

# Using 5 element theory for hexagram interpretation.

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Together with Yin-Yang , the 5 element theory (Wu Xing) is of fundamental importance in Chinese philosophy. I'll present here a comprehensive system that uses the 5 element theory to interpret the I Ching hexagrams.

## **5 Element basics.**

The 5 elements are : Water, Fire, Wood, Metal and Earth.

As the elements interact with each other, four different kinds of relationship between them are possible. This gives the four sequences in which the elements can be arranged:

- Generating sequence: Wood generates Fire, Fire generates Earth, Earth generates Metal, Metal generates Water and Water generates Wood.
- Weakening sequence: Wood weakens Water, Water weakens Metal, Metal weakens Earth, Earth weakens Fire and Fire weakens Wood.
- Controlling sequence: Wood controls Earth, Earth controls Water, Water controls Fire, Fire controls Metal and Metal controls Wood.
- Insulting sequence: Wood insults Metal, Metal insults Fire, Fire insults Water, Water insults Earth and Earth insults Wood.

It is important to understand these sequences rightly:

The generating sequence is also known as the "creating" or "nourishing" cycle.

The weakening sequence, which is simply the reverse of the generating sequence, is also referred to as the "exhausting" cycle.

The best way to visualise these first two cycles is as a mother and child. So, Wood is the child of Water and the mother of Fire. Whenever a mother and child element are together , both the "nourishing" and "weakening" are happening simultaneously and unconditionally (unless the mother element is completely exhausted). There are two possible imbalances : a strong child can overburden the mother (causing exhaustion) or a weak mother might undernourish its child.

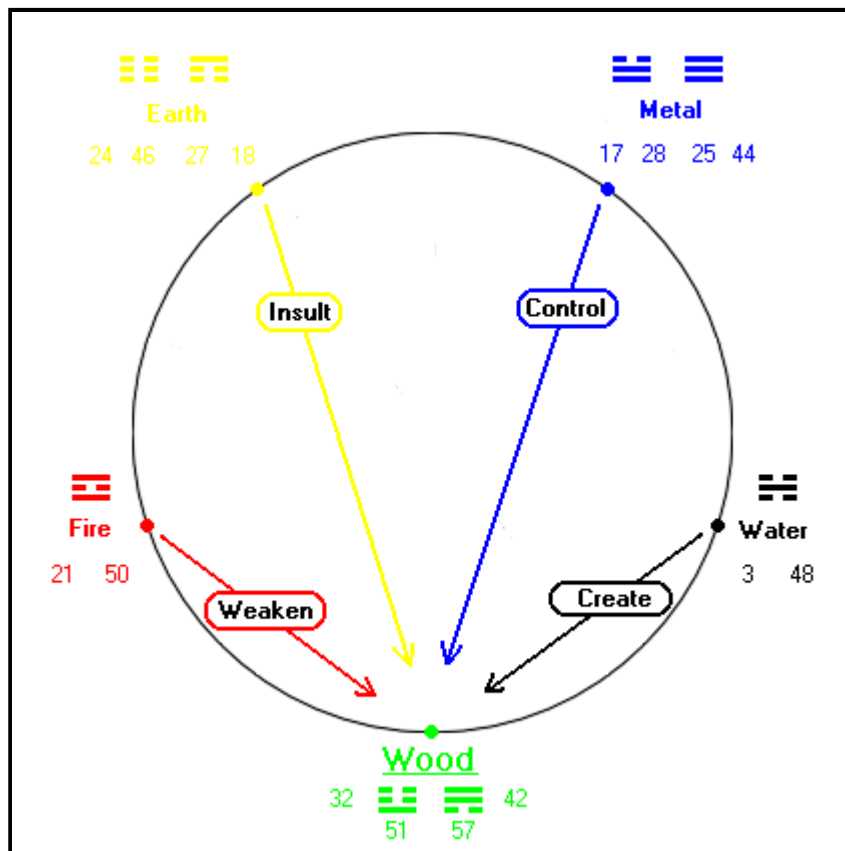
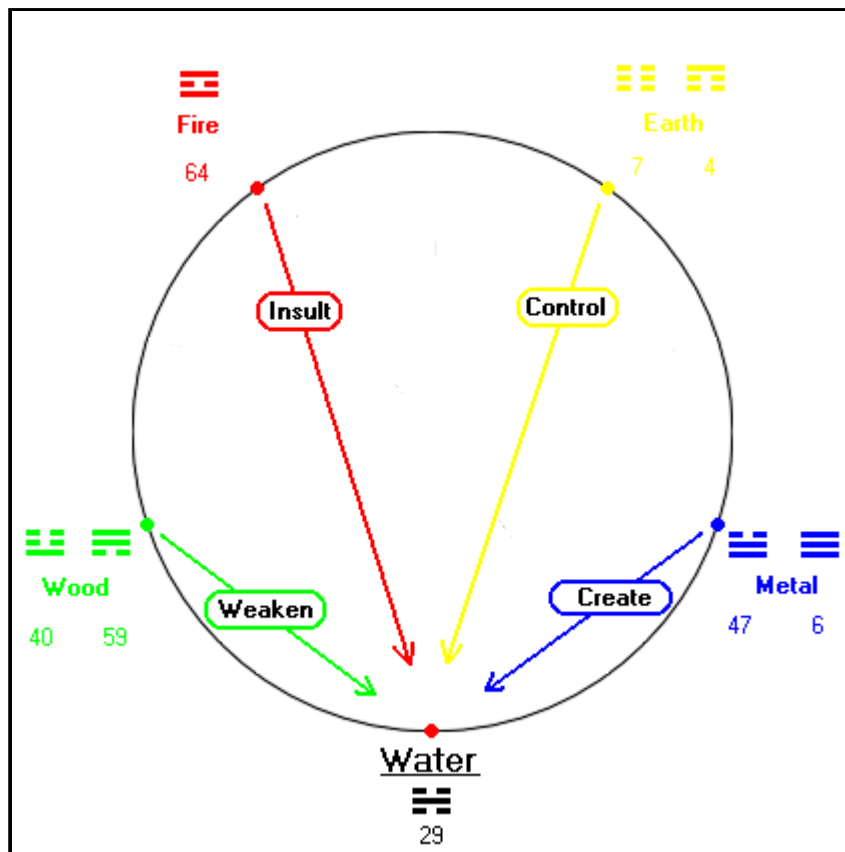
The controlling sequence is also known as the "destroying" cycle.

