Teaching the *I Ching* (*Book of Changes*)

GEOFFREY REDMOND

TZE-KI HON

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Geoffrey Redmond and Tze-ki Hon

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PREFACE

The *Yijing* 易經, also referred to as the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes,* has been the most influential of the Chinese ancient classics. In the present volume we attempt to meet the needs of university teachers especially, but also the needs of anyone with a serious interest in the *Yijing,* to provide a concise introduction to what is, together with the Hebrew Bible, the world's oldest book in continuous use.

The idea for the present work actually arose as a suggestion from a member of the audience at a session of the American Academy of Religion entitled, "Questioning the Spirits: The *Yijing* (*I Ching* or *Classic of Changes*) as a Way of Personal Spirituality in the Confucian Tradition" held in Chicago in 2008. Our experience presenting papers in this session, which attracted a large and interested group from diverse fields, demonstrated to us that many scholars were eager to engage with this important but enigmatic Chinese classic, but did not know where to start. Because of the obscurity of the text, portions of which are 3,000 years old, together with its enigmatic diagrams and peculiar organization, beginning the study of the *Changes* can seem overwhelming. Confidence in one's understanding is not easily acquired.

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Prior English-language studies of the *Yijing* are plentiful; there are many excellent ones to which we are indebted in the writing of the present book. What is lacking, however, is an up-to-date, detailed introduction that will concisely cover such fundamental issues as dates of composition, textual-critical considerations, imagery, philosophy, cosmology, the development of ethical awareness, and the effects of modernity. Recently the application of critical philological method as well as the archeological discovery of previously lost manuscripts has altered our understanding of the classic in significant ways.

Discussions with many university faculty suggests to us that in teaching about Chinese civilization, the *Yijing* receives much less attention than its importance merits, simply because of its obscurity. Although it is the subject of some important English-language scholarship, the great majority of works purporting to be about the *Yijing* are actually adaptations by enthusiasts, few of whom display any authentic knowledge of its language or history. Thus the need, which we hope to meet with the present work, for an introduction to historically informed understanding of this fascinating and frustrating text. We have tried to meet the needs of several groups, including China specialists with other areas of concentration, scholars in other fields within religious studies, as well as teachers of general Asian and world history.

As with other classical or scriptural texts, the later commentaries are at least as important as the text itself. Though the *Yijing* has inspired thousands of commentaries, those of a few—notably Wang Bi, Cheng Yi, Shao Yong, and particularly Zhu Xi—set the meanings of the text for nearly 2,000 years. The commentaries are covered; but unlike many treatments, this volume separates the early probable meanings from the views of later commentators. The commentaries add to the early meanings; they do not replace them.

While attempting to provide the necessary background for understanding the *Changes*, we also point to issues about which scholarly opinion remains unsettled. When we have felt that one particular view is right—that the roles of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou in

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composing the classic are mythical, for example—we have briefly indicated this and summarized our reasoning. In general, however, we have been more concerned to fairly present contested issues rather than argue for one or another position. Inevitably, there will be those who disagree vehemently with some of what we have said. Throughout Chinese history, the authoritative status of the *Changes* has been used to support a great variety of intellectual agendas. Given the obscurity of the text and the open-ended possible meanings of the diagrams, the classic has attracted diverse ideas. We have tried to present the most important of these; however, to consider all traditional ways of reading the *Changes* would require nothing less than a multivolume comprehensive treatise on the history of Chinese thought.

This work represents a collaboration between two scholars of divergent interests and backgrounds. Geoffrey Redmond is a physician and biomedical researcher with an earlier graduate literature degree emphasizing textual criticism. His particular interests with respect to the *Yijing* are twofold: The reconstruction of the early meanings when the text was composed in the Chinese Bronze Age, and the ways its meanings have made it popular outside East Asia. Tze-ki Hon is an historian of Chinese intellectual history with interests in Song dynasty use of the *Yijing* and its fate in modern China.

While we hope we have succeeded in distilling an immense amount of complex material into readily comprehensible form, we must admit that our own knowledge, such as it is, did not come quickly or easily. Perhaps we are slow learners, but it took each of us more than a decade of study just to feel a degree of comfort about our understanding of this classic. Since then the *Changes* has continued to offer new mysteries for us to explore. Borrowing Laozi's famous phrase, "Within any mystery, there is deeper mystery — the gateway to the profound." We hope that this introduction will provide an easier entry to the study of the *Changes* than was available to us when we began, and that it will encourage readers to further seek its hidden profundities.

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While we have enjoyed a harmonious collaboration and agree on much, we do not agree about everything and are aware, in the spirit of the *Yijing*, that what is correct is itself changeable. An attentive reader may note differences of opinion. We feel that such are best left in place rather than artificially smoothed out.

