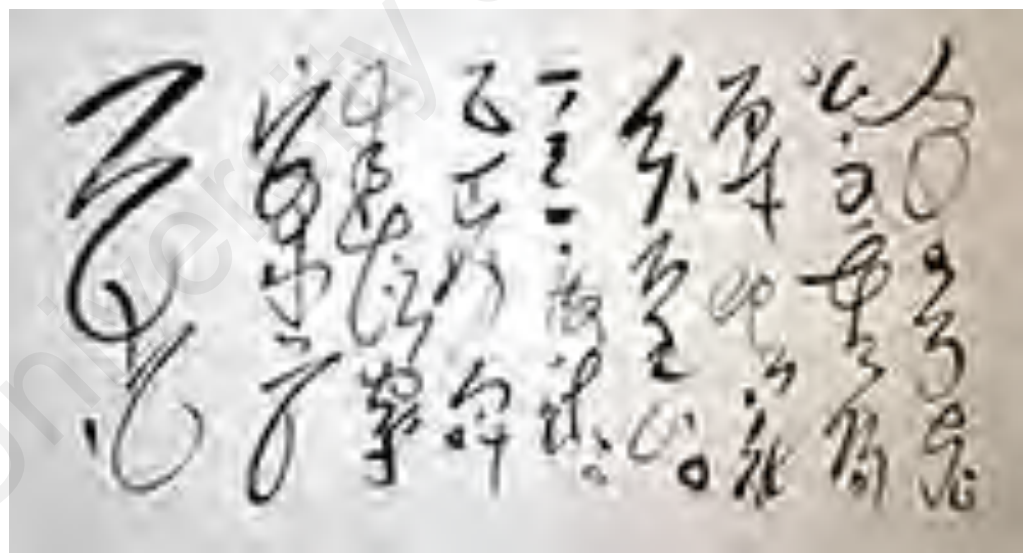


Figure 4.14: Cursive Script Calligraphy of Laurie Doctor, Hite Art Institute
Retrieved from <http://www.china-tour.cn/Chinese-Arts/Chinese-Calligraphy.htm>

As mentioned before, calligraphy is an important artistic heritage in China. However, it does not mean that it is immutable and fixed. Many artists today, including

Choong Kam Kow, still use calligraphy in their arts; sometimes in ways that are very different from the historical past. Under the influence of modernization and globalization, the recent practice of calligraphy in Hong Kong requires a revision of traditional critical approaches to the art that is closer to other contemporary aesthetics.

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Figure 4.15: Autumn, Eastern Mausoleum at Ch'ing-ling, Eastern Mongolia, ca 1030. Source: (Fong, W, 1969)

4.1.2.2 Dragon

The creation of this series was inspired by the arrival of the New Millennium which fell in the year of Dragon of the lunar calendar. The re-interpretation of the shape

of legendary dragon and application of vibrant colours was intended to manifest the notion of dynamism, mightiness and adventurous spirit symbolized by the Dragon which has been inherited in our culture for thousands of years. Hand painting and silk screening techniques are innovatively used to obtain the best visual results (Choong, 2015). Dragons are mythological creatures created out of the imagination of the human beings. In Greek, German, and English folktales they represent evil where both humans and gods pursue freedom from them. It takes a person with supernatural abilities to defeat a dragon. It is different in the case of Chinese dragons. Long ago, the Chinese took the dragon as a character of royalty and depicted it with divine qualities. Moreover, the literature from the Eastern Asia reflects the people's high respect for these mythical creatures. (Petersen, 1962; Li, 2000). To the modern society, the dragon hasn't lost its religious awe thus, has become a symbol of strength and power and, above all, an auspicious sign and a harbinger of good fortune (Lee, 2003).

The dragon is one of the traditional subject-matters of Chinese and Japanese paintings as one of the most spiritually powerful being of the region (Gray, 1934).