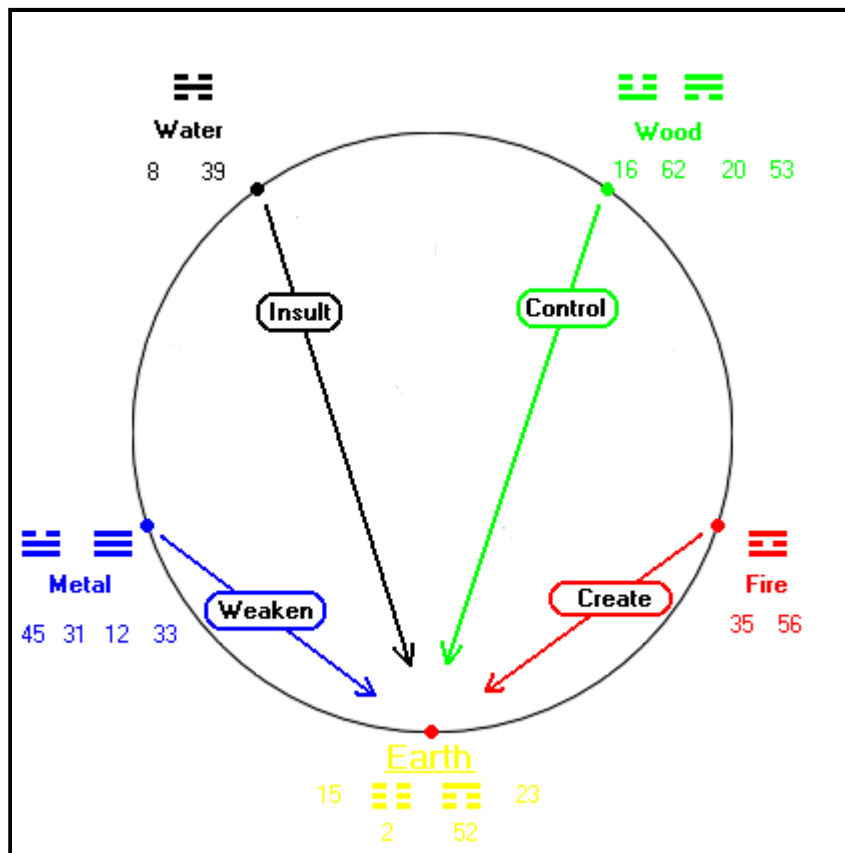
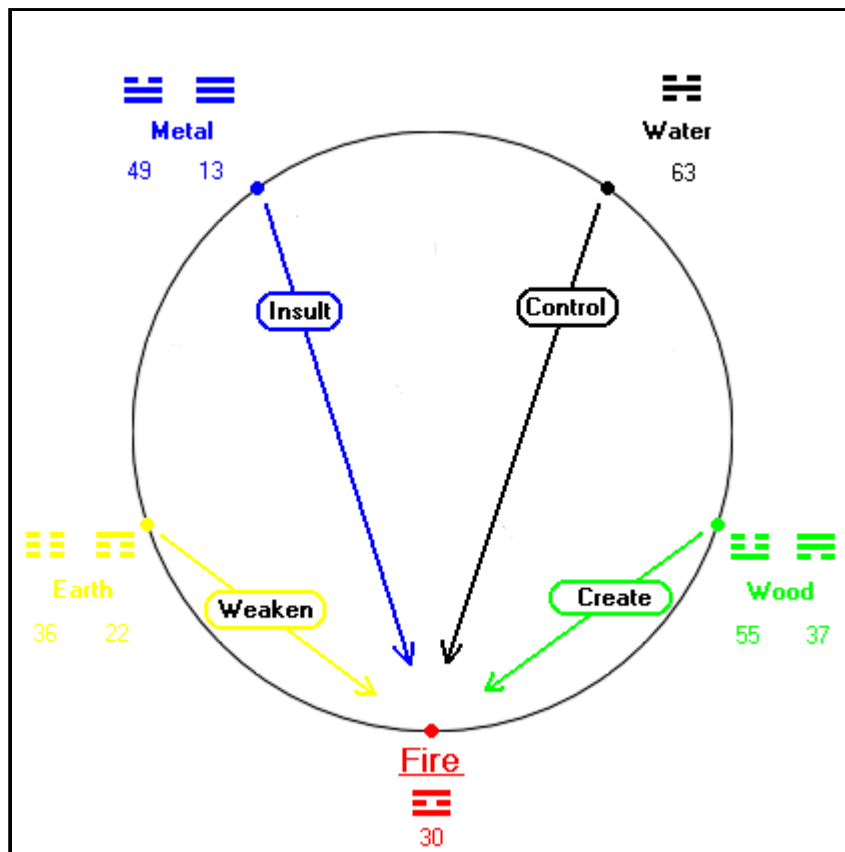
Every element controls another and is controlled by one itself. This maintains the natural balance in the system. When the harmony is lost and the controlling element becomes too strong, the controlled element can be destroyed.

