

The I Ching Landscape.

By D.H. Van den Berghe

This article builds on my earlier work on the traditional order of the I Ching.

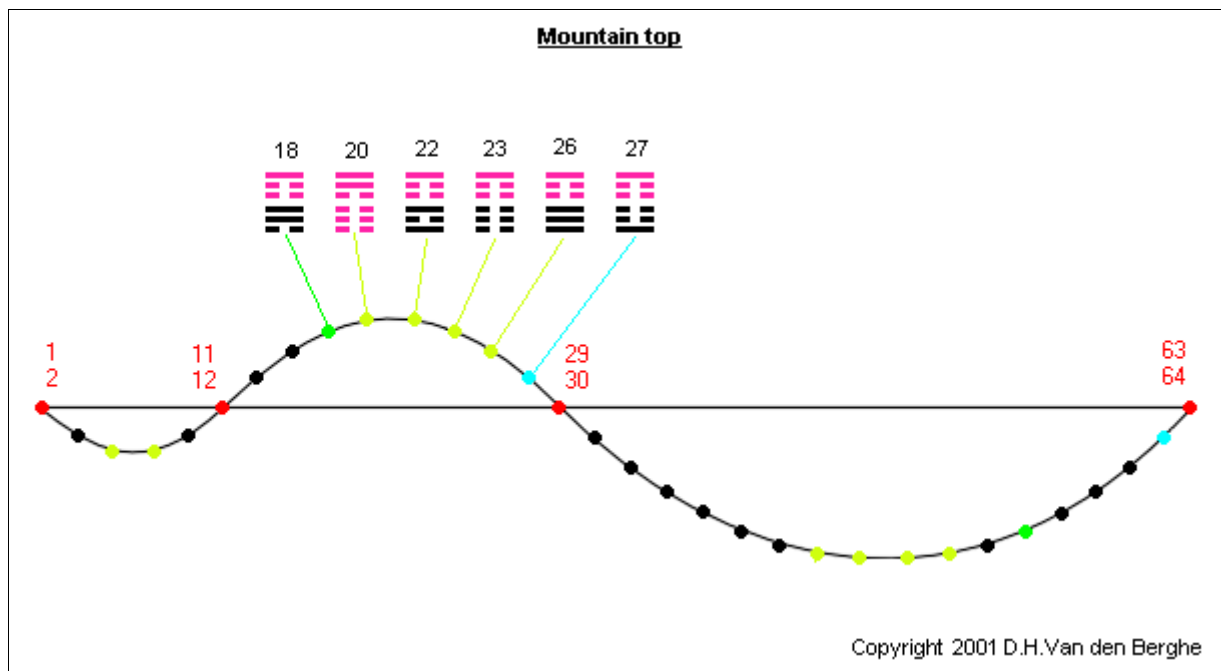
"The explanation of King Wen's order of the 64 hexagrams":

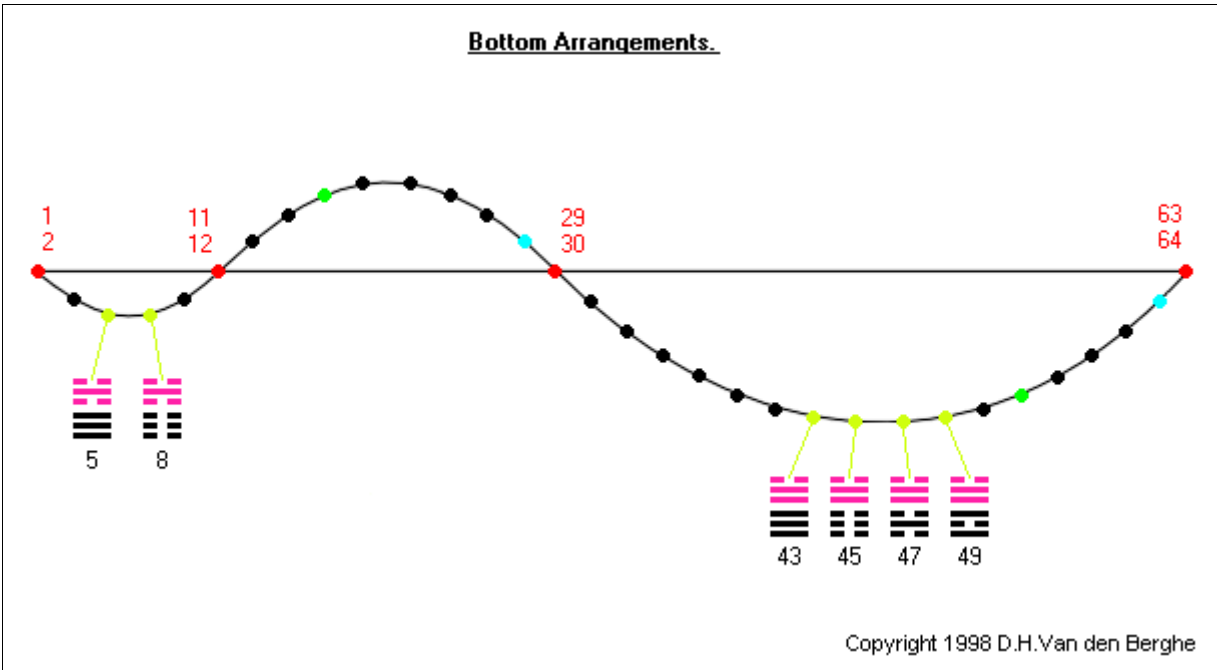
<http://www.fourpillars.net/pdf/kingwen.pdf>

The article uncovered some very basic structures found in the hexagram order, but also concluded that King Wen has likely taken inspiration from a kind of landscape when he constructed this order.