While we were preparing the present book, Richard J. Smith's *The* I Ching: *A Biography* (2012) appeared. This work is a product of a lifetime's erudition, yet is written in a style that is both elegant and lucid. It can be recommended without hesitation to readers of our book. However, our intention is somewhat different. While we also have done our best to clarify the meanings of the *Changes*, we have emphasized difficulties and problems. After all, this is the mission of the scholar—to glide over the easy parts in search of difficulties to puzzle over. But beyond the pleasures of intellectual challenge, the *Yijing*'s importance as a key text of traditional China is in no small part because its difficulties often reveal key issues in its culture. Another important work, though perhaps not appreciated to the degree that it deserves is Richard Rutt's work on the early meanings, *Zhouyi: The Book of Changes* (1996). Finally, Edward L. Shaughnessy's long-anticipated work on the excavated manuscripts, *Unearthing the Changes: Recently Discovered Manuscripts of the Yi Jing (I Ching) and Related Texts* (2014), is already adding immensely to our knowledge of the *Changes*. While we wish to acknowledge these works, there are many other notable works which can be found in our bibliography.

The proliferation of New Age and other appropriations, while having the happy effect of stimulating interest beyond scholarly circles, gives little sense of the *Changes* in its Chinese context. The literati certainly did not conceive of their esteemed classic as a way of overcoming the ego (Anthony and Moog 2002), of writing one's first novel (Sloane 2005), of solving romantic relationship problems (Karcher 2005), or of creating marketing plans (Mun 2006). Such altered versions are even more numerous in Chinese. Adaptations proliferate with little restraint, facilitated by 3,000 years of language change that has made comparison to the original all but impossible except for the few versed in the archaic language.

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Though the *yi* in *Yijing* can mean "easy," the book is not easy reading, nor is it easy to write about with clarity and accuracy—though we have tried to achieve both. We hope that the *Yijing* and early China specialists will look upon our efforts indulgently and even, perhaps, find it useful as an overview of the key issues in scholarship of the *Yijing*.

A NOTE ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The *Yijing*, uniquely among scriptural texts, is inherently visual, because the hexagrams form an essential part from the earliest known examples. We have included diagrams from the massive compilation *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (*Four Treasures of the Emperor*) carried out from 1772 to 1778 in response to the order of the Qian Long Emperor and supervised by his son, Yong Rong. Some of the figures are included to illustrate the basic aspects of hexagram arrangements. Others exemplify cosmological associations or simply the use of trigrams as a decorative motif. Many *Yijing* illustrations are so arcane as to be understandable only by their creators. A few examples are included here to show the extreme degree of elaboration reached by what began as a collection of ancient oracles. The illustrations from the *Four Treasures of the Emperor* are available in a clear modern Chinese version edited by Li and Guo (2004).

TRANSLATIONS

In general we have quoted from the standard English translations, most often Wilhelm-Baynes, but also Lynn and Rutt. We have occasionally made minor alterations; but rather than offer our own translations, we have felt the reader is better served by quoting from versions that are easily accessible. Wilhelm-Bayne's hexagram names have become almost standard in English, so we have used these except in a few cases where we felt they are unclear.

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CHINESE WORDS

Chinese characters and pinyin are used sparingly. In general we provide characters when a word or proper name of particular importance first appears. We have also provided them when the nearest English equivalent does not adequately render a key term or phrase—for example, *yuan heng li zhen*, the four words with which the classic begins. When providing close textual analysis, we have also provided the Chinese original. However, everything should be fully accessible to those without any Chinese. After all the *Yijing* has become a world classic, available in many languages.

AUTHORSHIP

While we both worked on all of the chapters, primary responsibility was as follows: Tze-ki Hon, chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 on the *Ten Wings*, Cosmology, Moral Cultivation, and the Modern China; Geoffrey Redmond, the Introduction and chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, and 11, on Divination, Bronze Age origins, Women in the *Changes*, Excavated manuscripts, Ancient Meanings, the Journey to the West, and the Reader's Guide.

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Any work of scholarship is in a sense a collaboration of the many individuals whose work constitutes the field of inquiry. Contemporary scholars without whose work this book could not have been written include, but are not limited to: Joseph Adler, Sarah Allan, Constance Cook, Scott Cook, Catherine Despeux, Li Feng, Norman J. Girardot, Paul Goldin, Marc Kalinowski, Richard John Lynn, S. J. Marshall, Michael Nylan, Richard Rutt, Edward Shaughnessy, Adam Smith, Richard J. Smith, Ken-ichi Takashima, Gregory Whincup, and Robin D. S. Yates.

We also acknowledge the first Westerners who can be called sinologists, those missionaries who went to China beginning in the seventeenth century, when foreigners in the Middle Kingdom faced great difficulties. While they made the long journey with the intent of changing China, their work changed the West as well. Many took

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an interest in the *Book of Changes*. These include Fr Joachim Bouvet S.J., perhaps the first Westerner to succumb to what a much later missionary, Richard Rutt, termed "the fascination of *Zhouyi*." The nineteenth-century Scottish missionary, James Legge, later the first professor of Chinese at Oxford, made the first comprehensive translations of the early classics, despite his oft-expressed skepticism about their content. The *Yijing* became a world classic with the appearance of the German translation of Richard Wilhelm, further translated into English by Cary F. Baynes. Of course, Chinese literati have been pondering the *Changes* and writing commentaries for more than two millennia. Their ideas about the classic make up much of the subject matter of this book.

Geoffrey Redmond wishes to express gratitude to the Columbia University Early China Seminar and the Society for the Study of Early China, both outstanding forums for cutting-edge research on early China. These have provided some necessary background for the present work as well as invaluable intellectual stimulation.