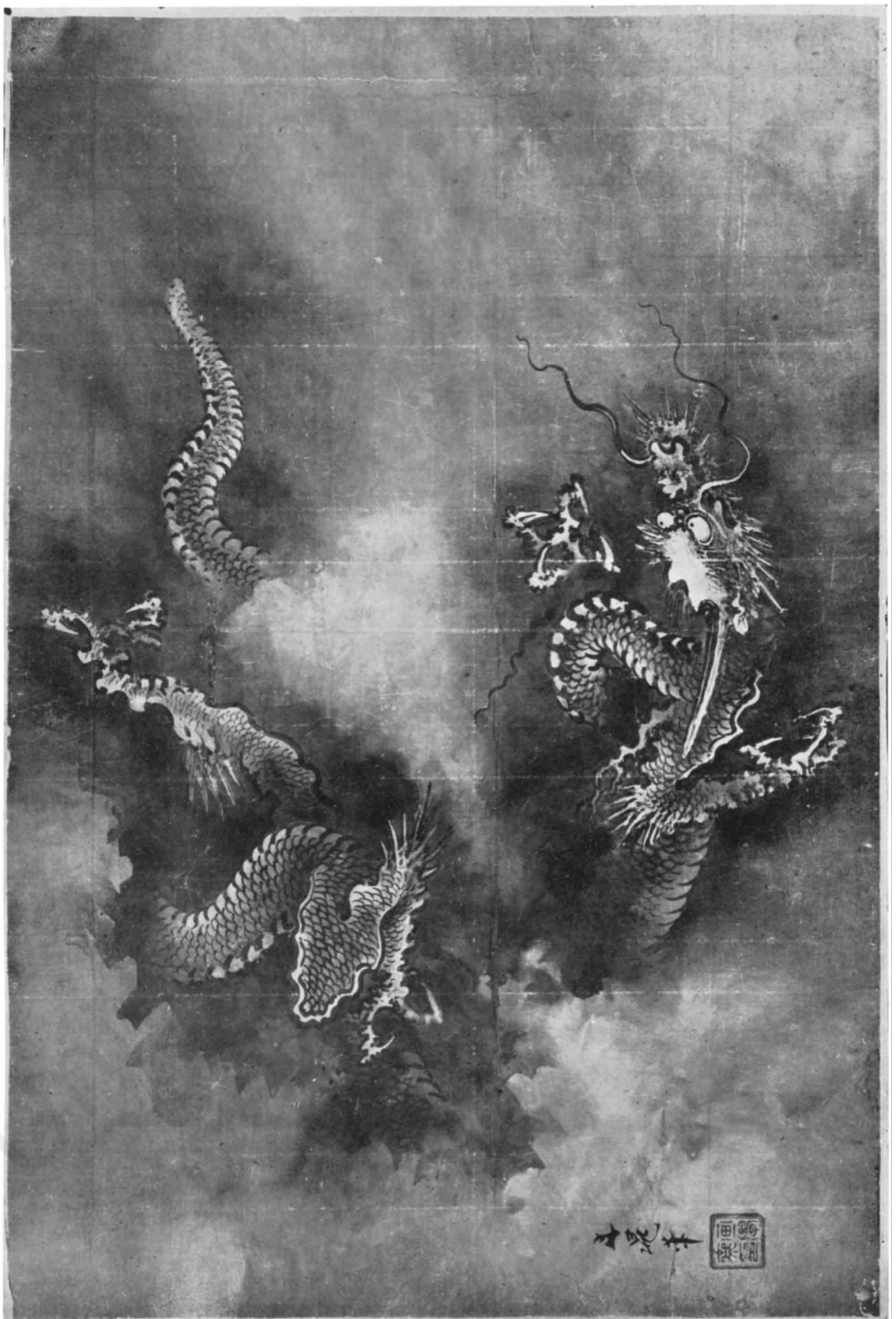


Figure 4.16: Dragon by Tani Buncho
Source:(Gray, B ,1934).

Generally speaking, the East Asian mythologies (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) regard dragons as very powerful beings with immense spiritual powers and physical strength that can easily move between the physical and spiritual realms. They can therefore be the emissaries of the gods and help humans. The dragon is one of the most auspicious mythological creatures in the Chinese mythology along with others such as the Qilin and Pixiu. The dragon is also one of the four creatures in the Chinese cosmology, which control the universe and is associated with different cardinal directions, along with the tiger, the phoenix and turtle. Similarly, in Korea, there is a tomb painting from the Goryeo [918-1270] period called the Sashindo which shows a turtle, a phoenix and a tiger, along with a yellow dragon² offering a Korean variation of the four creatures associated with the world order and orientation. In the early Chinese mythology, there were four kinds of dragons: one represents the power of growth and regeneration of heaven; another possesses the power to control the clouds and rain; third is endowed with the power over rivers and springs; and the fourth has the responsibility of guarding the treasures of the earth. In addition, there were dragon kings of the four seas ruling over the four oceans of the world.

The dragon is one of the twelve animals used to name the years in a twelve-year cycle. It is considered the most auspicious of all twelve, and curiously the only one that does not represent a real animal. People born in the Year of the Dragon are considered to be exceptionally powerful and fortunate. No wonder there is always a long line of people wanting to get married or give birth to babies in the Year of the dragon. Superstitious it may seem to be, it does signify the high esteem ordinary people hold for the dragon, and how deeply rooted the dragon motif is in the Chinese psyche.

² In China, the dragon of the East is known however as the bleu dragon not the yellow

They could ride on clouds and bring on rain to benefit mankind. They also had the power to ward off evil.

Thus, dragons are powerful spiritual creatures people pray to for rain and protection from evil. In the Chinese folklore, dragons lived under the ground during winter, and on the second day of the second month of the lunar calendar, they flew up to heaven, causing spring thunder and rain, heralding the beginning of the new agricultural year. People would then celebrate the ascent of the dragon with firecrackers, as they dance at the Spring Festival nowadays.

Since the 1930's, the debate on the origin of the dragon has focused on two different views (Li, 2000). The first one is that the dragon was a combination of different living species at the time, including snakes, horses, crocodiles, hippopotamuses, dinosaurs (of course dinosaurs were not alive in early China but maybe they had access to the calcified bones of the creatures) and pine trees. The second one maintains that the dragon was a composition of different shapes associated with natural phenomena such as clouds, thunder and lightning (Lee, 2003).

The earliest religious monuments or writings from China do mention or represent the dragon, therefore, it is safe to assume that the dragon has been part of the Chinese religious belief systems since they were synthesized in the earliest of Chinese dynasties. For example, it was the totem of the early Huaxia tribe (Li, 2000). In the early 2000BCE, written descriptions of the dragon, there were some variations on its body composition. One text describes it as a being with a horse's head, a snake's body, scales of a fish and claws of a bird. Another says that it has the body of a snake, scales of a fish, tail of a centipede, claws of a bird, horns of a deer, ears of a rat, head of a tiger, eyes of a prawn, lips of an ox, teeth of a horse and whiskers of a goat/sheep.

As mentioned before, there is a cosmological symbolism which also has a symbolic importance in the society. For example, throughout the dynastic history of

China, the head of the imperial kingdom, the emperor, would always consider himself to be the incarnation of the dragon. The dragon also plays a prominent role in folk festivals where dragon dances are invariably featured, not to mention the Dragon Boat Festival.

Along with other Chinese philosophical and religious exports, such as Confucianism and Taoism, the dragon spreads to other Asian countries such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam as can be visible in their folklore, art, and architecture. The most important act for this research is that the dragon is the sign of Tao itself; the general spirit force uniting and animating all of realities. In Taoism, as the dragon is immortal and can fly, it is the symbolic representation of a Taoist mage attaining immortality. At around 400 A.D., the great Taoist master Ku K'ai-chih declared in a mountain painting that "there should be shapes that writhe and coil like dragons". In his study of Chinese art, Laurance Sickman commented on the dragon as a symbol for the invisible Tao and of an Asian specialist that the dragon is "that king who pervades everything". Hence, the Chinese landscapes must be studied with a strong dragon sense. For instance, the coiling of the rivers in their twisting valleys is the dragon, the coiling of the mountain path is the dragon, and a progressive series of mountain flanks appearing and disappearing in mist is the dragon (McMahon, 2003).

