

# THE 天網 “HEAVEN’S NET” METAPHOR

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天網 “Heaven’s net” is an ancient Chinese metaphor for ‘divine justice; heavenly retribution’. In English, the nearest equivalent is “God’s mill grinds slow but sure” or “Justice has long arms.” The trope of *wǎng* 網 ‘net’, in comparison with *mill* or *long arms*, has an intrinsically appealing image of a wrongdoer being entrapped or entangled in divine justice.<sup>(1)</sup>

This paper examines four aspects of “heaven’s net”: the semantics of 天 ‘heaven; god’ and 罔 ‘net (~網); not; confusion’ (§ 1), the *Shijing* 天之降罔 “Heaven sends down its net/confusion” and 天畢 ‘heavenly net/fork; Hyades’ (§ 2), the famous *Daodejing* 天網恢恢疎而不失 “Heaven’s net is vast, though wide-meshed, it misses nothing” (§ 3), and other “heaven’s nets” (§ 4).

The aptness of “heaven’s net” led to the development of synonyms such as 法網 ‘net of the dharma/law’, caused the characters for 罪 ‘crime’ and 罰 ‘punishment’ to be written with the net radical 罒, and helped to strengthen Chinese belief in divine justice.

## 1. THE SEMANTICS OF 天 ‘HEAVEN’ AND 罔 ‘NET’

“Heaven’s net” combines two semantically complex words; *tiān* < \**t’ien* 天 ‘great; heaven, sky; god; nature; fate, destiny’ and *wǎng* < \**m̥iwang* 罔 (~網) ‘net; no, not; confusion, disorder’.

### 1.1 天 ‘GREAT; HEAVEN; GOD’

\**T’ien* 天 was a deity of the Zhou dynasty (11th-3rd cents. B. C.), but not

of the Shang (16th-11th cents. B. C.). On Shang oracle bones and shells, supreme deity was referred to as *dī* < \**tiē* 帝 'god; ruler', or sometimes *shàngdī* < \**diàngtiē* 上帝 'god above; god on high'. The Shang oracle graphs for \**t'ien* 天 anthropomorphically pictured a 大 'big/great (person)' with a big head.<sup>(2)</sup>

When the Zhou conquered the Shang, they identified their 天 'heaven; god' with the Shang's 帝 'god', similar to the manner in which the Romans identified their Jupiter with the Greeks' Zeus.<sup>(3)</sup> Schindler (1923:341-3) thinks that 帝 and 天 were related with the worship of ancestors and nature, respectively. In early Zhou texts, (e. g., *Shijing* 詩經), 天 and 帝 were interchangeably used for 'god', but in later Zhou texts (e. g., *Lunyu* 論語), 天 predominated, also in the sense of 'nature'.

H. G. Creel (1970:502) proposes the most feasible hypothesis to explain 天's semantic changes: The original 'great man' was specialized to the 'greatest men; kings', applied posthumously to 'dead kings; great spirits', or (since there was no overt singular/plural distinction) 'the great spirit'. Later, 天 was used to refer to 'the abode of the great spirits; heaven', and since it was believed to control destiny, 天 subsequently meant 'fate; providence'.

The association of 'heaven' as the dwelling place of the 'gods', and the

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(1) English *net* can have a figurative (esp. moral) sense of a 'snare; trap; entanglement'; e. g., Byron's "vain was the struggle in that mental net." Cf. Eric Clapton's "tangled in love."

(2) See Carr 1985b:8-10.

(3) The Zhou used 天 'heaven' for 'god' as early as 1080 B.C., according to Kuo Mo-jo 1935:5.

belief that the 'gods' controlled 'heavenly' phenomena (e. g., rain) are found in many ancient cultures. Carl Buck (1949:1484, 1464-5) traces out the 'sky-god' associations with 'heaven; sky; day' words in most Italic, Celtic, Baltic, and Indo-Iranian languages.

The etymology of \**t'ien* 天 'heaven', says Paul K. Benedict (1972: 157-8), derives from the Sino-Tibetan \**khien* < \**kha/n* 'the heavens'; seen in Tibetan *mkha* 'heaven; the heavens' and *nam-mkha* 'heaven, sky', and Magari *nan-khan* 'sun'.<sup>(4)</sup> He likewise sees a connection between *gān* < \**kān* 'dry' ~ *qián* < \**g'ian* 'heavenly' 乾 and Sino-Tibetan \**ga/n* 'heaven'.

*Tiān* < \**t'ien* 天 is cognate with two later words; *diān* < \**tien* 顛 'fore-head; top of the head; fall on the head, fall down; overthrow; concentrate', and *dǐng* < \**tieng* 頂 'top of the head'. The supposed semantic development was 'heaven' > 'above the head; top of the head' > 'head'.

Owing to its central importance in Chinese religion, philosophy, and politics,<sup>(5)</sup> *tiān* 天 'heaven' has been studied in more detail than *wǎng* 罔~網 'net'.

## 1.2 罔 'NET (網); NOT; CONFUSE'

The earliest characters for *wǎng* < \**miwang* 罔~网 'net' were pictographs of a 'net'.<sup>(6)</sup> Shima Kunio's concordance (1971:108, 240, 253, 409-410, 473) of Shang divination inscriptions lists thirty oracle graphs showing nets trapping fishes, rabbits, birds, boars, stags, and unidentified animals.<sup>(7)</sup>

Paul K. Benedict (1975:109) notes the similarity between AC \**miwang* 網 'net; to net' and words in Austro-Tai languages: Northern Thai (Dioi)

(4) Benedict suggests that the doublet *xiān* < \**Xian* 禊 'heavenly; Zoroastrian' is also related, but this is not recorded in early texts.

(5) See Schindler (1923), Li Zhengfu (1965), and Creel (1970:493-506).

(6) 罔 is written with the phonetic *wáng* < \**miwang* 亡 'not', see below.

(7) See the discussion of Tchang Tcheng-ming 1937:167-9.

*mòang* 'net' and Mak *mə:ng* 'casting net'; Sui-Thai \**müang*, Black Thai *mɔng* < \**mwang* 'net'; White Thai *xwɑ:ng* ~ *xɑ:ng* 'to fish with a net'; Shan and Lao *wing* < \**hwing* 'hand net'; Siamese *mung*, Old Burmese *mɔng-deau*, and Li *mang-dio* 'mosquito-net'. AC \**miwang* 網 might have been borrowed from an Austro-Tai 'net' word, or vice-versa (loaned back from AC).<sup>(8)</sup>

*Wāng* < \**miwang* 罔 'net' was anciently used as a graphic loan for two other words \**miwang* 亡 'not, no' and \**miwang* 調 'confuse; deceive'.<sup>(9)</sup> Loan characters are like a rebus; an analogy would be if written English were logographic instead of alphabetic, then the graph for *knot* (not *net*) could be used to write *not*. The ambiguity of 罔 'net; not; confused' was resolved with the specifying characters 網 (with the silk radical 糸) for 'net', 調 (with the speech radical 言) for 'confuse; deceive', and 惘 (with the heart radical 忄) for 'deluded, confused'.

The first meaning of 'net; to net' is usually written 網, rather than 罔. This distinction is largely owing to Han copyists, because characters in Zhou inscriptions and texts were often written without radicals. There are two notable graphic exceptions. The *Yijing's* 易經 account of the origins of civilization mentions Fu Xi 伏羲 inventing 罔 'nets':

作結繩而為罔罟以佃以漁蓋諸離 He made knotted cords and used them for nets and baskets in hunting and fishing. He probably took this from the hexagram of The Clinging. (Wilhelm 329)<sup>(10)</sup>

The *Mengzi* 孟子 (2B/10/7, Legge 228) uses *wāng* 罔 in the expressions 罔市

(8) For typographical reasons, *ng* is used for *ŋ*. Benedict (1972:44) proposes a Sino-Tibetan 'net' doublet of \**kwan* ~ \**gwan* on the basis of Tibetan *rkon-pa* ~ *skon-pa* 'basket; fowling net', Lepcha *kun* 'fishnet', Kachin *sumgon*, Nung *gun* and Burmese *kwan* 'casting net'.

(9) A third, *wāng* < \**iwang* 枉 'crooked; perverse', has been suggested by some commentators, but there is no textual support.

(10) This passage has many graphic variants, including 網 or 罔 for 罔. 'The Clinging' is hexagram 30, 離 (see fns. 32 and 50).

