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## THE *YIJING* (*CLASSIC OF CHANGES*) IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: SOME REFLECTIONS

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**Abstract:** This paper is based on research for a book-length project on the “globalization” of the *Yijing* or *Classic of Changes* (see attached bibliography for some of my preliminary work on this topic). Clearly the “globalization” of the *Yijing* was in part the product of its alluring “special features:” its exalted position as “the first of the [Chinese] classics;” its cryptic and challenging basic text; its elaborate numerology and other forms of symbolic representation; its utility as a tool of divination; its philosophically sophisticated commentaries; its psychological potential (as a means of attaining self-understanding); and its reputation for a kind of encyclopedic comprehensiveness. The spread of the *Yijing* was also facilitated by the self-conscious strategies employed by those who sought to use it in various environments for their own political, social, intellectual or evangelical purposes. In the process the *Changes* invariably became “domesticated,” but not always in ways that its advocates in those environments might have originally envisioned.

### Introduction

The “evolution” of the *Yijing* is a fascinating and complicated story. This biological metaphor seems apt as a way of characterizing how the *Yijing* developed in China over time and how it spread to other parts of the world because, as the writings of Stephen Jay Gould and others in the sciences have demonstrated, “evolution” is not a simple process of linear development and progressive “improvement.” Rather it is a complex process of adaptation and transformation that yields interesting and often unexpected permutations according to local conditions.

The *Changes* began as a primitive fortune-telling manual about three thousand years ago, and developed out of the interaction between an unwritten folk tradition involving omens, oracles, proverbs, riddles and stories, and an elite system of divination that employed writing and a sophisticated numerology. This interaction, which took place primarily during the latter part of the Zhou dynasty, from about the eighth to the third centuries B.C.E, has been amply documented by a host of Chinese scholars, a number of Japanese ones (notably Toda Toyosaburo) and a few Westerners, including Richard Kunst and Edward Shaughnessy in the United States and the “Groupe de travail” in France. As we now know from recent archaeological excavations at Mawangdui, Fuyang, Wangjiatai and elsewhere, several different versions of the *Yi* text circulated during this crucial period, although the relationship between them is still poorly understood. I have no doubt that still other versions will be discovered in time.

During the early Han dynasty the commentaries known as the “Ten Wings” (*shiyi*)--attributed (erroneously) to Confucius—became permanently appended to the “basic text,” and as a result the work received imperial approval in 136 B.C.E. as one of

the five major “Confucian” classics. Had it not been for this development—including the association of the Ten Wings with the Sage himself—we may doubt whether Chinese scholars would have given the document so much careful scrutiny and searched so relentlessly for its deeper significance over the next two thousand years.

In any case, amplified by the “Ten Wings,” the *Yijing* became a repository of profound moral and metaphysical truths, not just a divination manual, and for the next two thousand years, it attracted more scholarly attention in China than any other classical text. From the 3rd century to the 10th century the commentaries of Wang Bi (226-249) and his latter-day disciple, Han Kangbo (d. c. 385) dominated exegetical scholarship on the *Changes*. From the 14th century into the 17th, the commentaries of Cheng Yi (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi (1130-1200) held sway in most intellectual circles. The cosmological critiques of scholars identified with “evidential learning” (*kaozheng xue*) during the 17th and the 18th centuries exposed the interpretive liberties taken by various Song neo-Confucian commentators, but many scholars still followed Zhu Xi’s lead, as we can see from On-cho Ng’s excellent recent study of Li Guangdi.

The important point is, of course, that people of different philosophical persuasions read the *Yijing* in significantly different ways—even during the same basic time period. Consider, for example, the divergent views of such savants as Su Shi (1037-1101), Shao Yong (1011-1077), Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi during the Song. One important reason for this variety was the enormous complexity of the *Changes*, which proved endlessly fascinating to creative Chinese minds, as it does to this very day. Another reason was that although the “Ten Wings” did much to explain certain symbolic features of the basic text, many of its cryptic judgments and line statements remained highly problematical. As a result, scholars continued to pore obsessively over the *Yijing*, analyzing it phrase by phrase, concept by concept, and word by word—puzzling over it, playing with it, and learning from it.

