

A CLASSIC CHINESE READER

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE CLASSICS: CONFUCIANISM, TAOISM AND BUDDHISM

Editors-in-chief: Li Ji, Wang Yueqing

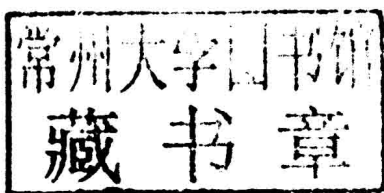
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Foreword

This book is intended for international readers, especially young readers.

China is vast in territory and is an ethnically diverse community. It has created a glorious civilization in the past 5000 years, and it has witnessed numerous changes. It has also been subjected to misunderstandings and discriminations. Standing at the crossroads of the 20th and 21st centuries, China has stunned the world with Chinese speed and Chinese miracles. Meanwhile, Chinese experiences, Chinese path, and Chinese institution are attracting global attention.

If a country wants to move forward, it is crucial for its people to rediscover and reevaluate its own tradition. What affects the choices of Chinese path, influences Chinese spiritual world, and determines Chinese way of thinking, value judgments and aesthetic tastes are the ideas immersed in the Chinese classical system of thoughts. What best conveys and expresses Chinese traditional ideas are the Chinese classics. It is for this reason people today must respect and learn these foundation works.

Classics are texts composed by past sages. They provide a nation with wisdoms of life and quintessence of their times. They embody the

way of life, the political institution, the social norms, the value system, the emotional patterns, as well as the cultural products of a country or a nation. These classics are more alive than dead—they are daily read and frequently quoted by people today .

Classics transmit the experiences and wisdoms of our ancestors to our times. Classics have stood the test of time and they are as vital as ever. They not only provide a rich intellectual heritage, but also articulate and direct the current affairs and future developments of human beings. .

Chinese classics are the fruits of a variety of intellectual traditions which have influenced and shaped Chinese civilization. They are the eternal galaxies of the Chinese cultural universe, the main rhythm of the Chinese symphony, and the records of the historical vicissitudes of China.

To introduce Chinese wisdom to international readers, we have chosen a number of Chinese classics which best represent and trace the evolution of Chinese traditional thoughts. Each chapter contains the following parts: the author's life, the main thoughts, the historical contributions, the cultural impact, and the modern relevance. The major concern of each classic has been condensed in the key words of titles in order to pinpoint the core ideas of every chosen classic.

The classics shortlisted are as follows:

The Philosophy of Change: *Yijing*

China's Sacred Book: *The Analects*

Life Wisdom: *Laozi*

The Conscience of China: *Mencius*

The Music of Heaven : *Zhuangzi*

Universal Love : *Mozzi*

Extolling Rituals and Laws: *Xunzi*

The Rule of the Country: *Han Feizi*

A Universal Moral Truth: *The Classic of Family Reverence*

Chinese Family Education: *Admonitions for the Yan Clan*

Knowing the Mind, Seeing the Nature: *The Platform Sutra*

Priority of Value: *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*

The Unity of Knowledge and Action: *Instructions for Practical Living*

Please bear in mind that the classics chosen do not come close to represent the totality of Chinese philosophical classics, but instead provide a starting place. By interpreting these key texts and key authors, we hope to shed some light on the contour of Chinese philosophy and Chinese spiritual world. Family Instructions for the Yan Clan may even be questionable when classified among the classics, but we still decided to include it in our book, because the Chinese concepts of family and clan are well illustrated in this text and it has influenced the life of Chinese families for more than a thousand years.

In the era of globalization when people are carried away by materialism, consumerism and sensualism, ethical and political concerns of Chinese philosophy may provide a solution to the modern spiritual crises. At the same time, we hope Chinese civilization can go on contributing to human beings and equal communications between global cultures can be achieved. The concept of change in *Yijing*, the core idea of benevolence in *The Analects*, the teaching of Way in *Laozi*, the promotion of universal love in *Mozi*, can not only enhance our cultural self-awareness and self-confidence, but also prove to be a beacon to the bustling but lost world.

LI Ji, WANG Yueqing

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A black and white photograph of a traditional Chinese courtyard. In the foreground, there is a large, paved area with a circular pattern. A low stone railing with decorative pillars runs across the middle ground. Behind the railing, there are trees and a city skyline in the distance under a cloudy sky.

Change *Yijing*

Yijing (Book of Changes, or I Ching), or *Zhouyi*, enjoys a particularly high position in the history of Chinese civilization. Scholars of all ages have expressed their admiration for it, reaching a unanimous consensus that it is the classic of classics in both its primordiality in time and primacy in value. For thousands of years, *Yijing* has been a source of nourishment for Chinese culture feeding everything from the Hundred Schools of Thought of the Pre-Qin Period to medicine, architecture and art. Despite their uniqueness and diversities, they are all tied to *Yijing*, exemplifying the Chinese idiom— “different ways, but the same destination, hundreds of thoughts, but one conclusion”. Therefore, to trace the sources of Chinese civilization, we should begin from this book.

1. The Origins and Authors of *Yijing*

Due to its remote origin and scarcity of historical evidences, the date of creation as well as and the author of *Yijing* remain unknown and a subject of debate throughout the ages. One matter scholars since ancient times have agreed on is that the book was the collective wisdom of more than one author. According to *History of the Han Dynasty: Treatises on Literature and Art*, *Yijing* was co-authored by three sages who lived in three different ages. They are Fuxi of the upper ancient, King Wen of Zhou of the middle ancient, and Confucius of the lower ancient. Fuxi and King Wen's addition to *Yijing* is thought to be most likely the product of hundreds of years, continuously edited across generations. It is for this reason that *Yijing* manifests cultures of different ages. It is generally acknowledged by modern scholars that the main texts of *Yijing*, referred to as "Jing", were written around the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, while the commentaries of "Jing", referred to as "Zhuan" were written around the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. Fuxi, King Wen of Zhou, Duke Zhou, and Confucius are all believed to have made significant contributions to the composition of *Yijing*.