利 "to catch in his net the whole gain of the market,"<sup>(11)</sup> and 罔民 'to net/entrap the people':

及陷於罪然後而刑之是罔民也 When they thus have been involved in crime, to follow them up and punish them; -- this is to entrap the people. 焉有仁人在位罔民而可為也 How can such a thing as entrapping the people be done under the rule of a benevolent man? (1A/7/20, 3A/3/3; Legge 147-8, 240)

In the *Shujing* 書經 (169, Karlgren 21), there is an 'order' metaphor which describes 網 'net' with *gāng* < \**kāng* 綱 'guiding rope of a net; regulator; arrange threads; law': "若網在綱有條而不紊 It is like a net, resting on the leading-rope; it is orderly and does not become tangled."<sup>(12)</sup>

The second meaning of \**miwang* 罔 'net' is a graphic loan for the homophonous *wāng* < \**miwang* 亡 'no, not, none; disappear; die'. The \*-*ang* final is unique for AC negative words, but the \**m*- initial is seen in *wú* < \**miwo* (亡 can have this pronunciation) 無 'not; not have; no; do not', *mò* < \**māk* 莫 'not; nothing; no one; quiet', *wú* < \**miwo* 毋 'no, not, mò < \**mwat* 末 'not', and *wù* < \**miwət* 勿 'no, (do) not'. 罔 is often used in double negatives, e. g., in the *Shujing*:

今我民罔弗欲喪曰天曷不降威大命不摯 Now, of our people there are none who do not desire (your) ruin, and they say: "Why does Heaven not send down its terror, (why has) the great mandate not been seized?" (19/4, Karlgren 27)

One *Shujing* description of divine retribution uses 罔 for 'without (consideration)':

(11) This is said to have resulted in the taxing of traders. Cf. the economic sense of the English *net* < *neat*, and 買 'buy' in § 1. 3.

(12) A later *Shujing* passage (8/7, Legge 159) uses 網 with *jī* < \**kjəg* 紀 'leading thread; separate and arrange threads; regulate, rule, norm; follow, record' in the compound 紀網 'rules and regulations': "亂其紀網乃低滅亡 And thrown into confusion his rules and laws, the consequence is extinction and ruin."

The ways of God are not invariable;--on the good-doer He sends down all blessings, and on the evil-doer He sends down all miseries. Do you be but virtuous, 爾惟不德罔小 without consideration of the smallness of your actions, and the myriad regions will have cause for congratulation. If you be not virtuous, 爾惟不德罔大 without consideration of the greatness of your actions, they will bring the ruin of your ancestral temple. (13/8, Legge 198)

Some interpret this as assurance of rewards or punishments from god, others as results of following or violating natural moral laws.

The third meaning of \**miwang* 罔 is a loan for 'confuse, confused' words in a large AC semantic field that includes: \**miwang* 誦 'confuse; cheat; deceive' \**miwang* 惘 'confused; disconcerted; deluded', \**miwang* 忘 'forget; ignorant', \**miwang* 妄 'confused; foolish; false', \**mwàng* 茫 'confused; vast, vague', \**māng* 盲 'blind; ignorant; deluded', \**mung* 蒙 'cover; stupid; ignorant; exposed; deceived', \**mung* 矇 'blind; dim-sighted; ignorant', \**mung* 濛 'darkening (sc. rain)', \**miǔng* 'dream' ~ \**mung* 'darkened; blind' 夢, \**māng* 氓 'ignorant people, populace', \**miən* 泯 'ruined; troubled; disorderly', \**Xmwàng* 謊 'sleep-talking; nonsense; lies', \**Xmwàng* 慌 'confused; flurried, flustered', \**Xmwàng* 恍 'sudden, flustered; crazed, dazed; unaware', \**Xmwàng* 荒 'wild, desolate; vast, great; excessive; neglect; senile', \**g'iwang* 狂 'mad; shaman; foolish, reckless', and \**kiwang* 誑 'deceive; lie'.<sup>(13)</sup>

(13) See Carr 1986:115-8. Other possibilities include \**miwo* 誣 'cheat; deceive', \**Xmæng* 薨 'death (esp. of a king/prince)', \**miwən* 眠 'shut the eyes; be fooled', \**miwən* 紊 'entangle, confuse', \**Xmwən* 昏 'dusk, darkness; marriage (婚); mentally dark, blinded', and \**iwang* 枉 'bent, crooked; unjust; condescend'. All these words are related with an extensive Sino-Tibetan 'covered; darkened' word family. Paul K. Benedict (1986) has expanded his (1971:177) root of \**r-mu·k* 'fog(*gy*); dark; dull' to include \**r* ~ \**s*-prefixations on \**mu(-t/-s/-b)* ~ \**mu·k/·ng<sup>A</sup>* ~ \**məw<sup>B</sup>*; and semantically ranging across 'black, dark; blue, green; sky; sky (-god); sun; sea; dim; confused, ignorant; blind(ed); dull; quiet, sullen; downcast; darken; cloud, fog, mist'.

The *Liji* (15/51, Legge 80) says: “衣服在躬而不知其名為罔 When a man had his robes on his person and did not know their names (or the meaning of their names), he was ignorant indeed.” The *Liezi* 例子 (周穆王, Karlgren 1964: no. 1059) says: “有迷罔之病 He had the sickness of delusion and confusion.”

Confucius and Mencius say that a 君子 ‘superior man’ can be  $\bar{q}i < *k'i\grave{e}g$  欺 ‘deceived, cheated; imposed upon’, but not  $w\grave{a}ng < *mi\grave{w}ang$  罔 ‘confused; deceived’:<sup>(14)</sup>

可欺也不可罔也 He may be imposed upon, but he cannot be befooled.  
(*Lunyu* 論語 6/24, Legge 193)

故君子可欺以其方難罔以非其道 Thus a superior man may be imposed on by what seems to be as it ought to be, but he cannot be entrapped by what is contrary to right principle. (*Mengzi* 5A/2/4, Legge 348)

The *Lunyu* has two ambiguous loan usages of  $w\grave{a}ng$  罔. The first (2/15) is the Confucian warning that: 學而不思則罔思而不學則殆 ‘(if you) study and do not think, then  $w\grave{a}ng$ ; (if you) think and do not study, then (it) is dangerous/doubtful’. The meaning of the second half is clear,<sup>(15)</sup> and most translators take  $w\grave{a}ng < *mi\grave{w}ang$  罔 in the first half as a loan for  $w\acute{a}ng < *mi\grave{w}ang$  亡 ‘(labor) lost’, but Karlgren and Lin take it as  $m\acute{a}ng < *m\grave{w}ang$  茫 ‘confused’.

Learning without thought is labour lost. (Legge 150)

Learning without thinking is labor lost. (Mei 24)

He who learns but does not think, is lost. (Waley 91)

He who learns but does not think is lost. (Chan 24)

Entendre ou lire sans réfléchir, est une occupation vaine. (Couvreur 80)

Reading without thinking gives one a disorderly mind. (Lin 203)

If one studies without thinking, one is confused. (Karlgren 140)

(14) See *Shijing* (191/4) in § 2. 2. Cf. the later  $\bar{q}i\grave{w}ang$  欺罔 ‘deceive, cheat’ and  $\bar{q}i\grave{t}i\grave{a}n\grave{w}\grave{a}ng\grave{r}\acute{e}n$  欺天罔人 ‘to deceive heaven/god and people’.

(15) Lin (203) takes exception and translates 殆 as “flighty (or unbalanced).”

The second *Lunyu* (6/17) loan usage of 罔 contrasts with human *shēng* < \**sēng* 生 'life; birth; production': 人之生也直 'man's life is straight', 罔之生也幸而免 'wǎng's life is lucky and escape'. (Couvreur 130-1) paraphrases:

Tout homme en naissant a la rectitude du coeur. Si celui qui la perd, ne perd pas en même temps la vie, il a un bonheur qu'il n'a pas mérité. (Il a perdu ce par quoi l'homme est vraiment homme, et n'a plus sa raison d'être.)

Legge (190) takes the first 生 as 'to be born' and the second as 'to live':

Man is born for uprightness. If a man lose his uprightness, and yet live, his escape from death is the effect of mere good fortune.

Waley (119) changes the punctuation:

Man's very life is honesty, in that without it he will be lucky indeed if he escapes with his life.

These three attempts ignore the parallelism, but Karlgren (1968: no. 1938) translates:

If a man lives (can have his life) it is [by his] straightness; if a cheat lives (can go on living), his escaping (misfortune) is luck.

The equivocality of these two *Lunyu* 罔 loans is similar with the *Shijing*'s poetic "Heaven's 罔 net" (§2. 1).