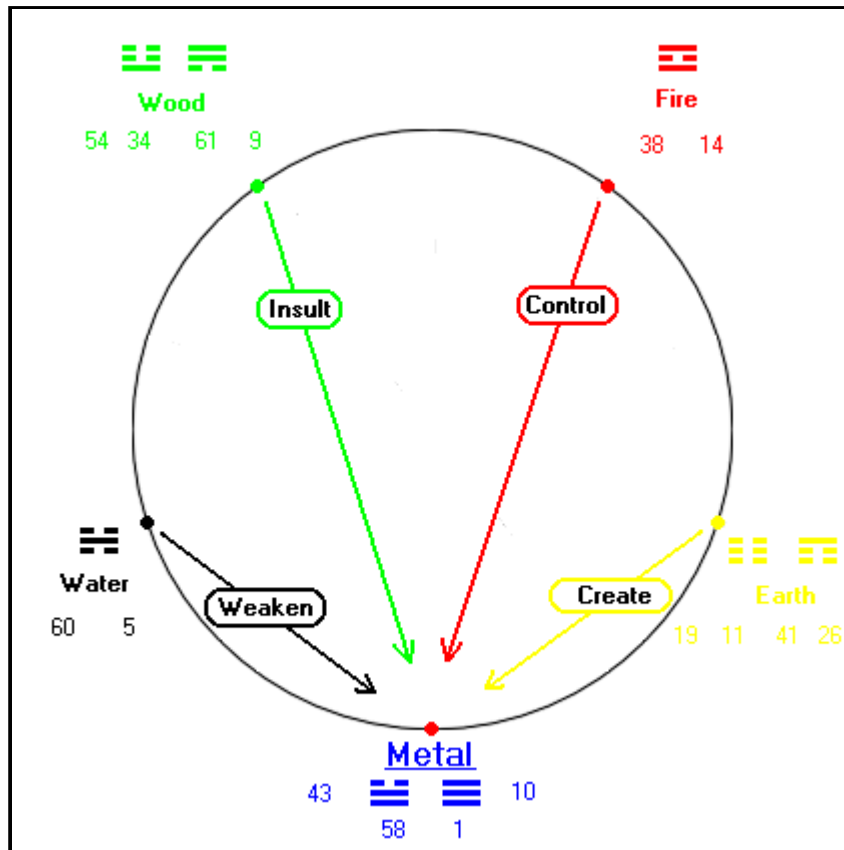
The insulting sequence is the reverse of the controlling sequence.

