

Zhu Xi 朱熹. *The Original Meaning of the “Yijing”: Commentary on the “Scripture of Change.”* Translated and edited by Joseph A. Adler. Translations from the Asian Classics. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. Pp. viii + 387 pages. \$65 (cloth). ISBN 978-0231191241.

Joseph A. Adler has made a great contribution to the community of China specialists as well as to a general readership with the first Western-language translation of Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130–1200) *Original Meaning of the “Yijing”* (“*Zhouyi*” *benyi* 周易本義, hereafter the *Original Meaning*): *Complete Commentary on the Scripture of Change*. The significance of this work seems self-evident. As Adler mentions in the introduction, “Zhu Xi was the most influential Chinese philosopher since Confucius and Mencius, and his commentary on the *Yi* has been one of the most influential in the past thousand years” (1). Yet, the importance of the *Original Meaning* transcends the narrow confines of *Yijing* (*I-ching*) 易經 studies. To gain a deeper understanding of traditional Chinese culture, especially to tap into the profound insights of Neo-Confucian philosophy, we should peruse and interpret Zhu Xi’s commentary on the *Yijing*.

The *Yijing* has fascinated a long line of philosophers, thinkers, and artists in the Western world at least since the seventeenth century. That Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646–1716) was inspired by the *Yijing* trigrams to develop his binary system is well-known. Building upon Leibniz’s concept of “pre-established harmony,” Carl G. Jung (1875–1961) articulated the principle of synchronicity to describe circumstances that seem meaningfully related yet lack a causal connection. In 1967, Syd Barrett (1946–2006) of Pink Floyd released a song, “Chapter 24,” the lyrics of which explicitly refer to the *fu* 復 hexagram of the *Yijing*. In 1968, George Harrison (1943–2001) of the Beatles wrote his celebrated song, “While My Guitar Gently Weeps,” by applying the message he received from the *Yijing*: “every little item that’s going down has a purpose.” Such anecdotes showing the academic, spiritual, and popular influences of the *Yijing* in modern Western culture abound. Of all the Great Books of the Chinese tradition, the *Yijing* is probably the most widely circulated and bestselling classic in the West.

In the long history of Confucian classical learning, Zhu Xi has an enormous presence: his commentaries on the *Four Books* (*sishu* 四書), especially, re-defined the Confucian tradition. Compared to his commentaries on the *Four Books*, the *Original Meaning* has not received the due attention it deserves in the West. The *Original Meaning* might have been neglected because it is

certainly one of the most difficult and intricate texts we have received from traditional China. Moreover, those with academic interests in the moral, ethical, and metaphysical aspects of Zhu Xi's learning might have put it aside because Zhu Xi's approach to the *Yijing* diverged radically from the long-standing interpretations of its "Meanings and Principles" (*yili* 義理), as epitomized by Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) and Cheng Yi's 程頤 (1033–1107) authoritative commentaries. Both Wang Bi and Cheng Yi "[focused] primarily on the textual levels to derive moral guidance"; by contrast, Zhu Xi emphasized that "the images—particularly the *yin-yang* and positional characteristics of the hexagrams and lines—required equal, if not greater, attention" (15).

As is generally known, Zhu Xi sought to restore the *Yijing* as a book of divination, which might seem counter-intuitive given his principled emphasis on the moral-ethical meanings of the classics. To his disciples, Zhu Xi criticized the limits of Confucius, Wang Bi, and Cheng Yi's approaches to the *Yijing* and suggested that they begin by reading the *Original Meaning*. For this reason, some modern scholars even argue that Zhu Xi's view of the *Yijing* primarily as a divination text was mistaken: "because he was preoccupied with the notion that the *Yijing* is a divination manual, his interpretations of the texts on hexagrams and lines could not but deviate from King Wen's original intent."¹ However, as he explained to his disciples, only by regarding it as a manual of divination, could we understand the sages' intent to make it accessible to all people: scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants alike.² In opposition to the narrow elitist moral reading of the texts, Zhu Xi sought to restore the spirit of the ancient sages who created the lines, hexagrams, and the Ten Wings (*shiyi* 十翼) to guide those who seek clairvoyance. In this regard, Zhu Xi's contributions to the classical learning of the *Yijing* should not be neglected: he redefined the *Yijing* as the classic of prognostication for everybody, including the educated, semi-educated, and illiterate.

Standing on the shoulders of the legendary modern Western translators of the Confucian classics such as James Legge (1815–1897) and Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930), whose translations of the *Yijing* relied heavily on Zhu Xi's interpretations, Adler has produced a fully annotated translation of the *Original*

1. Zhou Shan 周山, "Zhu Xi *Zhouyi* yanjiu deshulun" 朱熹《周易》研究得失論, *Zhexue yanjiu* 哲學研究 2018.3, 65.

2. Zhu Xi, *Zhuxi yulei* 朱子語類, comp. Li Jingde 黎靖德 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 66.1625.

Meaning with an informative and concise introduction. His translations are in general precise, succinct, clear, and insightful. Even those without any knowledge of literary Chinese, let alone contemporary Chinese, may benefit much by using Adler's translation of the *Original Meaning* for whatever purposes they might have in mind. Therefore, the greatest contribution of Adler's translation, I am tempted to say, is that he has made the *Original Meaning* accessible to lay readers with his scrupulous but easy-to-understand language. Those who have been fascinated by the enigmatic passages of the *Yijing*, as George Harrison was in the 1960s, may turn to Adler's translation of the *Original Meaning* for further guidance and creative inspiration.