4.1.2.3 Eight Trigrams (Bagua)

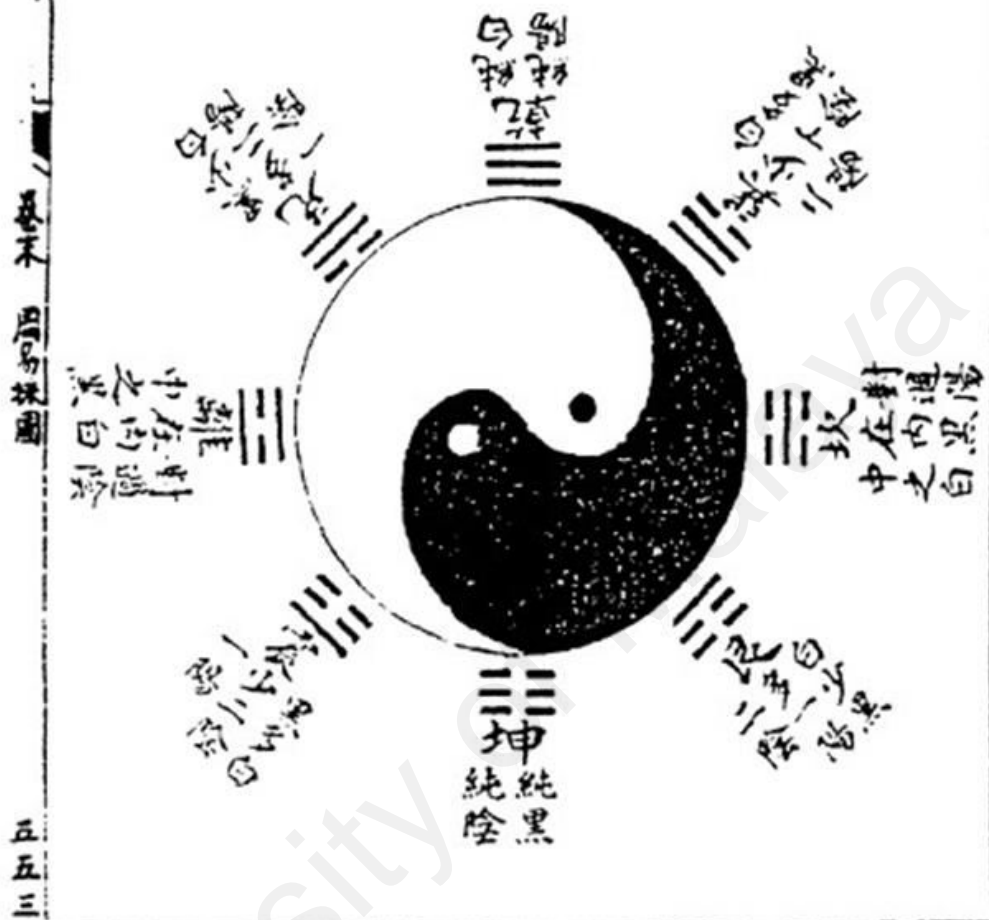
The Bagua is known as a hexagonal symbolic diagram with the Yin Yang in the middle and Eight Trigrams on its edges. Yin Yang is a very ancient symbol of the universe found in the Chinese folklore and Taoism. With the Yin Yang at its centre, the Bagua is a powerful symbol representing the forces of the cosmos. Following the duality of Yin Yang, the Trigrams are divided into male and female with the male represented by horizontal, yet continuous lines, while the female is represented by the broken ones.

Symbolically very powerful, it was also used for divination by the end of Shang dynasty (Cammann, 1985).

If we look at the diagram in more details, the circle of the eight Trigrams is divided into two inter twined dark and light halves to represent Yin and Yang. Near the centre are two dots which are usually interpreted as depicting Yang within Yin within Yang respectively. The Ming scholars were the first to discuss the history of this diagram, generally considered it a divine revelation from the past and believed that sages such as Duke of Zhou and Confucius knew about this divination (Louis, 2003).

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心易發微伏義太極之圖



正南純陽方也。故畫為乾。正北純陰方也。故畫為坤。畫離于東。象陽中有陰也。畫坎于西。象陰中有陽也。東北陽生陰下。于是乎畫震。西南陰生陽下。于是乎畫巽。觀陽長陰消。是以畫兌于東南。觀陰成陽微。是以畫艮于西北也。

Figure 4.17: Badua and Trigrams

Reference:(Louis, 2003)

4.1.2.4 Trigram



Figure 4.18: Chien Trigram/The Creative

In this depiction, instead of the hexagram, the Trigram was also observed. Based on Table 3.1, the Trigram has been distinguished as Chien/The Creative that signals a time when the fundamental creative power of the universe is available to the humans. An unrestricted outpouring of benevolent energy from the heavens makes profound improvement possible for those who are purposely following proper principles.

Worried activity is not in the order, instead your responsibility is to be open and approachable to the Higher power, letting it to guide your actions. By allowing lower beliefs and habits to pass away, you make area for a development of your superior qualities, which leads inevitably to good fortune. In your behaviour with others, you must embody open-mindedness, silence, and gentleness and attempt to meet others halfway in every situation. To overreach yourself, or necessitate that of another, is to generate an undesirable imbalance.

Your attitude to the Sage is the most significant. Alertness and openness are paramount. To achieve the powerful assistance of the Creative, you must stay humble, patient, tolerant, and responsive. Careful attention to truth brings vast rewards during this time.

4.1.2.5 Hexagram

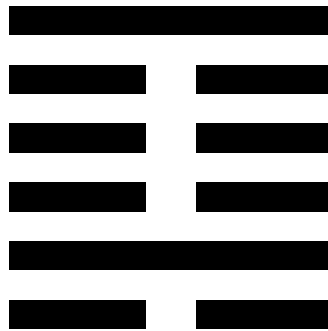


Figure 4.19: Meng
(Wilhelm,1951)

According to the Book of Changes: A Guide to Life's Turning Points, this hexagram is called “Meng” or youthful folly. Meng advises us to apply the “I Ching” as a light so that we might endure our youthful folly and travel safely through the woodlands of life. The symbol of “Meng” is a stream fountain to flow down a mountainside, filling each canyon and hollow place as it drives through them. If we insist on following the sage, looking for the advice of the “I Ching” and filling in the gaps in our character as they are exposed, we will be led to the lasting triumph in life. (Walker,1992). Meng/youthful Folly is the characteristic of youth. Those who have slight experience, usually display little wisdom. This is true of us in a mystical way as well in contrast to the sage as we are babies in the woods. The hexagram Meng counsels us to use the I Ching as a light so that we might endure our youthful folly and travel carefully through the woods of life. There is no disgrace in observing for guidance in life. A child is keen to be exposed to the way by his parents and teachers, and we are wise to recognize that in spiritual terms we are similar to children. Our success will come quicker if we find and follow a wise teacher. The sage is available to serve in this way for those who approach the I Ching with a sincere desire to learn and grow.

The study of I Ching is to gain the viewpoint of the deity and learn the cosmic lesson intrinsically in every condition that faces us. If we really look for and struggle to understand these larger lessons, we will gain mastery over panic, doubt, and anxiety. We can learn from the study of "I Ching" to live in the state of understanding, serenity, and receptivity although numerous things are required from us.

The first is that we hang up our mistrust of the unidentified and let the sage to lead us. It is inviting to think that the I Ching might just be a book, only words on paper, but there is more to it than these and to take these is to identify the sage and hold open to his help.