### 1.3 THE NET RADICAL 罒

*Wǎng* 罔 'net' is a graphic radical at the top of characters, written 罔 or simplified to 罒 (cf. 目 'eye'). Compared with the other 213 radicals, the net radical has an average frequency of usage.<sup>(16)</sup>

Most characters written with the net radical 罒 are pictographs in the NET semantic field: *fú* ~ *fóu* < \**b'üŋ* 罟 'net', *mín* < \**míwən* 罟 'trap, snare', *lúo* < \**lā* 羅 'bird net',<sup>(17)</sup> *zhì* < \**tjəŋ* 置 'set/place (a net); arrange; set aside',

(16) Less than 0.5% of characters in the largest corpus, the 大漢和辭典, have the net radical.



TABLE 1  
SOME NET RADICAL CHARACTERS

NET	CRIME
罟 'net'	罟 'net; guilt'
罟 'net'	罰 'punish; fine'
罟 'trap, snare'	罵 'curse, revile'
羅 'bird net'	詈 'revile; defame'
置 'set; arrange'	罪 'crime, guilt'
署 'place'	
罟 'fish net'	OTHER
罟 'fish net'	羈 'halter'
罟 'fish trap'	羈 'lodging house'
罟 'net; trap'	蜀 'caterpillar'
罟 'cloth cover'	熊 'brown bear'
罟 'entangle'	罷 'wear out'
	買 'buy'

*shù* < \**diō* 署 'place; position', *yàn* < \**iam* 罟 'fishing net', *zhào* < \**tōg* 罟 'fishing net/basket', *shēn* < \**šiēm* 罟 'fish trap', *juàn* < \**kiwan* 罟 'net, trap, entangle', *mi* < \**miak* 罟 'cloth cover; veil', and *hua* < \**g' wəg* 罟 'entangle; hamper'.

Several characters with the 罟 net radical have meanings in the CRIME lexical field: *fá* < \**b'iwāt* 罰~罰 'punish; fine', *mà* < \**mā* 罵 'curse, revile', *lì* < \**liēg* 詈 'curse, revile; defame', *gū* < \**ko* 罟 'net; guilt (~辜)', and *zuì* < \**dz'wəd* 罪 'crime, offense; guilt, fault; sin, evil'. The logograph for 罰~罰 'punish; fine' combines 罟 'net', 言 'speech' (= 'accusation'?, cf. 詈), and

(17) The *Liji* (11/22, Legge 433) mentions "The Great Netter," 羅氏 ('Net' as a surname or title).

‘knife’ (cf. *xíng* < \**g’ieng* 刑 ‘punish, punishment; law’).<sup>(18)</sup> The graph 罪 for ‘crime’ ideographically combines 罟 ‘net’ with 非 < \**piwər* 非 ‘not; wrong; evil’--but 罪 had an early graph 辜 that combines 自 < \**dz’iəd* 自 ‘nose’<sup>(19)</sup> and 辛 < \**siən* 辛 ‘bitter; pungent’ indicating the same draconian ‘knife’ (cf. 辜 above). 辜 was first changed to 罪 in the Qin dynasty (小篆) “small seal” graph which was made obligatory in 213 B. C. The *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 says the seal graph was changed because it resembled the tabooed 皇 ‘august’ (皇帝 ‘emperor’) in the name of Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝 (r. 221-210 B. C.). Actually, this clever graphic choice of 罪 “net + wrong” = ‘crime; guilt’ was affected by the “heaven’s net” symbol of divine law. The creator of this character 罪 wanted to suggest that the ‘net’ of law would ensnare criminals.

The word *zùì* 罪 (with 罟 ‘net’ and 非 ‘wrong’) ‘crime; guilt; fault; evil’ was chosen by Christian missionaries for ‘sin’, and some hypothesize that one cause for the lack of evangelical success in China and Japan is a supposed lexical gap for ‘sin’.<sup>(20)</sup> Ju I-Hsiung (1969: 88) claims that:

Since there is no oracle character for sin, we have to believe that the ancient Chinese knew nothing about sin, especially original sin. They believed that man was born sinless and perfect. Transgressions were committed when the human being went astray from his original nature.<sup>(21)</sup>

(18) Knives were used in two types of punishment, tattooing the face (墨), and cutting off the nose (劓). See fn. 77.

(19) The AC pronunciation of 自 may have been \**dz’iər*.

(20) The counter-example of Christianity’s popularity in Korea is conveniently ignored. Ruth Benedict (1946) popularized the idea that Japan has a shame (*haji* 恥) culture rather than a guilt (*tsumi* 罪) culture. She set up a dichotomy between shame based on externalized sanctions from societal values versus guilt based on internalized standards of absolute sin. There is some validity to this concept, but to most people, shame and guilt are nearly synonymous equivalents. See George Devos (1960:288ff.) and Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1976:11-14) for criticisms of Benedict’s narrow value judgment.

To criticize the ancient Chinese for not knowing about 原罪 'original sin' is as ludicrous as saying they were ignorant of 網球 ('net ball') 'tennis';<sup>(22)</sup> both are recent imports from alien cultures.<sup>(23)</sup> 罪 is polyreferential for religious 'sin' and legal 'crime; guilt' because this distinction is foreign. Historical linguistics reveals many parallels for Chinese 'guilt; sin' polysemy. In Indo-European languages, Buck (1949:1181-4) finds that 'sin' words usually derive from earlier, and semantically milder, 'fault; guilt; mistake; error' meanings.

The OTHER characters in Table 1 are not clearly related with 'net' or 'crime'. The character for *mǎi* < \**meg* 買 'buy' combines 罽 'net' and 貝 'cowry; valuable', interpreted as 'wrapping up' valuables or trying to 'net; obtain' wealth.<sup>(24)</sup> *Pí* < \**piā* 罽 'bear' may derive from *bà* ~ *pí* < \**b'ia* 罷 'wear out (a bear in a net?)'. The reasons for the nets in *jì* < \**kiā* 羈 'halter, reins; top-knot' and *jī* < \**kiā* 羈 'lodging house; passing guest' are uncertain.

There have been graphic simplifications to and from nets. The oracle graph for *shū* < \**ḍiuk* 蜀 'caterpillar, place name' pictured an insect, but in the modern graph 蜀, its head was changed to a 罽 'net', and its body changed to 勹 'bent' and 虫 'insect'. *Bi* < \**piēt* 畢 'net on a forked stick; wooden fork; Hyades' (§2.3) was originally a picture of a net, but the upper portion was changed to 田 'field'. The oracle graph for *yuān* < \**iwān* 冤 'in-

(21) See Nakamura Hajime (1964:284), Wu Pei-Yi (1979), or A. S. Cua (1980). Ju mistakenly gives 'crime' meanings to the oracle graphs for *kòu* < \**k'u* 寇 'robber, bandit' (rather than Ju's 'prisoner'), and *zāi* < \**tsəg* 宰 'official; butcher, slaughter' (rather than 'execution by beheading').

(22) The loan for *net ball* is MSC 落岡球 and Japanese ネットボール.

(23) A converse case: *qì* < \**k'iəd* 氣 'life force; vital energy; breath; air; weather; airs, manner; emotion, temper; spirit' is one of the most important words in Oriental philosophy, science, and psychology (see Onozawa, Fukunaga, and Yamanoi 1978; and Doi 1973:95-100), but it has no equivalent in most Western languages (other than loans such as "chi" or "ki").

(24) Cf. 罔市利 in *Mengzi* (§1.2).

justice; grievance; false accusation' shows a rabbit in a net (<? 'poaching'), but the modern graph 冤 has 兔 'rabbit' and 宀 'roof'.<sup>(25)</sup>

## 2. "HEAVEN'S NETS" IN THE *SHIJING* 詩經

The *Shijing* (*Book of Poetry/Odes*) is the oldest text with the "heaven's net" metaphor, or metaphors, since it has both "heaven's *wǎng* 罔 net/confusion," and "heaven's *bì* 畢 net/fork."<sup>(26)</sup>

### 2.1 "HEAVEN'S 罔 NET/CONFUSION"

*Shijing* ode 264 (瞻卯) mentions 天 'heaven' six times; once each in the first, third, fifth and seventh stanzas, and twice in the sixth stanza's 天之降罔 'heaven sends down its net/confusion'.<sup>(27)</sup> The first and third stanzas parallel heaven sending down *lì* < \**liad* 厲 'whetstone (斫); cruelty, evil; epidemic, calamity; demon', and *luàn* < \**lwân* 亂 'disorder, confusion, rebellion'.

