



Cheng, Yi, *The Yi River Commentary on the Book of Changes*. Edited and Translated by L. Michael Harrington. Introduction by L. Michael Harrington and Robin R. Wang

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CHENG Yi's 程頤 (1033–1107) commentary on the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*) is very long. In the Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局 edition of *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 (*Collection of the Two Chengs*, 1981) it occupies 338 pages, despite the fact that CHENG Yi did not include the *Xici* 繫辭 (Appended Remarks) or *Shuogua* 說卦 (Discussing the Trigrams) appendices in his commentary. I have often suspected that its length has contributed to the fact that no one hitherto has produced a complete English translation. (It was translated once into French, along with ZHU Xi's 朱熹 commentary, by P. L. F. Philastre in 1885–1893, and Thomas Cleary's partial English translation was published by Shambhala in 2003.) Considering the importance and historical influence of CHENG Yi, the *Yijing*, and in particular CHENG Yi's commentary on the *Yijing* (independently), such a work is long overdue. We should therefore be grateful to L. Michael Harrington for attempting to fill the lacuna with his new translation, which fills 482 pages not including the introduction and endnotes. The title, by the way, is a literal translation of the Chinese, *Yichuan Yizhuan* 伊川易傳, which is one of the titles by which the book has been known but probably not the earliest, which more likely was simply *Yizhuan* (*Commentary on the Yi*). *Yichuan*, which literally refers to the Yi River near Cheng's hometown, Luoyang 洛陽 in Henan 河南 province (it is the river that flows alongside the Longmen 龍門 Buddhist caves), was a sobriquet of CHENG Yi. The meaning of the title used here is “[CHENG] Yichuan's commentary on the *Yi*.”

The *Yijing* probably needs little introduction to readers of this journal. Considered the “first” of the “Five Classics” since the 2nd century BCE, its earliest layer, the sixty-four hexagrams, may date back to the 1st century of the Zhou 周 dynasty (ca. 1045–256 BCE), while its earliest textual layers, the hexagram statements and line statements,

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date probably to the 9th century BCE. This early version, a manual of divination, was originally called the *Zhouyi* 周易 (*Changes of Zhou*), and most scholars today reserve that title for this “basic text.” In the Warring States period (480–222 BCE) and early Han 漢 dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE) the *Zhouyi* was supplemented by seven appendices (called “Ten Wings” because three are divided into two parts each), and it was this more inclusive text that was first called a *jing* 經 (“classic,” although I use “scripture” because it and the other *jing* were considered sacred texts). It is customary today to reserve the title *Yijing* for that more inclusive book. With the addition of the Ten Wings, attributed to Confucius—especially the *Xici*, also called the “Great Treatise” or *Dazhuan* 大傳—the *Yijing*, or *Scripture of Change*, became a book of wisdom as well as divination.

CHENG Yi, of course, was one of the early Confucian revivalists during the Northern Song 宋 dynasty (960–1127). He and his brother, CHENG Hao 程顥 (1032–1085), established the concepts of *li* 理 (principle/order) and *qi* 氣 (psychophysical stuff) as the foundational concepts of “Neo-Confucian” metaphysics and cosmology. The school or “party” (*pai* 派) of Confucians that eventually became predominant in the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) was called the Cheng-Zhu school, after the Chengs and ZHU Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). ZHU Xi’s own commentary on the *Yijing*, the *Zhouyi Benyi* 周易本義 (*Original Meaning of the Zhouyi*), to some extent eclipsed CHENG Yi’s commentary in influence, but in the imperially-sponsored Qing 清 dynasty (1644–1911) version of the *Yijing* (the *Zhouyi Zhezong* 周易折中) both CHENG Yi’s and ZHU Xi’s commentaries were included. This compilation was the predominant influence on James Legge’s English translation of 1899 and Richard Wilhelm’s German translation of 1924, which was translated into English in 1950. Legge’s and Wilhelm’s books were largely responsible for the growing popularity of the *Yijing* in the 20th-century English-speaking world. Thus CHENG Yi’s commentary on the *Yi* was one of the two most influential premodern texts contributing to the worldwide popularity of the *Yijing*, especially since the 1960s.