Most of all, he is grateful to his wife, Mingmei Yip, novelist, illustrator, and *guqin* virtuoso for her warm support, as well as for sharing with him her deep knowledge of Chinese culture, past and present.

Tze-ki Hon would like to thank Joseph Adler, Dennis Kat-Hung Cheng, Edward Shaughnessy, and Richard J. Smith for their inspiration and support. They will find some of their insightful arguments about *Yijing* studies incorporated in Tze-ki's chapters.

When writing his chapters, Tze-ki was given the additional duty to chair the History Department at SUNY-Geneseo. Without the care and patience of his wife, Wan-chiung, he would not have been able to continue to write while he dealt with administrative crises.

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CONCISE CHRONOLOGY OF CHINESE DYNASTIES (WITH REFERENCE TO THE *BOOK OF CHANGES*)

Chinese history is conventionally divided into dynasties, of which there are many. The following lists only those of particular importance for cultural history, as a guide for those unfamiliar with this system. More complete chronologies are available in standard sources. To give a general sense of each time, a key event or personage of each period is provided here.

Eras of mythical rulers and the Xia 夏 dynasty: Mythical origin of Chinese civilization, including the trigrams. Whether the Xia dynasty existed or is mythical is disputed, often with political implications.

Shang 商 (ca. 1600–1046 BCE): Earliest divination records, the oracle bones. These are from the latter Shang, often referred to as the Yin 殷.

Western Zhou 西周 (1046–771 BCE): Composition of earliest form of the *Book of Changes,* the *Zhouyi*.

Eastern Zhou 東周 (770–221 BCE): Divided into two periods:

Spring and Autumn (770–403 BCE): The time of Confucius. The *Zuozhuan*, a record of some of the events of this period, contains the earliest accounts of *Changes* divination.

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- **Warring States** (403–221 BCE): Intense philosophical activity. Earliest extant *Changes* manuscripts.
- **Qin** 秦 (221–206 BCE): First emperor whose tomb contains the terra-cotta warriors.
- **Han** 漢 (202 BCE–220 CE): Elaboration of cosmology, including yin-yang.
- **Three Kingdoms** (220–265): Wang Bi's influential commentary.
- **Tang** 唐 (618–907): Systemization of *Yijing* commentaries by Kong Yingda.
- **Song** 宋 (960–1279): Formulation of neo-Confucianism by Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi, Shao Yong, and others.
- **Yuan** 元 (1271–1368): Mongolian rule. Zhu Xi orthodoxy.
- **Ming** 明 (1368–1644): Song neo-Confucianism becomes state orthodoxy.
- **Qing** 清 (1644–1912): Extensive scholarship on the *Yijing*, including that by the Kangxi emperor. Rise of critical philology.
- **Republic** (1912–1949): Authority of the classics challenged.
- **Communist victory to death of Mao Zedong** (1949–1976): Suppression of the *Yijing* and other traditional culture during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) as "feudal superstition."
- **Contemporary** (1980–present): *Yijing* revival within China and beginning of worldwide interest.

The dynastic dates are those of the PRC standardization. These have been controversial, particularly for the earliest three dynasties, the Xia, Shang, and Zhou. Although the existence of a dynasty referred to as Xia is generally doubted by Western sinologists, there is now extensive archeological knowledge of pre-Shang cultures. Whether any of these were the supposed Xia dynasty is heatedly debated. For the views of Western scholars on the Xia and other issues of early Chinese chronology, see Shaughnessy 2008; for the Chinese rebuttal, see Yin 2002.

Whether or not the name "Xia" can be applied to any known pre-Shang cultures, archeology has demonstrated beyond doubt

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the extensive human presence in part of the area now called China. Excavation continues to be very extensive and is greatly expanding our knowledge of this formative period. For an up-to-date discussion of the complexities of dynastic dating and the question of the Xia dynasty, see Wilkinson 2012: 1–15; 678–80. Regarding the early cultures in what is now China, see Liu 2004: 105 et passim.

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE *YIJING*

The *Zhouyi* (Earliest Texts)

- Images of the sixty-four hexagrams (from ䷀ to ䷿)
- Judgment texts (also referred to as hexagram texts) of the sixty-four hexagrams (from *Qian* 乾 to *Weiji* 未濟)
- Line statements of the sixty-four hexagrams (from *Qian* to *Weiji*)

The *Ten Wings* (Later Canonical Commentaries)

- 1–2: *Tuanzhuan* 彖傳 (Commentary to the Judgments)
- 3–4: *Xiangzhuan* 象傳 (Commentary to the Images)
- 5–6: *Xici* 繫辭 (Appended Statements), also known as the *Dazhuan* 大傳 (Great Commentary)
- 7: *Wenyan* 文言 (Words of the Text)
- 8: *Shuogua* 說卦 (Explanation of the Trigrams)
- 9: *Xugua* 序卦 (Hexagrams in Sequence)
- 10: *Zagua* 雜卦 (Hexagrams in Irregular Order)

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TEACHING THE *I CHING (BOOK OF CHANGES)*

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Introduction: The Rewards and Perils of Studying an Ancient Classic

The *Yijing* (*I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*), along with the Hindu Vidas Upanishads and the Hebrew Bible, is one of the world's oldest books in continuous use; it has been considered by Chinese to contain their most profound philosophy. Yet it began three thousand years ago as a humble divination manual, basically a collection of folk expressions, magic spells, and allusions to long-forgotten ancient events. How it came to be an ethical and philosophical text, and now a psychological one, is a fascinating saga that takes us from the beginnings of recorded human consciousness to the digital age.

