The *I Ching*

A Biography

Richard J. Smith

LIVES OF GREAT RELIGIOUS BOOKS

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The Hexagrams

Hexagram	Number	Chinese Character	Chinese Name
	1	乾	Qian
	2	坤	Kun
	3	屯	Zhun
	4	蒙	Meng
	5	需	Xu
	6	訟	Song
	7	師	Shi
	8	比	Bi
	9	小畜	Xiaoxu [Xiaochu]
	10	履	Lü

Hexagram	Number	Chinese Character	Chinese Name
	11	泰	Tai
	12	否	Pi
	13	同人	Tongren
	14	大有	Dayou
	15	謙	Qian
	16	豫	Yu
	17	隨	Sui
	18	蠱	Gu
	19	臨	Lin
	20	觀	Guan
	21	噬嗑	Shihe
	22	賁	Bi
	23	剝	Bo
	24	復	Fu

Hexagram	Number	Chinese Character	Chinese Name
	25	无妄	Wuwang
	26	大畜	Daxu [Dachu]
	27	頤	Yi
	28	大過	Daguo
	29	坎	Kan [Xikan]
	30	離	Li
	31	咸	Xian
	32	恆	Heng
	33	遯	Dun
	34	大壯	Dazhuang
	35	晉	Jin
	36	明夷	Mingyi
	37	家人	Jiaren
	38	睽	Kui

Hexagram	Number	Chinese Character	Chinese Name
	39	蹇	Jian
	40	解	Xie
	41	損	Sun
	42	益	Yi
	43	夬	Kuai [Guai]
	44	姤	Gou
	45	萃	Cui
	46	升	Sheng
	47	困	Kun
	48	井	Jing
	49	革	Ge
	50	鼎	Ding
	51	震	Zhen
	52	艮	Gen

Hexagram	Number	Chinese Character	Chinese Name
	53	漸	Jian
	54	歸妹	Guimei
	55	豐	Feng
	56	旅	Lü
	57	巽	Sun [Xun]
	58	兌	Dui
	59	渙	Huan
	60	節	Jie
	61	中孚	Zhongfu
	62	小過	Xiaoguo
	63	既濟	Jiji
	64	未濟	Weiji

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Chronology of Chinese Dynasties

Note: Much debate surrounds the dating of the earliest Chinese dynasties (especially the Xia, which many scholars consider to be semihistorical), and even later dates are sometimes highly contested.

Dynastic Name			Chinese	
Pinyin	Wade-Giles	Subperiods	Name	Dates
Xia	Hsia		夏	ca. 2000– ca. 1600 BCE
Shang	Shang		商	ca. 1600– ca. 1050 BCE
Zhou	Chou		周	ca. 1050– 256 BCE
		Spring and Autumn Period	春秋	ca. 770 BCE– ca. 476 BCE
		Warring States Period	戰國	ca. 475 BCE– 221 BCE
Qin	Ch'in		秦	221 BCE– 206 BCE
Han	Han		漢	206 BCE– 220 CE

Dynastic Name			Chinese	
Pinyin	Wade-Giles	Subperiods	Name	Dates
Six Dynasties Period			六朝	220–589
Sui	Sui		隋	589–618
Tang	T'ang		唐	618–907
Five Dynasties Period			五代	907–960
Song	Sung		宋	960–1279
Yuan	Yüan		元	1279–1368
Ming	Ming		明	1368–1644
Qing	Ch'ing		清	1644–1912

Preliminary Remarks and Acknowledgments

The curse of China studies for Westerners has always been the transliteration of Chinese sounds. For many years the scholarly (and popular) convention was to use the so-called Wade-Giles system for rendering Chinese names, terms, and titles, which is why so many people in the West know the *Classic of Changes* as the *I Ching*. I have retained this long-standing usage in the title of this biography, but in the body of the book I have rendered it according to the more current Pinyin system of transliteration: hence, *Yijing*. I have employed similarly standard conventions for the transliteration of other Asian names but have eliminated most diacritical marks and have tried to keep technical terms and titles to a minimum. For instance, although the two characters for *Yijing* are pronounced (and therefore transliterated) in sometimes radically different ways in Japanese (*Ekikyo*), Korean (*Yokkyong*), Vietnamese (*Dich Kinh*), and Tibetan (*Yi Kying*), I have used only the Chinese (Pinyin) transliteration of this title in the text, regardless of the culture area under discussion. In the same spirit, I have translated into English (or used already

common renderings of) virtually all the technical words, expressions, terms, and titles in the main part of this book, relegating transliterations to the index, in parentheses that follow the translated terms and titles.

