Zhu Xi's Reading of the *Yijing*[1]

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The *Yi*

The well-known 1973 discovery of a cache of silk manuscripts in a Former Han dynasty tomb at Mawangdui included several texts associated with the *Yijing* 易經. Besides a hitherto unknown version of the *Zhouyi* 周易 itself (i.e. the basic or core text of the *Yijing*), they included a version of the *Xici* 繫辭 (Appended Remarks) appendix and four unknown commentaries.[2] One of these, called *Yao* 要 (Essentials), contains an interesting dialogue between Confucius and his disciple, Zigong 子貢, who asks whether Confucius believes in milfoil divination. Part of Confucius' reply reads:

> If men of later generations doubt me, Qiu [i.e. Confucius], perhaps it will be because of the *Yi*. I seek the virtue in it, no more. I am one who shares a path with the scribe/astrologers and shamans [i.e. diviners], but whose final destination is different. How can the virtuous conduct of the gentleman be intended to seek fortune [happiness, *fu* 福]? Thus his performance of sacrificial worship is infrequent. How can his humaneness and sense of duty be intended to seek auspices [good fortune, *ji* 吉]? Thus his performance of turtle and milfoil

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[1] Parts of this chapter are adapted from the Introduction to my translation of Zhu Xi's commentary (Adler [2020]) and from chapter 6 of Smith, et. al. (1990).

[2] All of these have been translated by Edward L. Shaughnessy (1997). The *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳 (Treatise on the Appended Remarks), also known as the *Da zhuan* 大傳 (Great Treatise), is the most philosophically rich and influential appendix of the *Yi*. It is not a commentary, but rather a collection of statements about the *Yi* as a whole and how it functions as both an oracle and a book containing the most fundamental natural and moral principles.

> divination is rare. Does not the turtle and milfoil divination of the incantors and shamans come after this?[3]

This dialogue expresses a certain tension between two ways of reading the *Yijing*: as a divination text concerned with seeking happiness and good fortune, and as a compendium of insight into the moral implications of natural patterns and guidance for living a virtuous life. Confucius justifies his occasional use of the *Yi* for divination on the basis of its moral wisdom, clearly subordinating the former to the latter.

A bit of historical background is necessary to fully appreciate this apocryphal anecdote. The basic text of the *Zhouyi* is generally thought to have reached its present state by about the 9th or 8th century BCE. The basic text consists of the hexagrams (*gua* 卦) attributed to the primal sage Fuxi 伏羲, the hexagram texts (*guaci* 卦辭) attributed to King Wen of the Zhou dynasty, and the line texts (*yaoci* 爻辭) attributed to the Duke of Zhou (i.e. the short texts accompanying each of the six lines of each hexagram). These layers of what became the *Yijing* constituted a divination text with very little if any moral content. Over the course of several centuries various other texts came to be associated with the *Zhouyi*, some of them commentaries and others more loosely connected to the basic text. By the late Warring States period seven of these came to be considered "appendices" or "wings" of the basic divination text, eventually being called the "Ten Wings" (*shiyi* 十翼) (because three are each divided into two parts that are counted separately). The combined text, consisting of the *Zhouyi* plus the Ten Wings, came to be called the *Yijing*.[4] It was canonized by Emperor Wu of the Han (r. 140-87 BCE) as one of the "Five Classics" or "Five Scriptures" (*wujing* 五經).[5]

The addition of the Ten Wings to the *Zhouyi* added a moral, philosophical dimension, much of it Confucian, that had not been there before. The dialogue between Confucius and

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[3] Trans. Donald Harper (1999: 826). For the complete text in Chinese and English see Shaughnessy (1997: 24-25, 236-243).

[4] Many Chinese scholars follow a different convention, calling the basic text *Yijing* to distinguish it from the Ten Wings, which they call *Yizhuan* 易傳 (*Yi* commentaries), and the two together *Zhouyi*.

[5] For a fuller but concise account of the history and composition of the *Yijing* see Adler (2022: chs. 1-2).

Zigong excerpted above, found in a tomb sealed in 168 BCE, was probably written during the late Warring States period or early Han, placing it *after* the circulation of at least most of the Ten Wings and the resultant "Confucianization" of the *Yi*. By this time the Ten Wings had come to be attributed to Confucius, and the author of our dialogue undoubtedly took that for granted. But according to modern scholarship's dating of the Ten Wings, Confucius (551-479 BCE) lived *before* their composition, so his reference to the moral guidance to be found in the *Yi* is anachronistic.

Zhu's theory of the *Yi*

The tension between the *Yi* as a divination manual and the *Yi* as a book of wisdom can also been seen in modern views of Zhu Xi's understanding of the *Yijing*. The first point that most students and scholars learn about the topic is that he considered the *Yi* to be "just" a divination manual. The implication is that unlike, say, Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) and Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), both of whom wrote important commentaries elucidating the philosophical meaning and moral guidance of the *Yi*, Zhu Xi's opinion of the text was somewhat dismissive. Divination of all sorts, according to this assumption, was performed in the context of practical, if not mundane, goals, such as long life and wealth – the happiness and good fortune mentioned by Confucius in his reply to Zigong. The superior person (*junzi* 君子), on the other hand, placed virtue over self-serving and practical goals, seeking to benefit the greater world beyond his or her own person and family.