The second thing required of us is that we gather the demands of ourselves for complete answers to pure queries about life. The I Ching teaches us not on how to get from A to Z but how to grow from A to B, then from B to C and so on. The sage travels step by step, distributing always with what is directly at hand and transporting complete focus and attentiveness to the moment. By following the sage, similarly we fall into stage and obtain the help of the creative control of the universe. Lastly, we are obligatory to be unstructured in our approach. By abounding plans about people and circumstances, we let the past and future go and meet the present with an open mind. Thus, to be unstructured and open is to allow the sage to guide us safely and joyfully through life.

The image of Meng is that of a stream that starts to run down a mountain side, satisfying each ravine and hollow place as it goes. If we preserve it beside the sage, looking for the counsel of the I Ching and filling the existing gaps in our personality, eventually a lasting triumph in life will be gained (Wilhelm, 1951).

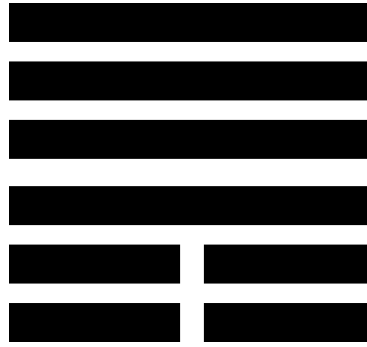


Figure 4.20: Hexagram TUN/Retreat
(Walker,1997)

It is a characteristic in the plan of life that services of darkness and disturbance come into the frame from one time to another. This hexagram indicates that this is such a time, and counsels you to reply by quietly retreating. To fight or battle in anger now is to enhance fuel to the fire of negativity which looms to consume you.

The superior individual accepts that there is a natural receding tide and flow between the powers of light and dark in the world. Knowledge lies not in fighting these actions but in replying to them appropriately. Just as a plant which shoots in the dead of winter is destined and one which sprouts in spring accompaniments, so it is with us. Success and prosperity are accrued to those who advance in time of light and retreat in time of darkness. To depart now is to benefit in the end from the altering tides (Walker, 1992).

Retreating is not the same thing as submission, surrender, or abandonment, which are desperate and unsatisfying events. Neither is it branded by an inurement into angry or disciplinary feelings. It is instead a receipt and choice; we calmly accept that the energies of the moment are against us and we wisely choose to withdraw into the safety of immobility. In this distinguished and stable manner, we protect ourselves from negative effects and return refreshed in a more helpful hour (Walker, 1992).

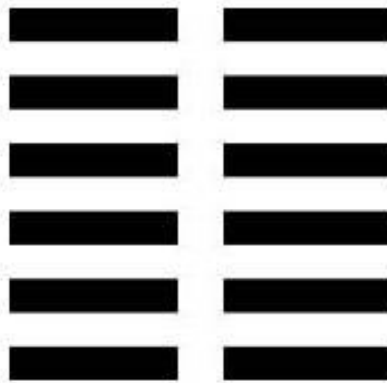


Figure 4.21: Kun hexagram/The Receptive
(Walker,1992)

Based on Table 3.1 which is the key identification of Eight Trigrams, this symbol of Kun indicates that receptivity is the sort of compliment to the Creative, the darkness that is brightened by light, the earth that acquires the blessing of heaven, and the receptacle into which nutrition flows. In other words, this is a time to purchase rather than lead, assist rather than initiate, and listen rather than talk. You must devote yourself to the cultivation of modesty, receptivity, gentleness now and let go of the concerns about the conduct of others or the progress of your worldly ambitious. The wisdom of cultivating receptivity cannot be overstated as receptivity is the rich earth without which the creative cannot take root in our lives.

This original hexagram serves as a powerful persuasion to focus on the abilities to nurture, support, accept to work without desiring recognition and follow the guidance of the sage. The hexagram denotes that one can benefit greatly in a period like this from the time spent in solitude. In quietness, we have an opportunity to focus on the purification of our hearts and minds. It is a good time to ask oneself; am I sincerely pursuing the good for its own sake, or do I have a hidden agenda? If so, detach from it and return to the path of independence and balance. Through humility and openness, we become receptive to the assistance of the higher power (Wilhelm, 1951).

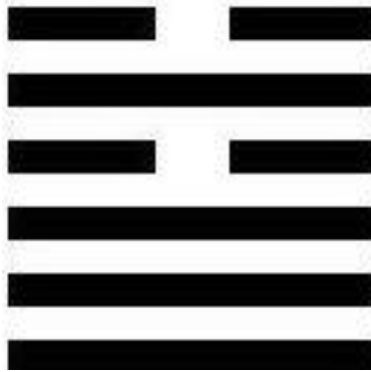


Figure 4.22: Hsu Hexagram/waiting(nourishment)
(Walker,1992)

There is a condition at hand that cannot be modified by force or outside effort. The creative will deliver the solution to one who waits with an accurate attitude. This is a time for enduring and careful attention to the internal truth.

You must not give in to hesitation and anxiety now. You are not intended to wait in a state of despairing desire but in one of the persistent inner strength. Being deprived of certainty in the power of truth makes success impossible. The efforts for forcing a change rather than allowing it to establish obviously will only cause bad luck. You would be wise to reinforce and repeat your dependence on the Creative. When you spoil in fear and hesitation, you flood the ground where the higher power is trying to work. Your main responsibility in life is to keep this arena (your own awareness) free of bad influences.

By tolerating things as they are and not making unproductive contrast to the circumstances of the others or some fictional idea, one involves the control of the creative (Wilhelm, 1951).



Figure 4.23: Lin Hexagram /Approach

The hexagram Lin signs the approach of strong beneficial influences. The appearance of this hexagram symbols is like a movement towards light and growth where improvement and success are certain now to those who continued their path of truth.

To exploit the opportunity understood in this moment, it is significant to nurture a proper attitude. During good times, it is stress-free, to relax our internal self-control and fall back into incorrect beliefs and actions. Allowing one's ego to take over in a second of success is a sure outcome of ending the growth that has just begun. The development that is at hand is made conceivable by conscientious conduct and to continue sensibly along that path is our only resources of coming into full control of it.

An unwavering diffidence and getting where external circumstances are good or bad, is the spot of a higher person. In yourself, you must sustain balance, composure, and self-effacement in times of achievement while with others, you must remain enduring, accepting, and gentle. Clinging to these values promises you a time of joy and success (Walker, 1951).