Since this book is designed primarily for nonspecialists, I have not burdened it with detailed descriptions, elaborate footnotes, discussions of arcane scholarly debates, or extensive bibliographies in Asian and Western languages. Material of this sort may be found in my 2008 book, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World: The* Yijing *(*I-Ching, *or* Classic of Changes*) and Its Evolution in China*. I am grateful to the University of Virginia Press for permitting me to draw from parts of this work in my discussion of the domestic development of the *Changes*. I might add that the acknowledgments, notes, and bibliographies of *Fathoming the Cosmos* reveal abundantly the profound debt I owe to my teachers in the China field, my many valuable friends and colleagues at Rice University, and a host of other scholars around the world, several of whom also deserve special mention here for their specific contributions to this volume: Joseph Adler, Alejandro Chaoul, Howard Goodman, Tze-ki Hon, Pei Jin, Yung Sik Kim, Livia Kohn, Liu Dajun, Richard John Lynn, Naturaleza Moore, Benjamin Wai-ming Ng, Bent Nielsen, Valrae Reynolds, Hyong Rhew, Dennis Schilling, Edward Shaughnessy, Shen Heyong, Kidder Smith, Benjamin Wallacker, Wang Mingxiong, and Zhang Wenzhi.

There are literally hundreds of Western-language translations of the *Yijing* (also known as the *Zhou*

Changes), several of which I discuss in chapter 5. For this biography I have drawn upon, and modified when necessary, five well-known renderings that reflect different understandings of the work as they developed at different periods in Chinese history: (1) Richard Kunst's dissertation, titled "The Original *Yijing*" (1985), which offers a heavily annotated translation of the earliest layers of the so-called basic text (c. 800 BCE); (2) Richard Rutt's *Zhouyi* (1996), which has a similar chronological focus but is less technical and more accessible; (3) Edward Shaughnessy's *I Ching* (1996), which translates a second-century BCE version of the *Changes* that was discovered at Mawangdui (Hunan province) about four decades ago; (4) Richard John Lynn's *The Classic of Changes* (1994), which not only provides a rendering of the work after it became a classic in 136 BCE but also offers a highly influential third-century CE commentary on the *Yijing*, as well as abundant notes on later interpretations of the work; and (5) Richard Wilhelm's *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (1967), based on a Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) understanding of the text that became the orthodox interpretation from the fourteenth century into the early twentieth.

For a reference book on *Yijing* scholarship and technical terminology, there is no better English-language resource than Bent Nielsen's *A Companion to Yi jing Numerology and Cosmology: Chinese Studies of Images and Numbers from Han (202 BCE–220 CE) to Song (960–1279 CE)* (2003), which is organized alpha-

betically by Pinyin transliterations of names, terms, and titles. Another extremely useful reference work, in German, is Dennis Schilling's *Yijing: Das Buch der Wandlungen* (2009), which attempts to capture the earliest meaning of the *Changes* while also offering valuable information on the complex history of the classic.

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virtue of its wisdom, it becomes a repository of what has happened."[1] But whereas most religious traditions, both East and West, have emphasized the activities of a god or gods as an explanation for cosmic processes, devotees of the *Changes* have long held the view that such explanations reside in the cosmic powers embodied in its lines, trigrams, and hexagrams.

The central preoccupation of the *Yijing* throughout the imperial era (from the Han to the Qing) was how to understand the patterns and processes of nature, and how to act in harmony with them. The most common term for nature in premodern China was Dao, usually translated as "the Way." Although this longstanding metaphysical concept had neither a personality nor a particular identity, it remained an overarching unifying truth among the Chinese in the same general sense that concepts such as Yahweh, Allah, God, Brahman, and Ultimate Reality were in the Judaic, Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions, respectively. To fathom the Dao was to understand the various types of change in the universe, from the cosmic to the mundane, from recurrent cycles of movement—ebb and flow, rise and decline, advance and retreat—to physical and metaphysical transformations. From this sort of understanding came an appreciation of proper timing and positioning, essential in a culture where the ritual ideal had always been to do the right thing, at the right time, in the right place, facing the right direction.