Another assumption often made by students and scholars of Zhu Xi is that he was a philosopher in the traditional Western sense – perhaps a religious philosopher, like Thomas Aquinas, but still a philosopher more than a religious practitioner. This assumption has been abetted by an unspoken scholarly agenda among both Chinese and Western schoolars. Many of the most prominent Chinese scholars who came of age during the first decades of the 20th century were influenced by the New Culture and May Fourth movements. These movements, adopting many of the European Enlightenment values that had become so powerful in the 18th century, took science and democracy as their chief guiding principles and were strongly opposed to what they called "superstition" (*mixin* 迷信) as distinct from legitimate religion (a dichotomy that is considered problematic today). Since the European Enlightenment was a reaction against

the stultifying effects of religious (Christian) dogma, religion in general came into bad repute in 20th century China. Rational, critical philosophy (*zhexue* 哲學, a word coined by Japanese translators of Western documents just a few decades earlier), on the other hand, had flourished in the Enlightenment and was seen as a crucial element in the important task of modernizing China. Philosophy stood for modernity, while religion was "tradition."[6] A subtext, therefore, of the 20th century histories of Chinese philosophy, such as those by Feng Youlan and Wing-tsit Chan, was that China had a philosophical tradition every bit as rich and sophisticated as the history of Western philosophy, and thus deserved to be taken seriously in the modern intellectual world.[7] Many Western scholars share the same bias for philosophy over religion, although for somewhat different reasons. In general they do not share the motivation to demonstrate China's modernization, but they too have been strongly influenced by Enlightenment values, and many assume that modernity is uniquely Western.[8]

When one begins to actually read Zhu Xi's writings and recorded conversations on the *Yijing*, any notion that he regarded divination as irrelevant to his "deeper" philosophical ideas quickly dissipates. First of all, one may be surprised at the sheer volume of material available to us. In addition to his two published books on the *Yi* – the *Yixue qimeng* 易學啟蒙 (Introduction to the Study of the *Yi*) from 1186 and the *Zhouyi benyi* 周易本義 (Original Meaning of the *Zhouyi*) from 1188[9] -- a very large section of the *Zhuzi yulei* (Master Zhu's Classified Conversations) is devoted to the *Yi*. The *Yulei* contains 38 named topics, one of which is the *Yi*. The single topic filling the largest number of pages is the *Lunyu* (Analects), covering roughly 24% of the entire collection. The *Yi* is the second largest, filling 11%. (The next largest is the

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6 Yet another questionable assumption, along with the idea that modernization in East Asia meant Westernization. See Tu Weiming (1996: 1-10).

7 See Fung (1952-53) and Chan (1963).

8 Another factor contributing to the bias for philosophy over religion among historians of Chinese thought is the fact that the academic study of religion, as distinct from theology, did not fully develop until roughly the 1960s. The anthropological study of religion had begun in the late 19th century, and the sociology of religion in the early 20th, but neither of these approaches focus on religious thought. Theology of course does focus on thought, but, unlike religious studies, does so from the perspective of a particular religious tradition, accepting its fundamental truth claims, such as the existence of God.

9 I have translated both of these in Adler (2002) and (2020).

Mengzi [Mencius], covering 7%.) Zhu's other main collection, the *Zhuzi wenji* (Master Zhu's Collected Papers), cannot be analyzed in this way because it is organized by literary genre, not by topic. But Zhu discussed the *Yi* in many letters, prefaces, colophons, and miscellaneous essays, as well as some poems. Throughout these writings and conversations his repeated dictum is, "The *Yi* was originally created for divination" (*Yi ben wei bushi er zuo* 易本為卜筮而作). That is not, however, a dismissal of the *Yi*'s relevance to Zhu Xi's overall project of learning to become a sage. It is in fact a basic hermeneutical principle designed to guide practitioners of *daoxue* in the proper *use* of the *Yi* as an aid in their self-realization.

"The *Yi* was originally created for divination" is a claim found dozens of times in Zhu's *Classified Conversations* and *Collected Papers*, and refers specifically to Fuxi's original creation of the hexagram divination method.[10] He announced his discovery of the idea in 1175 in a letter to his close friend, Zhang Shi 張栻 (1133-1180):

> I recently had an idea about how to read the *Yi*. When the sage [Fuxi] created the *Yi* it originally was to cause people to engage in divination, in order to decide what was permissible or not in their behavior, and thereby to teach people to be good.... Thus the hexagram and line statements are based simply on the images (*Zhuzi wenji* 31:1350).[11]

The premise of this interpretive theory is the myth, taken as an historical datum by Zhu Xi, of Fuxi's creation of the *Yi*. The myth, as told in the *Xici*, goes as follows:

> In ancient times, when Baoxi [Fuxi] ruled all under Heaven, he looked up and contemplated the images (*xiang* 象) in Heaven; he looked down and contemplated the patterns (*fa* 法) on Earth; he contemplated the markings (*wen* 文) of the birds and beasts and their fitness [i.e. adaptation] to the earth. From nearby he took

[10] See especially chapter 66 of the *Zhuzi yulei*. Zhu Xi believed that Fuxi created all sixty-four hexagrams, not just the eight trigrams. In premodern times this was a minority view, but recent scholars are coming to agree that the hexagrams preceded the trigrams. See Adler (2020: 3, 53, 324 n11).

[11] In the context of Zhu Xi's other writings and comments about the origin of the *Yi*, it is clear that he is referring here to Fuxi alone, not including King Wen and the Duke of Zhou.