Today there are two slightly overlapping “communities” with strong interests in the *Yijing*: the community of scholars, East and West, who recognized the profound influence of the text on traditional Chinese thought (sometimes comparing its influence to that of the Bible in Western cultures); and the community of *Yijing* aficionados or devotees who regard it as a world classic of timeless wisdom. The majority of the latter and a much smaller percentage of the former use the text for its original purpose, divination. Both communities will have an interest in this new translation, which is an important and ambitious contribution to a significant field of study. Unfortunately, it falls short of its potential in two major respects: first, it lacks adequate contextualization and explication, and second, the relative inexperience of the translator (whose main area of expertise is apparently medieval Western philosophy) is painfully evident in too many cases.

The first problem is suggested by the fact that the Introduction is only fifteen pages long, and about half of that covers necessary background information about the *Yi* and CHENG Yi. The remaining half is divided into two sections, one on the *Yi* and the cosmos and the other on the *Yi* and the state. Those topics are indeed crucial, as Cheng Yi saw the *Yi* as a political handbook based on the natural patterns of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽. However, the sections focus on relatively abstruse problems under each topic: the correspondence of the lunar months with the twelve “sovereign hexagrams” and some of the subtleties of the parallel between hexagram positions and government positions. These are discussions that I fear will quickly lose the reader who lacks substantial

exposure to such topics, and there is very little else in the Introduction to give that reader a grasp of the problems CHENG Yi was attempting to address in his commentary, or how the commentary reflects his philosophical system.

Overall, there is very little attempt to point out Cheng's larger concerns or agenda, either in his terms or from the perspective of contemporary scholarship. For example, the word *li* 理 (principle)—the centerpiece of his philosophical system—occurs only once in the Introduction, as part of the term *yili* 義理 (meaning and principle), referring to one of the two traditional approaches to interpreting the *Yi* (the other being *xiangshu* 象數, or image and number). There is a paragraph on *li* in the Glossary, but it is not referenced in the Introduction and it does not explain the significance of *li* in CHENG Yi's general problematic. One short paragraph in the Introduction (11) addresses Cheng's support for political factions, but in the notes to the translation itself there are no references to the issue, even under hexagrams which Cheng believes address it (e.g., hexagrams 11, 13, 23, and 24). There is exactly one sentence summarizing his life and political career: "A lecturer on the Confucian classics deeply involved in the political factionalism of the Northern Song dynasty, CHENG Yi composed or at least completed his commentary on the *Book of Changes* during the first of two periods of exile he suffered toward the end of his life" (2). These circumstances, along with the unmentioned blacklisting of his writings, are crucially important to an understanding of Cheng's motivation for writing a lengthy commentary on the *Yi*, and deserve more attention. Political behavior was clearly on his mind during his exile in Sichuan 四川, and he was deeply concerned to make government work on Confucian principles. Those principles address inner self-cultivation as well as outward political behavior, and are almost completely ignored in this book. Self-cultivation itself, although not foregrounded in Cheng's commentary, was always in the background as the means by which government officials could learn to "change according to the times in order to follow the Way" (quoting from the first sentence of Cheng's Preface). This could have been briefly summarized in the Introduction and brought out in the notes to the translation, where relevant, without overburdening an already long book.

The sixteen-page Glossary, covering forty-three terms, is helpful and can be used to flesh out some of Cheng's philosophy. However, as a glossary of terms it does not substitute for a synoptic summary of Cheng's thought or his approach to the *Yi*. Except for one mention in the "Translator's Note" (xiii), there are no specific references to the Glossary in the translation or notes, where they could have helped the reader situate the commentary in Cheng's larger system of thought. The notes, which cover twenty-eight pages, averaging less than one note per page of translation, not counting the Introduction, consist primarily (not exclusively) of citations and identifications of names and key terms. These of course are necessary and helpful, but without a more robust apparatus, even someone quite familiar with the *Yijing* will have considerable difficulty drawing out the larger issues implicit in the commentary—the kind of work that previous scholars, such as Kidder Smith and Tze-ki Hon, have done (e.g., in Smith et al., *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990]; and Hon, *The Yijing and Chinese Politics* [Albany: SUNY Press, 2005]).