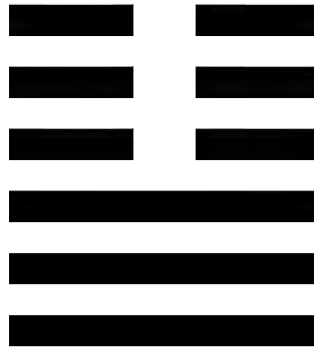


Figure 4.24: Tai Hexagram/Peace

Being on earth for those who sustain correct opinions and movements, Tai means a time similar to spring: there is a strong flow of energy where settlement and prosperity are the award of those who correctly balance their progressive and lower natures. It is by outstanding knowledge of our mediocre self when protecting that the greater-self governs our behaviour that we arrived in a state of peace time. You must see yourself as early tree now while the minced around you is productive; water, sun and wind are overflowing. By preserving your focus on moving increasingly to light, simplicity, and purity you can grasp great heights. If you become entangled in inferior things, you will not like the full benefit of this kind hour (Walker,1951)



Figure 4.25 Chien Hexagram/Modesty
(Walker,1992)

The first Hexagram in the green wavy cubic box represents Chien/modesty which suggests improving the position. There is no power as great as modesty for convincing the assistance of the sage. Those in high positions who keep their modesty are loved by all and incessantly flourish while those below who nurture modesty inevitably increase on the forte of the qualities, without making opponents along the path. According to its explanation modesty involves a refusal to claim or act domineeringly with others, even in minor ways. However, outside this steadfast self-effacement it also means that our exertion is to distinguish what is right and then do it endlessly. We do not work in contradiction to ourselves and spoil in doubts about the insight of correct conduct. This firm commitment to anything that is correct might be named the modesty before the sage.

The hexagram is prepared by the Trigrams Ken, keep unmoving and mountain. The mountain is the youngest son of the Creative, the demonstrative of heaven on earth. It distributes the dedications of heaven, rain and clouds that gather round its peak, and thereafter sparkles forth radiant with wonderful light. This demonstrates what modesty is and how its meaning is great and represents strong men. Kun, the earth, stands above while lowliness is a quality of the earth this is the very reason why it appears in this hexagram as exalted, by being placed above the mountain. This shows how modesty functions in lowly manner where simple people are boosted up by it (Walker, 1992).

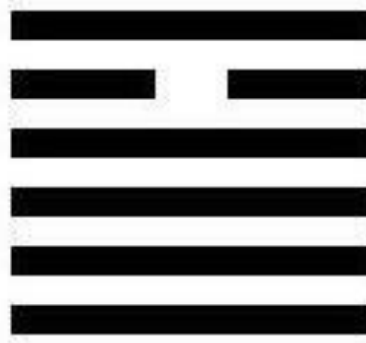


Figure 4.26. Ta Yu Hexagram /Possession in great measure
(Walker,1992)

The second hexagram explains that this is the time of countless power and lucidity for you. By deliberately following the path of proper principles, you have come into a company of the higher influence and enjoyed the impact of the Creative everywhere in your life. If you keep on being modest and stable now, you will come into the ownership of prosperity and success.

The “I Ching” indicates here that you improve your personal power by purifying your considerations, actions, and approaches. When you have done this long enough that it serves the truth and good that becomes your only goal in lifetime, you come into whole harmony with the universe. As a consequence, you begin to have a far-attainment influence, more outstanding than others as the sun shines on everything under the heavens. Because your influence is so great, it is especially significant to continue the correct attitudes and behaviour now.

Having achieved a high situation, you are clever enough to continue being modest and generous towards others and remember that it is the advanced power that grants you your strong point. You must not make the mistake of becoming satisfied, sneering at others, or convinced of your skill to control events. By leaving the sage in charge, extracting from all inferior influences, and promoting the good wherever possible, you

remain elegantly balanced and in harmony with the universe. Your peace of mind becomes enduring, and in this path, you come into the ownership of success and prosperity (Walker, 1992).

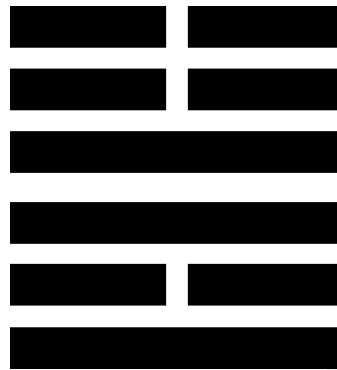


Figure 4.27: Feng Hexagram/Abundance(fullness)
(Walker,1992)

The forth one, Feng/abundance (fullness), is that of thunder and lightning rich sky. It means a period of fabulous power that like all such seconds, only lasts for a time. Here we are trained on how to know when the second is prepared, and what to do when it is not. Our inspiration in the world is obviously receding wave and flow. At one second, others are full of suspicion and forward movement is impossible. In the next, by consistently clinging to what is true and good, we reawaken the receptiveness and allow the growth to take place. Only by careful clarifications of these cycles, “the openings and closings of others to our inspiration,” we can achieve greatness. To do this, we must cultivate an attitude of self-governing alertness. In this state of silence reflection, we open our hearts to the help of the sage who in turn unlocks our eyes to what is conceivable and what is not. This clearness enables us to move with strength and grace when the time is right, and in this we achieve wealth.

Feng also counsels us that influence cannot last forever; as the sun rises so must it set. When receptiveness gives way to suspicion and our influence begins to wane, we ought not to fight to fortify or extend it. Modesty and objectivity require that we accept the turning of the tide. By letting go of the passing moment and entering the next with a correct and balanced attitude, we save ourselves for a more beneficial time.

4.1.2.6 Colour interpretation

Choong Kam Kow has been known for his artistic method that combines the western art with eastern art. His use of colour, for instance, is based on the western colour theory proposed by Swiss theorist Johannes Itten³ (1888-1967). The latter was an important art teacher of colour in the 19th century, particularly on the visual, psychological and aesthetic effects of colour. He proposed that colours have a mystical capacity for spiritual expression that is unrelated to objects. The current form of colour theory was developed by Johannes Itten, the colour theorist who was teaching at the School of Applied Arts in Weimar, Germany. This school is also known as 'Bauhaus'. Itten also developed 'colour chords' and modified the colour wheel.

Itten's colour wheel was based on Johann Wolfgang Goethe who was after Isaac Newton's colour wheel in 1666. However, Itten further developed this model to introduce a new variation of the concept which includes secondary and tertiary colours. According to the colour wheel, Itten suggested seven kinds of colour contrast as follows.

1. Contrast of hue

³ Itten was interested in painting and color as a student so he moved to Stuttgart in 1913 in order to study under Adolph Holzer a leading German color theorist and educator. He moved to Vienna between 1916 to 1919 and further developed his ideas on the relationship between music and color. After which he became well-known as a teacher at the Bauhaus which was founded by Walter Gropius. There he developed his basic course in colour as a master alongside other masters such as Lyonel Feininger, Paul Klee, Vasily Kandinsky, Oskar Schlemmer.