> from his own body; from afar he took from things. In this way he first created the Eight Trigrams, to spread the power/virtue (*de* 德) of his spiritual clarity (*shenming* 神明) and to classify the dispositions of the myriad things (*Xici* B.2.1).[12]

From this and later accounts of the contributions of King Wen, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius, Zhu Xi constructed his understanding of the history and purposes of the *Yi*:

> The *Yi* was originally created for divination. Thus Confucius [in *Xici* A.10.1] said, "The *Yi* contains the Way of the Sages in four respects: in speech we honor its phrases" (Master Cheng's discussions are an example of this);[13] "in activity we honor its fluctuations" (this is divination. The *Yi*'s fluctuations are prognostications; thus it says, "The superior person at rest contemplates the images and appreciates the remarks; in activity he contemplates the fluctuations and appreciates the prognostications" [*Xici* A.2.6]); "in making implements we honor its images" [referring to thirteen specific hexagrams][14]; "in divining we honor its prognostications." The remarks of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou are all about divination (*Zhuzi yulei* 67:2226).
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> The *Yi* was originally created for divination. Ancient people were unsophisticated and originally had no writing. Therefore he [Fuxi] drew the hexagram lines to

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[12] Adler (2020: 287). In another myth, "The River Chart (*Hetu* 河圖) emerged from the Yellow River on a dragon-horse when Fuxi ruled the world. He accordingly took its design as a model and drew the Eight Trigrams." This comes from Kong Anguo 孔安國 (2nd century BCE) in his commentary on the *Shujing* (Scripture of Documents), which is quoted by Zhu Xi in the first chapter of his *Yixue qimeng* 易學啟蒙 (Introduction to the Study of the *Yi*) (Adler [2002]: 3). He subordinates this version to the one quoted earlier, however, by saying that Fuxi understood the principles, images, and numbers independently of the River Chart and Luo Text (*Luoshu* 洛書) (*Zhuzi yulei* 67:2211). The larger point is that Fuxi's examination of the natural world is, for Zhu Xi, a mythic paradigm of "investigating things" (*ge wu* 格物).

[13] These parenthetical remarks are all by Zhu Xi.

[14] *Xici* B.2 tells how the ancient Sages -- Fuxi, Shennong (the Divine Farmer), the Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun – invented various cultural implements and customs on the basis of thirteen hexagrams.

> "disclose things and complete undertakings." Thus [the *Xici*] says, "What does the *Yi* do? The *Yi* discloses things, completes undertakings, and encompasses the Ways of all under Heaven; that is all" [*Xici* A.11.1]. This is the *Yi*'s overall intention (*da yi* 大意) (*Zhuzi yulei* 66:2179).
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> People reading the *Yi* today should divide it into three levels: Fuxi's *Yi*, King Wen's *Yi*, and Confucius' *Yi*. If one reads Fuxi's *Yi* as if there were no *Tuan* 彖, *Xiang* 象, and *Wenyan* 文言 discussions, then one will be able to see that the original intention (*benyi* 本意) of the *Yi* was to create the practice of divination (*Zhuzi yulei* 66:2190).[15]

Zhu Xi insisted that people in his time needed the assistance of the ancient sages in their efforts of moral self-cultivation, and so they should take into account the sages' "original intention" in creating the *Yi*. Fuxi had created the hexagrams explicitly for the purpose of divination. King Wen and the Duke of Zhou had written the hexagram and line statements as aids for people to use in interpreting the hexagrams they received in divination. Confucius had written the Ten Wings (Zhu thought) as further interpretive aids and (in the case of the *Xici*) to explain the theory underlying the mechanism and purpose of divination. "The *Yi* was originally created for divination," not as a book of moral principle or moral guidance simply to be read – even though its textual layers do contain valuable moral principle and guidance. But that guidance in the process of self-cultivation was intended to be accessed *through and only through* the mechanism of divination. When done properly, said Zhu Xi, divination "enables everyone from kings and dukes to the common people to use it for self-cultivation and ordering the state."[16] In this way Zhu integrated the practice of milfoil divination with his philosophical system of mind (*xin* 心), nature (*xing* 性), and self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身). The *Yijing*, for

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[15] The *Tuan*, *Xiang*, and *Wenyan* are three of the most important commentaries included among the Ten Wings.

[16] Zhu Xi (1713: 27:12a). "Self-cultivation" (*xiushen* 修身) and "ordering the state" (*zhiguo* 治國) are two of the eight stages of the "Great Learning" (*Daxue* 大學).

Zhu Xi, was *both* a book of divination and a book of "philosophy" – the latter primarily in the Ten Wings, especially the *Xici*.

In addition to Zhu Xi's focus on divination, he was particularly interested in correcting the interpretive approach to the *Yi* taken by Wang Bi – the "orthodox" commentator for the past nine hundred years – and by Zhu's honored predecessor, Cheng Yi. By the Song period two "schools" of *Yijing* interpretation had developed, called *xiangshu* 象數 (image and number) and *yili* 義理 (meaning and principle). *Xiangshu* was the earlier one, first flourishing in the Han dynasty with such figures as Meng Xi 孟喜 (1st century BCE) and Jing Fang 京房 (77-37 BCE). *Xiangshu* focused on the trigrams and hexagrams, their developmental and transformational relations, their numerological values, and their symbolic correlations with a variety of cosmological categories and diagrams (*tu* 圖) associated with the *Yi*. Its methods posited various relationships within and among the hexagrams and cosmological relationships (a form of correlative cosmology) with various natural phenomena, particularly time or seasons. It resembled in some respects the European Hermetic traditions that flourished from about the 3rd through the 16th centuries, which involved alchemy, kabbalah, magic, Christian symbolism, and other esoteric elements.[17]

By the end of the Han dynasty *xiangshu* methods had begun to appear mind-bogglingly esoteric to more rationalistically-inclined readers, such as Wang Bi, who was the first notable exponent of *yili* interpretation. He rejected the whole *xiangshu* approach and focused instead on finding meaning in the textual levels of the *Yi*, including the basic text and the appendices, rathern than the graphic levels (trigrams and hexagrams). His commentary became the standard for at least eight hundred years, including its incorporation into the official Tang edition of the Five Classics, the *Wujing zhengyi* 五經正義(Correct Meaning of the Five Classics), compiled by

[17] For Hermeticism see, for example, Roob (1997) and Copenhaver (1992). For early *xiangshu* practitioners see Adler (2022: 76-90).