And so, in stages, did scholars in other parts of the world. The result has been that during the past thousand years or so, the *Yijing* has gradually become a global property. By virtue of both its pervasive influence in China and China’s great prestige in peripheral areas (for a small sample of the abundant evidence, see Duong Ngoc Dung and Lê Anh Minh, Hu Wenhui, Imai Usaburo, Jiang Chengqing, Lao Gen, Li Ling, Liao Mingchun, Pak Yong-suk, Ryu Sung-guk, Song, Chae-guk, Tang Mingbang, Wang Zhenfu, Yang Hongsheng, Ying Dingcheng, Zhang Qicheng, Zhu Bokun, etc.), the *Changes* gradually spread to other realms of East Asia—notably Japan, Korea, Annam (Vietnam) and Tibet. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jesuit missionaries brought knowledge of the classic to the West; and today there are dozens of different translations of the *Yijing* in various European languages. The work has inspired countless derivative books, and is presently used for insight and guidance by millions of people worldwide. (A recent bibliography by Edward Hacker, et al., lists 500 books and dissertations and about the same number of articles related to the *Changes* in English alone) How do we account for these developments—particularly the transcultural spread and enduring influence of the *Yijing*? In what respects can the *Yijing* be compared to other “classic” works as a document of truly “global” significance?

### The *Changes* in East Asia

Let us take the question of transmission first. Although the specific circumstances under which the *Changes* found its way to various East Asian countries naturally

differed, there seem to be certain common patterns in the way that it travelled. In the first place, with respect to those areas closest to China in terms of both geography and culture—Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—the literati were thoroughly conversant in the classical Chinese language; hence, there was no significant barrier to written communication. Secondly, since the *Yijing* continued to occupy an exalted position in Chinese culture into the twentieth century, there was never a time when it lacked prestige in peripheral areas. Initially, elites—and then other sectors of society—embraced the *Changes*, using it for their own purposes. Finally, and most importantly, the *Yi* became “domesticated” in each of these environments, undergoing sometimes radical transformations in the process. Japan provides a particularly apt illustration of these themes, as the many writings of Professor Benjamin Wai-ming Ng indicate.

The *Yijing* was transmitted to Japan during the 6th century C.E., but study of the classic became institutionalized only in the Nara period (712-793). The Bureau of Education treated the work as a Confucian text, while the Bureau of Divination naturally considered it to be a book of oracles, for use in determining the timing and shape of military and court rituals as well as in calendrical calculations, astronomy and medicine. From the standpoint of scholarship, Wang Bi’s third century commentaries seem to have been favored. Apparently there was a general taboo in Japan against studying the *Changes* before the age of fifty—the result of a misreading of a famous passage in the Confucian *Analects*.

Prior to the seventeenth century, the *Yijing* exerted some influence in Confucian, Buddhist, and Shinto circles, but it did not become particularly popular until the Tokugawa era. During that period, however, for reasons that are not entirely clear to me, interest in the *Yi* suddenly took off. From the beginning of the Tokugawa regime in 1603, to the fall of the regime in 1868, more than a thousand books were written on the *Changes*. This amount is not much less than the total number of books written on the *Yijing* during the more-or-less contemporary Qing dynasty in China—which had a population fifteen times as great as Japan’s.

Although the *Yijing* was employed primarily to bolster and amplify Tokugawa Confucianism, it was also used to validate or undergird other Japanese cultural traditions—including both “native” Shinto and “borrowed” Buddhism. Buddhists, for instance, often explained the idea of reincarnation in terms of the following passage from the “Great Commentary” of the *Yijing*:

Tracing things to their origins and then turning back to [see] their ends, we understand the lessons of life and death. With the consolidation of material force into essence [*jingqi*], a person comes into being, but with the dissipation of the soul [*youhun*], change comes about. It is due to this that we understand the true state of gods and spirits.

Similarly, Shinto scholars sought to validate their belief system by reference to the *Changes*. A common strategy was to cite the “Commentary on the Judgments” for hexagram #20 (Guan in Chinese, signifying “Viewing”). It reads: “Viewing the way of the spirits [*Shendao* in Chinese; *Shinto* in Japanese], one finds that the four seasons never deviate, and so the sage establishes his teachings on the basis of . . . [this way], and all under Heaven submit to him.”

There were, of course, other ways of linking the *Yijing* to Shintoism. Kumazawa Banzan (1619-1691) wrote:

The Way of the sages in China is also the way of the spirits. Shinto in my country [Japan] is the Shinto of Heaven and Earth. The *Ekikyo* [*Yijing*] is also the Shinto of Heaven and Earth . . . . The Chinese sage known as Fu Xi was the first to draw the lines of Ken [Qian, hexagram #1] and Kon [Kun, hexagram #2], which later developed into the eight trigrams and eventually became the sixty-four hexagrams. Similarly, we [Japanese] have used the number eight, such as the Yatano [Mirror] and the Yasaka [Jade], because the Shinto of Heaven and Earth is one, and it is naturally the same wonderful principle shared by both Japan and China.