瞻卯昊天 I look up to the great Heaven, but it is not kind to us.

For very long we have had no peace, 降此大厲 it has sent down these great evils.

In the state nothing is settled, officers and people suffer. Nocuous insects gnaw and injure, there is no peace, no (limit, restraint =) moderation.

罪罟不収 The guilty ones are not apprehended, there is no peace, no cure.<sup>(28)</sup>

(25) The 'roof' in the modern graph for *hān* < \**Xān* 罕 'net; rare' was originally written with a 'net'.

(26) The *Shijing* odes mention nets being used to catch: rabbits (7), birds (70, 216), and fish (57, 70, 104, 159, 172, 174, and 197). See Legge's (148-9) summary.

(27) In Karlgren's translations "=" and ":" indicate figures of speech.

(28) Legge (560) translates 罪罟不収 literally as "The net of crime is not taken up," but 収 'collect; take in' means 'apprehend' both according to Mao's commentary and the antithesis in the second stanza.

People have their land and fields, you, however, take possession of them.

People have their commoners, you, however, snatch them.

此宜無罪 Those who ought to be held guiltless, you on the contrary apprehend them.

彼宜有罪 Those who ought to be held guilty, you on the contrary let them loose.

A clever man builds a city wall, a clever woman overthrows it.

Beautiful is the clever woman, but she is an owl, a hooting owl.

A woman with a long tongue, she is a (steps =) promoter of evil.

亂匪降自天 Disorder is not sent down from Heaven, it is produced by women.

Those who cannot be taught or instructed are woman and eunuchs. <sup>(29)</sup>

When they (exhaust people =) pick people to pieces, their slander is first entirely (cold-shouldered =) disregarded.

But how can you say: “They (do not arrive =) can come nowhere, what evil can those do?”

They are like those who sell at a triple profit, the nobleman knows this.

And (therefore) the women have no public service, they have to (rest =) abide by their silkworm work and their weaving.

(29) The third stanza illustrates the sexism in ancient Chinese society. Legge (561) notes that “Only a Chinese will agree that it is a bad thing for a woman to be wise.” But sexism was not limited to the ancient Far East, compare the net metaphor in Ecclesiastes (7:26):

And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets; and her hands as bands; whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

(30) The “flee” rhymeword repeated in the sixth stanza (and the phonetic in *wāng* 罔) is *wāng* < \**miwāng* 亡 ‘disappear; exile; die; destroy; not’.

天何以刺 Why does Heaven reprove you, why do the Spirits not bless you?

You (leave aside =) do not care about your great anxieties (troubles), you only feel hatred against us.

You are not good, not felicitous, your demeanour is not (up to the standard =) good.

When people flee <sup>(30)</sup> the country, the state is exhausted and distressed.

天之降罔 When Heaven sends down (confusion =) disorder, it is really (ample =) widespread.

When people flee the country, it is a grief to the heart.

天之降罔 When Heaven sends down disorder, it is really near (the end)

When people flee the country, it is a pain to the heart.

Squirting is the straight-jetted spring, it is really deep.

Oh, the grief of the heart, why is (the distress) of the present time, not before me, not after me?

藐藐昊天 The distant great Heaven, there is nobody whom it cannot steady.

Do not disgrace your ancestors, then you will save your person. (Karl-gren 236-8)

Despite the 罔 antitheses of heaven sending down (the loan character) 厲 'evil, calamity' and 亂 'disorder' rebellion', Legge (563) literally translates "Heaven is letting down its net," <sup>(31)</sup> and quotes the commentary of Yan Zhan that "Heaven is sending down calamities to act as a net, more numerous-

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(31) Cf. "God is letting down his net, -- is sending calamities upon mankind" (Giles 1151); "Le ciel envoie ses (châtiments, qui nous enveloppent comme des) filets." (Couvreur 415)

ly than before.”

The meaning of “heaven’s 罔 confusion/disorder” in the sixth stanza is tied up with the first stanza’s *zúigù* 罪罟 ‘(net of) crime and guilt’, and the second’s *wúzuì* 無罪 ‘not guilty’ and *yǒuzúì* 有罪 ‘guilty’. *Zúigù* 罪罟 has two other *Shijing* usages :

天降罪罟 Heaven sends down crime and guilt, noxious insects cause disorder in the (interior =) government. (265/2, Karlgren 238) <sup>(32)</sup>

My tears fall like rain; do we not long to return home? 畏此罪罟 But we fear this guilt (blame). (207/1, Karlgren 159) <sup>(33)</sup>

Some commentators take *zúigù* 罪罟 metaphorically to mean ‘net of crime/guilt’; thus Legge’s (364, 565) “net of crime” and Waley’s (143) “meshes of crime.” The Mao commentary (Mao Heng and Mao Chang, 2nd cent. B. C.) glosses both 罪 and 罟 as ‘net’, thus 罪罟 ‘ensnaring net’. Zheng Xuan (A. D. 2nd cent.) takes 罟 as a verb, thus 罪罟 ‘crime will net/entrap’ the guilty. But Karlgren (1964: nos. 651, 1059) says these misinterpretations were caused by a “graphic etymology.” Both *zùì* 罪 and *gǔ* 罟 are written with the net radical 罟, but 罪 was also written 辜, and *gǔ* 罟 is a loan for *gǔ* 辜 ‘crime; guilt’ which occurs with *zùì* 罪 in two other *Shijing* odes: <sup>(34)</sup>

無罪無辜 I have committed no offence, have no guilt; but the slanderous mouths are clamouring; the evils of the lower people, they do not come down from Heaven. (193/7, Karlgren 139)

(32) Odes 264 and 265 are quite similar. Both mention “noxious insects,” and 265/1 says: “Great Heaven is terrific, Heaven (massively =) heavily sends down death.” 265/2 also mentions heaven and uses *lí* 離 (see fn. 10) for ‘pass through’.

(33) 207/2, 3 have abstract parallels to *zúigù*: “We fear reproof and anger... (incultations =) repeated orders.” These make the “net of crime” interpretation unlikely.

(34) The *Shijing* has *gǔzùì* 辜罪 ‘guilt’:

卿士師師非度凡有辜罪乃罔恆獲 The dignitaries and officers in a great host are doing unlawful things, (each of them =) all have guilt, but they are not regularly caught. (20/2, Karlgren 27)

Oh, distant, great Heaven, you are called (our) "father and mother"; 無罪無辜 there is no offence, there is no guilt, but the disorder is as great as this! (198/1, Karlgren 147)

Therefore, *zuìgū* 罪罟 apparently means 'crime and guilt' and not 'net of crime/guilt' -- but writing the word with 罟 graphically associates it with "heaven's net."

Another means of determining whether this *Shijing* 罟 meant 網 'net' or 罟 ~ 惘 'confusion; disorder' is examining other usages within the text.

## 2.2 OTHER *SHIJING* OCCURRENCES OF 天, 降, and 罟

What are the *Shijing* textual distributions of the subject, verb, and object in 天之降罟 "Heaven sends down its net/confusion"? The *Shijing* has four sections: the *Song* 頌 'Elegies, Sacrificial Odes', the *Da Ya* 大雅 (with 264 above) and *Xiao Ya* 小雅 'Greater and Lesser Elegentia', and the *Guo Feng* 國風 'Airs of the States'.<sup>(35)</sup> The general consensus of *Shijing* scholars is that the text is a miscellany of poems written between the eleventh and sixth centuries B. C., with the *Song* containing the earliest, and the *Guo Feng* the latest odes.<sup>(36)</sup>

(35) The *Guo Feng* comprises odes 1-160, *Xiao Ya* 161-234, *Da Ya* 235-265, and *Song* 266-305.

(36) On the basis of different diachronic sets of grammatical function words, W. A. C. H. Dobson (1968) proposes a hypothetical dating scheme for the *Shijing* sections (in approximate centuries B. C.): *Song* (11th-10th), *Da Ya* (10th-9th), *Xiao Ya* (9th-8th), and *Guo Feng* (8th-7th). Matsumoto Masaki (1958) takes the opposite view that the odes in the *Guo Feng* are the oldest, but this is based on thematics, not linguistics.