When we compare, for example, Legge's and Adler's translations of "Treatise Discussing the Trigrams (*Shuogua zhuan* 說卦傳), the latter's strengths show.

LEGGÉ'S TRANSLATION: "Anciently, when the sages made the Yi, in order to give mysterious assistance to the spiritual Intelligences, they produced (the rules for the use of) the divining plant. The number 3 was assigned to heaven, 2 to earth, and from these came the (other) numbers. They contemplated the changes in the divided and undivided lines (by the process of manipulating the stalks), and formed the trigrams; from the movements that took place in the strong and weak lines, they produced (their teaching about) the separate lines. There ensued a harmonious conformity to the course (of duty) and to virtue, with a discrimination of what was right (in each particular case). They (thus) made an exhaustive discrimination of what was right, and effected the complete development of (every) nature, till they arrived (in the Yi) at what was appointed for it (by Heaven)."

昔者聖人之作《易》也，幽贊於神明而生蓍，參天兩地而倚數，觀變於陰陽而立卦，發揮於剛柔而生爻，和順於道德而理於義，窮理盡性以至於命。

ADLER'S TRANSLATION: "In ancient times, when the Sage [Fu Xi] created the Yi, he was mysteriously assisted by [his] spiritual clarity to produce the yarrow stalks. He tripled Heaven and doubled Earth to give the numbers a basis. He observed the fluctuations of yin and yang to establish the hexagrams. He initiated the movement of the firm and yielding to produce the lines. He harmoniously accorded the Way and virtue to put in order [*li* 理] rightness. He fully explored the order of things [*qiongli* 窮理], fulfilled their natures [*jinxing* 盡性], and thereby attained [Heaven's] decree [*zhiyu ming* 至於命]."

Legge's literalist and consistent translations have their own merits, but their meanings are at times difficult for us to comprehend. Adler's translations,

as demonstrated by the passage above, are clearer, easier, and more distinct and literary. In lieu of translating the texts word by word, Adler has absorbed the cumulative works of scholarship on Confucian classical learning as well as Neo-Confucian philosophy and processed them in his delicate choice of terms for translation: for example, compare Legge's translation of "li yu yi" 理於義 into "with a discrimination of what was right" with Adler's "to put in order rightness."

For another example, let us compare Legge's translation of the following passage from the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳 (I) with Adler's.

LEGGÉ'S TRANSLATION: (He who attains to this) ease (of Heaven) will be easily understood, and (he who attains to this) freedom from laborious effort (of the Earth) will be easily followed. He who is easily understood will have adherents, and he who is easily followed will achieve success. He who has adherents can continue long, and he who achieves success can become great. To be able to continue long shows the virtue of the wise and able man; to be able to become great is the heritage he will acquire. With the attainment of such ease and such freedom from laborious effort, the mastery is got of all principles under the sky. With the attainment of that mastery, (the sage) makes good his position in the middle (between heaven and earth).

易則易知，簡則易從。易知則有親，易從則有功。有親則可久，有功則可大。可久則賢人之德，可大則賢人之業。易簡，而天下之理得矣；天下之理得，而成位乎其中矣。

ADLER'S TRANSLATION: What is easy is easy to know; what is simple is easy to follow. One who is easily known has intimates. One who is easy to follow has achievements. With intimates one can live long; with achievements one can be great. Being able to live long is the virtue of the Worthy; being able to be great is the undertaking of the Worthy. It is through ease and simplicity that one grasps the order/principle of all under Heaven. Having grasped all under heaven one has achieved one's position in it.

Because Legge translated the archaic texts of the *Yijing* and Adler the twelfth-century texts of the *Original Meaning*, word-to-word comparison may be unfair and misleading; however, the English-speaking audience today, at least, would immediately find Adler's more friendly and comprehensible. I have no intent to give short shrift to Legge's grand contributions to the field of Sinology. His translations have served academia and general readers of the Western world for more than a century and will continue to be of service to future generations; however, each generation should translate the classics into

their own language for their own time by absorbing the cumulative new findings and interpretations of scholarship to date. It is undoubtedly the privilege of later generations to have multiple translations of the same classics. Most notably, Adler has meticulously interpreted philosophical terms with precision and insightfulness. It seems obvious that his translations will serve and guide those who are interested in Neo-Confucian philosophy, but this work will be of interest to everyone that takes the *Yijing* seriously.

Throughout history, the *Yijing* has served diverse purposes for diverse readers: as a divination manual, a cosmogenic theory, a self-development tool book, a source of spiritual inspiration, or a wellspring of creative misinterpretations. Adler's translation of Zhu Xi's *Original Meaning* should attract the attention of not only Sinologists and historians, but also all those who are interested in the *Yijing* for any reason. As Adler notes, Zhu Xi interpreted it afresh as a book of divination to make it accessible to all people regardless of their levels of comprehension. As Zhu Xi intended, Adler's translation of the *Original Meaning* shall reach the creative young students who will be enrolled in my undergraduate course, "Chinese Intellectual Traditions." I hope that there will be another Leibniz, Jung, Harrison, or Barrett in times to come.

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