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ZHU XI, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing: Commentary on the Scripture of Change*. Translated and edited by JOSEPH A. ADLER. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. 387 pp. Bibliography, Index. US\$ 65 (HB). ISBN 978-0231-19124-1 (HB), 978-0231-54830-1 (eBook)

Despite many meticulous studies of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) in recent years, the question “Why did he promote divination in his interpretation of the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes)?” remains unanswered. This question is hard to answer because it contradicts our conventional image of Zhu Xi as a cool-headed thinker famous for his empirical, rational, and systemic method of learning (*dushu fa* 讀書法). The question is also troubling because it challenges our understanding of divination as an archaic, superstitious, and unscientific practice. To many of us who consider philosophy and divination as diametrical opposites, it does not make sense that a rational philosopher like Zhu Xi would view divination as a tool to resolve moral questions.

Against the odds, Joseph Adler has been zealous and vigorous in finding an answer. As early as in 1992, he gave a tentative answer in a chapter included in Kidder Smith’s *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*. He wrote,

The ultimate purpose of performing divination, like everything else in [Zhu’s] system, was to contribute to self-cultivation. [...] [T]he oracular power of the [Yi] was considered to be like the “spiritual” (*shen*) capacity of the perfectly clear mind of the sage to know the future. (p. 176)

At that time, Adler saw divination as a pragmatic means for Zhu Xi to achieve his goal of self-cultivation. Because of Zhu Xi’s realization of the multitude of humankind, Adler explains, he was willing to make compromise by incorporating a popular practice into his system of self-cultivation. As a means to an end, divination serves the same function as sweeping the floor, cooking a meal, or counting the number of trees in a forest. It is to calm the mind, purify the soul, and above all, connect the person to the incessant unfolding of the universe.

But this tentative answer immediately invites further questions. In Zhu Xi’s vast corpus, we find that he devoted a tremendous amount of time contemplating the edifying impact of divination (see, for instance, his discussion with his students in *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類). To make his point, Zhu compiled a manual of divination called *Yixue qimeng* 易學啓蒙 and at the end of his life, he completed a full commentary to the *Yijing* entitled *Zhouyi benyi* 周易本義. In these two writings, Zhu Xi demonstrated that divination was not merely a technique to foretell the future, but also a medium to express the manifold forms of cosmic regeneration. In 2002, Adler

translated Zhu's manual of divination into English as *Introduction to the Study of the Classic of Change*, and now he renders Zhu Xi's *Yijing* commentary into English as *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*.

When comparing Adler's 1992 chapter with *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*, we see a sea change in Adler's view on Zhu Xi's philosophy of divination. First, in *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*, Adler views the *Yijing* as a "book of wisdom" even though its origin was divination. He says: "The premise of the *Yijing* is that the hexagrams represent all configurations of change in nature and in human life" (p. 1). Even in its original form, Adler asserts, the *Yijing* is unique because it is a collection of oracles wherein the diviners sought advice and guidance in dealing with specific issues or coping with contingencies (p. 2). Thus, the *Yijing* divination was philosophical, and the authors of the "Ten Wings" (seven pieces of early *Yijing* writings of the Warring States Period) successfully transformed the oracles into symbols that help people "in making moral decisions regarding their behavior in order to enhance the well-being and success of themselves and those around them" (p. 8).

Second, Adler carefully explains Zhu Xi's philosophy of divination. He provides a list of terms and concepts to help readers follow Zhu Xi's interpretation of the *Yijing* (pp. 22–36). He also includes Zhu's nine *Yijing* diagrams (pp. 44–52) that show how the trigrams and hexagrams can be seen as pictorial representations of the constant changes in the natural world and the human world. Together, Adler highlights one uniqueness of Zhu Xi's moral philosophy. By insisting that the original *Yijing* is pictorial and divinatory, Zhu Xi saw in Fu Xi (the alleged creator of trigrams and hexagrams) "the first to intuit the linkage between these realms: the idea that Confucian moral values are not conventional (as the early Daoists said) but are part of a larger order – the Dao – that includes what we call natural law" (p. 22).

Third, in rendering Zhu Xi's commentary into idiomatic English, Adler demonstrates that Zhu successfully transformed the 64 hexagrams into concrete events where moral decisions have to be made. This transformation was achieved through what Adler calls Zhu Xi's "minimalist" approach to interpreting the *Yijing* (p. 20). In his commentary, Zhu Xi consistently refuses to pin down a definite meaning to a hexagram statement or a line statement. Take, for instance, the six lines of "Qian" 乾 (Creating, #1). The hexagram depicts the six *yang* (straight) lines as a dragon in various positions – a "hidden dragon" in line one at the bottom, an "emerging dragon" in line two, a "wavering dragon" in line four, a "flying dragon" in line five, and an "arrogant dragon" in line six at the top. In addition, the line statements suggest a correspondence between the dragon's position and a proper course of action: the "hidden dragon" should avoid taking aggressive action, the "emerging dragon" and the "flying dragon" should seek help by meeting "a great man," the "wavering dragon" should take flight over the depths despite the danger and apparent risks, and the "arrogant dragon" will regret being stubborn and excessively confident. But in his commentary, Zhu Xi emphasizes the ambiguity and the openness of "Qian" (pp. 53–56). He stresses that in five of its six lines, the tone seems to be upbeat, projecting an impression of an incessant progress from a hidden dragon to an emerging dragon, a wavering dragon and finally a flying dragon. On the other hand, the progression is abruptly cut short by the downfall of an arrogant dragon. To Zhu Xi, the lesson of "Qian" is that the diviner must take timely action to respond to the changing situation (pp. 55–56).