2. Light, dark contrast
3. Cold warm contrast
4. Complementary contrast
5. Simultaneous contrast
6. Contrast of saturation
7. Contrast of extension

In this section, the researcher will employ Itten's terminology to describe the artist's use of colour and their effects in the paintings. The artist mostly used complementary and analogous colours in order to produce harmonious and pleasing artworks result in his understanding of the colour theory and visual experience. Complementary colours are pairs such as Green/Red or Purple/Yellow or Orange/Blue. However, the artist used the combination of Red and Green. The Rising Dragon (Figure 4.1) is a good example of this combination.

(a) Complementary Contrast

Colours that are opposite each other and on the colour wheel are considered to be complementary colours. Every colour has its complement - or opposite. By looking at the colour wheel, one can become more familiar with the opposites in colour, where one will see complements like red and green, blue and orange, and yellow and violet. The high contrast of complementary colours creates a vibrant look in particular when used at full saturation. When a painter mixes the pigments of two complementary colours, a neutral grey will be produced.



Figure.4.28. Complementary contrast
Retrieved from <http://www.tigercolour.com/colour-lab/colour-theory/colour-harmonies.htm>

(b) Analogous colours

Analogous colour schemes use colours that are next to each other on the colour wheel. They usually match well and create serene and comfortable designs. Analogous colour is often found in nature and harmonious and pleasing to the eye such as the combinations of Blue, Green, and light-Green.

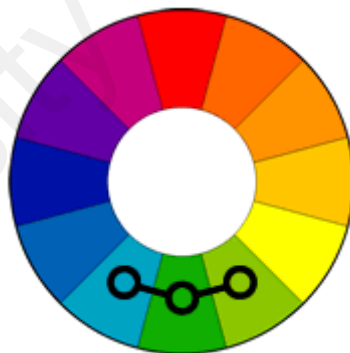


Figure 4.29. Analogous colours.
Retrieved from <http://www.tigercolour.com/colour-lab/colour-theory/colour-harmonies.htm>

As mentioned earlier, Itten believed that colour is subjective and therefore has the ability to express what he called “the aura of the person.” However, he explained that certain colours and colour combinations may still have particular attributes. Below are some of Itten’s description of each individual colour and its effects when combined with other colours.

(c) Yellow

Yellow is the colour of light, understanding and knowledge, which on orange, seems purer. The combination of these two colours is like the strong morning sun on growing wheat field. Yellow on green provides a beaming effect, outshining the green. Since green is a blend of yellow and blue, it's like the yellow is among friends. Yellow on red is a loud joyful noise, the various effects of yellow illustrate well the struggle of defining the key properties of colours in general terms without direct intuition (Itten,1997).

(d) Red

Red is the colour of fire and blood, so it is associated with energy, war, danger, strength, power, determination as well as passion, desire, and love. Red-orange is thick, glowing as filled with internal warmth and is characteristically similar to rejuvenated earth. Red-orange light stimulates plant growth and biological function. Moreover, proper contrasting changes red-orange into an expression of excited and aggressive passion. It was used as a worn, a symbol of material profession by fighters in combat. It has been the badge of revolutions. Passionate physical love sparks in red-orange. The different impacts of red-orange in our examples are just an offer of its expressive potentialities (Itten, 1997).

(e) Orange

Orange, being the mixture of yellow and red, is the maximum glowing motion. Orange is the combination of the energy of red and happiness of yellow. It is associated with joy, sunshine, and the tropics. It has cosmological luminosity in the material sphere, attaining the highest level of warmth. Red-orange is like an active energy. Orange

represents enthusiasm, fascination, happiness, creativity, determination, attraction, success, encouragement, and stimulation (Itten, 1997).

(f) Green

Green is a combination of yellow and blue. With the increase in intensity of yellow or blue, the appeal of its appearance changes. Green is the colour of nature. It symbolizes growth, harmony, freshness, and fertility, productivity, gratification, tranquillity, optimism faith and knowledge. When luminous green is dulled by grey, it results into a sense of sad rot. When the green rises to yellow, coming within the sort of yellow–green, we can sense the young, vernal power of nature. If the green rises in the direction of blue, its spiritual components are increased (Itten, 1997).

(g)Blue

Blue is the colour of the sky and sea. It is often associated with depth and stability. It symbolizes trust, loyalty, wisdom, confidence, intelligence, faith, truth, and heaven. Blue is considered beneficial to the mind and body. It slows human metabolism and produces a calming effect. Blue is strongly associated with tranquillity and calmness. Blue represents the power of nature in winter and blue points out our soul with feelings of reliance in to the endless distances of soul. The implication of faith to us and for the Chinese is symbolized immortality. Once blue is darkened, it falls into superstitions, fear, sorrow and punishment but it always mentions the realm of the transcendental (Itten , 1997).

4.1.3 Phase 3: Iconological Interpretation

Phase 3 has been divided into three parts. Each is an interpretation of the specific series, which are the Dragon, Festival and Sea Thru series.

First is the Dragon series. According to the author, in this series, he demonstrated his approaches from the profound Chinese philosophies that is I Ching which is very precisely and insightfully. A philosophy of wisdom and change, as mentioned earlier, I Ching is based on an Eight Trigrams chart used to guide people. In order to attain wisdom, a seeker should trust the instruction found in the diagram and follow the guidance to observe the change in their lives. To show I Ching's importance in his life, the artist has mostly drawn it in the centre of the paintings.

According to the artist, if we follow I Ching, we would be able to make changes in our lives that would be positive outcomes, by the methodical observations of our holistic being. Apparently, when you achieve unity in your body, mind and soul (Microcosm), which is a result of the one who is determined (according to the artist, similar to the power of the dragon) and has chosen to follow the guidance found in I Ching, one can attain unity with the universe (Macrocosm). Ultimately, creativity leads one towards happiness in order to achieve freedom, and realize that we have the power of the dragon within ourselves.

All of the Chinese calligraphies in Choong Kam Kow's artworks have been inspired by an I Ching book written approximately Three thousand years ago. There are a lot of translations and versions of I Ching. However, they generally focus on the phenomenal change in the universe, 'I' means change while Ching means sacred text, so its literal meaning would be the sacred book of phenomenal changes of the universe. Basically, it was used to explain the changes and events in the world and in making predictions.