As in other areas of East Asia during the same period, Zhu Xi's interpretations of the *Yijing* were considered "orthodox" in Tokugawa times, but this did not prevent scholars in Japan, Korea or Vietnam from criticizing Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, using the "evidential research" (*kaozheng xue*) techniques of contemporary Chinese critics as well as their own distinctive methodologies.

Individuals of all outlooks and backgrounds embraced the *Yijing* in Tokugawa Japan—not only Confucians, Buddhists, and Shinto clergymen, but also exponents of Kokugaku (Ancient Learning), Mito scholars (emphasizing reverence for the emperor), and advocates of Western ideas or "Dutch Learning" (Rangaku). As a result, the *Changes* quickly penetrated all levels of Japanese society. Samurai scholars and members of the clergy studied it and also divined with it; merchants used the *Yijing* to make all kinds of business decisions, and as a justification for their profession. There were even commercial divination manuals, which used the sixty-four hexagrams of the *Yi* to predict price fluctuations in the rice market. Manuals prepared for artisans explained crafts such as ship building and architecture in terms of the *Changes*, and peasants throughout the land conducted their daily lives in accordance with the dictates of professional fortunetellers.

As in China, the symbolism of the *Yijing* could be found in virtually every realm of Japanese life, from the tea ceremony, flower arranging, popular drama, military tactics, martial arts, medicine and board games, to artistic, literary and musical criticism. Even distinctly Japanese cultural forms, such as *tanka* poetry (consisting of five lines of 31 syllables, broken down 5-7-5-7-7), came to be explained in terms of *Yijing* numerical categories.

Not surprisingly, the *Changes* played a major role in Japanese politics, since many emperors and shoguns sought its spiritual and practical guidance. For instance, Shogun Tsunayoshi, who reigned from 1680-1709, presided over at least 240 *Yijing* seminars in 7 years. Here is a description of the sessions by one of his ministers:

[In these seminars] the shogun [Tsunayoshi] sometimes lectured on the *Shueki hongi* [Zhu Xi's *Zhouyi benyi*] . . . . [The audience consisted not only of] his close retainers, but also . . . also daimyo, high-ranking samurai, local administrative officers, executive officers and high officials, Buddhist monks, and Shinto priests. The *Yijing* was often used to support the central notion of loyalty to the ruler.

Thus we find Matsunaga Sekigo writing in the 17th century:

The *Classic of Changes* reads: ‘At the beginning there was Heaven and Earth; then husband and wife followed. Father and son came after husband and wife. Ruler and subject came after father and son.’ Who can live without these relationships? If you apply filial piety to serving your ruler, it becomes loyalty. Using the method of settling family affairs to govern the country will bring peace and stability.

The *Yijing* could also explain the shogun’s unique position as a ruler (administering the realm in the emperor’s name). Another 17th century Japanese writer, Asayama Soshin, tells us:

Of the six unbroken lines [of the Ken (i.e. Qian) hexagram], the lord’s place is indicated by the second line from the top, the fifth from the bottom. Why not the first line at the very top, as some would argue? If the ruler of the realm thinks that he is the top of everything . . . he should be told that this is clearly contrary to the Way of Heaven, that he will do evil things. The place at the top has the following negative commentary in the *Ekikyo* [*Yijing*]: “A dragon at the top will have cause to repent.

The top line actually says that only the dragon who “overreaches” (i.e. is “arrogant”) will have cause for regret, but the point remained that it was all right for the emperor to be at the top, because he didn’t rule; he merely reigned.

Although the *Yijing* was often cited to support the political status quo—as, for example, in the laws governing military households—it was also used to justify political reform. Thus we have Ito Jinsai, an eighteenth century scholar, using hexagram #49 [Ge, in Chinese, indicating “Radical Change”) to explain the need for contemporary solutions to contemporary problems:

If the sages of the past lived in today’s world, they would have to act according to today’s customs, and apply today’s laws. Therefore, [the *Classic of Changes* says] ‘When the superior man changes like a leopard, it means that his pattern [i.e. “culture”] becomes magnificent, and when the petty man radically changes his countenance, it means he will follow his sovereign with obedience.’ Thus, the country will naturally be well governed.

