

The classic of changes

A new translation of the I Ching

(上)

*The
Classic
of
Changes*

A New Translation
of the I Ching as
Interpreted by
Wang Bi

*Translated by
Richard John Lynn*



*Columbia University Press
New York*

Columbia University Press
New York Chichester, West Sussex

Copyright © 1994 Columbia University Press
All rights reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
I ching. English

The classic of changes : a new translation
of the I Ching as interpreted by Wang Bi /
translated by Richard John Lynn.

p. cm. — (Translations from the Asian
classics)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-231-08294-0

I. Lynn, Richard John. II. Wang, Bi, 226-
249. III. Title. IV. Series.

PL2478.D48 1994

299'.51282—dc20

93-43999

CIP

©

Casebound editions of
Columbia University Press books
are printed on permanent
and durable acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The
Classic
of
Changes

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE ASIAN CLASSICS

EDITORIAL BOARD

William Theodore de Bary, Chairman

Paul Anderer

Irene Bloom

Donald Keene

George A. Saliba

Haruo Shirane

David D. Wang

Burton Watson

Philip Yampolsky

Acknowledgments

The idea to prepare a new English version of the *Book of Changes* originally came some years ago from Bonnie Crown, director of International Literature and Arts in New York, who also provided much assistance in planning the venture in its earlier stages. She convinced me that a new version was needed, that it would find an audience, and that I was the person to do it. Initially, I was skeptical on all counts and reluctant to get involved in such a complex and massive research and translation project, something that then was rather far removed from the usual areas of my scholarly work. Now that the book is finished, I thank her for all that good advice and encouragement, without which it would never have happened. David Knechtges and Kidder Smith served as readers of the manuscript for Columbia University Press; their reports contained numerous helpful suggestions, many of which I was able to incorporate into the amended and corrected version. I am grateful for their comments and criticism. I also thank Sarah St. Onge for her fine contribution as manuscript editor. Her unflagging energy and zeal for consistency and clarity greatly improved the manuscript, and the patience and good humor she showed in carrying out this complicated and demanding task was most remarkable and very welcome.

The

Classic

of

Changes

Contents

Acknowledgments

ix

Introduction

I

General Remarks on the *Changes of the Zhou*, by Wang Bi

25

Commentary on the Appended Phrases, Part One

47

Commentary on the Appended Phrases, Part Two

75

Providing the Sequence of the Hexagrams

103

The Hexagrams in Irregular Order

113

Explaining the Trigrams

119

The Sixty-Four Hexagrams, with Texts and Commentaries

127

Bibliography

553

Glossary

557

List of Proper Nouns

575

Index

581

Introduction

The *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*) or *Changes of the Zhou* (*Zhouyi*) was originally a divination manual, which later gradually acquired the status of a book of wisdom. It consists of sixty-four hexagrams (*gua*) and related texts. The hexagrams, formed by combinations of two trigrams (also *gua*), are composed of six lines (*yao*) arranged one atop the other in vertical sequence and read from bottom to top. Each line is either solid (yang —) or broken (yin --). For example, Hexagram 59, *Huan* (Dispersion), is represented with the hexagram ☱☵: First Yin, Second Yang, Third Yin, Fourth Yin, Fifth Yang, Top Yang—the bottom trigram being *Kan* ☵ and the top trigram being *Sun* ☱. The combinations are determined by the numerical manipulation of divining sticks, originally yarrow stalks (*Achillea millefolium*, also known as *milfoil*) or, later, by the casting of coins. In the translation, each hexagram graph or schema appears at the head of the section devoted to the particular hexagram, immediately below the hexagram number.