Kong Yingda 孔穎達 in 651.[18] To summarize, the *xiangshu* method finds meaning in the graphic elements of the *Yi*, while the *yili* method focuses on the textual levels.

Both the *xiangshu* and *yili* approaches had prominent exponents in the Northern Song: Shao Yong 邵雍 and Cheng Yi, respectively. Shao revived interest in the *Hetu* (River Chart) and *Luoshu* (Luo Text), which had been discussed in late Han texts, especially the so-called "*Yi* apocrypha" (*Yiwei* 易緯). These were numerological diagrams using black and white dots to symbolized even (*yin*) and odd (*yang*) numbers, which could be correlated with trigrams, directions, and seasons (although their connection to the *Yi* was not obvious). He also promulgated what he called the "Prior to Heaven" (*xiantian* 先天) (or *a priori*) sequences of trigrams and hexagrams, which ordered the figures in what today is recognized as a binary numbering system (using only two digits, 0 and 1, instead of the ten [0-9] used in the decimal number system).[19] Cheng Yi followed Wang Bi's use of the *yili* approach, focusing primarily on the textual levels to derive moral guidance for proper behavior by the superior person, who by implication was literate. His lengthy commentary, today usually known as *Yichuan Yizhuan* 伊川易傳 ([Cheng] Yichuan's Commentary on the *Yi*), became very influential from the early 12th century onward.

Zhu Xi rejected both the *xiangshu* and *yili* approaches as they had been practiced up to his time, saying that they both, in different ways, expressed partial views of the *Yi*. The *xiangshu* commentators, especially those of the Han, recognized the importance of the graphic imagery and its correlations, but failed to apply it to human affairs. They were, he said, "mired in muck" and "bound by forced associations."[20] In this respect he agreed with Wang Bi, who was put off by the arbitrariness of *xiangshu* analysis. The *yili* commentators, on the other hand, while correctly focusing on the moral principles that could be discerned in or inferred from the *Yi*, ignored the textual levels' concrete referent, namely the hexagrams, their configurations, and

[18] It remained influential long after, and was also incorporated into the Qing dynasty collection, *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Commentaries and Subcommentaries on the Thirteen Classics), compiled by Ruan Yuan 阮元 in 1815.

[19] See, e.g., Adler (2022: 96-109).

[20] Zhu Xi (1532: 67:3255) and (1186: 1:209).

their imagery. This allowed the text to be used as simply a screen on which to project the commentator's own ideas. Since "the hexagram and line statements are based simply on the images," Zhu Xi felt that the graphic images – particularly the *yin-yang* and positional characteristics of the hexagrams and lines – required as much attention as the texts. And since Fuxi had created only the images, discerning his authentic intentions required seeing them in those images, without the help of the later explanations by King Wen, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius. In this way Zhu combined the *xiangshu* and *yili* interpretive approaches into a new, synthetic hermeneutic.

In the remainder of this essay I will address two questions arising from Zhu Xi's theory of the *Yi*: (1) how does Zhu understand divination; and (2) how is his theory of the *Yi* reflected in his commentary, the *Zhouyi benyi*?

Divination: incipience and sagehood

Chapter 24 of the *Zhongyong* reads as follows:

> The Way of utmost authenticity (*cheng* 誠) enables one to foreknow.[21] When a state or family is about to rise up there will necessarily be omens of good fortune. When a state or family is about to fall, there will necessarily be unlucky omens. They will be seen in the milfoil and tortoise and in [involuntary] movements of the four limbs. When misfortune and good fortune are about to arrive, both the good and the bad will necessarily be known. Therefore one who is most authentic is like a spirit (*shen* 神).

In his commentary on this passage Zhu says of the various types of divination and foreknowledge mentioned here:

[21] Zhu Xi understood "being authentic" (*cheng*) as thinking and acting in perfect accordance with one's moral nature.

> These are all premonitions of principle (*lizhi xianjian* 理之先見). But only one whose authenticity is extreme, and who hasn't the slightest selfish artifice left in his mind's eye, is able to examine the incipiencies (*cha qiji* 察其幾) therein.[22]

Thus divination is a matter of examining incipiencies" (*ji* 幾), an ability possessed only by one with utmost authenticity (*cheng* 誠), which according to Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 is the key identifying characteristic of a sage. In his commentary on Zhou's *Tongshu* 通書 (Penetrating the *Scripture of Change*, section 3) Zhu says:

> Incipience is the imperceptible [beginning] of activity. It is that according to which good and evil are differentiated. For at the imperceptible [beginning] of activity in the human mind/heart, the natural order (*tianli* 天理) will certainly be found right there; yet human desires (*renyu* 人欲) will also have sprouted within it. Integrity has no activity, and so it is simply good. In movement there is activity, and so there is good and there is evil.[23]

The incipient phase of mental activity is the point at which the mind has just been stimulated (*gan* 感), but no response (*ying* 應) has yet appeared.[24] As Zhou Dunyi says, "Movement with yet no form, between being and nonbeing, is incipience."[25] It is the juncture between the still substance (*ti* 體) of the mind – the nature (*xing* 性), or the principle (*li* 理) of being human -- and its active functioning (*yong* 用), and thus is the critical point at which either evil human desires or the original goodness of heavenly principle and human nature can become actualized.

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[22] *Zhongyong zhangzhu* 17b, in Zhu (1190).

[23] Zhou (1708: 5.10b).

[24] Alluding to a line in the *Xici* (A.10.4) that Zhu quoted often: *jiran budong, gan er sui tong*" 寂然不動, 感而遂通 ("silent and inactive; when stimulated it then penetrates"). See Adler (2014: 86).