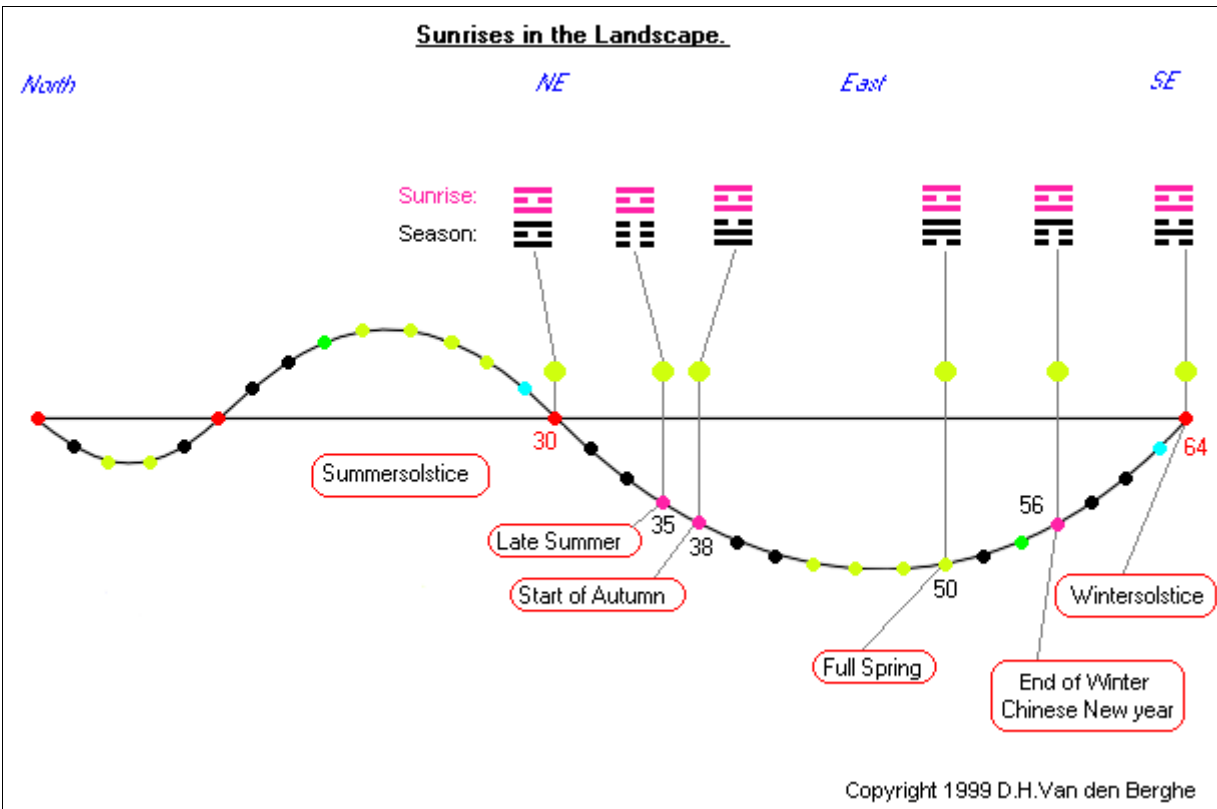
This was based on apparent arranged orders involving Water, Mountain and Lake trigrams respectively.

The following diagrams summarize this "landscape":





Based on the arrangement of hexagrams depicting sunrises in different seasons of the year, we also have evidence that we are probably facing towards the East in this landscape:



In these sunrises, the season is indicated by the lower trigram, according to the well-known Later Heaven arrangement of the trigrams:

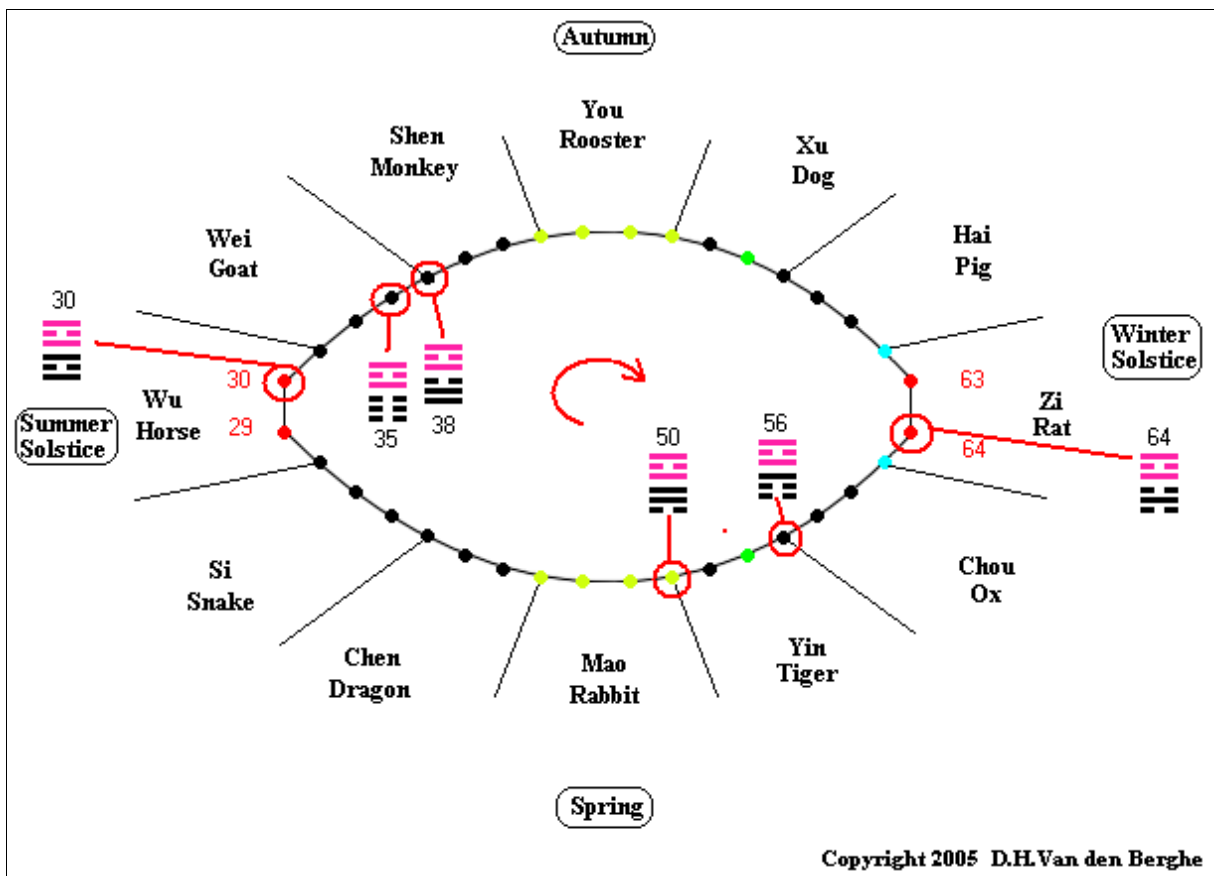


Each of these sunrises are correctly placed in the landscape facing East.

