



**Zhu, Xi, *The Original Meaning of the Yijing: Commentary on the Scripture of Change*. Translated and edited by Joseph A. Adler**

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**Michael Lackner<sup>1</sup>**

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Up to the Warring States period and even to the Han 漢, a large number of methods existed for obtaining a hexagram. We have texts that bear witness to a considerable amount of hexagram interpretations which differ from what is now known as the *Yijing* 易經 (*Scripture of Change*). Some of them, such as the *Guicang* 歸藏 (*Return to the Storehouse*), do have overlaps with the familiar hexagram names, but the interpretive text is completely different (Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes: Recently Discovered Manuscripts of the Yi Jing (I Ching) and Related Texts* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2014], 141). There are entire series of numbers on oracle bones since the Shang 商 period; and there are simplified ways to obtain a hexagram, like the *shifa* 筮法, where the basic value of a hexagram merely consists in representing gender (Constance Cook and Zhao LU, *Stalk Divination: A Newly Discovered Alternative to the I Ching* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2017]). As Constance Cook puts it, “This text interprets the parallel number series as an array of four trigrams, with both the positions of the specific trigrams and their mantic relationships to each other (as defined by factors of gender, time, number, and image correlations)” (“Divination in BCE China according to Newly-recovered and Excavated Texts,” in *Handbook of Chinese Divination*, edited by Michael Lackner and Lu Zhao [Leiden: Brill, forthcoming]). Others differ in the number of stalks used for the divination purpose or imply the use of dice. The list (which also includes the no-longer-extant *lianshan* 連山 as one of the “Three Changes” [*sanyi* 三易]) is far from exhaustive, and the temptation to create other approaches with more or less of a family resemblance to the *Yijing* never really came to an end, from YANG Xiong’s 楊雄 *Taixuanjing* 太玄經 (*Canon of Supreme Mystery*) to *Meihua Yishu* 梅花易數 (*Plum Blossom Yi Computation*) to the still popular method of *Wenwang gua* 文王卦 (*The Hexagrams according to King Wen*). The

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✉ Michael Lackner  
michael.lackner@fau.de

<sup>1</sup> International Consortium for Research in the Humanities, IKGf, Hartmannstrasse 14, D – 91052 Erlangen, Germany

question of how the *Zhouyi* 周易 became the canonized *Yijing* can be answered by referring either to an imperial bureaucratic decision, or to mere contingency (as it was the case for a number of texts that have not been included in the Gospel) or to an intrinsic superiority of this precise text.

No such question can be raised for the canonizing of ZHU Xi's 朱熹 interpretation of the *Yijing*. The book under review is Joseph Adler's English translation of ZHU Xi's *Zhouyi Benyi* 周易本義 (*The Original Meaning of the Zhouyi*). In his introduction (1–38), Adler provides us with a convincing explanation: ZHU Xi's *Zhouyi Benyi* reconciled divination with moral philosophy by integrating the approaches of “Image and Number” (*xiangshu* 象數) and “Meaning and Principle” (*yili* 義理). ZHU Xi achieved this harmonizing by the idea that “guidance in the process of self-cultivation was intended to be accessed *through and only through* the mechanism of divination” (13). Although in the *Zhouyi Benyi* moral concerns prevail over cosmological speculation, one might add that the spiritual union with the “Way of the Sages” and the “Way of Heaven,” which the questioner attains through that mechanism, is in itself a cosmological event.

Adler's translation is an exemplary exercise in both hermeneutics and exegesis. As we shall see below, ZHU Xi's hermeneutical principles (and those of his translator) are congruent with “the rather modern view that meaning *emerges* in the relationship between the author, the text, and the reader” (19). Adler has been faithful to this maxim, because the “meaning of the *Yi* emerges *only* in the reader's (or user's) personal encounter with the text” (19).

In his remarks on how to read (*dushu fa* 讀書法), ZHU Xi frequently alludes to the fact that new insights are born “after a thousand or even ten thousand times.” The passages I cite follow the paragraph numbers of *Zhuzi Dushu Fa* 朱子讀書法, compiled by ZHANG Hong 張洪 and QI Bi 齊斿, who draw extensively—but not exclusively—on ZHU Xi's respective remarks in *juan* 卷 10 and 11 of the *Zhuzi Yulei* 朱子語類 (*Collected Sayings of Master Zhu*), contained in the *Siku Quanshu* (<https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=479054>).