Choong Kam Kow wants his contemporary works to be infused with ancient thoughts and wisdom. Overall, according to the artist, he applied two elements from I Ching; first, the text from his ancient book which he then beautified with traditional Chinese calligraphy, and then the Eight Trigrams which are hexagonal diagram shape or

Bagua. In some of his paintings, some of the calligraphy is difficult to read because of its low visual values. According to the artist, this is because of the hidden part of I Ching. As seen previously, these 64 hexagrams mean 64 situations that one can be confronted with.

By considering these facts, the interpretation of these works is more possible.

The I Ching philosophy in these paintings has been depicted in different forms, such as Chinese Calligraphy, Dragon, Yin and Yang, Hexagram, Trigram, and Bagua. These cognitive symbols are conveying the message of balance within the body (Microcosm) and with the universe (Macrocosm) which can lead one to obtain the unity.

In addition, Yin and Yang are two contraries, two complementary and interdependent forces and symbols that have been combined, which represent the universal oneness with black and white colours rotating in a circle as the main symbol of Taoism. As mentioned earlier, this symbol is relevant to the formation of the Hexagram as feminine and masculine forms due to its duality. Although the feminine and masculine forms are the only dualities associated with the Yin and Yang in the Chinese culture, it is interesting to note that the artist uses this duality in many of his paintings which will be studied in more details later in this section. Each Hexagram has its own direction in order to lead one towards unity within itself.

By following the guidance of this hexagram, the follower will be able to take or acquire from the universe certain capacities such as patience that were not innate in him or her.

The combination of Eight hexagrams with Yin and Yang elements represent Bagua which is the main and principle Diagram of I Ching. Bagua explains the pathway of achieving balance and unity within the body (Microcosm) and with the universe(Macrocosm). Eventually, Dragon is the result of this balance in human body

that equipped it with the cosmic energy and power. Consequently, evolution within one or the soul called change is possible through the integration of Microcosm towards Macrocosm (like the unity between soul and mind). The only path for growth and lasting longer is to realize the universal interactions which are represented in the paintings by the Eight Trigrams (Bagua) such as some practices in the recommended Chinese methods like meditation which is to keep calm and being just simple observer to become a sage. In other words, by achieving unity in the body (microcosm) and universe (macrocosm), one could become a sage by the time to become capable of changing the destiny. The artist uses the Bagua in his series as a link between the Microcosm and Macrocosm.

For example, in the Dragon series, seven artworks were chosen from and share similar elements of Chinese culture such as Dragon, Hexagrams, Eight Trigrams, Yin and Yang and sometimes even similar colour combination and compositions. Using complementary and analogous colours demonstrates balance as a visual experience, since these colours are particularly harmonious and pleasing.

As it is the Dragon series, the dragon is an important visual element in all these paintings. As explained in the previous section, the god-like qualities of dragons and its role in Chinese culture are prominent. According to this artist depiction, this old powerful and mythical creature which is an ultimate symbol of cosmic energy, good fortune and prosperity is strong enough to change the destiny on earth. However, there are variations in appearance, including their shapes and colours. These sinuous dragons are placed mostly at the sides or bottom with green or red colour which is the colours of vibrant energy, rejuvenated, and growth.

Besides the dragon as a symbolic creature of balance, the artist depicted balance in different ways, such as making painting in pairs such as Kun and Qian, Rising and Emerging, and The Legend of Dragon I and The Legend of Dragon II. In the Chinese culture, good things happen in pair like marriage, so the artist used two dragons because

of auspicious. Sometimes pairs of dragons which stand in front of each other represents this harmony such as Qian (Figure 4.4). The movement is also present, but in a more subdued way, using colours transition of the light as a symbol of movement.

A good example of balance in this series is Kun (Figure 4.3) means the earth. On its own, the hexagram means 'feminine'. However, in the painting, we can see that a duality with this hexagram and Bag is represented in the lower section of the painting. The different Trigrams in this Bagua are all related to the family, such as different family members (younger daughters, older, and sons). Flanked by the two dragons, which are signs of the inner power, this painting is a representation of the Microcosm of the individual feminine, in relation to the Macrocosm of the family. This painting is therefore based on the balance and acceptance and importance of the feminine power within the family. Acceptance is the key element of success, so this hexagram depicts the superior person that has achieved balance through acceptance. As mentioned earlier, most of these artworks have been designed in pair so in order to complete this artwork Qian is a complement artwork for Kun. Qian is masculine and positive and it means sky.

Consequently, these two artworks are complementing each other and they are prominent in this series because each of them shows the first and second hexagrams out of the 64 possible. Both of them are conveying a message that a superior person is in balance with any masculine or feminine power. When someone is internally in balance this then leads one to be in touch with the balances of the universe.

As just presented, the artist included many important traditional Chinese elements, although he also included the Malaysian traditional elements in his artworks. Malaysia is a multicultural country with various elements of tradition, so the artists are surrounded by cultural elements and values such as festival celebrations, eating habits, and handicrafts. Eating habit is one of the most important cultural elements of identity,

specifically in festival celebrations. In Malaysia, food preparation has very particular techniques such as using banana leaves and bamboo for packing the food as a container in a very fabulous and amazing appearance.

Still analysing the Dragon series, the painting *The Legend of Dragon II* (Figure 4.7) describes the daily life of fishermen of the village in the East Coast of Malaysia. Fishing is the main economic activity for most of the villages along the East Coast in Malaysia. The sale of salted fishes, dried anchovies and shrimps, and the prawn and fish crackers (keropok) are common throughout the coastline. At the centre and bottom of this painting, there are two ambiguous wavy shapes which are the symbols of the *Bangau* (stork). Most fishing boats are decorated with wood carving of the stork because storks are large, long-necked and long-legged birds well-known as the king of fishers. Being naturally gifted at fishing, has made them the Kings of Fishers. Subsequently, the symbol of this bird means good fortune or good harvest which is always the fishers expectancy. Besides that, it has green dragon symbol which represents the intention of the Malaysian fishers due to the boat riding as green in the Malay culture is a popular colour which can be driven from Malaysian religious believers.

Eventually, the last icon is a square with six big fish that has been depicted side by side. These fishes can be driven from the Chien hexagram. This hexagram insists on creativity which leads one to the good fortune. Based on Chien advice, good harvest can be a vintage of hardworking creative fisher.

Consequently, this depiction is about the fisher man's daily expectations which is a good harvest by starting every morning with a hope and whenever they believe in their strength in fishing, good fortune will be absorbed, which is the rule of the unity inward and outward by themselves and the universe.

The Dragon Series is not the only series that includes the Malaysian traditional elements. For example, the texture of Festive Mood (Figure 4.8) resembles a woven mat of analogous colours of yellow, green and blue. Although the hexagram in this artwork is rather ambiguous because it is so elongated, the visual importance is on the colours and texture of the background. Yellow represents light and knowledge, green is generally faith and growth and finally blue in Chinese culture is used as a symbol of immortality.