The translation itself is another disappointment. Most of it is competent and therefore a boon to readers of English. However, there are numerous choices made by the translator that can only be called bizarre. For example, all the hexagram names are intentionally translated as "short English words, preferably those that can serve as

both nouns and verbs” (xiv). In fact almost all of these words are a single syllable, as if the fact that individual Chinese characters are single syllables has any implication whatsoever for an adequate translation (obviously it doesn’t). The first six, for example, are “lead (Qian 乾),” “yield (Kun 坤),” “block (Zhun 屯),” “blind (Meng 蒙),” “need (Xu 需),” and “fight (Song 訟).” It is true that Chinese characters can often function as nouns or verbs, but in the context of a text and commentary that explicitly or indirectly defines the names, there is no reason for such runic translations. In fact some are nearly incomprehensible—for example Li 離 (hexagram 30), defined explicitly by CHENG Yi as “to make a connection” (*li* 麗) and translated by Harrington as “cast.” I suppose the idea is casting a line or a light (since the hexagram is composed of two *li* trigrams, which symbolize fire) and thereby connecting. The only other advantage of “cast” I can think of is that it is a single-syllable word. This is an example of the mechanical application of a wrong-headed assumption that can only confuse the reader. Similarly, Harrington says that he will “split apart many two-character combinations that would ordinarily be translated by a single English word. For instance, I translate *wenming* [文明] as ‘pattern and enlightenment,’ rather than the more common ‘civilization’” (xiii). Although he is correct to take *wen ming* as two words, not one, most words in literary (classical) Chinese are one character, rather than the two-character words more common in spoken Chinese, and *wenming* in particular did not mean “civilization” until centuries after CHENG Yi.

There are also cases in which a common idiom is not recognized and translated too literally. In his Preface, for example, CHENG Yi says in reference to the hexagram statements (in Harrington’s translation), “The symbol and the prognostication lie at their center” (19), suggesting their central importance. This actually contradicts CHENG Yi’s notion that the symbol (*xiang* 象) and prognostication (*zhan* 占) are wholly secondary to the meaning of the hexagrams—a point made in Harrington’s Introduction. In fact, Cheng pretty much ignores the broader notion of symbolism (for him *xiang* are simply “images” or representations) and completely ignores the use of the *Yi* for divination. The latter point was the reason for ZHU Xi’s harsh criticism of Cheng’s commentary: he believed that to correctly understand and benefit from the *Yi* one had to understand and respect the Sages’ original purpose in writing it, which was divination. Harrington’s confusion in this case arises from the fact that “lie at their center” (*zai qi zhong* 在其中) should be rendered as something like “are implicit in them,” meaning that once you understand the hexagram text no further investigation is necessary to know the image and prognostication—they will already be apparent, like by-products. The phrase occurs six times in the *Analects* of Confucius and is quite common in subsequent literature. A bit further on in the Preface Harrington renders *zhi wei zhe li ye* 至微者理也 as “Principles are extremely minimal” (20), which is rather misleading given that principle (*li*) is absolutely central to CHENG Yi’s philosophy. It actually says, “What is most subtle is principle.”

Another example: CHENG Yi’s understanding of change itself is obviously an important concept in this context. Harrington and Wang rightly foreground it in their Introduction, quoting the definition Cheng gives in his first comment under Weiji 未濟 “Uncrossed” (hexagram 64), which follows Jiji 既濟 “Has Crossed” (hexagram 63): “The *yi* [易, change] character of the *Book of Changes* refers to alteration and the avoidance of depletion” (499). They explain this as follows: “In other words, it refers both to the change going on outside interpreters (‘alteration’) and to the change that the

interpreters themselves make in response to the external changes they observe (“avoidance of depletion”)” (4). However, neither Cheng’s definition nor the rest of his paragraph (even in Harrington’s translation under hexagram 64) makes any reference at all to the interpreter or his/her inner state, and in fact it is not about “avoidance of depletion” at all, whether external or internal. The line is actually “*Yi* is change without end” (*Yizhe bianyi er buqiong ye* 易者變易而不窮也; *Er Cheng Ji*, 1022). The rest of Cheng’s paragraph explains the apparent paradox of “Uncrossed” following “Has Crossed” by means of the principle that change is endless; each ending is followed by a new beginning. Harrington and Wang have apparently not recognized that *buqiong* 不窮 is a common way of saying “without end,” although one of the root meanings of *qiong* is “to exhaust.” Of course, a wider discussion of this point from CHENG Yi’s perspective would in fact lead to the implication that the political actor should follow this principle and learn how to turn each ending into a new beginning—“to change according to the times.” That would be a point to bring out in an explanatory note, but it is not in the text itself.