There happen to be exactly 18 hexagram pairs going from Hex29/30 (summer solstice) till Hex63/64 (winter solstice), that means 36 hexagrams.

This would assign about 10 days to each hexagram, or three hexagrams per Chinese Month.

Projecting the sunrise hexagram positions on the full year cycle we get this result:



Hex35 falls in the end of Wei/Goat Month, correctly indicating end of Summer.
 Hex38 is right at the beginning of Shen/Monkey Month, which is considered start of Autumn.
 Hex56 is exactly at the beginning of Yin/Tiger Month, which marks the end of Winter and start of the New Year.
 Hex50 is at the beginning of Mao/Rabbit Month, which corresponds to full Spring.
 Both solstices (Hex30 and Hex64) are also in their proper place.

One of the most frequent type question I received after publishing this explanation of the order was: "Where can this landscape possibly be? Where did King Wen sit when he saw this?..."

Initially I thought it would be unlikely to find this place (if it existed), since China is such a big country.

And what would it prove?

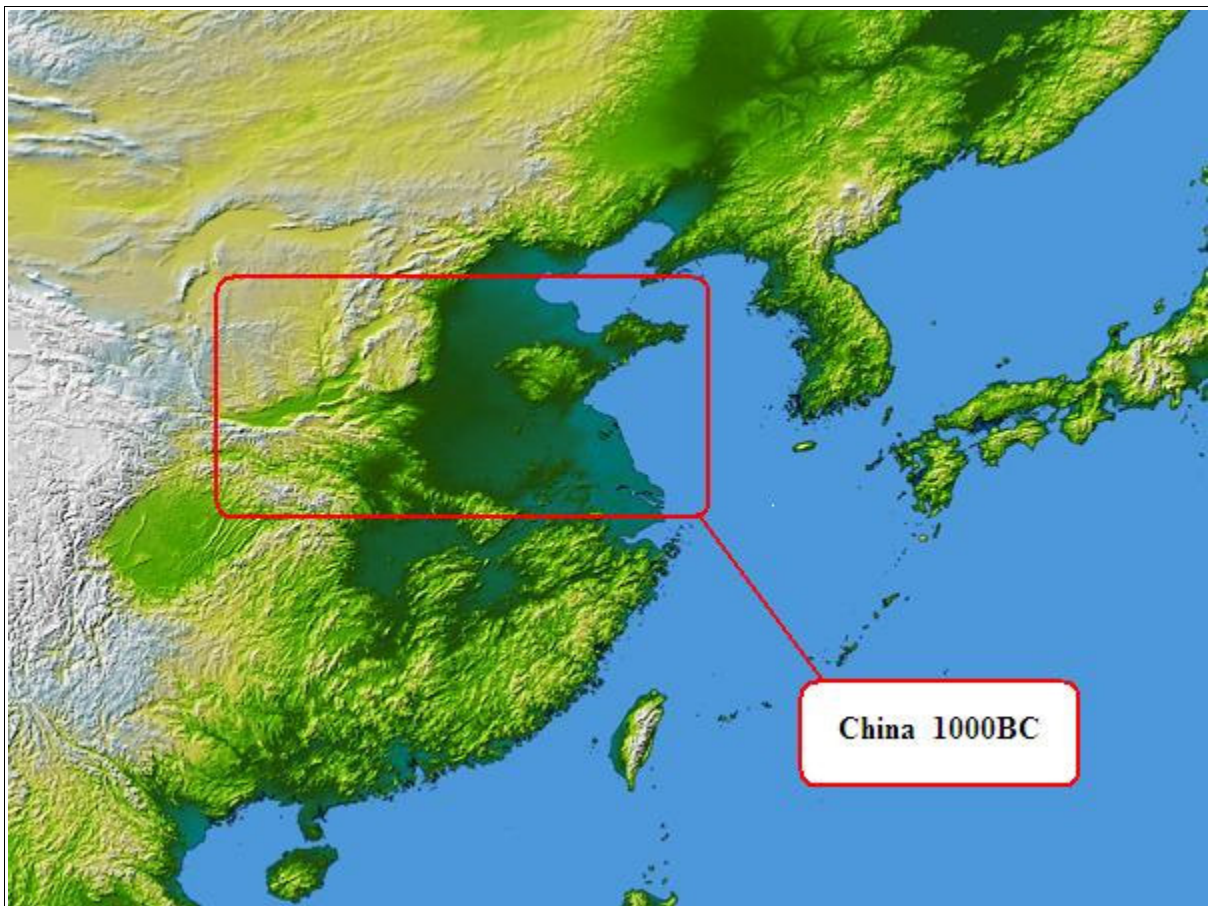
Probably a lot of places would be suitable candidates...

Is it an idealised landscape, or does it really exist somewhere?

So, I never really looked for 'the place'.. until recently when I saw a topographic map of China.

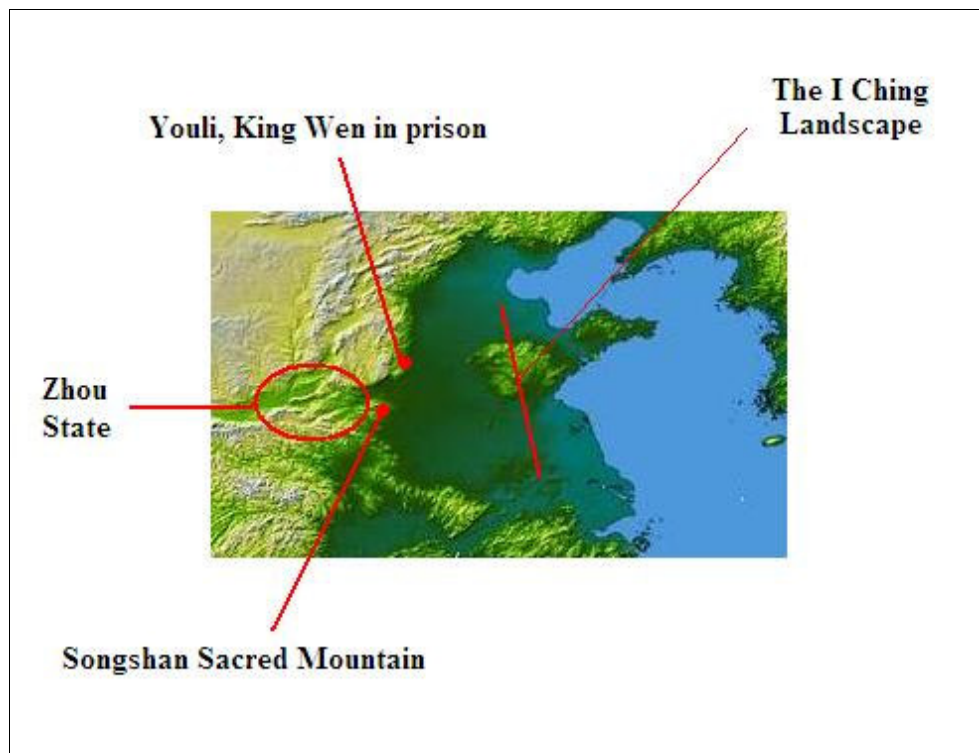
Map of China.