[25] Zhou (1708: 5.17b) (*Tongshu*, ch.4).

The moment of incipient mental activity at the "birth of a thought"[26] is the point at which the creative pattern of Heaven manifests itself. Knowledge of incipient activity is tantamount to foreknowledge or oracular knowledge, since the character *and direction* of future events is present in incipient form. Furthermore, there is a moral incentive to pay attention to the incipient phase of mind, and a sense of urgency in Zhu Xi's exhortation to do so:

> Incipiencies, or the subtle indications of activity, lie between desiring to act and imminent activity, where there is both good and evil. One must understand them at this point. If they reach the point of becoming manifest, then one cannot help anything.... The point of subtle incipience is extremely important.[27]

> At that moment, one must exhaustively examine [oneself] and recognize what is right and wrong. At first there will be tiny, brief, subtle indications. When one has exhaustively examined oneself for a long time, one will gradually see their full extent. As it is Heaven [i.e. it is natural], it is moral principle. The gaps in it determine the incipient, subtle indications and differentiate good and evil. If one can analyze it in this way, then "things will be investigated" and "knowledge perfected." With perfected knowledge, "intentions will be made sincere." With sincere intentions, the "mind will be rectified," the "self will be cultivated," the "family will be regulated", the "state will be well-governed," and "all under Heaven will be at peace."[28]

In terms of Zhu Xi's system of self-cultivation, the incipient phase of mental activity is when one must cognitively distinguish one's good feelings, ideas, and intentions from the bad ones (e.g. selfish desires). This is self-examination (*xing cha* 省察). One must then follow through on that discrimination by actively preserving and nourishing (*cun yang* 存養) the good

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[26] Zhou (1708: 5.11b) (a comment by Zhu Xi on Zhou's *Tongshu*, ch.3).

[27] Zhou (1708: 5.12b).

[28] Zhou (1708: 5.12a). Note that these are the eight stages of the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*).

mental phenomena and conquering or subduing (*ke* 克己) the evil ones.[29] A student of Zhu Xi's summarized the implications of incipience for moral cultivation as follows:

> Master Zhou said, "In being authentic there is no activity; in incipience there is good and evil." This clarifies the unexpressed (*weifa* 未發) substance of the human mind, and refers to the beginnings of its expressed (*yifa* 已發) phase. He probably wanted students to extend their [self-]examination to the subtle signs of germinal activity, to understand how to decide which to extirpate and which to adopt, so as not to lose [contact with] the original substance.... Students should be able to examine the predilections and aversions of what is expressed [by the mind], right at the time of the incipient subtleties of germinal activity. What comes out straight [i.e. as true, direct expression of the authentic human nature] is the principle of Heaven; what comes out deviant is human desire. ... We should take advantage of and find guidance in what comes out straight, and extinguish what comes out deviant. When this effort is perfected, then the expression of our mind will spontaneously come out on course, and will ensure our possession of Heaven's decree (*tianming* 天命) ....
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> The Teacher [Zhu Xi] replied: This explanation has got it.[30]

In summary, Zhu Xi understood *Yijing* divination to be an instrument for the detection of incipient psycho-physical activity, both in external events and within oneself. Incipience is the critical point at which moral principle begins to manifest itself, but has not yet become actualized in concrete phenomena. Divination focused internally can contribute to self-knowledge; focused externally it allows one to harmonize one's activity more effectively with the flow of events. One can also more effectively exercise control or mastery (*zhu* 主) over events in their incipient phase.

In Zhu Xi's system, therefore, the *Yi* could contribute to self-cultivation in the following ways:

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[29] These terms come from *Mencius* 7A.1 and *Analects* 12.1.

[30] Zhou (1708: 5.13b-15a).

(1) It could enable one to "settle doubts"(*Xici* A.11.1) about one's behavior by indicating which course of action would be auspicious and which inauspicious. This was the most basic function of the *Yi*, the one most directly implied by Fuxi's original intention: "The Sage created the *Yi* to teach others to act when prognostications are auspicious, and not to act when inauspicious" (*Zhuzi yulei* 66: 2575).

(2) On a deeper level, the *Yi* could serve to heighten one's sensitivity or moral responsiveness (*ying*) to one's environment by teaching one how to detect, interpret, and respond to incipiencies external to oneself. In other words, moral responsiveness is the internalized capacity to choose correct courses of action. This involves self-knowledge as well as knowledge of external events, for moral responsiveness to the social and natural environment must be based on an integrated understanding of self and world.[31]

(3) The *Yi* also provided a means of acquiring self-knowledge ("self-examination," i.e. learning to become aware of one's ideas, intentions and feelings in their incipient phases, by means of divination, and (4) morally purifying these mental phenomena by learning -- with the guidance of the sages' interpretations of the hexagrams -- how to distinguish the good ones from the bad, and how to "preserve and nourish" the former and "conquer" or extirpate the latter.

Thus Zhu Xi defined the legitimate uses of the *Yijing* in the context of the pursuit of Confucian sagehood, and more specifically in the context of "rectifying the mind." While in the Northern Song the *Yi*, along with the Four Books, had begun to receive greater philosophical attention than it had previously,[32] Zhu Xi refocused attention on the practical use of the *Yi* as a manual of divination, reinterpreting this ancient ritual in terms of his theory of mind and incorporating it into his religious-philosophical system.

Theory in practice: the *Zhouyi benyi*

As mentioned earlier, Zhu Xi came up with his basic hermeneutic principle for the *Yi* in 1175. Two years later, according to his chroniclers, he completed a commentary on it, but all that

[31] For a fuller discussion of moral responsiveness see Smith, et. al. (1990: 190-194).