Despite its centrality in Chinese intellectual history, it is with much trepidation that one sets out to write about the *Yijing*. Its first layer, the *Zhouyi*, is extremely ancient. Though the date of composition is disputed by a factor of three centuries, we have no idea who composed it, or even if one can even speak of authorship at all regarding a text assembled from diverse, long-lost sources nearly three millennia ago. Perhaps the *Zhouyi*'s meanings were clear to those for whom it was contemporary, but since then, thousands of pages of commentaries have been expended debating, often acrimoniously, the meanings of even its seemingly most transparent passages. It is not only the texts that elude definitive exegesis. The hexagrams, the famous six-line figures often depicted surrounding the familiar yin-yang symbol, were at times given meanings with little evident basis in the text. These diagrams, being independent of language,

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underwent a sort of diaspora and are now found in contexts ranging from Tibetan art, to the flag of South Korea, to the T-shirts of Western martial arts students. Whether understood or not, they look like they mean something profound. Of course, it is this very complexity and fluidity of possible meanings that have made possible the universality of the *Yijing* and contributed to its fascination.[1]

Despite, or perhaps because of, all these intricacies, the *Yijing* remains in use as a scriptural classic by many individuals throughout the world, even though it is not an official text for any institutional religion. In traditional China, however, it was one of the five formally officially recognized "Confucian classics," together with the Classics of *Songs, Documents, Rites* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.[2] The Chinese word, *jing*, as in *Yijing* has a meaning in between what we would term a scripture, that is a text of spiritual revelation, and a classic, an important and esteemed book. Only a very select group of Chinese texts were considered *jing*.

Full understanding and appreciation of the *Yijing* involves being aware of its dual, even paradoxical, nature as an ancient historical text embodying nearly forgotten ways of life and as a modern scripture (or self-help book) still consulted for practical guidance by millions throughout the world.

CLASHING OPINIONS ABOUT AN ANCIENT CLASSIC

Few who have engaged with the *Yijing* have remained neutral about it; controversy began centuries ago and continues into the present day. The following gives a sense of the ranges of responses to the classic. We can begin by letting the *Yijing* speak for itself:

1. Much has been written about the fascination of the *Zhouyi*. Of particular interest are the works of Jung 1950; Rutt 1996: 44–59; and Smith 2012.

2. The Confucian classics are discussed in detail in the monograph by Nylan (2001).

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> The *Changes* is a paradigm of heaven and earth. . . . Looking up, we use it to observe the configurations of heaven, and, looking down, we use it to examine the patterns of earth. Thus we understand the reasons underlying what is hidden and what is clear. We trace things back to their origins then turn back to their ends. Thus we understand the axiom of life and death.[3]

The *Dazhuan*, the Great Commentary, also implies that Confucius endorsed the *Book of Changes*:

> The Master [Confucius] said: "The *Changes*, how perfect it is! It was by means of the *Changes* that the sages exalted their virtues and broadened their undertakings."[4]

This is now thought to be apocryphal. Given that the *Dazhuan* was part of the *Yijing*, this can be regarded in somewhat the same light as a modern publisher's blurb, as a way of enhancing the appeal of the work.

In a passage in the *Lunyu* (the *Analects),* Confucius was famously represented as saying:

> Give me a few more years. . . . [I]f I have fifty years to study the *Book of Changes*, then perhaps I, too, can avoid any great errors.[5]

The Wilhelm-Baynes translation continues this conventional interpretation, as do many Chinese sources; however, following current scholarly consensus, Watson gives as the more likely translation, "give me fifty years to study," without any reference to the *Book of Changes.* While current scholarship doubts that Confucius ever made such a statement, throughout imperial Chinese history, it was accepted as the Master's endorsement of the *Changes*. This

3. *Dazhuan* I.4; Lynn 1994: 51.
4. *Dazhuan* I.7; Lynn 1994: 56.
5. *Lunyu* 7: 16; Watson 2007: 50.

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contributed to the *Yijing*'s reputation for profound wisdom, however difficult it may have been to understand. This appealing myth continues to be widely taught to students in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. Like many myths it does embody a truth: Whether the great sage knew the *Changes* or not, it became an inextricable component of the complex and syncretistic philosophy now referred to as Confucianism.