Eventually, as the Tokugawa rulers began to lose their political authority in the mid-nineteenth century, the *Yijing* was increasingly used to attack the Shogunate. Hirose Tanso (1782-1856), focusing on hexagram #12 [Pi in Chinese, signifying “Obstruction”] wrote, for example: “In the *Classic of Changes*, the hexagram with the trigrams for Heaven at the top and Earth below represents the idea of Obstruction] . . . . This is the symbol of a country without proper rule. Today the ruling warrior family [i.e. the shogun] makes the mistake [of creating too much distance between above and below, making communication impossible.”

In the meantime, the *Yijing* had become increasingly assimilated to the indigenous culture of Japan, at least in some circles. Thus we find Jiun Sonja (1718-1804), a Shinto priest, arguing that:

The images of the River Chart [*Hetu*, which provided the model for the eight trigrams], were manifested through the Okitsu Mirror [a round bronze mirror kept at the sacred Ise shrine] . . . . Every word of the *Ekikyo* [*Yijing*] is interesting and significant . . . [and] the whole book is completely borrowed from us [the Japanese].

Similarly, Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) asserted that the ancient Chinese culture hero Fu Xi was actually a Shinto deity!

Like Hirata, and perhaps influenced by him, the nationalistic Korean scholar, Sin Ch'aeho (1880-1936), attempted to “domesticate” the *Yijing*, arguing, on the basis of forged texts, that Fu Xi was in fact a Korean prince who had learned the *Changes* from Hang Wong, an early Hanguk ruler. And even earlier, in a similar expression of cultural pride, Chong Yagyong (1762-1836), suggested that the brother of the last Shang dynasty king, the Viscount of Ji (Jizi)--who allegedly left China for Korea and was viewed by many Koreans as a kind of ancient “patriarch”—might have written part of the basic text of the *Changes*. Another strategy of domestication in Korea was to invent a book derived from, but different than, the *Yijing*—rather like Yang Xiong’s (53 B.C.E.-18 C.E.) *Taixuan jing* (Classic of Great Mystery), or the apocryphal Han treatise known as the *Qianzuodu* (A Penetration of the Laws of Qian) in the Chinese tradition. The most prominent example in Korean history is the nineteenth century derivative work known as the *Correct Changes* (Chongyok), discussed in detail by Yi Chong-ho, Lee Jung Young, Paul Fendos and others.

I have not yet found evidence for similar strategies of domestication in the case of Vietnam, but it is clear that use of the *nom* script in works such as Dang Thai Phuong’s *Chu dich quoi am ca* (Songs of the *Zhou Changes* in National Pronunciation; 1815) had this effect, even though they explained the cryptic text of the *Yijing* explicitly in terms of the Chinese exegetical tradition known as *xungu*. As the preface of Dang’s book puts the matter, “Our [Confucian] learning in Vietnam is the same as that of the Chinese, but our pronunciation [of the words in the texts] is different.”

In many respects, pre-modern Korean and Vietnamese intellectuals approached the *Yijing* in the same spirit as that of the Japanese (for refinements and qualifications, see Ryu Sung-guk and He Shengda). In both of these cultural environments, the work retained its aura as a Chinese classic; and in both, it had wide application at all levels of society as an explanatory device, extending into the realms of language, philosophy, religion, art, literature, science, medicine, and social customs. Despite the esteem of Zhu Xi’s thought in both Yi dynasty Korea (1392-1910) and Le dynasty Vietnam (1428-1789), Vietnamese and Korean scholars seem to have appreciated the school of “images and numbers” (*xiangshu*) more than the school of “morality and principle” (*yili*). This is quite evident from the materials I have seen in Seoul University’s Kyujanggak Archives as well as Hanoi’s National Library. Nonetheless, most of the premodern writings on the *Yijing* that I have perused in both Korea and Vietnam acknowledge explicitly the value of Cheng-Zhu learning. Thus, it appears that the sharp distinctions that are often drawn between different exegetical traditions in Japan, Korea and Vietnam tend to blur somewhat when individual thinkers and their texts are examined closely. This, as I have argued in a recent article titled “The Jesuits and Evidential Research: Some Reflections,” is also true of a number of Chinese scholars who, I believe, have been too narrowly pigeon-holed in the past.