The text must be experienced in one's own person (*tiyan* 體驗 [*Dushu Fa* no. 141], *ticha* 體察 [*Dushu Fa* nos. 125, 142]) and embodied by readers, who perceive it like something “incisive,” “cutting in” (*qieji* 切己), where they must “get immersed” (*hanyong* 涵泳 [*Dushu Fa* no. 125]). A text based on each reader's personal encounter necessarily has to be “exceedingly obscure” and Adler has left it that way. Geoffrey Redmond's naive assumption that the “*Zhouyi* was understandable to the readers of 3000 years ago” (19) misses the markedly cryptic characteristic of all oracular utterances; in most cases, the Delphic Pythia's verdicts had to be translated by *prophetes*, and such is the case for the interpretations of the *Yi*. An unambiguous oracle is but the lowest form of prognostication. A brief glance at SHANG Binghe's 尚秉和 (1870–1950) *Zhouyi Gushi Kao* 周易古筮考 suffices to get an impression of the often conflicting readings of an obscure divinatory statement (SHANG Binghe 尚秉和, *Zhouyi Gushi Kao* 周易古筮考 [*Studies on Changes Divination in Ancient Times*] [Taiyuan 太原: Shanxi Guji Cubanshe 山西古籍出版社, 1994]. Preface from 1926).

Joseph Adler is aware of the fact that ZHU Xi by no means wanted to reestablish an *Urtext* of the *Zhouyi*. Rather, it is the *intention* of its creators that he wanted to grasp. The English word “original” in the title of this translation might be somewhat misleading in this context, but English—alas!—does not have a good equivalent for the

German “*eigentlich*” (look up a German-English dictionary and you will find “real,” “actual,” “true,” “basic,” “authentic,” and a dozen more renderings).

While the translation (41–322) is free of the kind of lofty speculations one finds, for instance, in the Wilhelm/Baynes edition, and thus trusts the reader’s capacity for an individual meeting of minds with the text, the endnotes (323–373) are a masterpiece of exegetical effort. Among numerous other helpful elucidations, Adler’s broad erudition provides the reader with explanatory quotations from the Classics, from ZHU Xi’s *Collected Sayings* and relevant passages from writings of ZHU Xi’s contemporaries (and, in particular, CHENG Yi’s 程頤 commentary *Yichuan Yizhuan* 伊川易傳 and, of course, passages from SHAO Yong 邵雍 and ZHANG Zai 張載) and the clarification of rhymes. Moreover, he decodes many of the opaque interpretations of a hexagram (or a line, etc.) by analyzing the intrinsic structural relationship of lines and their positions or the affinity between images. In some cases, he points to apparent contradictions in ZHU Xi’s interpretation (e.g., note 56 on p. 335) or to the fact that ZHU Xi admits he does not understand a line (e.g., note 166 on p. 360 or note 275 on p. 349). This magisterial exegesis leaves nothing more to be desired.

However, restoring the intention of the creators of the *Yi* naturally has its limits: among the many helpful entries on “Key Terms and Concepts” in the introduction (22–36), we also find two pages of explanation on “The ‘Four Virtues’ of Qian [乾].” Adler is fully aware of the fact that in the ritual context of the Zhou 周, the meaning of the terms *yuan heng li zhen* 元亨利貞 was closely related to sacrifice and divination. However, long before ZHU Xi’s time, the terms had been transformed into “virtues.” The early key witness for this reading, which divides the original pairs of characters into four separate words, is the story of Lady Mujiang 穆姜 related in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (31, 120 and note 202 on p. 344; unfortunately, even ZHU Xi does not solve the riddle of the *Zuo zhuan* text, where Lady Mujiang meets with “Gen’s Eight” [*gen zhi ba* 艮之八]). In the passages on the key terms, the reader would probably have expected more elaboration on the important term of “Image” (*xiang* 象) that goes beyond its occurrence in the *Xici Zhuan* 繫辭傳 (*Treatise on the Appended Remarks*) and explains the use of images in ZHU Xi’s interpretations, but this does not affect the translation.

In his translation, Adler has not followed ZHU Xi’s original arrangement of the text, which breaks up the connections between the various levels; instead, he has opted for the more comprehensible order already adopted by previous editions. This wise approach follows the examples of the Coimbra scholars of dealing with Aristotle and the Jesuit Ludovico Buglio’s rearranging his Chinese translation of the *summa theologica* of Thomas Aquinas in the 1650s. No need to apologize!

This book is an important milestone for specialists of the *Changes*, but it also represents a meaningful help for its users. The curious specialist might be more tempted to consult the exegetical part (i.e., the notes) together with the translation, but why shouldn’t users also get more familiar with the intricate and complex ways in which sinological erudition and craftsmanship are able to shed more light on the mysteries of Chinese wisdom? Since Adler states, “the focus of this book, then, is really ZHU Xi more than the *Yijing* itself” (21), we may take the liberty to claim that it is yours as well as mine.