Table 2  
 Meanings of 天, 降, 網, and 罔 in the *Shijing*

MEANING	OCCURRENCES PER SECTION			
	<i>Song</i>	<i>Da Ya</i>	<i>Xiao Ya</i>	<i>Guo Feng</i>
天 'heaven, sky'	1	4	11	2
天 'Heaven, god'	21	66	47	15
降 'incarnate'	3	1	--	--
降 'send down'	8	13	5	--
降 'come down'	4	2	1	1
降 'calm down'	--	--	1	1
網 'net'	--	--	--	1
罔 'not'	--	5	4	2
罔 'confuse'	--	1	1	--

Table 2 shows the semantic occurrences of \**t'ien* 天 'heaven, sky'; Heaven, god'; \**klòng* 降 'descend (from heaven), incarnate; come down' ~ \**g'long* 'calm down'; \**miwang* 網 'net'; and \**miwang* 罔 'not; confuse'.

\**T'ien* 天 means 'Heaven, god(s), God' nine times more often than 'heaven, the heavens, sky' in the *Shijing*.<sup>(37)</sup> The 'sky' sense is limited to three circumstances: a) flying birds; e. g., (239/3, Karlgren 191) " 鳶飛戾天 The hawk flies and reaches heaven; the fish leaps in the deep";<sup>(38)</sup> b) celestial phenomena (cf. §2. 3), e. g., (238/4, Karlgren 191) " 倬彼雲漢為章于天 Great is the Heavenly Han river, it forms a pattern on heaven";<sup>(39)</sup> and c)

(37) This is generally the same in other early Zhou texts, see Creel (1970:494-5). 天 frequently occurs with the abstract "net words" 罪 'crime; guilt' and 罟 'net; crime, guilt' in the *Da* and *Xiao Ya*'s. For example (197/1, Karlgren 145): "I alone am in misery; 何辜于天我罪伊何 what guilt have I against Heaven, what is my offence?"

(38) The others are 178/3, 184/2, 204/3, 252/8.

(39) Karlgren's "Heavenly" Han river is 雲 'cloudy', cf. 258/1 below. Two other cases of 天 'sky' are 118/1 and 155/2.

the expressions 天下 and 天之下 '(all) under heaven; the world'; e. g., (205/2, Karlgren 157) “薄天之下莫非王土 Under the vast heaven there is nothing that is not the land of the king.”<sup>(40)</sup> 天 frequently means 'god' in the compounds 天子 'son of heaven, the king', 昊天 'bright/splendid heaven', 旻天 austere/high heaven', and 天命 'mandate of heaven'.<sup>(41)</sup> Five odes have double reference with 天 meaning both 'the heavens, sky' and 'Heaven; god'; the best example is:

悼彼雲漢 Bright is that Heavenly Han river, 昭回于天 it shines and revolves in the sky;<sup>(42)</sup> the king says: Alas, what guilt rests on the present men? 天降喪亂 Heaven sends down death and disorder, famine comes repeatedly... 旻天上帝 Great Heaven, God on High does not let us survive... {repeated with} why does he cause us to skulk (for fear)?...does not (think about =) consider us... 瞻仰昊天 I look up to the Great Heaven, oh how distressed I am!... {repeated with} small are its stars...when will it kindly give us peace? (258/1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, Karlgren 224-6)<sup>(43)</sup>

In “heaven's net/confusion,” \**t'ien* 天 'heaven' definitely means 'god'.

\**Klong* 降 is closely associated with 天; all occurrences in meanings of 'incarnate' and 'send down', and many of 'come down' refer to 'heaven; god'. The first 'incarnate; descend (from heaven)'<sup>(44)</sup> describes divine births, e. g.: (303, Karlgren 263) “天命玄鳥降而生商 Heaven ordered the black bird to descend and bear Shang.”<sup>(45)</sup> 降's second meaning of 'send down (only from

(40) Compare 296.

(41) In some odes, 天 'god; heaven' is used synonymously with 帝 'god; lord'; e. g., (47/2, Karlgren 31) “胡然而天也胡然而帝也 How is she so like Heaven, how is she so like God?”

(42) Karlgren's “Heavenly” is 雲 'cloudy' and “sky” is 天 'heaven'. Cf. 238/4 above.

(43) The others are 192/4, 6, 7, 13; 196/1, 2; 210/2, 4; and 241/2, 5.

(44) The MSC word for 'incarnation' (of Christ, Buddha, etc.) is *jiàngshēng* 降生, literally 'to descend and be born'.

(45) Eberhard (1968:131) analyzes the Shang “black bird” creation myth. Cf. 259/1 and 304/3, 7.

heaven)' shows a remarkable change; in the *Song*, 100% of the things heaven 'sends down' are beneficial (e. g., blessing, felicity),<sup>(46)</sup> but this changes to about 20% in the *Da* and *Xiao Ya*'s where evil and disorder are 'sent down' from heaven.<sup>(47)</sup> In a similar manner, 降's third 'come down' meaning refers to gods and spirits 'descending' from heaven in the *Song*, but generally refers to people 'descending' from hills in the other sections.<sup>(48)</sup> 降's fourth meaning (pronounced *xiáng* < \*g'long) 'calm/settle down, be at rest' only occurs in the line 我心則降 'my heart then settles down':

When I have not yet seen my lord my grieved heart is agitated; but when I have seen my lord, 我心則降 my heart calms down. (168/5, Karlgren 113)<sup>(49)</sup>

"Heaven's net" being 降 'sent down' is typical of *Da* and *Xiao Ya* odes blaming god for disorder and suffering.

In the *Shijing*, \**miwang* 罔 does not mean 'net', but \**miwang* 網 does in an 'unexpected' metaphor (43/3, Karlgren 29): "魚網之設鴻則離之 A fish-net they had set; a wild-goose fastened in it."<sup>(50)</sup>

\**Miwang* 罔 (unlike 天 and 降 in Table 2) does not occur in the *Song*. Eight of the eleven \**miwang* 罔 occurrences meaning (\**miwang* 亡) 'no, not,

(46) 239/2, 245/6, 248/4, 274 twice, 279, 284, 300/1, 4, and 302 twice.

(47) 166/2, 191/5, 193/7, 194/1, 255/2, 257/7 twice, 258/1, 264/1, 3, 6 (twice with 罔), and 265/1, 2. Chen Mengjia (1956 : 570-1) discusses 降 on Shang oracle inscriptions referring to heaven sending down blessings (若, 食) and curses (禍, 不若, 糞).

(48) See 305/4. Cf. 50/2, 190/2, and 250/2. The oppositional compound 陟降 is used for gods and spirits 'going up and down' in 286-8 and 235. Chen Mengjia (1956 : 579-81) notes that on Shang oracle inscriptions, where the graphs for 陟 and 降 showed feet ascending and descending steps, the gods were said to 陟降.

(49) 我心則降 is repeated in 14/1. This is part of the *Shijing* "grieved heart series," see Carr (1983:13-15). In later usage *xiáng* 降 'calm down' came to mean 'submit, cause to submit; be humble; condescend; exorcise'.

(50) This "fastened" is 離, see fn. 10. Other *Shijing* odes (e. g., 70 and 170) use 離 for birds and fish being 'trapped, netted'.

none' are with 極 'limit; extreme; utmost' in *wāngjī* < \**miwāngg* 罔極 'unlimited, infinite; unrestrained; reckless; excessive'.<sup>(51)</sup> For example, (202/4, Karlgren 153), in speaking of filial love for dead parents: "I wished to requite you by goodness, 昊天罔極 but the great Heaven (has no limit:) goes to excess". The three other usages of 罔 'not' all refer to obeying ancestral spirits, for example:

(Wen Wang) was obedient to the (dead) princes of the clan (his ancestors); 神罔時怨 of the Spirits, none were annoyed with him; 神罔時愆 of the Spirits, none were (pained, grieved =) dissatisfied with him. (240/2, Karlgren 192)<sup>(52)</sup>

罔 only means 'confuse, cheat, deceive' in "heaven's net" (*Da Ya*, 264/6) and in (*Xiao Ya*, 191/4) 勿罔君子 "do not cheat the noble men."<sup>(53)</sup> Ode 191 uses 天 'heaven' seven times:

天方薦瘥 Heaven now repeatedly causes epidemics, death and disorders are widespread and many... 天子是毘 the Son of Heaven, him you should (augment:) strengthen... 不弔昊天 oh, merciless Heaven, you ought not to exhaust our crowd... 勿罔君子 do not cheat the noble men;<sup>(54)</sup> be peaceful, be (stopping:) moderate, do not (have the danger of =) let yourself be endangered by mean men; then your petty relatives will not enjoy great offices. 昊天不傭 The great Heaven is not just, it sends down these (full:) ample quarrels. 昊天不惠 the great Heaven is not just, it

(51) 58, 109, 199, 202, 219, 253, and 257. See Dobson (1968:229). Zhu Xi (A. D. 1130-1200) says *wāngjī* cannot have different meanings in these occurrences. Karlgren's 罔極 translations are consistent, but Couvreur's, Legge's, and Waley's are not.