In the case of Tibet, the process of transmission involved substantial modification—in part, no doubt, because unlike Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese elites, comparatively few Tibetan monks knew Chinese. The *Yijing* (*Yeekyin* in Tibetan) first came to Tibet as a respected Chinese “classic” during the early Tang dynasty, and there is some evidence of a scholarly interest in the document at that time. Meanwhile, and not surprisingly, Tibetan diviners began using the trigrams of the *Changes* in more or less the Chinese fashion. Later, as Wang Yao and others have noted, they borrowed the numerological diagrams of the *Yijing*—notably the *Luoshu*—creating new divinatory symbols, including four-lined tetragrams (there was, of course, a precedent for this in China with Yang Xiong’s *Taixuan jing*), and five-lined pentagrams—which were still, however, normally organized in groups of eight.

Like the Japanese, the Tibetans seem to have been particularly eager to assimilate the *Yijing* to their indigenous culture. Some Tibetan commentators emphasized affinities between the *Yijing* and Tantric Buddhism, and other scholars in both the Buddhist and Bon traditions transformed Confucius, as the major transmitter of *Yijing* divination (and other forms) into their own religious figures. Moreover, in at least some cases, the eight trigrams acquired significantly different symbolic identifications in Tibet than their traditional Chinese ones. Zhen, for example, usually associated with Thunder, came to be linked in some Tibetan divination systems with “meteoric iron.” The famous late 18th century work on Tibetan divination by Sangs-rgyas rGya-mtsho (Sangye Gyatso; 1653-1705)—known popularly as the *White Beryl Treatise* (*Vaidurya dKar-po*) and recently translated and annotated by Gyurme Dorje (2001)—provides a wealth of detail on the various ways that the Tibetans drew upon, and departed from, Chinese divinatory traditions associated with the *Yijing*, amplifying the excellent study of Tibetan divination produced by Phillippe Cornu (1997).

A distinctive feature of the process by which various East Asian peoples borrowed from Chinese culture was their periodic use of emissaries—individuals and groups who transmitted Chinese texts and traditions to their home countries in a self-conscious and sometimes quite systematic way. Westerners, too, sent missions to China, and they brought back all kinds of information, but these missions proceeded from very different motives.

### **The *Changes* in Western Hands**

Initially, Jesuit missionaries played the major role in transmitting Chinese culture to the West. From the late sixteenth century onward, in a pattern replicated in many other parts of the world, the Jesuits attempted to assimilate themselves as much as possible to the host country. They studied its language, learned its customs, and sought to understand its philosophical and religious traditions. In the course of their study they proved to be inveterate collectors of alien artifacts. During the past few years I have done a good deal of research in the Chinese archives of the Vatican Library, and I have been astonished at the range of materials that the Jesuits brought back to Rome from China—everything from sophisticated philosophical tracts to children’s games.

The Vatican archives reveal that the Jesuits were extremely successful in penetrating the highest levels of Chinese society. To be sure, they had their enemies among certain Ming and Qing literati, but during the early eighteenth century in particular the Jesuits could boast friends in very high places. Indeed, some had daily contact with the Kangxi emperor himself.

One such person was Father Joachim Bouvet (c. 1660-1732). According to Vatican records, there were times when Father Bouvet tutored the emperor every day for two hours in algebra and geometry. In addition, the two men discussed the *Yijing*—which the emperor naturally believed to be the source of all the mathematics he was learning. Kangxi also apparently appreciated Bouvet’s claims to be able to predict the future with numerological charts based on the *Changes*.

The Vatican collection contains a number of documents that deal with their relationship, as well as several written communications between the emperor and one of Bouvet’s colleagues named Jean-François Fouquet (1665-1741). Judging from the archival materials I have seen, the essays and documents on the *Yijing* produced by these men and their Chinese collaborators are highly sophisticated, although Fouquet’s personal journal suggests a man with strange ideas about the etymology of Chinese characters.

It is clear from the Kangxi emperor’s writings that he admired Bouvet above all—a man, he wrote, who “has read a great deal, and [who has] developed the ability to undertake serious study of the *Yi*.” It is important to remember, however, that Bouvet’s studies of the *Changes* proceeded from an clear agenda. For all his appreciation of Chinese literature and culture, Bouvet’s ultimate goal was to convert the emperor and his officials to Christianity. The *Yijing* was merely one potent weapon in his evangelical arsenal.

Bouvet and Fouquet represented a development in Western Christianity known as the Figurist movement. In general, the Figurists tried to find in the Old Testament evidence of the coming and significance of Christ through an analysis of “letters, words, persons and events.” Apart from the literal meaning of the “outer” text, in other words, there existed a hidden “inner” meaning to be discovered. In China this gave rise to a concerted effort to find reflections (that is “figures”) of the biblical patriarchs and examples of biblical revelation in the Chinese classics themselves.