Moving west, we find similar praise for the *Changes*. An early admirer, Paul Carus (1852–1919), in what now seems quaint Orientalist language, declared the *Yijing* to be

> one of the most ancient, most curious, and most mysterious documents in the world. It is more mysterious than the pyramids of Egypt, more ancient than the Vedas of India, more curious than the cuneiform inscriptions of Babylon.[6]

It was Richard Wilhelm's German version, as translated into English by Cary F. Baynes, that made the *Yijing* accessible to non-sinologists. Wilhelm extolled the classic as "unquestionably one of the most important books in the world's literature."[7]

Likewise, Carl G. Jung expressed great esteem for the *Yijing*—and its admirers:

> The *I Ching* insists on self-knowledge throughout. . . . It is appropriate only for thoughtful and intelligent people who like to think about what they do and what happens to them. . . .[8]

Others, however, have been far less admiring. The translator James Legge commented:

6. Carus 1907: 26.
7. Wilhelm and Baynes 1967: xlvi.
8. Jung's (1950) Foreword to Wilhelm and Baynes 1967: xxxiii.

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> [U]ntil the Chinese drop their hallucination about the *I* [*Changes*] as containing all things that have ever been dreamt of in all philosophies, it will prove a stumbling block to them, and keep them from entering upon the true path of science.[9]

Despite his rather dismissive rhetoric, Legge was an untiring scholar who produced the first accurate English version (1882) of the ancient Chinese classics.[10]

The great British historian of Chinese science, Joseph Needham, noted the uniqueness of the *Yijing*:

> [A]n elaborate system of symbols and their explanations (not without a certain inner consistency and aesthetic force), having no close counterpart in the texts of any other civilization.[11]

But he added that "the abstractness of the symbolism gave it a deceptive profundity,"[12] substituting "for what was actually observed in nature . . . an empty symbolism. . . ."[13]

Needham was preoccupied with the question of why science in China did not develop systematically as it did in the West. He suggested that the belief that the *Yijing* contained all necessary truth inhibited further speculation about the natural world. While it is true that the literati believed in *Yijing* cosmology, counterfactuals, such as hypothesizing why something as broad as science did *not* happen at a particular time and place in history are dubious. Needham's point about the comprehensiveness of its symbol system does merit attention here, because it hints at what is probably the *Yijing*'s most positive cultural contribution—providing imagery that served as unifying factors across the great ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and geographic diversity of China and East Asia.

9. Legge 1899; quoted in Needham (SSC II) 1956: 336.
10. See Girardot 2002 for a biography of Legge.
11. Needham (SSC II) 1956: 304.
12. Needham (SSC II) 1956: 304.
13. Needham (SSC II) 1956: 325.

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YIJING PHOBIA

The suspicion expressed by Legge and Needham persists to this day. Traditionally, graduate students have been warned away from taking up this most challenging of Chinese classics. Thus, Edward L. Shaughnessy, one of the most renowned anglophone scholars of the *Changes*, recalls that he was told by his professor, the distinguished oracle-bone scholar David Keightley, that he had often been admonished as a graduate student that “an interest in the *Yijing* was one of three sure signs that a sinologist had gone overboard.”[14]

Another leading Western scholar of the *Yijing*, Richard J. Smith, was similarly admonished:

> For years, friends and colleagues have warned me not to tackle the evolution of the *Yijing*, or *Classic of Changes*. The topic is too big and too complicated, they said, and they were right. The study of the *Changes*, or *Yixue* 易學, is a black hole within the China field . . . that allows no possibility of escape for anyone drawn by its powerful pull.[15]

Fortunately, these now eminent scholars did not allow themselves to be frightened away from engagement with this sinological black hole. They were undaunted, despite being well aware of the difficulties of their subject. Indeed, those who claim to find the *Yijing* simple to understand can be assumed not to have comprehended its subtleties. No less a figure than the Kangxi emperor himself said as much. As told by Richard J. Smith, the emperor asked his court lecturers “not to make the *Yijing* appear simple,” and “when reading the *Yi*, with his teachers, three days were spent on each hexagram.”[16]

Smith further tells us that one Qing scholar Qian Lucan, whose fame as a *Yijing* savant attracted several hundred students, would

14. Shaughnessy 1995: 223.
15. Smith 2008: xi.
16. Smith 1991: 112.

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spend a month teaching each hexagram.[17] No doubt Qian and his followers had more time on their hands than the emperor, though one might speculate that the prolonged period of instruction may have had pecuniary as well as intellectual motives. Nonetheless, anyone who persists in trying to fully understand the *Changes* can find the years slipping by. This does not mean that a useful knowledge of the classic cannot be obtained in less time. Indeed, it is the purpose of the present work to facilitate this process.

We are left to imagine for ourselves the reasons for these phobias regarding the *Yijing*, though some will become clear as the present book proceeds. A prominent, if not always acknowledged, reason for suspicion regarding the *Yijing* is its association with divination, long condemned by Western religious authorities and now disparaged by the scientific establishment.[18] Moreover, the enthusiasm of the 1960s occult counterculture for the newly translated ancient classic engendered suspicion that interest in the *Yijing* signaled wavering capacity for critical thought. Divination is discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

The Western *Yijing* revival did introduce new ways of understanding the ancient classic. Indeed, it is particularly the interpretations of Carl G. Jung that have reinvented the *Changes* for modern readers. Jung's views are of considerable interest and are discussed in detail in a later chapter. These reinterpretations make the *Changes* more accessible to moderns, but can have the unfortunate effect of supplanting the traditional meanings of the classic. Modern psychological interpretations of the *Yijing* are considered in chapter 10. Despite, or perhaps in part because of, its many difficulties, Chinese generally regarded the *Yijing* as the most valuable of the Confucian classics, and it is the only one to have attained best-seller status in the West.[19]

17. Smith 1991: 108.

18. Although science certainly does not support divination, it should not be imagined that this is an important issue among scientists. Except for a few outspoken debunkers, most scientists have little interest in the matter.