Finally, there are occasional statements that strike me as quite odd, beginning with the very first sentence: “Little can be said with certainty about the classical Chinese text known as the *Book of Changes* (*I-Ching*, *Yijing* 易經), save that a version of it was used as a divination text during the Zhou 周 dynasty, and that it somehow reflects the divination practices of the preceding Shang 商 dynasty” (1). How the *Yi* may reflect Shang oracle bone divination seems to me one of the *least* certain points one could make about it. Yes, they were used concurrently during the early Zhou dynasty, and some of the divination-related terms in the *Yi*—such as *zhen* 貞 and *bu* 卜, both referring to the act of divining—were also used on the oracle bones (*bu*, also constituting the upper part of *zhen*, representing the cracks on the bones). However, any connections between the “divination practices”—heating and cracking bones versus sorting and counting yarrow stalks to derive hexagrams—are extremely speculative and, in fact, rarely discussed. Another odd statement: “The *Book of Changes* easily lends itself to use as a divination text” (4). “Lends itself?” It *is* a divination text. That fact is not negated despite the book’s use by many people, including CHENG Yi, as a repository of cosmic, social, or political wisdom.

In my opinion, the translation errors and naïve claims found in this book are overshadowed by the lack of adequate contextualization and explanation. The assumption seems to be that the text (with the Glossary) stands on its own and can be adequately understood by any reader—rather like the “Great Books” or “New Criticism” approach to scholarship that was popular in the middle of the 20th century (championed, incidentally, by the founder of the *Kenyon Review*, John Crowe Ransom, and put into practice by Harrington’s *alma mater*, St. John’s College). Ironically, that approach contradicts the major assumption behind the whole tradition of textual commentary, which in premodern China was a major genre of scholarly literature. If CHENG Yi had thought that the *Yijing* could stand on its own he would not have written his commentary. Of course, Cheng was *promulgating* his view of the *Yi*, while a modern scholarly approach would be to *explain* it. One could argue whether the gap between Cheng’s time and the *Yijing*’s origins was greater or lesser than the gap between him and us. I would venture to say that it was lesser, making it all the more necessary for 21st-

century readers to have an informed guide to Cheng's commentary. This book fails to provide that necessary support. That is not to say that the book would have no value to someone working on CHENG Yi's commentary who wants to check an English translation. No translation, after all, can be perfect. However, Yale University Press should have demanded a more solid scholarly treatment of such an important book.

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A Response to Joseph Adler

Michael Harrington¹

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Joseph Adler and I both have clear ideas about what we want to see in a translation and its introduction, notes, and glossary. Our ideas are different, and Adler has chosen not to report mine in his review, so I am taking the opportunity offered me here to describe very briefly my method of translation and the purpose of the introduction, notes, and glossary.

1. I state my method, together with what I take to be its weaknesses, in my translator's note: "I have striven above all for consistency, especially when translating technical terms. In some cases, I have allowed the meaning to be ambiguous or the reading of a passage to be awkward to preserve consistency of translation" (xiii). Adler does an excellent job of counting the cost of this method, but he never mentions that I am using it, and he ignores what readers gain from it: whenever they observe the same word in the translation they can be reasonably confident that the same character is in the original Chinese. This emphasis on consistency would not benefit a purely literary text, but it is singularly useful for a commentary on the *Book of Changes*, where interpretation often depends on the appearance of the same character in different passages. A translation that is not consistent in its rendering of most characters, on most of the occasions when they occur, will deprive the reader of that interpretive tool.