(52) See 256/3. Heaven is mentioned in 256/4, 11, and 12.

(53) Cf. the Confucian and Mencian sayings in §1. 2. This \**miwətmiwāng* 勿罔 'not not' is comparable with \**XmwətXmwāng* 惚恍 'divine bliss; confusion; obscurity' in Carr 1986.

(54) Cf. "ne trompent l'empereur" (Couvreur 228), "betray not thou thy lord" (Jen-ning's 211), "He should not deal deceitfully with the superior man" (Legge 311).

sends down these great transgressions... 不弔昊天 Oh, merciless Heaven, the disorder is never settled, every month it grows... 昊天不平 The great Heaven is iniquitous; our king is not at peace. (19i/2, 3, 4-5, 6, 9, Karlgren 133-4)

This ode appeals to the king, and denounces Master Yin 師尹, a minister of King Yu 幽王 (r. 781-771 B. C.), the last Western Zhou regent. <sup>(55)</sup>

The *Shijing*'s “heaven’s net” was probably written around 770 B. C. (or 735 B. C., see Arthur Waley 1936). <sup>(56)</sup> Commentators believe odes 191-194 and 264-5 refer to King Yu. These six odes, out of the *Shijing*'s 305, have the only two 罔 usages for ‘confuse; deceive’--and 57% of the 罪 ‘crime; guilt’, 60% of the 罟 ‘net; crime; guilt’, 43% of the 辜 ‘crime; guilt, and 14% of the 天 ‘heaven; god’ usages. Most historical attributions of *Shijing* odes are dubitable, however, 193 has one of the earliest reliable dates in Chinese history, the eclipse on August 29, 776 B. C., which was taken as a divine omen of Yu’s downfall.

“Heaven’s net” is part of a *Shijing* cycle of odes, presumably written about 2700 years ago, which impute 罪罟 ‘guilt and crime’ to the rulers; and blame 天 ‘heaven; god’ for 降 ‘sending down’ political and economic dis-

<sup>(55)</sup> This ode is unusual for the *Shijing* because it names its composer, Jia Fu 家父. There is another 家父 mentioned in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 during the reign (608-591 B. C.) of Duke Xuan 桓公 (8, 15; Legge 51, 64).

<sup>(56)</sup> Julian Jaynes finds a historical parallel that the ancient Greeks may have developed ‘guilt’ around the same time the Chinese developed “heaven’s net.” Based on the admittedly “pretty meager evidence” of contrasts between the *Illiad* (7th cent. B. C.) and the *Odyssey* (5th cent. B. C.) versions of the Oedipus story, Jaynes (1982:434) believes that around the seventh century B. C., metaphor-generated consciousness developed the:

ideas for justice, retribution, doing wrong, remission of wrongs, and forgiveness, all very curious behaviors when we think of them against the background of the evolution of mammalian behavior, and all occurring in world history for the first time.

The ideas of guilt, law, and retribution seem to have developed earlier in China than in Greece. See Li Ya-nung (1955:122-5) and Anazawa Tatsuo (1982:48-50).

orders, and mental 罔 'confusion'.

### 2.3 "HEAVEN'S NET/FORK"

The *Shijing* has another "heaven's net." It uses the names *bì* < \**piēt* 畢 'net on a forked stick; wooden fork; complete, all' and *tiānbì* 天畢 for 'Hyades' (an asterism of five stars in the head of Taurus). The oracle and bronze graphs for 畢 picture a forked stick net. <sup>(57)</sup>

*Bì* 畢 occurs four times in the *Shijing*. First, 畢 is verbally used in its basic sense of 'net on a forked stick' (216/1, Karlgren 169): "The ducks go flying, 畢之羅之 we take them with hand-nets and spread-nets." Second, 畢 means 'all, each' when (190/3, Karlgren 131) shepherds wave to their sheep, and: "畢來既升 they all come; and now they have gone up (into the fold)." Third, 畢 is the 'fork-net; Hyades':

There are swine with white legs, in great numbers they wade through the waves; 月離于畢 the moon (is attached to =) dwells in (the constellation) {Bi}, <sup>(58)</sup> it causes a great flow (of rain). (232/3, Karlgren 184) <sup>(59)</sup>

This is a double coincidence. *Hyades* comes from Greek *Huades* 'little pigs'. The ancient Greeks and Chinese associated rainfall with the sun rising in ("the rainy ones") Hyades (ca. May 7-21). Fourth, 天畢 is heaven's fork-net; Hyades' in an ode with other stellar names:

維天者漢 In the heavens there is the (celestial) Han (the Milky Way), it looks down and is bright; (slanting =) triangular is the Weaving Lady  $\alpha$  in Vega and  $\epsilon$ ,  $\zeta$  in Lyra) ...brilliant is the Draught Ox (in Capri-

(57) 畢 definitely means 'fork-net' on oracle and bronze inscriptions about hunting, but which "heaven's net" came first, 'divine confusion' or 'Hyades'?

(58) Cf. "the Net" (Waley 120), "the Hyades" (Jennings 272, Legge 422), and "les Hyades" (Couvreur 316).

(59) Waley (120) notes: "Rain falling looks like a net cast over the landscape. The characters for 'net' and 'rain' are in their oldest forms very similar."

corn), but one does not yoke it to any carriage; in the east there is the Opener of Light (Lucifer); in the west there is the Long Continuer (Hesperus); 有球天畢 long and curved is the Heavenly Fork (eight stars in Hyades), but it is just placed there in its row. In the south there is the Winnowing Basket (in Sagittarius), but one cannot winnow with it, in the north there is the Ladle (Ursa major), but one cannot ladle wine or congee with it; in the south there is the Winnowing Basket, it draws in its tongue; in the north there is the Ladle, it raises its western handle. (203/5 – 6, Karlgren 155)

Karlgren (1964: no. 634) explains translating 天畢 as “Heavenly Fork” rather than “the Nets of Heaven” (Waley 319), “the Hand-Net” (Jennings 235), or “the Rabbit Net of the sky” (Legge 356).<sup>(60)</sup> Even though Mao glosses 畢 as ‘rabbit net’, Karlgren follows the *Liji* usage of 畢 as a forked instrument for lifting a sacrificial tripod,<sup>(61)</sup> and concludes:

If we translate thus, there is nothing to prevent the association of ideas at the same time calling to mind the “hunting fork” (fork-net), since both objects (‘fork-net’ and ‘caldron fork’) are fundamentally one and the same word.

The eight stars of *bi* 畢 do not correspond with the five of Hyades,<sup>(62)</sup> and include three stars in Taurus. Since there are about one hundred spectral class G and K stars in the Hyades cluster, seeing a fork, a fork-net, or little pigs is a Rorschachian choice.

(60) Cf. “ce Filet recourbé qui semble fait pour prendre (les Hyades)” (Couvreur 226).

(61) 20/12, Legge 141: “The scoop used in addition was of mulberry, three cubits long, with its handle and the end carved.” The *Liji* (6/35, Legge 268) also uses 畢 as the constellation name.

(62) The mythological Hyades sisters who nursed Dionysus were transformed into five stars in Hyades, and (different versions say) two/three in Pleiades.

### 3. "HEAVEN'S NET" IN THE *DAODEJING* 道德經

The *Daodejing* (*Classic of the Way and the Power*, by Lao Zi 老子?, 6th cent. B. C. ?), has the proverbial 天網 "heaven's net."

#### 3.1 THE FAMOUS "HEAVEN'S NET"

The conclusion of *Daodejing* chapter 73 says: <sup>(63)</sup> "天網恢恢疎而不失 Heaven's net is *hūihūi* < \*k'wəgk'wəg 恢恢 'extensive, vast, immense'; <sup>(64)</sup> (its meshes) are *shū* < \*sio 疎 'wide apart; sparse; loose'; <sup>(65)</sup> (but it) does not *shī* < \*sīt 失 'fail, lose, let go; neglect, err'."

He who is brave in daring will be killed.

He who is brave in not daring will live.

Of these two, one is advantageous and one is harmful.

Who knows why Heaven dislikes what it dislikes?

Even the sage considers it a difficult question.

The Way of Heaven does not compete, and yet it skillfully achieves victory.

It does not speak, and yet it skillfully responds to things.

It comes to you without your invitation.

It is not anxious about things and yet it plans well.