What Is the *Yijing* and How Does It Work?

The *Changes* first took shape about three thousand years ago as a divination manual, consisting of sixty-four six-line symbols known as hexagrams. Each hexagram was uniquely constructed, distinguished from all the others by its combination of solid (——) and/or broken (— —) lines. The first two hexagrams in the conventional order are Qian and Kun; the remaining sixty-two hexagrams represent permutations of these two paradigmatic symbols.


Qian


Kun

At some point in the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1045–256 BCE), no later than the ninth or eighth century, each hexagram acquired a name, a brief description known as a "judgment," and a short explanatory text for each of its six lines called a "line statement." This highly compact document, less than 4,200 characters in length and probably first inscribed on strips of bamboo, became known as the basic text of the *Yijing*. The operating assumption of the *Changes*, as it developed over time, was that these hexagrams represented the basic circumstances of change in the universe, and that by selecting a particular hexagram or hexagrams and correctly interpreting the various symbolic elements of each, a person could gain insight into the patterns of cosmic change and devise a strategy for dealing with

problems or uncertainties concerning the present and the future.

During the third century BCE, a set of diverse and poetic commentaries known as the "Ten Wings" became attached to the *Changes*, and the work received imperial sanction in 136 BCE as one of the five major Confucian classics. These Ten Wings—particularly the so-called Great Commentary—articulated the *Yijing*'s implicit cosmology and invested the classic with an alluring philosophical flavor and an attractive literary style. The worldview of this amplified version of the *Changes* emphasized correlative thinking, a humane cosmological outlook, and the fundamental unity of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. For the next two thousand years or so, the *Yijing* held pride of place in China as the first of the Confucian classics.

How does the document work? The first point to be made is that the *Changes* allows, and even encourages, an enormous amount of interpretive flexibility; by nature it is an extraordinarily open-ended and versatile intellectual resource. It reflects what Keats once referred to as "negative capability"—the capacity to encounter uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts "without an irritable reaching after fact & reason"—and it relies on many different ways of knowing. Thus there can be any number of approaches to the classic, whether as a book of divination or as a source of philosophical, spiritual, or psychological inspiration. The editors of China's most important premodern literary compilation,

line statement describes a situation in which the subject is making progress but has not yet conquered his egotistical drives and desires. The fifth line statement refers to the need for the subject to be cautious in what he says and to know when to speak and when to remain silent. The sixth line statement marks the attainment of equanimity and insight, thus facilitating success in all things.[5] Lest this seem like a simple process, it should be noted that in imperial China it was not uncommon for a scholar to spend days or even weeks contemplating a single hexagram. The reasons for this will become apparent as we proceed through the life of the *Yijing*.

The Transnational Travels of the *Changes*

The *Yijing*'s great prestige and multifaceted cultural role in China naturally commended it to several civilizations on the Chinese periphery—notably Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—each of which had long been influenced significantly by Chinese philosophy, religion, art, literature, and social customs. In all these environments, the *Changes* enjoyed an exalted reputation, and in each it was employed in a variety of cultural realms, as it had been in China. The process of transmission in East Asia was relatively uncomplicated—in part because the classical Chinese language in which the *Yijing* was written served as the literary lingua franca of virtually all educated Korean, Japanese, and Viet-

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As indicated in my "Preliminary Remarks," I have provided transliterations for certain non-standardized Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese and Tibetan terms and titles in parentheses following their English translations in order to facilitate further investigations and comparisons. This approach is necessary for two reasons: (1) there are often several different translations of even the most common East Asian terms and titles; and (2) the single most important English-language reference work on the *Changes*, Bent Nielsen's *A Companion to Yi jing Numerology and Cosmology*, is organized alphabetically by Pinyin transliterations only; it has no other index. For ease of reference I have created a few special entries under which related items are grouped together and listed alphabetically under a single heading rather than scattered throughout the index—for example, the categories "trigram references" and "hexagram references." Finally, with the exception of a few particularly prominent individuals, I have not included the names of the many Westerners who have used and/or translated the *Changes*; they can be found easily enough by consulting the subsection of the main entry "*Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*)" under the titles "travels to the West of" and "translations of."