In the days of Zhou dynasty the territory of China was a lot smaller than it is today. Borders changed frequently because of feudal wars, but the country roughly stretched from the Yellow River valley in the North up till the river Yangtse in the South.



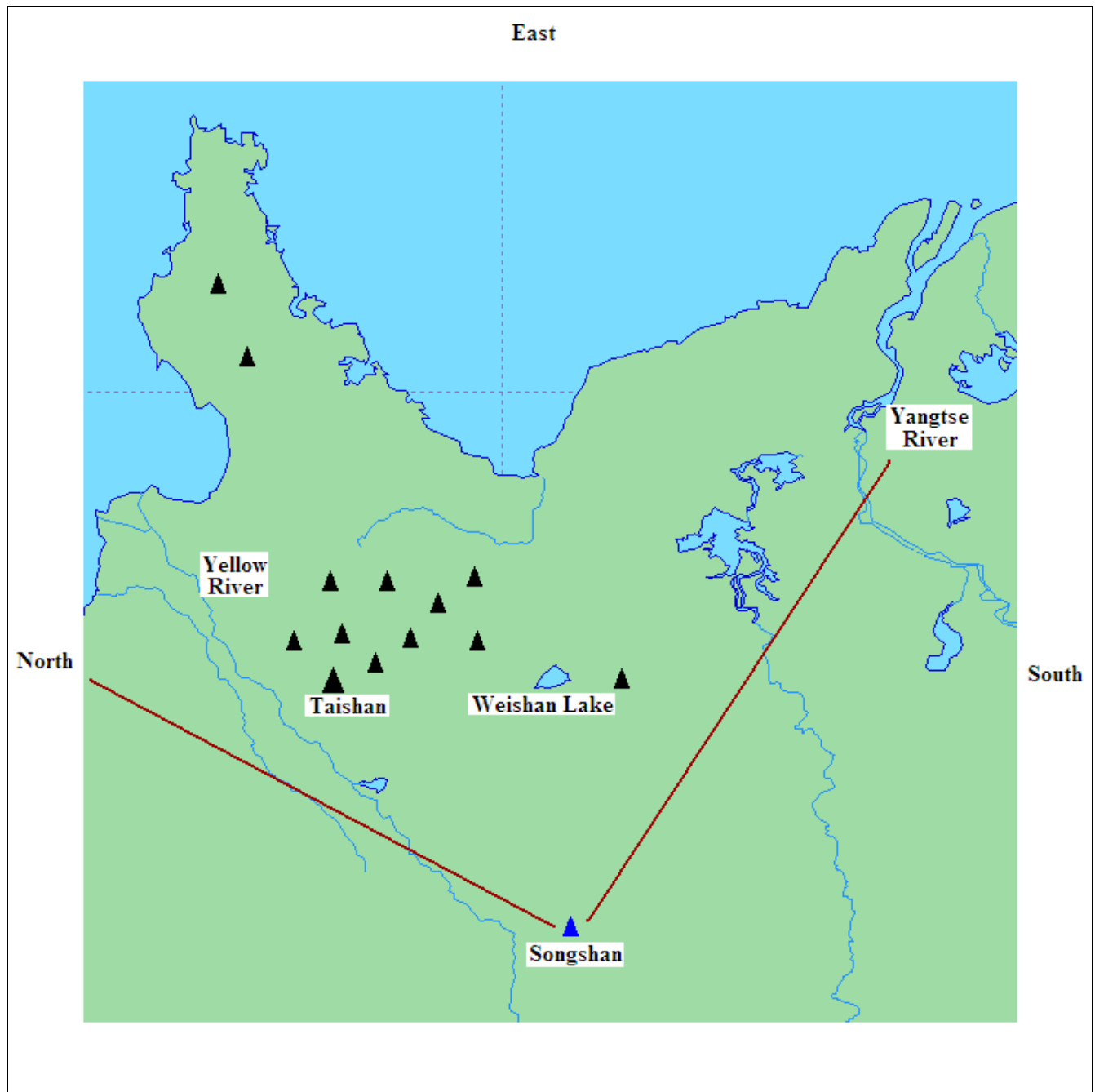
The home state of King Wen, the duchy of Zhou, happened to be in the West of the territory. This is not so far from what is known as the Sacred Mountains of the Center, Songshan. King Wen himself was reportedly imprisoned in Youli a place just North of the Songshan mountains.

But no matter which of these places we choose, the overall image of the entire Chinese territory looking in Eastward direction from these places, closely resembles our 'landscape'. It seems to describe the country starting from North in Yellow River valley going towards Yangtse valley in the South.



From North to South

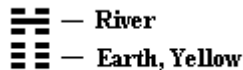
Below is another map of China, turned with East upwards, so it will be easy to see the hexagram order on this map.
It gives us the overview of ancient China as seen from Songshan or Zhou State:



The book appropriately starts with hexagram 1 and 2, located in the North (left in the map). The Yellow River valley is considered the cradle of Chinese civilisation, so it makes sense to start the book in this area.

Hexagram 5 and 8 depict rivers, since we have a Water (= river) trigram on top. We have two rivers running closely parallel in this area.