天網恢恢 Heaven's net is indeed vast.

疎而不失 Though its meshes are wide, it misses nothing. (Chan 228-9) <sup>(66)</sup>

<sup>(63)</sup> Chapters 72-74 concern crime and punishment. The Hoshang commentary calls 73 任為 "How to Act Adequately."

<sup>(64)</sup> Reduplicating *hūi* 恢 'great, immense, vast, extensive; recover, restore'. The *Shi-ji* 史記 says 天道恢恢 "The Way/Dao of Heaven (cf. *Daodejing* 47 and 76) is vast." In one of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 "knack" passages (3/9), 恢恢 means 'ample room'.

<sup>(65)</sup> *shū* 疎 can also mean 'distant; thin, scanty; coarse; take away, eliminate; perforate, penetrate'.



The *Daodejing* commentary attributed to Hoshang Gong 河上公 (fl. 179-159 B. C.) says :

天所網羅恢恢甚大雖踈遠司察人善惡無有所失 As regards the net of heaven, it has wide meshes and is very large. Though it is coarse and wide, it overlooks the good and bad within man. Nothing escapes it. (Erkes 124)

Two Song dynasty (A. D. 960-1279) *Daodejing* commentators Su Che (1039-1112) and Lu Huiching (fl. 1078) note the paradox of evil people who escape from “heaven’s net,” and suggest post mortem punishment. Yuan Wucheng (1249-1333) recommends that a wise ruler should not execute the guilty, but rather wait for heaven to kill them.

### 3.2 QUOTATIONS AND MISQUOTATIONS

Many texts quote the *Daodejing*'s “heaven’s net.” It is correctly quoted in the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (A. D. 426, 郎顛傳), and in the *Wenxuan* 文選 (ca. A. D. 530).

The *Weishu* 魏書 (ca. A. D. 290, 任城王傳) misquotes the *Daodejing* with *lòu* 漏 ‘leak, miss, leave out; water clock’ instead of *shī* 失 ‘fail, lose,

(60) Other translations of the proverb are :

The meshes of the net of Heaven are large; far apart, but letting nothing escape. (Legge 146)

The net of Heaven has meshes wide, but through its meshes none can glide. (Heysinger 92)

The net of Heaven extends everywhere. Its meshes are wide, but nothing ever escapes it. (Balfour 44)

The net of God is vast and its meshes great, but no one escapes. (Giles 1151)

The heaven’s net is broad and wide. With big meshes, yet letting nothing slip through. (Lin 306)

Heaven’s net is very wide-meshed. It is coarse and still loses nothing. (Erkes 124)

The net of heaven is cast wide. Though the mesh is not fine, yet nothing ever slips through. (Lau 135)

Heaven’s net is extensive, its meshes are wide and it lets nothing slip through. (Karlgrén 12)

miss; let go; neglect, err', but this does not significantly alter the meaning. The misquote is repeated in the *Jinshu* 晉書 (A. D. 644, 劉頌傳), the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (A. D. 984), and other later texts, including some versions of the *Daodejing* (v. Shima Kunio 1973 : 208-9).

#### 4. "HEAVEN'S NETS" IN OTHER TEXTS

Chinese texts written after the *Shijing* and *Daodejing* mention 天網 'heaven's net; divine retribution', 天畢 'heaven's net; Hyades', plus variations and synonyms for them.

##### 4.1 LATER "HEAVEN'S NETS"

"Heaven's net" words are widely spread. The *Hanshu* 漢書 (A. D. 78, 敘傳) has 天罔 (not 網) in the line "觀天罔之紘覆兮 to gaze upon the vast cover of heaven's net."<sup>(67)</sup> The *Hou Hanshu* (朱穆傳) uses 天網 in discussing legal reforms: "張理天網補綴漏目 to stretch out heaven's net and repair its loose meshes."

The *Shiji* 史記 distinguishes the net metaphor as "coarse-meshed" or "fine-meshed" to mean 'laxity' or 'strictness' in laws and punishments. The (酷吏傳, 序 and 論質) "Ku Shi" ('rapacious/cruel underlings') section has both 網漏 'net leaks; escape the net of justice' (cf. § 3. 2): "網漏於吞舟之魚 the (legal) net has such wide meshes that even a fish big enough to swallow a boat (i. e., major criminals) can escape from it," and 網密 'net's closeness; strict laws': "自張湯死後網密多詆嚴 since the death of Tang, the net has

(67) The *Hanshu* (刑法志) has a usage which is similar with the *Shijing*: "風流篤厚禁罔疏闊 with the dispersion of honesty, the strict net became separated."

(68) The *Shiji* (殷紀) has a story about (the legendary founder of the Shang dynasty) Tang's 湯 belief in destiny. Tang orders a fowler to "網開三面 open the net three sides," to insure that only birds would be caught whose fate decreed it. Cf. *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (18/34) "湯教祝網者 Tang taught the use of the net of fate." The *Shiji* also (浮徠傳) criticizes overly strict 文網 'civil (law) nets': "扞當世之文網 to guard against the civil (legal) net of that age."

been tight and very strict." (68) The opposite 網疏 'net's looseness; lax laws' is also used in the *Shiji* (平準傳): "當此之時網疏而民當 the people's behavior was thus because at that time the net was loose."

Hyades acquired other names. The *Chuci* 楚辭 (ca. 3rd-2nd cents. B. C.) has 天畢 (畢 elaborated with the net radical 𦉳) along with two other constellation names:

I visited Fu Yueh, (69) bestriding a dragon,  
 Joined in marriage with the Spinning Maiden,  
 舉天畢兮掩俗 Lifted up Heaven's Net to capture evil,  
 Drew the Bow of Heaven to shoot at wickedness,  
 Followed the Immortals fluttering through the sky,  
 Ate of the Primal Essence to prolong my life. (17/14b, Hawkes 181)

天畢 became interchangeable with 天網. The *Hou Hanshu* (蘇意傳) uses *tiānwǎng* 天網 for Hyades: "月入於畢畢為天網主網羅無道之君 The moon enters into *bì*, 'heaven's net' controls the nets which ensnare immoral rulers." The name *wǎngchē* 罔車 'net cart' means 'Hyades' in a poem (思玄賦) by Zhang Heng 張衡 (A. D. 78-139): "觀罔車之幕幕兮獵青林之芒芒 gazing into the depths of the 'net cart,' hunting in the extremes of the green forest." (70)

#### 4.2 "HEAVEN'S NET" SYNONYMS

天網 "Heaven's net" has synonyms such as 天羅 'heaven's net', and associated 'heavenly punishment' words such as 天罰.

Two *tiānwǎng* 天網 synonyms are *tiānlú* 天羅 'heaven's net' and *fǎwǎng* 法網 'dharma net'. *Tiānlú* 天羅 'heaven's net' is used in the *Chenshu* 陳書 (ca. A. D. 610, 高祖 1): "茲地軸抗此天羅 this earth pivots against that

(69) A Shang minister who was supposedly transformed into a star.

(70) Cf. the *wǎngchē* 罔車 'net cart', a vehicle which scooped up fallen objects, and the Japanese *aminorimono* 網乗物 'net vehicle', a paddy wagon used during Tokugawa era.

(71) 天羅 can mean 'halberd' or '(天然) "naturally" luxuriant (nets of) plant growth, jungle'. Cf. 天羅絮 'loofah' and 大羅 'canopy of heaven'.

'heaven's net'.<sup>(71)</sup> Compare *tiānlúo-dìwǎng* 天羅地網 'heavenly net (above) and earthly net (below); tight encirclement, surrounded on all sides'.

Buddhism was introduced to China centuries after "heaven's net" entered the Chinese lexicon, but the idea of karmic retribution coincided with the metaphor.<sup>(72)</sup> *Fǎwǎng* 法網 'net of dharma/law', reflecting the Buddhist meaning of 'dharma' for *fǎ* < \**piwǎp* 法 'law, rule; standard; method, pattern', is found in the *Songshi* 宋史 (A. D. 1345, 太祖紀 3): "何近代法網之密乎 Why has the net of the law been so tight recently?" *Fǎwǎng* 法網 is similar with Indra's net, a Buddhist metaphor for karmic interrelatedness, found in the *Avatamsaka* (Chinese *Huayan* 華言) *Sutra*. Charles Eliot explains that:

In the heaven of Indra, there is said to be a network of pearls, so arranged that if you look at one you see all the others reflected in it. In the same way each object in the world is not merely itself but involves every other object and in fact is everything else. "In every particle of dust, there are present Buddhas without number."  
(1969:109-110)

A later word is 佛罰 'Buddha's punishment'.<sup>(73)</sup>

There are four compounds meaning 'heavenly punishment' that combine 天 with: *fá* 罰 'punishment, penalty; fine' (written with the net radical), *tāo* 討 'punishment, suppression; denunciation', *xíng* 刑 '(corporal) punishment, death penalty; torture', and *zhū* 誅 'punishment; death penalty'. *Tiānfá* 天罰 'heavenly punishment' is used in the *Shujing* with 罔 'not':

天罰不極庶民罔有令政在于天下 if Heaven's punishments were not perfect,<sup>(74)</sup> the common people would not have a good government under Heaven. (47/21, Karlgren 78)<sup>(75)</sup>

(72) Cf. 塵網 'dusty net; entanglements of mortality', and 誤為時網牽 'become wrongly entangled in the snares of this world (rather than attending to the next)'.