19. The *Daodejing* of Laozi is likely the second best-selling Chinese classic in the West, and supposedly the most translated. It continues to be regarded as inspirational by many. While Confucius undoubtedly enjoys the best name recognition of

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GOING OVERBOARD: FACING THE HAZARDS OF *YIJING* SCHOLARSHIP

Sinologists are still known to shake their heads when the subject of the *Changes* comes up. There is an extra irony here because one of the meanings of the character "yi" 易 is "easy." Some think this, rather than "change" was the original meaning, because its use for divination with yarrow sticks was much easier than the elaborate preparations required for oracle-bone divination. Perhaps, the text was indeed easy three thousand years ago, but it has not been since.

When there are so many warnings, there must be some real danger, and it must be acknowledged that expressing opinions about this ancient text can be risky. Only the simplest statements about the *Changes* can be made without fear of eventual refutation. Dates, authorship, meanings of many key words and phrases, all are uncertain.[20] Yet the *Yijing*, for all its mythological and occult associations, is simply a text; as with other ancient texts, meticulous consideration of the received version, comparison to excavated variants, and recognition of historical context can yield much of immense interest, even if enough obscurities remain for the text to maintain its beguiling sense of mystery.

Heedless of these many perils, we have decided to "cross the great water" and provide this introduction to the study and teaching of the *Changes*, hoping to have selected an appropriately auspicious moment to do so. In fact, much suggests that this is indeed a favorable time for crossing the great water of the *Yijing*. The revival of China's presence

any Chinese philosopher, the *Lunyu* does not seem to have caught popular interest outside China to the same degree as the *Yijing* or the *Daodejing*. This is not to say that the Master lacks modern admirers. For an influential attempt to revalidate Confucius, see Fingarette 1998.

20. There is an old story, likely apocryphal, that on the first day of medical school, the professor announces to beginning students, "Half of what we are going to teach you during the next four years is wrong. The problem is, we don't know which half it is." Something like this may be true of the *Yijing*—and of history generally. The only remedy is to continuously question our certainties.

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on the world stage, the waning of ideological suppression of scholarship within the People's Republic, easy travel to China, increased enrollment in university courses on Chinese language and history—all of these contribute to the present surge in worldwide interest in the phenomenon that is China. In recent decades Chinese scholarship has blossomed, providing much new information about the *Changes*. Unfortunately, much of this scholarship is difficult to find, or it assumes the reader already possesses detailed knowledge of the classic. What is needed is an integration of these new insights with traditional and early modern understandings of the *Changes*. One reason for crossing the great water is to bring this new information to anglophone readers. The great water is actually quite wide as it must cover the reconstructed early meanings, the two millennium long classical commentarial tradition, and the newly discovered manuscripts.

HELP FOR THE PERPLEXED: THE *YIJING* AND ITS COMMENTARIES

The Chinese, too, when curiosity about the *Yijing* leads them to start reading it, find themselves perplexed, even as they maintain faith in its profundity.[21] A fundamental reason is that the classical form of the Chinese language has not been part of standard curricula for the past century. The *Yijing* in the received version is actually a much harder book to read in the original Chinese than in translation because the many difficulties of the text have not been smoothed out by a translator. Not that this removal of difficulties is entirely a good thing. Translations, including those into modern Chinese, tend to favor simplicity over accuracy. A good translation of the *Yijing* should leave the reader puzzled by some passages because they are inherently enigmatic.

21. Despite its obscurities, or perhaps partly because of them, the *Yijing* continues to fascinate. At the time of a recent visit to Hong Kong, one well-known general bookstore had on display nearly one hundred works related to the *Yijing*.

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The literati of premodern China who studied the *Changes* also found it challenging, but they expected to spend much of their youth, or even their entire lives, trying to refine their understanding of the *Yijing* and other classics. Most importantly, they had access to a commentarial tradition, both written and oral, extending back over many centuries. These would have provided explanations for words, phrases, and imagery that were already obscure by Confucius's time. (Meaning changes are discussed in chapter 5.) Although the commentaries were far from unanimous, at least interpretations by esteemed scholars were available to aid one in choosing between a variety of exegetic traditions. The Han scholars emphasized cosmological aspects, with the diagrams tending to be emphasized over the text. An alternate tradition associated with the work of Wang Bi (226–249 CE), focused on the philosophical ideas in the text, although the diagrams were still important. These schools are discussed in detail in chapters 7 and 8.

During the Song, philosophical interpretations of the *Changes* blossomed. Zhu Xi, often said to be the second most influential philosopher of China, wrote two highly influential works on the classic; these established standard interpretations that lasted until the early twentieth century. Other influential commentators included Cheng Yi, who, like Wang Bi, emphasized ethical content, and Shao Yong, who developed elaborate cosmological theories based on the diagrams. This diversity of interpretative approaches should not surprise us. Uniquely, the *Changes* has a dual nature, consisting of diagrams and texts—which of these is regarded as primary is essentially a matter of temperament.