First we have the Tuhai River (Hex5), and just South of it runs the great Yellow River (Hex 8):



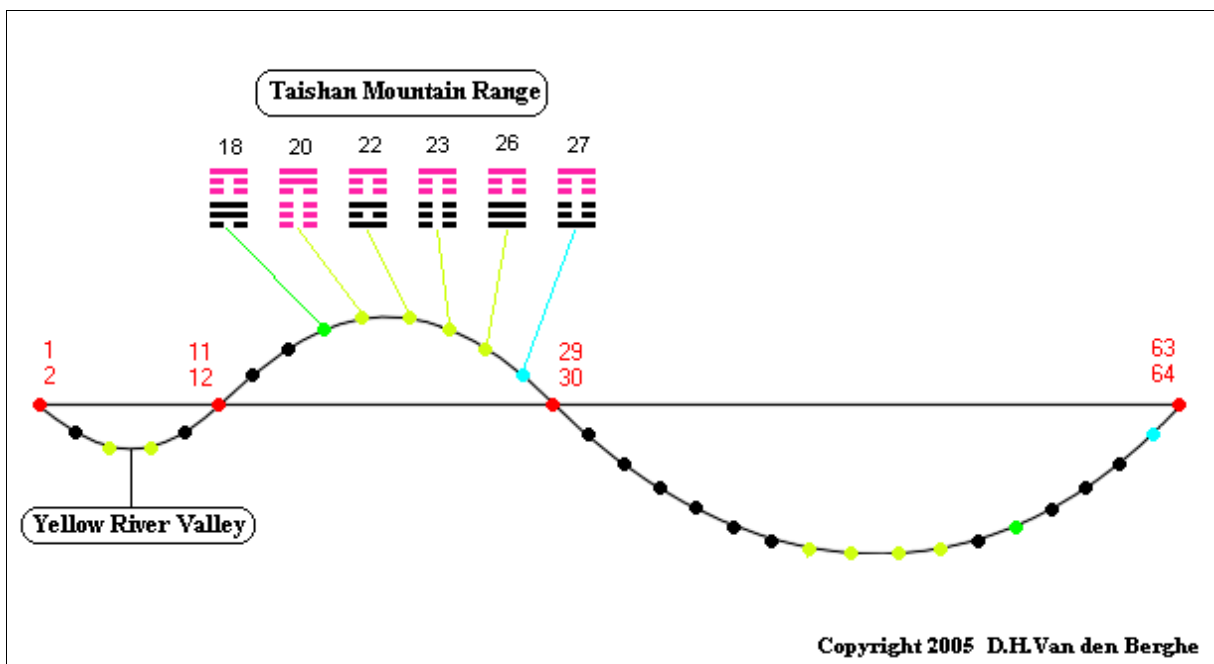
Hex5 may also represent to upstream part of Yellow River, and Hex8 the downstream part.

As we leave this landmark river behind, and move further South, we reach into the famous Tai Shan mountain range.

That's why we find the abundance of Mountain related hexagrams in this stage of the book. Five hexagram pairs in a row contain a Mountain trigram on top (or Mountain trigram doubled in Hex 20)

Tai Shan itself is probably given by Hexagram 20 (Mountain doubled) while the neighbouring hexagrams in the sequence will represent other peaks in this area.

Hex22 describes a beautiful sunlit peak, not surprising since the Tai Shan area is famous for amazing sunrise and sunset coloring the peaks.

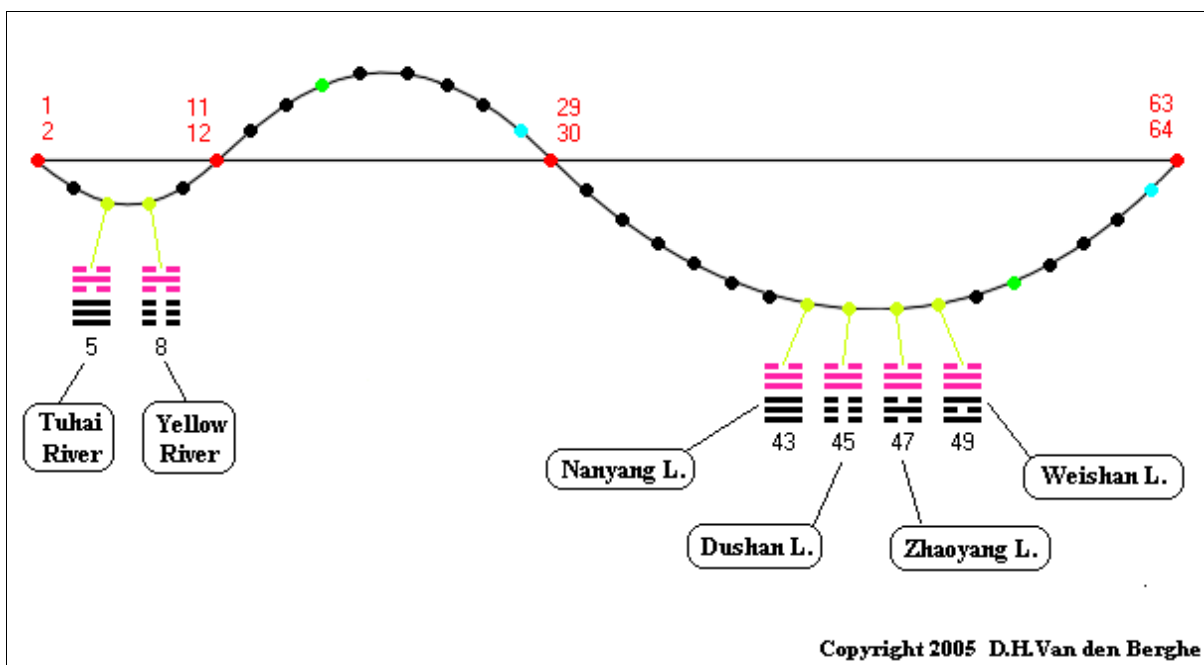


As we descend from the Taishan range the mountains become gradually lower, and many small rivers have created deep valleys between them.
 Hexagram 29, gorge upon gorge, is a good description.
 In hexagram 39 we find a similar description: steep mountains behind us and deep gorge in front.

Thus we approach the marshy plains of what is now Jiangsu province.
 This area is dotted with lakes and marshes, very appropriate for the 'Lake part' as described in my earlier work.

The Lake bottom sequence (Hex 43 – Hex 49) could represent the Weishan Lake, which is exactly East from Songshan, or it could be other big lakes which are a bit further South (see map)

Weishan is an interesting possibility, since it now consists of a sequence of 4 connected lakes, traditionally known as the Four Southern Lakes, from North to South : Nanyang Lake, Dushan Lake, Zhaoyang Lake and finally Weishan Lake.
 This would mean:



I am not acquainted with the individual properties of each of these lakes, but there is a very interesting story about Weishan Lake.

Hexagram 49 shows us Fire under Lake trigram.
 Their movements are in opposite direction and therefore the hexagram is commonly associated with the theme of revolution.
 Fire revolts against the Lake and its upward movement creates an island in it, also contributing to the Lake's beauty (= Fire trigram).
 Weishan Lake happens to have an island in it.