[32] See Gardner (1986: 12-14).

has survived is its preface.[33] In 1186 he published the *Yixue qimeng* (Introduction to the Study of the *Yi*), in which he recreates the sketchy method of divination found in the *Xici* appendix (A.9), explains in detail how to go about practicing divination, and also explains the numerology and symbolism of various diagrams associated with the *Yi* -- relying heavily on the *xiangshu* and divination expert Shao Yong. The *Zhouyi benyi* was completed in 1188. Together the *Yixue qimeng* and the *Zhouyi benyi* constitute an example of Zhu Xi as "the great synthesizer" of the Confucian tradition – in this case synthesizing the two schools of *Yijing* interpretation into something new. Partly for this reason, Zhu Xi's commentary quickly overshadowed all previous ones, including that of Cheng Yi – even though both were included in the Qing dynasty edition sponsored by the Kangxi Emperor, the *Zhouyi zhezhong* 周易折中 (*Yijing* Judged Evenly), in 1716. According to Bent Nielsen, between 1265 and 1918 at least thirty editions of the *Zhouyi benyi* were published in China alone.[34]

Although the *Zhouyi benyi* draws from both the *xiangshu* and *yili* traditions, it would be fair to say that it is closer to the latter. The overlap with *xiangshu* is primarily on the general level of paying close attention to the graphic elements of the *Yi*: the lines, trigrams, and hexagrams. Its attention to numerology and symbolism is found mainly in the "Nine Diagrams" prefaced to the commentary, four of which are also found in the *Yixue qimeng*.[35] Wang Bi and Cheng Yi, by contrast, paid little if any attention to either the graphic dimensions or divination.

Zhu's chief objections to the *yili* commentaries of Wang Bi and Cheng Yi are reflected in the *Zhouyi benyi* in three principal ways: (1) the arrangement of the text, (2) the type of comments Zhu Xi made, and (3) his frequent references to divination.

Originally the Ten Wings or appendices had been separate works. As mentioned earlier, Wang Bi and Cheng Yi collated several of them with the hexagrams, obscuring the differences between "Fuxi's *Yi*," "King Wen's *Yi*," and "Confucius' *Yi*," as Zhu put it. He therefore returned to the "Old *Yi*" arrangement, with all the appendices intact and separate from the basic text.

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[33] These are the conclusions of Shu Jingnan (2001: 594, 911). In some earlier writings (including Adler [2002]) I have used the prior consensus view of 1177 as the date of the *Zhouyi benyi*.

[34] Nielsen (2003: 342).

[35] Adler (2014: 42).

Wang Bi had collated four appendices (the *Tuan*, *Daxiang*, *Xiaoxiang*, and *Wenyan*) with the hexagrams in order to "use the appendices to explain the basic text."[36] By placing the relevant commentary passages together with the hexagram and line statements, he tried to enable the reader to focus on and grasp the essential idea or intent (*yi* 意) expressed by each hexagram. His aim was to help the reader understand the *Yi* as a unified system, expressing the principle of bipolar change on the indeterminate ground of the *dao*.[37] Cheng Yi, in the eleventh century, agreed with Wang Bi concerning the primacy of the text over the images, and he used the same arrangement, adding the *Xugua* (Sequence of Hexagrams) appendix at the beginning of each comment to show how the hexagram fit into the overall, unified process or principle (*li* 理) of change.[38] Like Wang Bi, he was "concerned to demonstrate the unitariness underlying all phenomena, not only in general terms but in specific instances."[39]

Zhu Xi felt that collating the appendices with the hexagrams obscured the actual history and authorship of the text and thereby made it more difficult to discern its "original meaning" as he understood it. Fuxi, he felt, was the most important author because it was he who had intuited the linkage between the natural patterns symbolized by the lines and hexagrams and their moral meanings. This non-duality of natural principle (*tianli* 天理) and moral principle (*daoli* 道理) was, in my view, the key to Zhu Xi's moral metaphysics and, one can argue, the key to the whole edifice of Confucian ethics, especially *vis-à-vis* Daoism and Buddhism.[40] He therefore published the *Zhouyi benyi* with the appendices separate from the hexagrams, hexagram texts, and line texts, following the example of his friend and colleague Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137-1181). This was fully consistent with his general hermeneutic theory, as a corollary to his insistence on the

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[36] See T'ang Yung-t'ung (1947: 135).

[37] See Arthur F. Wright (1947).

[38] See Hon (2005: 121-123).

[39] Kidder Smith, in Smith, et. al., *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*, 159.

[40] This is obviously a large topic, which I have discussed in Adler (2014: ch. 1). My identification of *tianli* and *daoli* as natural principle and moral principle is my own; the terms were not used consistently in this way by Song Confucians, and were in fact sometimes used synonymously. I think they are fitting, however, because *tian* (Heaven) often implies the natural world (as Xunzi used it, and in expressions like *tiandi* [heaven-and-earth]), while *dao* in Confucian usage usually has moral connotations, as a normative Way.

original intention of the *Yi*; he felt it more accurately reflected the history of the *Yi*'s compilation, beginning with "Fuxi's *Yi*," which consisted solely of hexagrams. The arrangement therefore better represented the original intentions of the *Yi*'s sagely creators.