1) Fuxi

The early stage of the ancient Chinese civilization is usually traced back to the period of "Three Emperors and Five Kings", which was proposed as early as in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. Fuxi is regarded as "the first of the Three Emperors" and "the ancestor of the hundred kings". He was an offspring of Sui Ren Shi, who had been descended from You Chao Shi, the names of whom indicate their contributions to the people of their times. For example, You Chao Shi is said to have found the way to build shelters in trees in order to protect his people from beasts, and because of which he was



The portrait of Fuxi



The Mausoleum of Fuxi in Huaiyan, Henan Province

promoted to the chieftom of his tribe. Sui Ren Shi is said to have discovered the way to make fire with flint and thus became the tribe's head. Ancient records state that Fuxi had a man's head and a snake's or a dragon's body, or, in another version, an ox's head and a dragon's body. He married Nuwa, his younger sister, who made stones to repair the sky, and together they created man. Fuxi whose honorary epithet of "the ancestor of the hundred kings" indicates that his contribution is the greatest of all. Legends state that he was credited with six great inventions. On the top of the list is the invention of the Eight Diagrams, whose value cannot be estimated enough, because it comprises the main contents of *Yijing*, a source of Chinese civilization. Next to it come his instructions to his people of knitting fishnets and domesticating wild animals, which explains how domestic animals originated and how the life of his people became richer and easier. Third on the list is the reformation of marriage. After his reformation, wives were to live with their husbands, thus ending the time when children knew only their mothers and never met their fathers. The invention of writing ranks the fourth of his inventions, which replaced the previous practice of keeping records by tying knots. The fifth one comes his



The Temple of Fuxi in
Tianshui, Gansu Province

invention of musical instruments such as Tao Xun, a wind musical instrument made of clay and some stringed instruments. From this invention man became enlightened through music. His final invention was the governmental hierarchy, which would become the model for later governments.

These details about Fuxi of course are from the realm of the mythic rather than the factual, nevertheless, they do reflect the prevalence of totem worship during the age of Fuxi. It is probable that the snake, dragon, and ox were the totem animals worshipped by the Fuxi tribe. Since ancient times, Chinese have always revered those who improve the life of their fellow men. Usually, to remind the descendents of these great ancestors, stone tablets are erected, biographies are kept, and temples are built lest they be forgotten. Great sages like Fuxi have long been deified and worshipped in memorial halls. Since ancient times, the city of Tianshui, in the province of Gansu has been regarded as “the Hometown of Emperor Fuxi”. The King of the Yuan Dynasty honored Fuxi, Sheng Nong and Xuan Yüan as the Three Emperors, and worshipped their virtues. He ordered every prefecture and county to build temples for the Three Emperors and hold memorial rites regularly. Located in his hometown, the temple of Fuxi in Tianshui is comparatively larger in size and importance. In the Ming Dynasty, a new temple was rebuilt on the original site, named “Fuxi Temple” and remains there today.

2) King Wen and Duke Zhou

The Eight Diagrams invented by Fuxi are not the *Yijing* we read today. They were merely the signs recorded in *Yijing*, whose implications were obscure until King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty and his son Duke Zhou elucidated on them. King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty(1152B.C.-1056B.C.), named Ji Chang, was once a vassal ruling the northwestern region of the Shang Dynasty, with the title of “the Chief Vassal of the West”. According to historical records, during King Wen’s lifetime, the emperor of the Shang Dynasty was extremely corrupt and cruel, leaving his people with no means of livelihood. By contrast, King Wen ruled his vassal state with virtues, and thus attracted folks and officials near and far to his side. This situation deeply worried the emperor of the Shang Dynasty. He detained King Wen in Youli(Tangyin County in Henan Province today). Though he was imprisoned, King Wen was never dispirited. Instead, he studied the Eight Diagrams scrupulously and wrote his interpretations for the sixty-four divinatory signs. It was later speculated that the interpretations made by King Wen were coded with secret messages instructing his sons to rescue him. Later, his sons presented a lot of treasures in tribute to the emperor



The statue of King Wen in Tangyin, Henan Province



The residence where King Wen studied the sixty-four divinatory signs, located in Tangyin, Henan Province

of the Shang Dynasty and secured his release. After this incident, King Wen found the emperor intolerable and determined to topple him. He began to recruit talents from far and wide. Coincidentally, he met Jiang Shang, a man of over 80 years old with unrecognized talents. Jiang Shang was fishing by the water while King Wen was passing by. As he noticed, Jiang Shang's fishing line was kept three feet above the water and the fishing hook was attached with no bait. King Wen asked laughingly: "Old Sir, how could you catch fish with a straight and dry hook?" Jiang Shang answered: "He who has a divine mission to accomplish will rise to the hook by himself". Realizing the undertones of these words, King Wen asked a few more questions and Jiang Shang's responses impressed him; King Wen was pleased with the talent he found in Jiang Shang and as a result made him chief counselor, bringing him into his kingdom by chariot. From this incident comes the Chinese saying: "the fish rising to Jiang Taigong's straight and baitless hook". In the Ming Dynasty, this story was retold in a mythic fashion in novel *Investiture of the Fairies*, making the story even more engaging.

King Wu, the son of King Wen, eventually overthrew Shang's monarchy