On this island is the tomb of Master Wei, who was a contemporary of King Wen. Master Wei was the brother of the last tyrant of Shang dynasty. He reportedly tried to bring his tyrant brother on the right path, but when his ideas were rejected he fled to the duchy of Zhou, who later overthrew the tyrant. If you read the line texts of Hex49 you will have no problem to relate it to this story.

Wei was buried on this island in Weishan Lake after his death. Therefore this Weishan Lake can be linked with hexagram 49 and the idea of revolution in more than one way.

Was the Lake bottom-sequence (Hex43 – Hex49) in the I Ching book based on this Weishan Lake system?
Or the reverse: was this Weishan 4 lake system artificially created based on the I Ching book landscape?
Both are interesting possibilities.

Going further South from Weishan we encounter a few more hills in hexagram 52 and 53. This could be the small mountains South of Weishan Lake near the current city Xuzhou.

Next we have hexagram 57, Forest upon Forest; and hexagram 58, Lake upon Lake (or Marsh upon Marsh). An appropriate description of these large marshy plains North of Yangtse River.

The last hexagram pairs of the I Ching seem to describe the Yangtse River and the difficulty of crossing it. The Yangtse River is the largest river of Asia, and the third largest in the world. Its regular flooding fills the lakes and marshes in the plains, as is described in the text of hexagram 60.

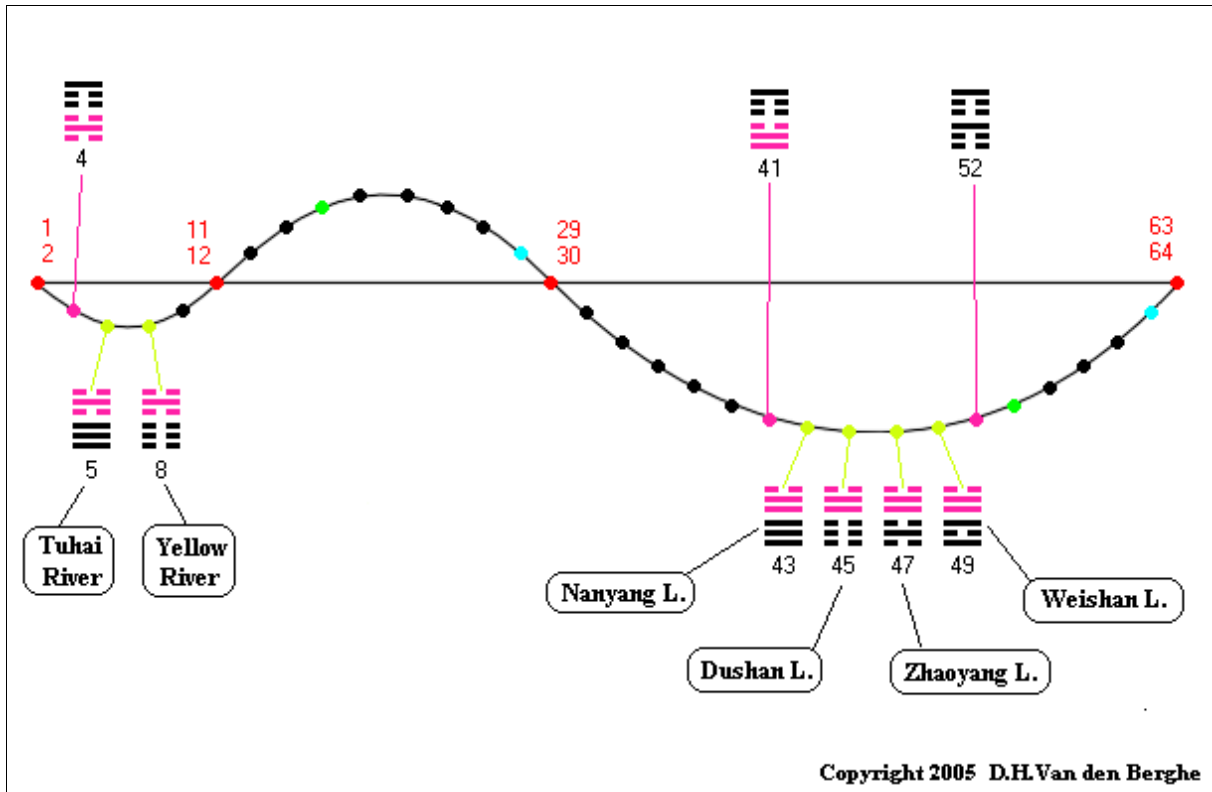
Hexagram 61 and 62 correspond to the Yangtse delta, where the river becomes very big (hexagram 62 is trigram Water, river doubled). The line texts of these hexagrams mention breeding birds and flying birds. Such river deltas are usually bird paradises. The text also mentions fish, which could even be dolphins or other big fish coming upstream in this delta.

The book ends with hexagram 63 and 64, where the task of crossing the great water (= Yangtse in Hex 62) is completed, and also expressing this is a new start. Maybe the person who devised this order had already set his eyes on conquering more land further South of Yangtse valley...

Other Mountains

Outside the Tai Shan Mountain range (Hex18 till Hex27), Mountain trigram on top only appears in three other places.

It is interesting to consider them:



Mountain above River appears in the second pair as Hex 4, just before the start of the River bottom arrangement (Hex 5 and hex 8).

This probably represents the high Mountains in the North (or North West) of China, where is the source for Yellow River.

Similarly we find Mountain above Lake in Hex 41, right before the start of the Lake bottom arrangement.

This can hardly be a coincidence.