Zhu's arrangement does, however, obscure the connections among the various levels of the *Yi*. For example, the *Daxiang* (Greater Image) appendix comments directly on the trigrams, the *Tuan* appendix refers directly to the hexagram statement, and the *Xiaoxiang* (Smaller Image) appendix quotes the *Tuan*. When these are printed separately, seeing the connections is difficult. For that reason, some of Zhu's own students (according to Zhu's Qing-dynasty chronicler Wang Mouhong) ignored his arrangement and collated the various levels, following the model of Wang Bi and Cheng Yi. Zhu's return to the original order never became standard, as most later editions of Zhu's commentary to this day use the collated arrangement.[41]

The second point of Zhu Xi's divergence from the typical *yili* approach to the *Yi* is the content itself of his comments. To illustrate, let us compare the comments of Wang Bi, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi on the name and hexagram statement of Dayou 大有, "Great Possession" (hexagram 14 ䷍), which is composed of the Qian (Heaven) trigram below and the Li (Fire) trigram above. The name and hexagram statement are "Great Possession: Supreme success (*yuan heng* 元亨)."

Wang Bi's comment:

> Without great commonality (*tong* 通), what else could great possession come from?[42]

Note that Wang Bi, in this uncharacteristically short comment, addresses only the hexagram name.

Cheng Yi's comment:

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[41] Wang Mouhong (1984: 280, n.3). For a full discussion see Adler (2020: 16-18).

[42] Wang and Han (c. 380: 2:4b)..

> The qualities (*cai* 才) of the hexagram can be considered "primacy and success."[43] As for the virtues of hexagrams in general, there are cases of the *name* of the hexagram itself containing the meaning, such as "Being close: auspicious" (Bi, hexagram 8) and "Being modest: success" (Qian, hexagram 15). There are cases where one derives the meaning of the hexagram from the *counsel and admonition*,[44] such as "Army: correct. The strong man has good fortune" (Shi, hexagram 7) and "Fellowship in the field: success" (Tongren, hexagram 13). And there are cases [such as the present] in which it is expressed in terms of the hexagram *qualities*, such as "Great possession: primacy and success." Since [the *Tuanzhuan* refers to the virtue of this hexagram as] "firm and strong, elegant and bright; responding to Heaven and acting in a timely way," it is able to have "primacy and success."[45]

All three of the loci of meaning Cheng discusses here (italicized above) are based on the hexagram statement. He does not mention the trigram/hexagram structure or *yin-yang* relationships.

Zhu Xi's comment:

> "Great Possession" means the greatness of what one possesses. Li resides above Qian, fire above Heaven, so everything is illuminated. Also, the 6 in the fifth, a single *yin* occupying the place of honor, is central, while the five *yang* lines correspond with it, so this is great possession. Qian is strong and Li is bright. Abiding in respect and responding to Heaven is a Way of success. If the diviner has these virtues, then there will be great goodness and success.[46]

Zhu Xi begins his comment with an explanation of the *yin-yang* relationships of the lines and the imagery of the component trigrams. On that basis he attempts to clarify the relationship between

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[43] These are the first two of the Four Virtues of Qian (1), as interpreted by Cheng Yi. Zhu Xi's interpretation is somewhat different..

[44] *Xunjie* 訓戒, in this case "[Be] correct" and "[be a] strong man."

[45] Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi (1981: 768).

[46] Zhu Xi (2002: 1:44).

the lines and the statements, drawing particular attention to the oracular pronouncements. This is a good example of his synthesis of the *xiangshu* and *yili* approaches, and is typical of his comments on the hexagrams. He makes extensive use of the graphic and numerological elements but combines them with the textual levels to derive moral guidance. The first of the four chapters of the *Yixue qimeng* is in fact entirely devoted to the *xiangshu* analysis of the lines, trigrams, hexagrams, and associated numerological diagrams. As mentioned before, much of this is also found in the "Nine Diagrams" that Zhu Xi (or perhaps a follower) appended to the beginning of the *Zhouyi benyi*.

Zhu Xi also differed with Wang Bi and Cheng Yi on the question of whom their commentaries were intended for. For both they were intended for *literati*, and in Cheng Yi's case especially those whose aim was to serve in government.[47] But Zhu Xi said,

> If we regard [the *Yi*] as [a book of] divination, then all people -- scholars, farmers, artisans and merchants -- will be able to make use of it in all their affairs. If this sort of person divines, he will make this sort of use of it. If another sort of person divines, he will make another sort of use of it (*Zhuzi yulei* 66: 1625).

In other words, Fuxi's original intention in creating the *Yi* was to aid all people, not only literate *junzi*, in making moral decisions by means of hexagram divination. (Zhu Xi would probably have assumed that most farmers -- even in the Song, when public education had expanded significantly -- were illiterate.)[48] In Zhu Xi's view, Fuxi had first intuited the linkages between the moral order and the natural order, which may be considered the first manifestation of the Confucian *dao* 道 (Way). Hence the title of Zhu's commentary, *The Original Meaning of the Zhouyi*.

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[47] See Hon (2011: 5).

[48] In his “Divination Ritual” (*shiyi* 筮儀) he includes instructions in case someone else is deputed to perform the divination for the subject. The subject just burns incense, bows, states the subject of the divination, and stands aside while the diviner performs the ritual. Presumably the subject could be illiterate. See Adler (2020: 319-322).

Implied in Zhu Xi's approach is the rather modern view that meaning *emerges* in the relationship between the author, the text, and the reader.[49] Therefore, for the most part he does not spell out all the moral philosophical implications of the text. As a result, his commentary is briefer than those of Wang Bi and Cheng Yi. For the most part he does not try to create an interpretive context of moral meaning; he leaves the scriptural text as gnomic, or runic, as it really is. The text is jumbled, fragmentary, cryptic, and exceedingly obscure, and he does not attempt to make sense of it where that sense is not evident. Nor does he assume that it made perfectly clear sense even to the early Zhou reader. He seems to have understood that divinatory pronouncements are usually, and perhaps by nature, opaque and puzzling.