To sum up, both the woven mat and the green colour (religion) represent tradition in Malaysian culture. However, the symbolism of blue is Chinese. By merging different colours and other cultural elements, both Malaysian and Chinese, the artist show the hybridity of his own identity, living in a multicultural country. Hence, the artist conveyed the I Ching as a factual path and solution in order to achieve multiculturalism. Unlike the other eight artworks Choong Kam Kow has a different approach in the installations of the Five Elements and Connect. These colourful wooden cubic shapes have been decorated by Chinese symbols and natural elements, such as Yin and Yang, hexagrams, Chinese words.

These installations are about the power of change in the five elements (cycle of spirit), the process of interactions between phenomena in the universe, human being, and nature. It is also about the interaction between the trinity of the man, earth and the sky (Universe) which is happening in a cyclic way in any living being. However, any kind of change needs unity between dualities, such as the feminine and masculine in order to show harmony and balance. For instance, five elements (change) installation represent the system of interaction and interrelationship between phenomena in the universe. According to the Chinese cosmology, these five elements are Wood, Earth, Water, Fire, and Metal which are shown by natural elements such as bottles of water or hanged piece of metal. Seasonal colours on wooden cubic shapes of five elements installation show the

process of change and balance in the nature which happens always between phenomena in the universe.

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5. CONCLUSION

The I Ching philosophy is the foundation of Choong Kam Kow's artworks. It may be said that, I-Ching to him is not just a philosophy, but it is a way of life. His exploration of Chinese philosophies and culture has begun in the 1970s to the present and the symbolic artworks produced during that era have never been closely examined. This thesis attempted to describe and explain the significance of these works.

The author chose ten artworks from three different series, all of which employ the I-Ching symbols with the two main objectives to identify and examine Chinese symbols in Choong's art works and interpret them based on I Ching and the concept of Macrocosm and Microcosm. The I Ching philosophy was further explained in relation to the Taoist philosophy. In addition, the author used Panofsky's theory of Iconography and Iconology as a primary methodology.

These ten artworks were chosen from the Dragon, Festival, and Sea Thru series. Choong Kam Kow used the I Ching Concept as he wants his contemporary works to be infused with ancient thoughts and wisdom. The I-Ching philosophy in these paintings has been depicted in different forms such as the Chinese Calligraphy, Dragon, Yin and Yang, Hexagram, Trigram, and Bagua. These cognitive symbols are conveying the message of balance within the body (Microcosm) and with the universe (Macrocosm) which ultimately leads one to obtain unity.

He applied two elements from I-Ching. The first element is the text from his ancient book, which he then beautified with the traditional Chinese calligraphy and then the Eight Trigrams which are hexagonal diagram shape or Bagua.

The Dragon series are depicted with similar elements of Chinese culture such as Dragon, Hexagrams, Eight Trigrams (Bagua), Yin and Yang and sometimes even similar colour combination and compositions. Using complementary and analogous colours he demonstrated a balance as a visual experience by using a harmonious and pleasing palette.

Besides symbolic elements of balance, the artist depicted balance in different ways, such as producing the painting in pairs such as the Kun and Qian, Rising and Emerging, and The Legend of Dragon I and The Legend of Dragon II. In the Chinese culture, good things happen in pair like marriage, so the artist used symbols in pair because of their auspicious connotation. Sometimes pairs of dragons stand in front of each other represent this harmony such as Qian (Figure 4.4) which are conveying the message that a superior person is in balance with any masculine or feminine power. When someone internally is in balance, it then leads one to be in touch with the balance of the universe. Movement is also present but in a more subdued way using colours transition of the light as a symbol of movement. Consequently, these two artworks Kun and Qian are complementary for each other and prominent in this series because each of them shows the first and the second hexagram out of the 64 possible.

The Dragon Series is not the only series that includes the Malaysian traditional elements. For example, the texture of Festive Mood (Figure 4.8) resembles a woven mat of analogous colours of yellow, green and blue. Although the hexagram in this artwork is rather ambiguous because it is so elongated, the visual importance is on the colours and texture of the background. Yellow represents spirituality, green generally faith and growth and finally blue in Chinese culture is used as a symbol of immortality.

The artist included many important traditional Chinese elements, although he also included the Malaysian traditional elements in his artworks. Malaysia is a multicultural country with various elements of tradition, so artists are surrounded by cultural elements and values such as festival celebrations, eating habits, and handicrafts. Eating habit is one of the most important cultural elements of identity, specifically in festival celebrations. In Malaysia food preparation has very particular techniques such as using banana leaves and bamboo for packing the food as a container in a very fabulous and amazing appearance.

Sea Thru series is also a representation the I Ching concept. These installations are about the power of change in the five elements (cycle of spirit);, the process of interactions between phenomena in the universe, human being and nature. It is also about the interaction between the trinity of the man, earth and the sky (Universe) which is happening in a cyclic way in any living being. However, as his artworks seem to emphasize, any kind of change needs unity between dualities, such as the feminine and masculine in order to achieve harmony and balance.

In conclusion, these artworks seem to direct us to the awareness that each person has his own journey towards integrity. In other words, collectively, Choong's artworks seem to emphasize that the unity of the universe (Macrocosm) and body (Microcosm) with reference to a careful interpretation of I-Ching advice can provoke one to realize our inner powers that in turn, have the power to change our destiny. The I-Ching and Tai Chi training has assisted Choong Kam Kow to realize this unity which healed his cancer and changed his destiny which may be viewed as his testimony of this unity.

Consequently, Choong Kam Kow as an artist and practitioner of Tai Chi had committed to the Macrocosm that by uniting the Macrocosm and Microcosm he will be able to represent the superiority of human being to other creatures and as a proof and result of this masterpiece, he could recover himself.

Recommendations for further research

The author selected just ten artworks for her further investigation although Choong Kam Kow has more artworks to be disclosed. 258 artworks still remain to be disclosed, which each series can be a research proposal due to their hidden mysterious and profound thoughts and connection with moral and cultural values.

Despite coming from a different background, the author found it challenging to choose the thesis in a field with new concepts and fundamentals. However, the author's constant curiosity and interest in the Malaysian and Chinese art philosophy has led her to explore it further. The author is optimistic that the exploration and learning in this thesis will enable her to create a platform of further research between arts in Malaysia and Iran. The author hopes that she can take this research to the next level and explore it further. The author is also sure that it will be a great contribution in enriching her country's and Malaysian arts.

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