This Lake bottom arrangement ends in Mountain upon Mountain, Hex 52

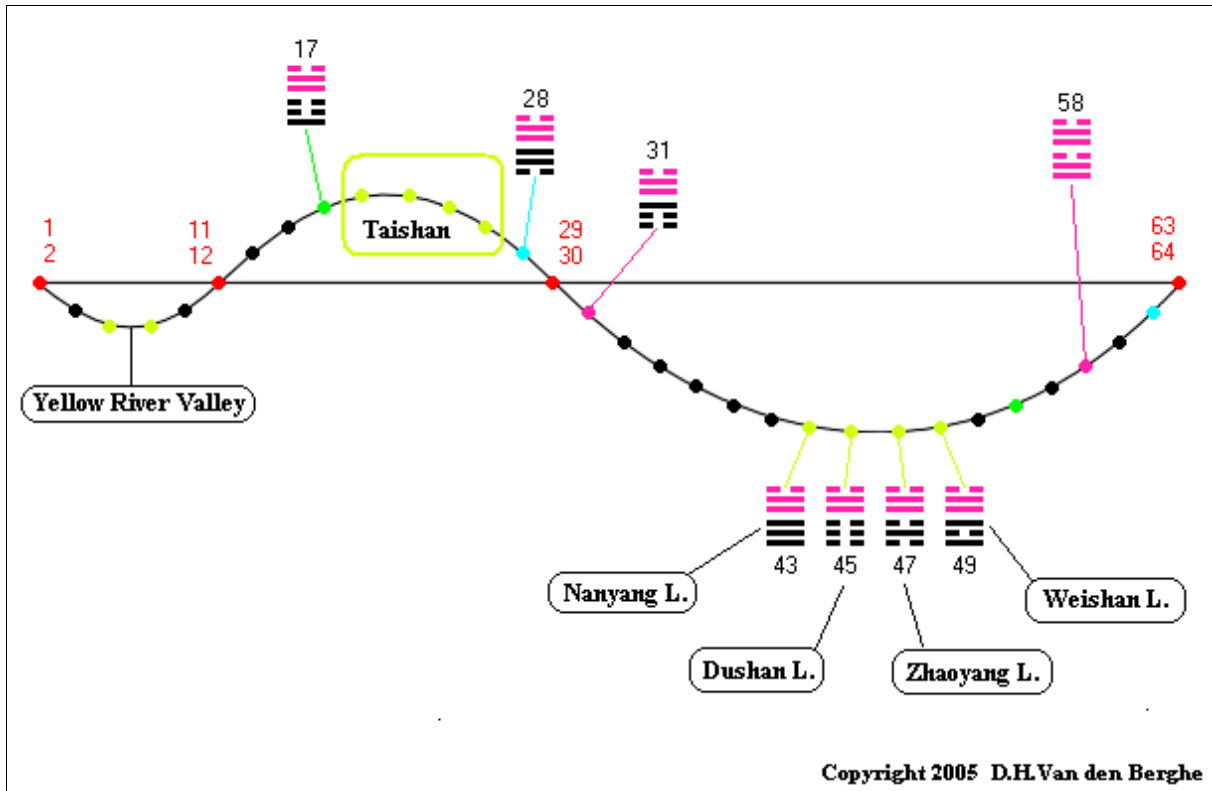
The lower trigram Lake in Hex 41, goes over in its opposite trigram Mountain to form Hex 52 and signalling the end of the lake.

This is great symmetry.

Other Lakes

Outside the Lake bottom arrangement (Hex43 till Hex49), the Lake trigram on top appears in four other places.

Again an interesting situation:



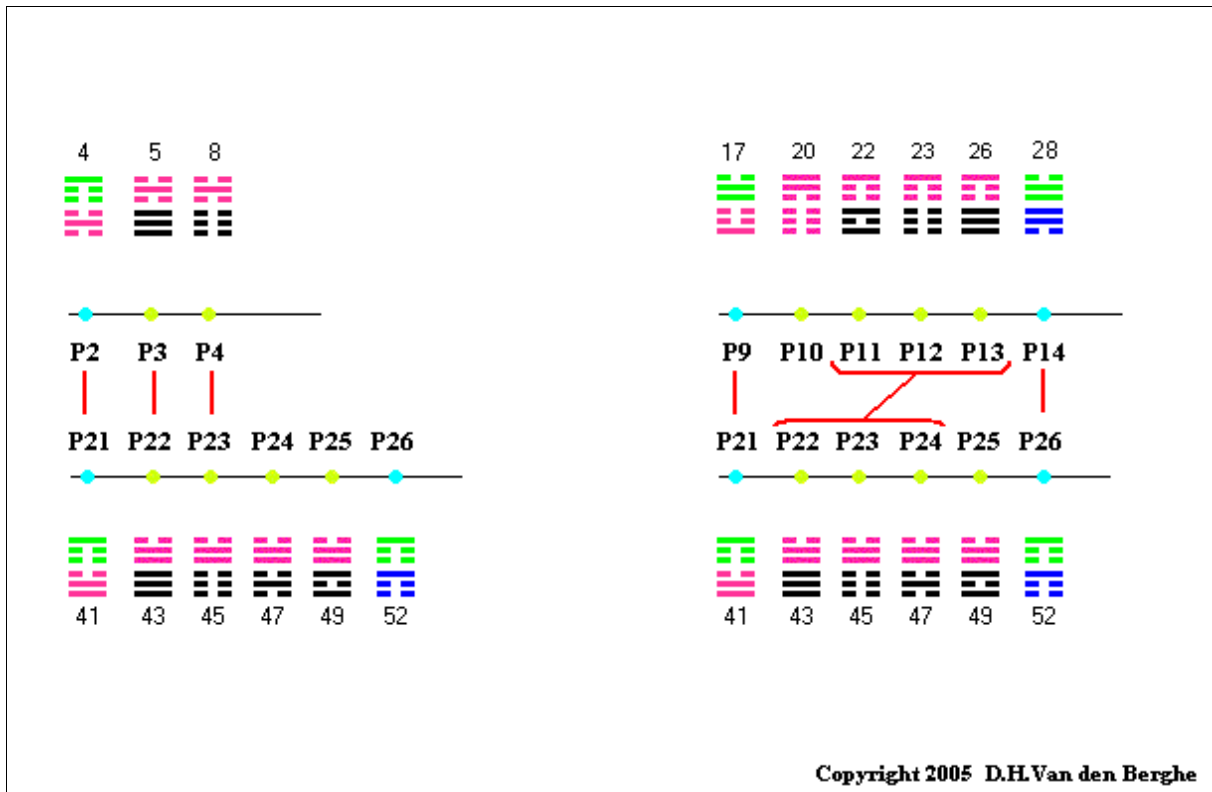
Most noticeable is that we see a repetition of the previous theme.

The Lake arrangement was flanked with two of the remaining "Mountain on top" hexagrams.

Here the Taishan Mountains are flanked by two of the remaining "Lake on top" hexagrams. This is very unlikely to be a coincidence.

Let's study this a bit further.

Symmetries in the River, Mountain and Lake arrangements



The River arrangement (Pair2 – Pair4) is constructed in completely similar fashion as the first 3 pairs of the Lake arrangement (Pair21 – Pair26)

Why is the River arrangement not continued beyond the first three pairs to complete this parallel?