It is likely that, by the time the *Changes* was put together as a coherent text in the ninth century B.C., hexagram divination had already changed from a method of consulting and influencing gods, spirits, and ancestors—the “powerful dead”—to a method of penetrating moments of the cosmic order to learn how the Way or Dao is configured and what direction it takes at such moments and to determine what one’s own place is and should be in the scheme of things. By doing so, one could avert wrong decisions, avoid failure, and escape misfortune and, on the other hand, make right decisions, achieve success, and garner good fortune. What exactly the Dao was in the thought of traditional China—at different times and with different thinkers—is a com-

Introduction

plex question. It was generally held throughout traditional Chinese society that Heaven was good and that human beings lived in a morally good universe—however it operated. Beyond that, it can only be said that a spectrum of opinion existed, at one end of which, the Dao—especially when it was understood as the manifestation of the will of Heaven—was seen as an unconscious and impersonal cosmic order that operated purely mechanistically, and, at the other, as something with a consciousness that heeded the plights of both humankind as a whole and the individual in particular and could answer collective and individual pleas for help and comfort. Although intellectual, elite culture tended to hold to the former view and popular culture favored the latter, much ambivalence concerning this issue can be found in the writings of many a sophisticated thinker.

Each hexagram is accompanied by a hexagram name (guaming), a hexagram statement (guaci) or “Judgment” (tuan), and line statements (yaoci) for each of the six lines. The line statements have a sequential or associational organization based on the general topic given in the Judgment; each states a specific, differentiated instance or variation of the topic, which in complete line statements (many statements seem to be fragments) is followed by a charge or injunction that one should take some action or refrain from it and a final determination (“misfortune,” “good fortune,” etc.).

The hexagrams, hexagram statements or Judgments, and line statements are the oldest parts of the *Changes*. The names and statements probably date from the ninth century B.C.—the hexagrams themselves may be much older—and constitute the first layer in what appears to be a three-layered text. The second layer consists of another two parts: commentary on the Judgments called Tuanzhuan and commentary on the abstract meanings or “Images” (xiang) of the Judgments and the line statements called Xiangzhuan. The Judgments have “Great Images” (Daxiang)—the abstract meanings of hexagrams as whole entities—and the line statements have “Little Images” (Xiaoxiang)—the abstract meanings of individual lines.

The traditional format of the *Changes* divides the Tuanzhuan and the Xiangzhuan each into two sections; together, they form the first four of the so-called Ten Wings (Shiyi) of the exegetical material included in the *Classic of Changes*. All Ten Wings are traditionally attributed to Confucius (551–479 B.C.); however,

individual Wings actually date from different periods, with some predating his time while others date from as late as the third century B.C. Only the Commentaries on the Judgments and Commentaries on the Images, which for the most part seem to date from the sixth or fifth century B.C., appear to have been the direct product of Confucius's school, if not the work of Confucius himself. The remaining Ten Wings consist of later materials, which may contain some reworking of earlier writings—even from before Confucius's time. These constitute the third layer of the *Changes*.

The fifth of the Ten Wings comprises two fragments of an apparently lost commentary on the hexagrams as a whole called the *Wenyan* (Commentary on the Words of the Text). Only those parts attached to the first two hexagrams—*Qian* (Pure Yang) and *Kun* (Pure Yin)—survived into the period of textual redaction, which began with the early Han era in the third century B.C. The Commentary on the Words of the Text actually seems to be a borderline text that contains elements of both the second and the third layers. It deals with the philosophical and ethical implications of the Judgments, line statements, and images—all very much in a Confucian vein.

The sixth and seventh Wings are formed by the two sections of the so-called Commentary on the Appended Phrases (*Xici zhuan*) or Great Commentary (*Da zhuan*). This commentary seems to consist of fragments of two different texts, one a general essay or group of essays dealing with the nature and meaning of the *Changes* in general and the other a collection of specific remarks about the Judgments and line statements of individual hexagrams (not all are discussed).¹

The eighth of the Ten Wings, Explaining the Trigrams (*Shuo gua*), consists of remarks on the nature and meaning of the eight trigrams (*bagua*), the permutations of which form the sixty-four hexagrams. Much of this is couched in terms of yin-yang dualism and the theory of the *wuxing* (five elements) and so probably dates from the early Han era (third century B.C.). It is among the latest of the exegetical materials included in the *Changes*.