Bouvet and Fouquet were masters of the art. Using a strained etymological approach to various written texts, as well as an evaluation of the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Yijing*, they found all kinds of hidden messages. Dissection of the Chinese character for Heaven (the number two and the word for Man) indicated a prophecy of the second Adam, Jesus Christ; the three solid lines of the Qian (Heaven) trigram represented an early awareness of the Trinity; the hexagram Xu (Waiting, #5), with its stark reference to “clouds rising up to Heaven” (in the Commentary on the Big Image), could only refer to the glorious ascent of the Saviour.” And, of course, the first hexagram, Qian, referred to Creation itself.

Efforts to link Chinese culture heroes to biblical figures produced all kinds of creative connections: Peng the Ancestor (Pengzu) became Adam; Fu Xi, inventor of the eight trigrams, was the mysterious Patriarch Enoch, who reportedly “walked with God;” references to the moral exemplar Yao, they argued, must have been derived from the Hebrew term Yaweh.

Bouvet emphasized the theme of prophecy in his writings; hence his favorite classic was the *Yijing*. Fouquet, for his part, favored the *Shujing* (Classic of Documents), which he believed (or at least claimed) was an elaborate allegory of Old Testament history. But both wrote extensively on the *Changes*, and many of their manuscripts are still preserved in the Vatican archives and the Bibliotheque Nationale.

One of Bouvet’s several essays in Chinese, titled *Yiyao* (Key to the *Changes*; 1712), makes the following claim:

“All the people of the people of China and the Western regions originally came from one ancestor; they are all brothers . . . . They submitted to the one Way, the one principle and the one teaching. [ . . . ] How could the ancient Chinese have the true tradition of the heavenly teachings and beliefs, and the myriad countries of the West . . . [have none of these teachings and beliefs] at all?”

In another work, titled *Yikao* (An Examination of the *Yi*), he makes a similar argument, pointing out that although the West has nothing quite like the *Yijing*, there are plenty of examples of early illustrations and writings that are similar. They represent, he says, an ancient time when all men had “one mind, one principle, one Way and one learning.”

Bouvet’s specialty interest was numerology and mathematics. Even before leaving for Asia in 1685, he had already laid the groundwork for this approach to the *Yijing*. He tells us: “I brought with me [to China] a special knowledge of the Hebrew Mosaic cabbala, and of the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy . . . .” This knowledge, he would later claim, represented “the true elements of the whole hieroglyphic wisdom of the Chinese, or rather of the Old Patriarchs.”

For the next ten years or so Bouvet studied the Chinese language literature, literature and music. In the process he acquired a deep understanding of *Yijing* numerology, which he claimed represented messianic prophecies. In addition, he believed that all references in the Ten Wings to “sages”, “superior men,” and “great men” betokened the Messiah. Eventually Bouvet developed the idea that the *Yijing* contained the idea of three “states” or stages in the history of the world—a state of original perfection, one of corruption and degeneration, and one of reformation and restoration. By Bouvet’s account, the Kangxi emperor approved of this notion, perhaps because it resonated with similar schemes devised by Chinese scholars (notably Shao Yong) centuries before. The emperor did not, however, accept Bouvet’s assertion that the *Yijing* was originally one of several Jewish-Christian books by Enoch that found its way to China after the flood. Indeed, for the Kangxi emperor the *Classic of Changes* was an ideal example of the “Chinese origins of Western learning” (*Xixue Zhongyuan*).

According to a recent article by Han Qi in *Hanxue yanjiu* (1998), Bouvet’s broad-ranging investigations of the *Yijing*, and his study of various charts in Cheng Dawei’s *Suanfa tongzong* (Account of Mathematical Formulas, 1592), not only nourished the Kangxi emperor’s already well developed interest in the *Changes*, but they also gave him a new-found appreciation for Cheng’s book. The result was that he arranged for the *Suanfa tongzong* to be republished immediately with additions and corrections, and ordered his trusted Grand Secretary, Li Guangdi (1642-1718) to begin compiling a huge annotated edition of the *Yijing* which was published under the title *Zhouyi zhezong* (A Balanced [Edition of the] *Zhou Changes*; 1715).

Unfortunately for Bouvet, however, his Figurist enterprise, like the broader Jesuit evangelical movement, fell victim to harsh criticisms and vigorous attacks by other members of the Christian community in China and abroad. Bouvet also had his Chinese critics. For example, He Su and Wang Daohua of the Imperial Household Department wrote disparagingly in 1712:

After looking repeatedly at Bouvet’s [studies of the] *Yijing* and his charts, we really don’t understand [what he is trying to say]. The charts have things like ghosts and spirits, which seem [as muddled and unsubstantial as] flowers.