The insult can only happen when the system is out of balance. If an element becomes too weak it can be insulted by the element it normally controls. So, "controlling" and "insulting" are never happening simultaneously.

The following diagrams show the constellations for every element:







## Hexagram interpretation.









It is now quite simple to apply this for hexagram interpretation. Every hexagram falls in one of the five possible classes of elementary interrelationship, the fifth class being when two trigrams of the same element are together. Two same elements together are a neutral constellation, we could say there is a kind of sympathy between them, they "join" each other.

So, for every hexagram we can take the elements represented by the upper and lower trigrams and see which elementary relationship we have (The Wen numbers are indicated in the diagrams).

It is always the upper trigram that is active upon the lower trigram. The lower trigram is more yin, receptive and the upper trigram is more yang, the active principle. The lower trigram is the Situation, "what is"; the upper trigram is the Force, "what is done".

This is the complete list:

Weaken	5	45, 12	40, 59	36, 22	21	50	60	33, 31
Insult	34, 9	8	64	49, 13	27, 24	46, 18	61, 54	39
Control	14	20, 16	4, 7	63	25, 17	28, 44	38	62, 53
Create	26, 11	35	6, 47	37, 55	3	48	19, 41	56
Join	1, 43	2	29	30	51, 42	57, 32	58, 10	52, 15
Lower Trigram	☰ Heaven	☷ Earth	☵ Water	☲ Fire	☳ Thunder	☴ Wood	☱ Lake	☶ Mountain

Upper Trigram	 Heaven	 Earth	 Water	 Fire	 Thunder	 Wood	 Lake	 Mountain
Weaken	33 , 12	36	5 , 60	50 , 21	40	59	45 , 31	22
Insult	13	46 , 24	39 , 8	64	34 , 54	61 , 9	49	27 , 18
Control	25 , 44	7	63	38 , 14	62 , 16	20 , 53	28 , 17	4
Create	6	19 , 11	3 , 48	35 , 56	55	37	47	26 , 41
Join	1 , 10	2 , 15	29	30	51 , 32	57 , 42	58 , 43	52 , 23

This technique works out very nice for many hexagrams.  
Some examples:

- Hex 4 and 7 : Controlled Danger(Water)
- Hex 36 and 22 : Weakened Succes, Status(Fire)
- Hex 39: Insulted Peace(Mountain)
- Hex 3: Creating Something New(Thunder)
- Hex 14: Controlled Spirit Power(Heaven)
- etc...

The upper trigram says something about the quality of the "insult", "control", etc...  
We see that:

- Force(Heaven) creates = Struggle(Hex 6)
- Receptivity(Earth) creates = Nearing and Peace (Hex 19 and 11)
- Gentleness(Wood) creates = a Family(Hex 37)
- Water creates = a Well(Hex 48) or New Life(Hex 3)
- Delighting(Lake) creates = Exhaustion(hex 47)
- New Initiative(Thunder) creates = Richness(Hex 55)
- Meditation(Mountain) creates = Accumulated Power(Hex 26) and Higher Gain at the sacrifice of lower things(Hex 41)
- Succes(Fire) creates = Easy Prosperity(Hex 35) and (the longing to become) a Wandering Seeker of Truth(hex 56).

This technique also opens up interesting possibilities to qualify the moving lines. More about this in a future article.