The ninth Wing is Providing the Sequence of the Hexagrams (*Xugua*), a collection of remarks on each of the hexagrams that attempts to justify their order in terms of various etymological and rational considerations—often extremely farfetched. This also seems to be quite late material.

Introduction

The tenth Wing, the Hexagrams in Irregular Order (*Zagua*), is a collection of brief remarks that attempts to define the meanings of individual hexagrams, often in terms of contrasting pairs—another late addition to the text of the *Classic of Changes*.

Traditionally, the hexagrams are thought to have been developed by King Wen of the Zhou (reigned 1171–1122 B.C.) out of the eight trigrams invented by the legendary culture hero and sage Fu Xi of remotest antiquity. King Wen is also supposed to have composed the Judgments. The line statements are attributed to the Duke of Zhou (died 1094 B.C.). However, the assertion that historically identifiable sages are responsible for the origins of the hexagrams and the composition of the first layer of the material in the *Classic of Changes* has been questioned throughout the twentieth century, both in China and abroad, and more recent advances in archaeology, paleography, and textual studies, which compare the earliest textual layer of the *Changes* with roughly contemporary inscriptions on bone, shell, metal, and stone, as well as with other ancient writings that exhibit similar syntax and vocabulary, have thoroughly discredited the myth of its sagely authorship. Modern scholarship has also discovered that the original meaning of the Judgments and line statements—as they were composed sometime probably during the two or three centuries preceding their compilation and final editing during the ninth century B.C.—is radically different from what the earliest layer of exegesis took it to be and that it often has very little to do with the values and ideals of Confucian morality and ethics. Either the writers of the *Tuanzhuàn* (Commentary on the Judgments) and the *Xiangzhuàn* (Commentary on the Images) were ignorant of this original meaning—concerned largely with the mechanics of divination and (often) its amoral consequences—or they knowingly suppressed it in order to replace it with a Confucian (or proto-Confucian) reading. However, with this first layer of exegesis, the collection of texts, which eventually developed into the *Classic of Changes* as we know it, was given a Confucian slant that shaped all subsequent interpretation—right up to modern times. This largely Confucian reading required a radical revision of syntax and the meaning of individual words—even the way the texts are divided into phrases and clauses. Therefore the original meaning of the earliest parts of the *Changes* is not represented in the commentary tradition—except perhaps, distantly, in some

Qing dynasty (1644–1911) philological approaches to the *Classic of Changes*—and thus plays no part in this translation, either of the *Classic of Changes* itself or of the Wang Bi commentary.²

The Translation

This work consists of an integral translation of Wang Bi's (226–249) *Zhouyi zhu* (Commentary on the *Changes of the Zhou*), including Wang's interpretations of the sixty-four hexagrams (Judgments, line statements, Commentary on the Judgments, Commentary on the Images, and—for the first two hexagrams—the Commentary on the Words of the Text) and his treatise on the *Changes*, the *Zhouyi lueli* (General Remarks on the *Changes of the Zhou*). The work also contains the commentaries of Wang's latter-day disciple, Han Kangbo (d. ca. 385), on those parts of the *Changes* not commented on by Wang himself: the *Xici zhuan* (Commentary on the Appended Phrases), the *Xugua* (Providing the Sequence of the Hexagrams), the *Zagua* (The Hexagrams in Irregular Order), and the *Shuo gua* (Explaining the Trigrams). Han was not an original thinker, but his remarks consistently seem to reflect Wang's approach, and so, while in no way as vital and interesting as Wang's own commentary, they probably are reasonably close to the kinds of things Wang himself might have said if he had chosen to comment on these parts of the *Classic of Changes*.