To Adler, this minimal approach makes Zhu Xi special because he emphasizes “the relationship between the author, the text, and the reader” (p. 19). A disadvantage of this approach is that his commentary looks sporadic and provisional. It appears particularly unstructured when compared to those of Wang Bi (226–249) and Cheng Yi (1033–1107), both of which have been translated into English by Richard John Lynn and L. Michael Harrison respectively. But, as Adler points out, the advantage of Zhu Xi’s minimal approach 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” (p. 19). A concrete example of this “personal encounter with the text” is the brief but forceful prognostication in line 4 of “Qian” that announces that the leaping dragon will have “no blame.” In Adler’s lucid translation, “no blame” is rendered as an open-ended decision where “if one is able to advance or retreat at the appropriate time, there will be no blame” (p. 55).

While Adler succeeds in highlighting the creative and provisional nature of Zhu Xi’s reading of the *Yijing*, he is not completely faithful to Zhu Xi’s recovery of the original meaning of the classic. The basic premise of Zhu Xi’s recovery is to read the *Yijing* as oracles, as if when the classic was first compiled by Fu Xi. The purpose of this recovery is to highlight the *Yijing*’s role in teaching people how to make difficult decisions in times of crisis. To achieve this goal, Zhu Xi distinguishes three layers of the *Yijing* text: (1) the trigrams and hexagrams created by Fu Xi, (2) the hexagram statements and line statements composed by King Wen and the Duke of Zhou, and (3) the “Ten Wings” authored by Confucius (or, as we know now, the scholars of various school of thoughts during the Warring States period). To highlight these textual differences, Zhu deliberately separates the 64 hexagrams (or the original classic, *jing* 經) from the “Ten Wings” (or commentaries, *zhuan* 傳) in his *Zhouyi benyi*.

In *Original Meaning of the Yijing*, however, Adler combines the translation of the hexagrams with that of the “Ten Wings.” Adler’s explanation is straightforward:

I began working on this translation following Zhu Xi’s plan but soon found it cumbersome, and I thought it important for the connections between the several commentaries to be more evident. I therefore changed it to the collated arrangements as in the right volume in the box. My apologies to Zhu Xi; but I think he sacrificed readability and usefulness just to make the point regarding his theory of the “original meaning” and to maintain consistency with it. (p. 18)

To me, Adler’s decision is questionable. As scholar, he has the right to disagree with Zhu Xi’s separation of the hexagrams from the “Ten Wings.” But as translator, he should do everything at his disposal to present Zhu Xi’s view accurately. More importantly, after making so much effort explaining Zhu Xi’s philosophy of divination based on openness and encounter, Adler ends up privileging consistency, smoothness, and structure over improvisation and spontaneity.

Like hexagram “Wei Ji” 未濟 (Incompletion, #64), *The Original Meaning of the Yijing* does not complete the task at hand; it merely begins a long journey ahead. In reading *The Original Meaning of the Yijing*, we now must mentally block off the “Ten Wings” (e.g., the *Tuan*, the *Image*, the *Wenyan*) when reading the 64 hexagrams. We must also continue to live with Zhu Xi’s two seemingly conflicting voices – one spontaneous and creative, and the other structured and programmatic. It is a pity that *The Original Meaning of the Yijing* should have been a new

milestone in studying Zhu Xi's moral philosophy. It turns out to be a task incomplete.

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Reply to: Hon Tze-ki, Review of ZHU XI, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing: Commentary on the Scripture of Change*. Translated and edited by JOSEPH A. ADLER (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), *Monumenta Serica* 68 (2020) 2, pp. 575–578.

For the record, I would like to correct a couple of misstatements in Hon Tze-ki's review of my translation of Zhu Xi's commentary, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing: Commentary on the Scripture of Change*, which appeared in the previous issue of this journal. First, I have never entertained the notion that Zhu Xi compared *Yijing* divination to "sweeping the floor, cooking a meal, or counting the number of trees in a forest [...] to calm the mind" (p. 575). Such an idea has never occurred to me, and I would in fact regard the suggestion as bordering on

the bizarre. If any single aspect of Zhu Xi's system of self-cultivation were to be compared to *Yijing* divination I would suggest it would be "thoroughly investigating principle" (*qiong li* 窮理) – at least for intellectuals like Zhu Xi – rather than calming the mind.

Second, Prof. Hon sees "a sea change" in my view of Zhu Xi's theory of divination between the book under review and my 1990 (not 1992) contribution to Kidder Smith, Peter Bol, Joseph Adler, and Don Wyatt, *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*. The first point he adduces is that "Adler views the *Yijing* as a 'book of wisdom' even though its origin was divination" (p. 576). I presume that the quotation marks around "book of wisdom" are intended to mean "so-called," as the term is often used in discussions of *Yijing* interpretive strategies. The wording, however, unfortunately suggests that he is quoting me. Yet the term does not appear in the passages he quotes to support his statement. In fact, the single instance of the term in my entire book is: "The *Yijing*, however, was unique in becoming a 'book of wisdom' as well as a manual of divination" (p. 2). Nowhere in the book do I take the position that the "book of wisdom" approach to the *Yi* (exemplified by the Wilhelm/Baynes translation) is the preferable hermeneutic – quite the contrary, in fact, although I will not elaborate that point here. The second and third points he adduces accurately summarize my approach without any demonstration of a "sea change" that I can see.

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