(73) Cf. 神罰 'god's punishment'.

(74) This is the 極 of 罔極 in § 2. 2.

*Tiāntāo* 天討 ‘heaven’s punishment’ is also used in the *Shujing* (4/6, Karlgren 9): “天討有罪 Heaven punishes those who are guilty.”<sup>(76)</sup> *Tiānxíng* 天刑 ‘heaven’s (death) penalty’<sup>(77)</sup> first occurs in the *Guoyu* 國語 (周語 2) “上非天刑下非地德中非民則 There is neither heavenly punishment above, nor earthly virtue below, nor civil law between.”<sup>(78)</sup> *Tiānzhu* 天誅 ‘heaven’s (death) penalty’ is used in a *Mengzi* (5A/7/9, Legge 364) misquote of the *Shujing* to say: “天誅造政自牧宮 Heaven destroying {Jie} commenced in attacking him in the palace of Mu.”<sup>(79)</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The “heaven’s net” metaphor has influenced Chinese written language, lexical structure, and belief systems.

First, “heaven’s net” has been codified into Chinese characters with the net radical 罟 (§ 1.3). James A. Matisoff (1986:9) uses Whorf’s “phenotype” to describe the unique significance of radicals in Chinese characters.<sup>(80)</sup> The net radical 罟 in the logographs 罪 ‘crime; guilt, fault;

(75) Cf. the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (昭公 26, Legge 718). The king could carry out 天之罰 ‘heaven’s punishments’, (*Shujing* 7/3, Karlgren 18): “今予惟恭行天之罰 Now I (furnish and practice =) execute Heaven’s punishment.”

(76) *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (光武紀贊) says: “神族乃顧遞行天討 the gods then favored us by meting out heaven’s punishment.”

(77) 天刑病 ‘heavenly penalty sickness’ is an old name for 癩病 ‘leprosy’. There is a contrast between *xíng* 刑 ‘punishment (for more serious crimes)’ and *fá* 罰 ‘fine (for less serious offenses)’. The *Shujing* (e. g., 47/15, Legge 602) mentions the *wūxíng* 五刑 ‘five punishments’: 黑 ‘branding the forehead’, 劓 ‘cutting off the nose’, 剕 ‘cutting off the feet’, 宮 ‘castration’, and 大辟 (various kinds of) ‘execution’; and (47/18, Legge 605) in cases when there is doubt over guilt, the *wūfá* 五罰 ‘five fines’: ranging from 600 to 6000 ounces of copper.

(78) *The Zhuangzi* 莊子 (5/31, Graham 79) asks: “天刑之安可解 When heaven does the punishing, how can they {fettors and handcuffs} be shaken off?”

(79) The received *Shujing* text (13/2, Legge 193) does not have this quote, but does use 罔 for ‘no’ in saying: “罔有天災 there were no calamities from Heaven.”

sin; evil' and 罰 'punish; fine' emphasizes the efficiency of Chinese laws, and implies that wrongdoers will be entrapped.<sup>(81)</sup> A book title with these two characters illustrates the graphic effect of 罟; in comparison with the Russian Преступление и Наказание and English *Crime and Punishment* titles, the Chinese 罪跟罰 and Japanese 罪と罰 have an obvious visual advantage.

Second, "heaven's net" has affected Chinese lexical structures. In MSC, *tiānwǎng* 天網 "heaven's net" is an aphoristic metaphor, and is elaborated into words (§ 4. 1, e. g. 網漏, 網疏, and 網密) describing 'lax' or 'strict' legal standards. Among the synonyms of "heaven's net" (§ 4. 2), there are more "heavens" (天罰, 天刑, 天誅, and 天討) than "nets" (法網, and 天羅).

Not only the Chinese lexicon, but also those of Korean and Japanese have "heaven's nets." In Japanese, *tenmō* 天網 is listed in most dictionaries, but it is relatively unknown by younger people. *Tenbatsu* 天罰 'heavenly punishment' is a common word, and Japanese distinguishes two pronunciations for 罰 *batsu* 'punishment, penalty' and *bachi* 'divine punishment; retribution; curse'.<sup>(82)</sup>

Third, "heaven's net" has paralinguistic connections with Chinese beliefs. Metaphor figures language, and can determine modes of thinking. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) cogently demonstrate how human thought pro-

(80) Benjamin Whorf (1945) distinguishes overt and covert linguistic categories as "phenotypes" and "cryptotypes," in addition to "selective" and "modulus" categories. For example, the English noun plural suffix *-s* is an overt selection, while the plural contrast between "fisherman's fish" (pluralized without *-s*, e. g., *trout*, *salmon*) and "low-grade fish" (e. g., *sharks*, *eels*) is a covert modulus.

(81) Some other "legalistic net" characters are 罟 'net; guilt (~辜)', 罵 'curse, revile', 詈 'curse, revile; defame', and 網 'guiding rope of a net; regulator; rule, law'.

(82) Esp. in *bachi ga ataru* 罰が当る 'be punished (by god)'. *Bachi* can refer to misfortunes suffered by descendants of a wrongdoer. Most *kanji* 漢字 have both Sino-Japanese (音読み) and native Japanese (訓読み) pronunciations; for example, 罪 'guilt; sin; blame' has both a Sino-Japanese *zai* (< \**dzwəd*) and a Japanese *tsumi* pronunciation. But 罰 only has Sino-Japanese *batsu* and *bachi* (< \**b'iwat*).

cesses, conceptual systems, and understanding are largely metaphorical. Julian Jaynes uses thunderstorms as an example. Many ancient peoples mythologically believed thunder to be the roaring or fighting of the gods (e. g., Thor or Rerkun),<sup>(83)</sup> while most people today "scientifically" believe thunder to be caused by electrical discharges and vacuums. But, as Jaynes says:

None of these really exist as we picture them. Our images of these events of physics are as far from the actuality as fighting gods. Yet they act as the metaphor and they feel familiar and so we say we understand the thunderstorm. (1976:52)

The "net" metaphor has molded Chinese understanding of heavenly retribution. Wing-tsit Chan explains that:

Throughout history the Chinese people have had a strong belief that good deeds bring good fortune, and evil deeds, evil fortune...The analogy of Heaven's net has greatly strengthened this belief and has given the Chinese a vivid image to support it. Both the belief and the image have formed the basis of popular {Daoist} religious treatises such as the {*Taishang Ganying Pian* 太上感應篇} (Tract of the Most Exalted One on Influence and Response).<sup>(84)</sup> (1963: 228)

天網 "heaven's net" was coined because the Zhou believed that 天 'heaven; god' punished evildoers, it was elaborated in Chinese language and literature, and subsequently strengthened the Chinese belief in heavenly control.

Divine retribution can be represented in various ways. The Indians conceptualized it as Karma, the Greeks personified it as Nemesis, and the

(83) Japanese has *kaminari* 雷 'thunder' < *kami* 神 'god; spirit' and *nari* 鳴り 'roar'. The same phonetic *shēn* < \**siēn* 申 'is found in *diàn*. < \**dien* 電 'lightning' and *shén* < \**d'ien* 神 'god; spirit'. Cf. *tiān* < \**t'ien* 天 'heaven; god' and *zhèn* < \**tiən* 震 'thunder; fear; become pregnant.

(84) Translated by Suzuki and Carus (1906).

Chinese metaphorized it as 網 'net'. The figurative use of "net" for 'heavenly punishment' is not a linguistic universal, but it has a universal appeal. For example, the Psalms (141:9-10)

Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me,  
and the gins of the workers of iniquity.

Let the wicked fall into their own nets,  
whilst that I withal escape.

"Heaven's net" exemplifies the "network" between thought, culture and language.

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