Although we don't [claim to] know their secrets, they look ridiculous. In addition, [Bouvet] continually draws upon writings from Chinese books only to claim contrarily that they belong to Western teachings.

During the next few years Bouvet's fortunes waned, although the emperor never gave up completely on him. Then, in April of 1716, a delegation of Jesuit missionaries hostile to Figurism for its far-fetched theories, managed to convince the Kangxi emperor, whose enthusiasm for Western science had diminished, that Bouvet's ideas were eccentric and even dangerous. From this point onward, Bouvet fell out of imperial favor, although he continued to write on the *Yijing* until his death in 1730.

Although the Figurism practiced by Father Bouvet and his followers has often been stigmatized—not only in its own time but also by later scholars—for its highly inventive etymologies, its numerological emphasis, its wide-ranging correlations and its far-reaching allegorical interpretations, roughly comparable exegetical strategies were a part of the *Yi* tradition in China (and elsewhere in East Asia) well before the arrival of the Jesuits. Chinese scholars of the *Changes* (and other classics) often dissected characters to explain concepts, indulged in elaborate numerological speculations, and established all kinds of creative correlations. What they lacked, on the whole, was an incentive to link Chinese culture heroes allegorically to foreign religious figures.

Despite the unhappy fate of the Figurists in China, and the Church's proscription of most of their writings, Figurist ideas circulated widely in Europe during the eighteenth century, capturing the attention of several prominent intellectuals—most notably, of course, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716). The writings of Leibniz and others, in turn, played a significant role in shaping the contours of Western scholarship on China in general and on the *Yijing* in particular, as we know from the work of Claudia von Collani, David Mungello, Paul Rule and others.

Between 1736 and 1763, a number of books on the *Yijing* appeared in Europe, including several that focused on the mathematical structure of the *Changes* as identified and explained by Bouvet, Leibniz and others. The first complete translation of the *Changes* in a Western language (Latin) was undertaken by three missionary-scholars who were extremely critical of the allegorical approach of Father Bouvet and his followers. Although completed by in 1736, this translation did not actually appear in print until the 1830s.

During the nineteenth century, several full translations of the *Yijing* appeared in Europe, including those by Canon Thomas McClatchie (1876), Angelo Zottoli (1880), James Legge (1882), P.L.-F. Philastre (1885-1893), and Charles de Harlez (1889). Like Bouvet, but with no overt discussion of him, McClatchie believed that the *Yijing* had been carried to China by one of the sons of Noah after the Deluge. But whereas Bouvet tried to use the *Changes* to prove that the Chinese had knowledge of the one true God, McClatchie believed that the work reflected a form of pagan materialism, “perfected by Nimrod and his Cushites before the dispersion from Babel.” He identified Shangdi as the Baal of the Chaldeans.

Terrien de LaCouverie, writing in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1882-83), put forward the view that the *Yijing* was originally a dictionary—“a handbook of state management . . . set forth under the sixty-four words [hexagram names].” Hostile to the Chinese commentarial tradition (the product of what he derisively described as “tortured minds” and “maddened brains”) and to most Western interpretations of the work as well (“amusing enough to dispel the spleen”), he posited Near Eastern origins for

the basic text of the *Changes* (but not the commentaries). His intent was not to “domesticate” the *Yijing*, however, for he held it in very low esteem.

According to de Harlez, the *Yi* was originally the notebook of some ancient political figure, which had been turned into a book of divination by another political figure at a later date. Iulian Shchutskii points out, however, that something of the opposite process actually took place

James Legge, the object of some of de LaCouperie’s most vitriolic criticisms, began his translation of the *Changes* in 1854, but for various reasons it was not completed for another twenty years or so. Like the Jesuits, he believed that the Confucian classics were compatible with Christian beliefs (hence his monumental translation project), but he was not a Figurist. Legge had no love of China and no respect for the *Yijing*, which he described as “a farrago of emblematic representations.” Although he admitted that the *Changes* was “an important monument of architecture,” he characterized it as “very bizarre in its conception and execution.” Legge’s highly literal translation, published in 1882, generally followed the prevailing neo-Confucian orthodoxy of the Qing dynasty as reflected in the *Zhouyi zhezhong*—although, as Lauren Pfister points out, Legge also drew upon *kaozheng* scholarship to criticize Zhu Xi.