The high esteem in which the *Yijing* was held was based not only on the existence of learned commentaries, but on something akin to religious faith. Its creation was attributed to culture heroes, including Confucius, who were regarded as the founders of Chinese culture. Throughout the development of thought in premodern China, philosophers usually justified their ideas as returning to the ways of high antiquity. Since this ancient past was an idealized mythical creation, not limited by an actual historical record, it was easy for Chinese

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thinkers to project their own ideas onto it. Confucius frequently assumed that the ancient past was superior to his own time in ethical understanding and in practice of governance:

> The Master said, "I was not born with knowledge, but being fond of antiquity, I am quick to seek it."[22]

As an example of how far his own age had fallen from the ideal, the Master commented:

> Formerly people studied to improve themselves; now they do so to impress others.[23]

Concern with behaving in accord with prescribed rules affected the minutiae of everyday life. If ritual propriety was violated, there could be both social and supernatural consequences.[24] Much of the value of the *Changes* was that it could tell one what was the correct way to act at a given moment.

Given its mythic origins with culture heroes, the *Yijing* was considered a definitive guide to harmonizing humanity with heaven and earth. As stated in a Tang commentary:

> When kings acted . . . they necessarily accorded with yin and yang so that not a single thing was harmed. Therefore, since they were able to hold together the cosmos and respond to the spirit light, the royal altars were never exhausted and their reputations never decayed.[25]

Here it is clearly implied that when rulers have an understanding of yin and yang there results a state of balance and order within the

22. *Lunyu* 7: 20; Lau 1992: 61.
23. *Lunyu* 14: 25; Watson 2007: 100.
24. For examples of the extreme elaboration of regulation of behavior, see Major et al. 2010: 182–206.
25. *Shisan jing zhushu*; quoted in Bol 1992: 95.

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empire. Such an understanding came to be one of the basic principles for *Yijing* interpretation.

This conventional account of the *Changes* did not go entirely unquestioned. At least by the Song, there were a few literati who doubted the received account of the book's origins, though not its profundity. However, the mythic account was generally accepted, or at least doubts were suppressed, until the work of early twentieth-century Chinese philologists. Their analysis fundamentally changed the way the difficulties of the classic were viewed, as discussed in chapter 9. In the modern era, the *Yijing* may still be viewed as a repository of secrets—now concerning humanity's remote past, rather than the ultimate meaning of the universe.

THE *YIJING* WAS FOR THE LIVING

Though it may not be noticed by most modern readers, a distinctive feature of the *Changes* is that it almost entirely concerns the living. Much other Chinese divination, notably the oracle bones, is concerned with the welfare of the dead—though this is assumed to have implications for the living. In Shang China, as evidenced by the oracle bones, communication with the dead was a major activity of rulers. Much Chinese divination, beginning with the oracle bones, was addressed to the deceased or to spirits, because many human afflictions, particularly disease, were assumed to be due to resentments by supernatural entities. However loving they may have been in life, after death relatives were assumed to be spiteful.[26] In much of the world, ghosts are still assumed to be real. Among Chinese, "yin feng shui"—that is, feng shui for the realm of the dead—is still employed by many to ensure that their deceased relatives will not be angered by an unsuitable burial. Such is the level of anxiety that

26. Though such beliefs seem quaint now, fear of the dead persists. We are still scared by ghost stories, and few will venture into cemeteries at night.

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the feng shui masters receive large fees by offering advice on grave siting.

The mystery of death has always been a major human preoccupation. Despite the impossibility of objective knowledge about the state of the dead, speculation and mythology about it have always been extensive. Some still seek to communicate beyond the veil. In the early twentieth century, so-called spiritualism, with its séances intended to receive messages from the deceased, had many followers, including even scientists and such luminaries as Arthur Conan Doyle and William James—although there were prominent debunkers as well, such as the stage magician Houdini. Mediumship, under the newer term of "channeling," enjoyed a revival of sorts in the 1960s that continues to the present day.

In contrast to oracle-bone pyromancy, shamanism, and yin feng shui, the *Yijing* does not explicitly address spirits or the dead as being responsible for the welfare of the living. While in the Western Zhou it was probably assumed that responses to inquiries somehow originated with ancestors, there is little trace of this belief in later use. Thus, the *Yijing* is this-worldly; as such, it is in harmony with two of the best-known passages in the *Lunyu*. When asked by his disciple, Jilu, about spirits and death, Confucius replies:

> When you don't yet know how to serve human beings, how can you serve the spirits? . . . When you don't yet understand life, how can you understand death?[27]

Despite Confucius, Chinese remained preoccupied with efforts to reach the spirit world. However, the use of the *Changes* can be considered a cultural advance because it refocused attention on this-worldly actions to attain one's ends, rather than on the supposed wishes of the dead. That the *Yijing* is a guidebook for life rather than death is a necessary part of its continuing appeal.

27. *Lunyu* 11: 12; Watson 2009: 73.