The reason is easy to see.

In fourth place we would have River above River, which belongs to the symmetric pairs and is used already in the basic structure as Hex29/Hex30.

Same for the fifth pair which would be River above Fire, this is Hex63/Hex64 which ends the book and also belong to basic structure.

The sixth place would have Mountain above Fire, and that is Hex21/Hex22 which we are using already in the Mountain arrangement.

Putting four subsequent rivers early in the book would also not be an accurate representation of the Chinese land, it obviously has to end with the Yellow River (Hex8) in the North.

The Mountain arrangement (Pair9 – Pair14) shows great parallel with the Lake arrangement (Pair21 – Pair26), but we notice some interesting differences.

Mountain above River seems to be absent, otherwise it would be a near perfect symmetry with the four Lakes below.

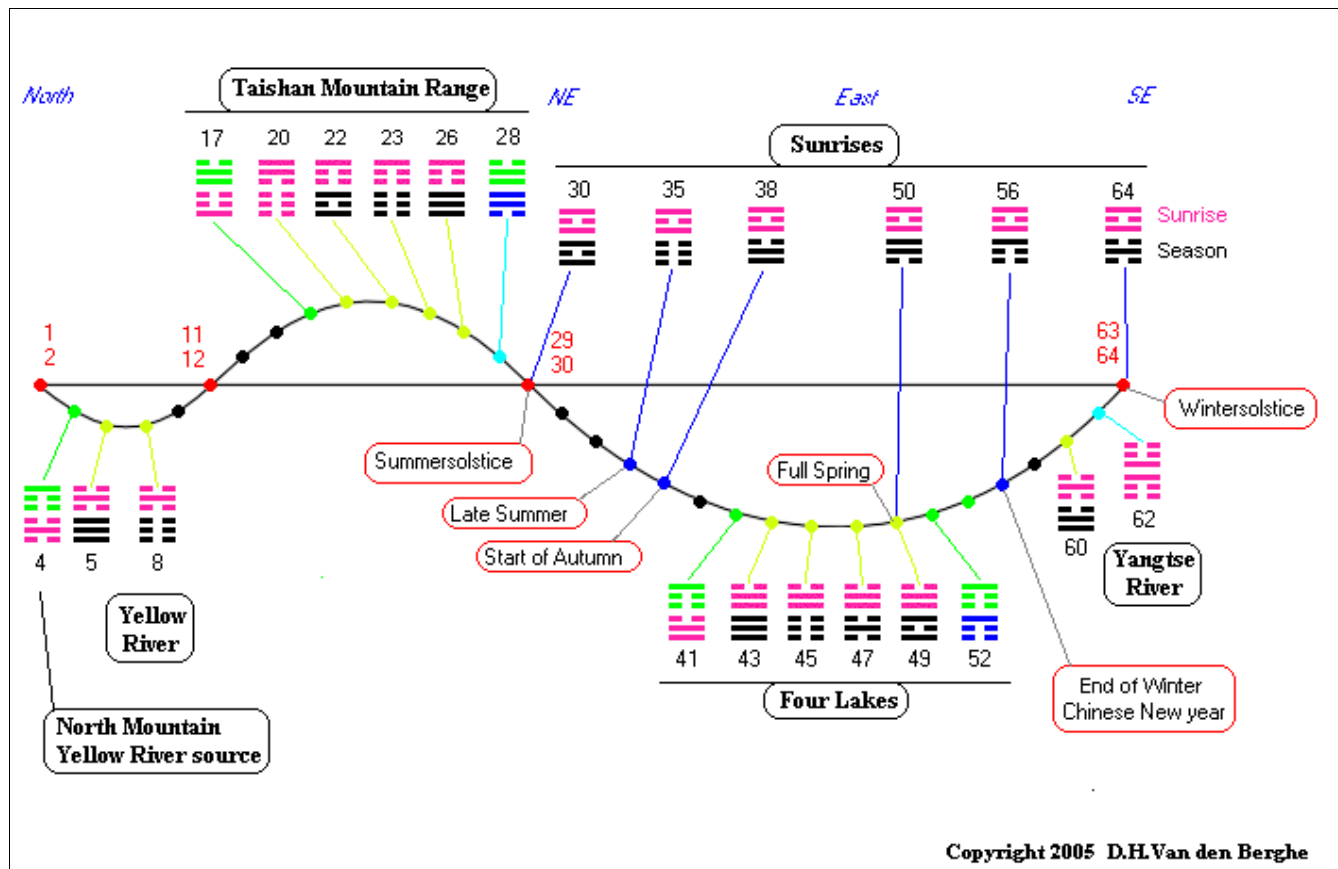
But there was no choice since Mountain above River is already used to start the River arrangement with Hex3/Hex4.

Therefore it was replaced with Hex20, Mountain doubled, which is perfect to symbolize the landmark Tai Shan Mountain here.

And since no major rivers have their source in Tai Shan range, it would not have been appropriate to position Hex4 (River flowing from Mountain) there.

Hex4 is therefore used at the very start of the book where it represents the mountains from where the great Yellow River flows.

Adding in our sunrise positions we can now draw a complete landscape map:



As we can see almost the entire hexagram pair order is complete.
Only a few more pairs need to be positioned, and only a few places left.

It can easily be done based on counter pair connections and/or further detailed landscape factors.

Doing it the way it is done gives interesting secondary structures (see earlier explanation article).

I have not found any way to position the few remaining pairs so that better structures appear.

This is the most elegant solution that does reflect the Chinese land quite well, and has most interesting mathematical structure at the same time.

Conclusion

It looks like "landscape" consideration plays a more important role in the order than I originally expected.

At the same time ordered structure is apparent throughout the book.

The idea to arrange the book according to the Chinese territory was probably not that strange.

The author might have thought it would benefit Chinese unity and power if all students of I Ching learn the book in this order that reflects the country's main features from North to South.

Or maybe the idea was that it would help China expand further Southward (cross the great Water = Yangtse).

Maybe it was the purpose to help cement the position of Zhou state as the ruling dynasty, since it is the view seen from their direction.

Or simply the idea was that the form and arrangement of the Chinese land is a sacred order created by the wisdom of nature, and therefore this order should carry that wisdom in it...

Oddly enough this "landscape" now roughly stretches from Beijing to Shanghai.

Two major cities have arisen in spots that correspond to the start and the end of the book