All translations are based on texts included in Lou Yulie, ed., *Wang Bi jijiaoshi* (Critical edition of the works of Wang Bi with explanatory notes), 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980). Some passages in Wang Bi's commentary are dense, cryptic, and difficult to understand. Also, Wang did not comment on a few passages in the *Changes*, and it is unclear how he might have read particular phrases and sentences. Where I was uncertain or Wang was silent, I referred to the commentary on the *Changes* written by Kong Yingda (574–648), the *Zhouyi zhengyi* (Correct meaning of the *Changes of the Zhou*), largely a subcommentary to Wang's *Zhouyi zhu* (which is also included in the *Zhouyi zhengyi* in its entirety). Kong's commentary is often wordy and redundant, but he seems to have tried to read the *Changes* as he understood Wang to have read it, so his remarks are often the only guide to understanding the more cryptic passages in Wang's commentary and how Wang might have read

passages in the text on which he did not actually comment. References to and translated excerpts from Kong's *Zhouyi zhengyi* are included in endnotes, along with other explanatory materials. I have used the text of the *Zhouyi zhengyi* that is contained in the critical edition prepared by Ruan Yuan (1764–1849) of the *Shisanjing zhushu* (Commentaries and subcommentaries on the thirteen classics) (1815; reprint, Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1955).

As this translation of the *Classic of Changes* is based exclusively on the Wang Bi/Han Kangbo commentary and the subcommentary of Kong Yingda, it is significantly different in many places from other translations, which for the most part are principally derived directly or indirectly from some combination of the commentaries of the Neo-Confucians Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200). The most important of these are James Legge, *The Yi King; or, Book of Changes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882); Richard Wilhelm, *I Ging: Das Buch der Wandlungen* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1924), translated into English by Cary F. Baynes as *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950); and *I Ching: The Book of Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), translated by John Blofeld. Except for works that attempt to reconstruct the so-called original meaning of *Zhouyi* as a western Zhou document,³ most modern editions of the classic published in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, which often include translations or paraphrases into modern Chinese, also closely follow the commentaries of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. Modern Japanese and Korean studies and translations of the classic do much the same thing.

All this means that the contemporary reader of the *Changes*, regardless of the language in which it is read, will usually know it in some version largely shaped by Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. Therefore where my Wang Bi version differs significantly from the readings of Cheng and Zhu, I include appropriate references to and translated excerpts from their commentaries in the endnotes to the passages concerned so that the reader may compare the different readings. Cheng's commentary is called the *Yichuan Yizhuan* (Yichuan's Commentary on the *Changes*) and Zhu's is called the *Zhouyi benyi* (Original Meaning of the *Changes of the Zhou*). Both these commentaries are included in Li Guangdi (1642–1718), editor, *Yuzuan Zhouyi zhezong* (Compiled upon imperial order: Equitable judgments on interpretations of the

Changes of the Zhou) (1715; reprint, Taipei: Chengwen, 1975); all references to Cheng's and Zhu's commentaries are to this edition.

Wang Bi may be said to have written the first philosophical commentary on the *Changes*—that is, apart from those sections of the classic that are themselves commentaries. His approach synthesizes Confucian, Legalist, and Daoist views, with Confucian views predominant. His version of the *Changes* was extremely influential and became the orthodox interpretation during the course of the pre-Tang and Tang eras (fourth through tenth centuries A.D.) and was finally canonized in Kong Yingda's *Zhouyi zhengyi*. Although the commentaries of the later Neo-Confucians largely eclipsed Wang's interpretation, much of what he had to say was incorporated into what eventually became the official Neo-Confucian orthodox view of the *Changes*, and what they rejected also helped to shape that view. A comparison of Wang's commentary with those of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi reveals how carefully Cheng and Zhu must have read Wang's remarks and how his arguments tended to shape theirs, whether they agreed with him or not (the disagreements largely result from their rejection of what they perceived to be elements of Legalism and Daoism in Wang's thought). The synthetic Neo-Confucian version of the *Changes* that emerged after the thirteenth century would have been very different if there had been no Wang Bi commentary first.