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THE THREE BOOKS OF *CHANGES*

Reading about the *Book of Changes* in disparate sources can induce a sense of vertigo—each source may seem to be about a different book. And, in a sense, this is true: While all literary and sacred texts, especially ancient scriptures, offer room for multiple interpretations, the internal differences of the *Yijing* are particularly substantial. A useful way to approach the classic is to consider it not as one *Book of Changes*, but as three.[28]

The first iteration of the *Changes* consists exclusively of the Western Zhou portions—the *Zhouyi*—either as part of the transmitted text or as reconstructed by modern scholars. Each *Zhouyi* section consists of four components: a title or tag, a six line *gua* (hexagram), a general statement, usually referred to as the hexagram "text" or "judgment," and six individual line texts. In strict usage, the term is employed, *Zhouyi* specifically refers to these elements composed in the Western Zhou texts; it excludes the *Ten Wings,* the canonical commentarial texts that were not appended to it until several centuries later.[29] Many Chinese editions, as well as the translation of Wilhelm and Baynes, place parts of the *Ten Wings* commentaries with the Western Zhou texts, making it difficult to tell which is which. The relation of the various portions of the text are discussed in chapters 2, 4 and 5.

The second iteration of the *Changes* is what is properly referred to as the *Yijing*—that is, the *Zhouyi* with the addition of the *Ten Wings* commentaries. In our discussion, the terms "received text," "received tradition," or "transmitted version" refer to the text that was declared canonical in 136 BCE and became standard with minimal variation

28. The distinction here is a modern one. According to Chinese tradition, there were originally three books of *Changes*, but of these only the *Zhouyi* survived (Hacker 1993: 101). The recently excavated manuscripts, which were found in tombs of the late Warring States or early Han, also vary from the received version. The latter are discussed in chapter 4.

29. In common usage in China, however, the term *Zhouyi* often refers to the entire *Yijing*.

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from the Han dynasty onward. The traditional commentaries were based on the received text, which seems to have been the only one in general use prior to the twentieth century. The versions outside the received tradition are the excavated manuscripts and the reconstructed original meanings. The latter are important because possibly by the Spring and Autumn, and certainly by the late Warring States, the meanings of some of the graphs had changed radically. These alternative versions of the *Changes* are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

The *Changes* was valued for its presumed antiquity, but was made suitable for the classical canon by the addition of ethical and philosophical content. Richard Rutt asserts that in itself the *Zhouyi* had no intrinsic ethical or spiritual content, but that such was manifested only in the minds of its later commentators. Certainly we do not find the well-developed moral sense in the Western Zhou texts that we find in later ones such as the *Zuozhuan* and the *Lunyu*. Yet we do find concern with whether actions are proper or not.

The third iteration of the *Changes* is that of the globalized modern world. We refer to this as most non-Chinese specialists know it—the *I Ching*, usually mispronounced in English as "eye ching."[30] Many know the *I Ching* only by reputation, but still believe it to be a profound work. Some read the *I Ching* for divination, but have little sense of its traditional meanings and tend to be unaware of any scholarship later than that of Wilhelm and Jung. A large subgenre of publications relates the *I Ching* to such contemporary concerns as the DNA double helix, quantum physics, psychedelic drugs, business administration, marketing, creative writing, romance, and others.

30. The spelling as *I Ching* is the old Wade-Giles romanization, now replaced by pinyin, which is official in the People's Republic. Some currently published works still employ the old Wade-Giles system. Unfortunately, while there are several excellent English translations, as listed in an appendix to the present volume, most of what are purported to be the *I Ching* are very loose adaptations, often by "translators" with no actual knowledge of Chinese. A similar situation exists with the *Daodejing*—one recent "translator" of which claimed he was uniquely able to know what it really meant because of his advanced spiritual development.

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These contain a few vaguely Chinese ideas gleaned from secondary sources diluted with New Age clichés, pop psychology, and misunderstood science. They appear in many languages, including Chinese. Such treatments, however, demonstrate the remarkable fact that the *Book of Changes* continues to seem relevant to many, three thousand years after its initial portions were composed. Modern appropriations of the classic are discussed in chapters 9 and 10.

DUALITIES IN READING THE *YIJING*

Like yin and yang, opinions regarding the *Changes* tend to divide into dualities, but without one ever completely replacing the other. A basic difference concerns whether the classic is primarily a divination manual or a book of wisdom. Those who see it as a monument of Chinese culture tend to present it as a book of wisdom, divination being out of intellectual fashion in the modern world. Yet in its earliest form as the *Zhouyi*, there is no indication that it served any other purpose than divination.

At our present distance, this dispute seems unnecessary. A book of wisdom may be consulted for practical guidance. Conversely, a method of divination, to be useful, should give wise advice. To understand the *Yijing* within Chinese culture, due consideration must be given to both approaches.

To read the *Zhouyi*, or *Yijing,* or *I Ching* in linear order from beginning to end is both confusing and frustrating. We need to remind ourselves that in traditional use, the *Changes* was not read like a modern book. Usually, a chapter or line text was selected by a random process to answer the question at hand. Alternatively, literati might flip through the book, hoping to alight on something with personal meaning. When passages are selected nonrandomly, the process is less mysterious, but there may be a gain in relevance. However, use of a random method may suggest possibilities that are unexpected, yet pertinent.

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