The translation "cast," for instance, allows the reader to see that the same Chinese character (*li* 離) is present in the following sentences: "it has not yet cast off those below" (where *li* means to separate), "those of its rank are cast into jubilation" (where *li* means to connect), and "the cast is from the setting sun" (where *li* means light). Defending each word of my translation in this manner would be an endless task, but I will say that I stand by the translations Adler criticizes. Prognostication, understood not as divination but as the warnings of the sage, is central to the meaning of the hexagram statements, and so "center" is an acceptable translation of *zhong* 中 (19). Alteration occurs, not all the time, but to avoid depletion when a cycle of activity is about to exhaust itself, and so "avoidance of depletion" is an acceptable translation of *buqiong* 不窮 (499). Principles are minimal in the sense of hidden—CHENG Yi 程頤 often equates the two ideas—and so "minimal" is an acceptable translation of *wei* 微 (20).

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I should probably pass over in silence Adler's suggestion that I think one-syllable English words are the best for translating Chinese characters. This claim is contradicted by every sentence of the translation, as well as hexagram titles like "Follow," "Family," "Great Excess," and so on.

2. The introduction, notes, and glossary provide a small amount of context, as Adler notes, but they are mainly concerned with the mechanics of interpretation. When you are learning to play chess, a long manual of strategy will not be as useful as a short guide to the mechanics of the game. In our introduction, Robin R. Wang and I provide such a guide to the concepts employed by CHENG Yi in his commentary—not an especially controversial way to introduce a work of philosophy, though perhaps noteworthy for treating the commentary as worth examining in its own right, having its own conceptual vocabulary and internal coherence.

Our discussion of CHENG Yi's interpretive method covers two essential topics that Adler dismisses as "abstruse" and then ignores altogether. These are the correspondence between hexagrams and months of the year, and the correspondence between hexagram positions and government positions. Having earlier built the logic of CHENG Yi's method from the ground up, explaining *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 as well as the principles that govern their interaction, we then apply that method to the cosmos and the state using these correspondences. The rise of *yang* over six months, followed by its six-month decline, provides the model for cyclical change as well as a cautionary tale for politics: how can we keep states from such a seasonal rise and fall? The mapping of ruler and minister onto hexagram positions allows CHENG Yi to address crucial questions such as whether a state always needs a strong ruler. The entry on "ruler" in the glossary then points the reader to fourteen different passages on rulers in the text, with a brief explanatory comment on what is said in each of them. By ignoring the glossary, readers can let the text stand on its own (as in Adler's caricature of the Great Books approach), but the glossary provides them with over two hundred specific passages highlighted for what they illuminate about concepts important to CHENG Yi.

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Reply to Michael Harrington

Joseph A. Adler¹

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Instead of going through Mr. Michael Harrington's response point by point, I think one example will suffice. Mr. Harrington's claim, "Prognostication, understood not as divination but as the warnings of the sage, is central to the meaning of the hexagram statements, and so 'center' is an acceptable translation of *zhong* 中 on 19," is wrong on two counts. First, "prognostication" (*zhan* 占) unambiguously refers to divination. Second, *zai qi zhong* 在其中 is a very common idiom (as I pointed out) that could accurately be translated as "lies herein," but in context suggests a fortunate by-product of what is really important. Its first instance in the *Analects* (2.18) is a perfect example: in D. C. Lau's translation, "When in your speech you make few mistakes and in your action you have few regrets, an official career [or "emolument," *lu* 祿] will follow as a matter of course [*zai qi zhong*]" (D. C. Lau, trans., *The Analects* [London: Penguin, 1979], p. 65). In other words, speaking and acting properly are inherent goods that will secondarily advance your career, but career and salary should not be their motivation; hence they are *not* central. By translating CHENG Yi's phrase literally ("lie at their center") Harrington not only fails to recognize the common idiom but contradicts a fundamental aspect of CHENG Yi's 程頤 interpretive theory, which is that the images (*xiang* 象) and prognostications (*zhan*) of the *Yi* do *not* carry its central meaning. So in this one sentence we see both major points of my review: an inexperienced translator of classical Chinese texts whose laser focus on the text itself blinds him to the importance of context in understanding a book such as CHENG Yi's commentary on the *Yijing*.

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