A comparison of Wang's interpretation with those of Cheng and Zhu also helps to emancipate the *Changes* from the notion that it can only be understood and appreciated as a timeless book of wisdom that somehow came into existence and maintained itself outside history and that there is one perfect and unchanging meaning to be extracted from it, if we only knew how. The "book of wisdom" approach to the *Changes* in modern times is, of course, extremely prevalent, and, although we can credit it largely to the great popularity of the Wilhelm/Baynes version, which interprets the *Changes* in such terms and includes an enormously influential foreword by Carl Jung, it also derives from the fact that the *Changes* was canonized as one of the Confucian classics at the beginning of the tradition and that throughout the centuries commentators, Wang Bi among them, attempted to wrest from it some kind of perfect meaning that could serve its readers for all time.

Introduction

In my view, however, there is no one single *Classic of Changes* but rather as many versions of it as there are different commentaries on it. The text of the classic is so dense and opaque in so many places that its meaning depends entirely on how any particular commentary interprets it. Some interpretations, especially those of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, have become standard and orthodox, but the authority they carry, it seems to me, was derived not from any so-called perfect reading of the text but from the fact that the Cheng-Zhu version of Neo-Confucianism became the cultural and intellectual orthodoxy of traditional China; thus their commentaries, including those on the *Changes*, had to be correct. My approach to the *Changes* is entirely different. The commentary of Wang Bi is the historical product of a certain time and place—as are those of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi or anyone else—a product that can tell us much about the development of Chinese intellectual thought during a particularly creative period of the tradition. It stands in great contrast to the later commentaries of the Song Neo-Confucians, the products of a different but equally creative age, and its presentation in the form of an integral English translation—with comparisons with the commentaries of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi—should, it is hoped, reveal how much variety and vitality traditional Chinese thought could achieve.

In preparing this translation, I have tried—as much as it is within my capabilities—to be true to the literal meaning of the texts involved and to re-create the original tone of discourse that pervades them. Thus there has been no attempt to modernize what is being said, no effort to avoid offending contemporary sensibilities and values shaped by democracy, egalitarianism, individualism, feminism, or any other movement that might affect the way we think, feel, and express ourselves. There is much in the way Wang Bi and the other commentators cited here approached the *Changes* that can offend contemporary values and sensibilities, for what they said was the product of a culture that took for granted certain things that now largely do not go unquestioned:

1. Human society is *by nature* hierarchical.
2. The state is the family writ large, and the family is the state in miniature.
3. Both state and family are *by nature* patriarchies.

4. The universe is dualistic *by nature*; everything in it has either a yin or a yang character and exhibits—or, more precisely should exhibit—either yin or yang behavior.
5. Human society—as a *natural* part of the universe—is also characterized by yin-yang dualism.

Superiors are yang, and subordinates are yin, and they should fill their respective roles accordingly. Yang is the hard and strong, the assertive, the authority, the initiator, the male; yin is the soft and yielding, the submissive, the one subject to authority, the follower, the female. Political roles are conceived analogously: rulers are like fathers, the ruled masses like children; the sovereign is to his minister as a husband is to his wife; a senior official is to his subordinate as an older brother is to a younger brother; a subordinate should be submissive and loyal—that is, exhibit “female” behavior, and so on. Such assumptions are readily apparent throughout the commentaries; any translation that attempts an accurate reconstruction of the original tone and meaning could not possibly ignore or suppress them. For instance, when choosing equivalents in English, the use of gender-neutral terms for such a patriarchal mode of discourse would be entirely out of place.

How then should one read this translation of a Chinese classic and its commentaries, rooted as they are in value-laden assumptions that many may find, if not alien and offensive, at least out of date and superfluous? The work is so rich in meaning that it should be read on several levels. To get at this richness, I suggest that the reader accept the historical reality of the text’s assumptions, let them inform a historical appreciation of traditional Chinese society, and then bracket or put them aside and allow the work to address the primary issues with which it is concerned: the interrelatedness of personal character and destiny; how position defines scope of action; how position and circumstances define appropriate modes of behavior; how the individual is always tied to others in a web of interconnected causes and effects; how one set of circumstances inevitably changes into another; and how change itself is the great constant—and flexible response to it the only key to happiness and success. There is a core of insights here concerning the structure of human relationships and individual behavior that can, I believe, speak to this and any other age—if we but allow it to do so.