Moreover, since Zhu Xi's hermeneutic principle is that the meaning of the *Yi* emerges *only* in the reader's (or user's) personal encounter with the text, mediated by the ritual of divination, one should not expect a commentary to be fully coherent for all readers. Instead, Zhu gives the reader (or user) the tools with which he or she can derive the meaning most appropriate to that particular person (whatever his or her station in life) in that particular circumstance. His assumption is that the closer we get to the bare words of the text the clearer it becomes that much of the *Yi*'s meaning must come from the mind of the reader. Zhu's strategy is perfectly consistent with his general "methodology of reading" (*dushu fa* 讀書法), which has been described thusly by Curie Virág:

> [T]ruly "getting" a text, that is, grasping its *li*, lies not in the apprehension of the text *per se* but in the encounter between the reader and the text. It also means that there is not one meaning but infinite possibilities of meaning, and therefore infinite possibilities of discoursing about it.[50]

What is unique about reading the *Yijing*, according to Zhu, is that divination must be part of the interpretive process. This is why his commentary is rather "minimalist" compared with his commentaries on other texts, such as the Four Books. Occasionally he does elaborate moral

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[49] This is an example of what Roger Ames and David Hall have called "aesthetic order" -- the idea that meaning in Chinese thought emerges from the shifting patterns of exigent circumstances; meaning is not imposed on those circumstances by correspondence with a transcendent principle, which they call "rational order." See Hall and Ames (1987: 11-25, 131-138).

[50] Virág, "Self-Cultivation as *praxis* in Song Neo-Confucianism," 1221.

implications that he considers especially significant and that might not be evident to the reader, but for the most part his commentary is quite brief. Compared with Wang Bi and Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi is much more concerned with the *yin-yang* symbolism and relationships of the lines (since that is the original form of the *Yi* before the written texts were added), and with helping the user to identify the various characteristics of the lines and elements of the text. These include:

1. The structural relations among the lines, e.g. whether they are "central" or "correct."[51] For example,
    - Hexagram 14, name and hexagram text (example given above, Dayou).
    - Hexagram 1, line 2: "The 9 in the second place is firm and creative, central and correct."
2. The function of each phrase, e.g. explaining the hexagram's name or the virtues of the component trigrams. For example:
    - Hexagram 31, hexagram text ("Xian is influencing.") Zhu's comment: "Explaining the meaning of the hexagram name."
    - Hexagram 3, hexagram text ("Acting in the midst of danger; great success and correctness"). Zhu's comment: "Explaining the hexagram statement in terms of the virtues of the two component trigrams."
    - Hexagram 4, upper trigram: "A single *yang* rests above two *yin* lines, so its virtue is stability/stopping (*zhi* 止) and its image is a mountain."
3. The "ruling" (*zhu* 主) line of the hexagram (in just a few cases) or of component trigrams. For example:
    - Hexagram 61, line 5: "9 in the fifth is firm, strong, central, and correct: the core of Zhongfu. It occupies the honored position and is the ruler of honesty."
    - Hexagram 4, line 2: "9 in the second place is the ruler of the inner trigram, a firm line residing in the center."
4. The prognostication (*zhan* 占). For example:
    - Hexagram 33, line 3 ("Keeping male and female servants is auspicious"). Zhu's comment: "This is a relationship of superior and inferior people, but only

[51] For explanations of these and other technical terms see Adler (2020: 22-38).

servants, not necessarily worthies, so one can 'keep' them. Hence this prognostication."

- Hexagram 7, line 5 ("There are game animals in the fields; appropriate to talk about capturing them; no blame."). Zhu's comment: "When a foe dominates you, one can do nothing but respond to him; hence the image of 'game animals in the field,' and the prognostication that it is appropriate and blameless to capture them."

5. The admonition or warning (*jie* 戒). For example:
    - Hexagram 3, line 1: "If it continues and is not abandoned, then it is certainly a disgrace. The diviner must be warned like this."
    - Hexagram 6, hexagram text: "Hence the warning that the diviner must engage in disputation, and will meet good fortune or misfortune according to his place."
6. The conditionality of the prognostication. For example:
    - Hexagram 35, line 5: "If you completely reject the mind that calculates merit and schemes for advantage, then going forward will be auspicious and everything will be appropriate. But you must have these virtues in order to correspond with this prognostication."
    - Hexagram 48, hexagram text: "The prognostication is that in one's affairs you should rely on the past and not reject it; you should respect and work on it. If you cannot come close to achieving it, you will fail."

These kinds of comments are somewhat reminiscent of the old grammar exercise of diagramming sentences. Their purpose is to enable the reader to parse the text analytically, to help understand which of the four Sages (Fuxi, King Wen, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius) was responsible for each level of the text, and what his intentions were.

Zhu Xi's minimalist commentary did not prevent him from using the text to express his own philosophy – as every commentator inevitably does. The Chinese commentarial tradition was, in fact, one of the major modes of creative philosophical writing. In Zhu's case, his "editorial conservatism" served the purpose of "hermeneutic activism."[52] Zhu Xi sincerely

[52] Dai (2016: 159).

believed that he had grasped the authorial intention of Fuxi and the other sages who had created the *Yi*; that the key to that intention was the *use* of the *Yi* as a divination text; that this method of divination provided access to the minds of those sages, who had first intuited and put into practice the Way of Heaven; and that this access was an invaluable tool in the process of self-cultivation by which ordinary people could approach sagehood themselves. The "original meaning" that Zhu Xi discerned, however, is quite different from what historically-oriented modern scholars understand as the original meaning of the *Yi* in the context of Bronze Age statecraft and ritual. It is a meaning that *emerges* in the dynamic interface between the sages, the text, and the reader. This is how it contributes to Zhu Xi's overall project of understanding the natural/moral order (*tianli* 天裡 / *daoli* 道理) and "learning to become a Sage" (*sheng xue* 聖學).

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