Less critical of Zhu and more influential worldwide was the rendering of the *Changes* by the German scholar Richard Wilhelm, which first appeared in 1924. The standard English translation of this work was carried out by one of Carl Jung’s students, Ms. Cary Baynes, and published in 1950. The standard comparison of the two works—somewhat of a distortion on both ends—is that Legge’s text indicates what the *Yijing* says while Wilhelm’s conveys what it means. The interesting point about Wilhelm’s translation is that it bespeaks a man not only in love with China, but also one who believed that the *Yijing* had something important to say to all mankind. Like Bouvet, he considered the *Changes* to be a global property and a work of timeless wisdom, but unlike Bouvet he treated it solely as a Chinese document, with no genetic links with the ancient West or Near East.

Wilhelm—like many scholars before him, both East and West—tried to “domesticate” the *Yijing* in various ways. One was to call upon the authority of classical German philosophers and literary figures, like Kant and Goethe, to illustrate “parallel” ideas expressed in the *Changes*. Another was to cite the Bible for the same purpose. Yet another was to argue that the *Yijing* drew upon “some common foundations of humankind that all our cultures—unconsciously and unrecognizedly—are based.” Wilhelm also tried to “demystify” the *Changes* by providing elaborate commentaries that paraphrased and explained the “spiritual” material that he felt might “confuse the European reader too much with the unusual.” This strategy of “rationalization,” as Michael Lackner points out, was similar to that of the French Jesuit Figurists, “who frequently prepared second translations of certain texts because they claimed to know the intrinsic meaning of these texts: the prefiguration of Christian revelation.” The process often involved the willful misrepresentation (or at least the ignoring) of traditional commentaries in order to “dehistoricize” the “original” text.

I would like to end this discussion of translation and transmission with a few relatively modern examples of *Yijing* interpretation by Westerners (putting aside studies in Chinese, such as Wang Xiangxuan’s *Yitong* [Unity of the Changes; c. 1917]), which, like Wang’s work, show strong affinities with “Figurism.” The first involves the British mystic, Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), who travelled to China for awhile during the first decade of the 20th century. Eventually, Crowley developed an approach to the classic

that dispensed with the conventional attributes of some of the trigrams and tried to assimilate them to the Kabbalistic “Tree of Life.” J. Edward Cornelius and Marlene Cornelius have provided an excellent overview of his highly idiosyncratic approach in “*Yi King: A Beastly Book of Changes*,” which appears in *Red Flame: A Thelemic Research Journal* (1998).

Crowley’s interpretation of the *Yijing* formed part of the core curriculum of the Great Brotherhood of God (or GBG), an American occult order founded by C. F. Russell, one of Crowley’s disciples. Although defunct by 1976, some of the GBG’s teachings have been published recently by the former head of its Southern California section, Louis T. Culling. Culling, for his part, employs Crowley’s cabalistic interpretation of the *Changes*, but changes the order of the hexagrams and virtually dispenses with the texts attached to them. Charlie Higgins’ on-line article, “The Hexagram and the Kabbalah” (1997) represents one of a number of other efforts to link the *Yijing* to ancient mysticism, including not only the Kabbalah, but also various forms of astrology and Tarot card reading.

There are a great many recent books and articles (including website publications) relating the *Yijing* to the conventional values of Christianity. One recent effort to apply a “Figurist” approach to the *Yijing* is Joe E. McCaffree’s *Bible and I Ching Relationship*, first published in 1967. Using strained etymologies and other “Figurist” exegetical techniques, but without an acknowledged debt to Bouvet or his followers, this work of 446 pages tries to show that (1) certain Chinese characters were “specially designed” for correlative purposes in works such as the *Changes*; (2) the texts of the *Yijing* and the Hebrew Bible “follow the same sequence with respect to the order of events and their inherent characteristics;” (3) various biblical personalities, including Joseph of Genesis, Moses and Solomon, are identified in the *Yijing*; (4) Biblical accounts have “a hexagrammatic structure” which includes literal references to the trigrams; (5) the Zhou people were “probably” Israelites; (6) that the *Yijing* “fulfills” biblical prophecy; and that (7) the *Changes* were intended as a “study guide” to the Bible. In short, the *Yijing* unveils a “divine plan for the culture of man,” and in so doing “consummates” what the Torah has “generated.”

Similarly, in his book *The Chinese Pakua*, Ong Hean-Tatt, a Cantonese writer, discusses the “common origin” of Chinese-Hebrew Kabalistic Magic Squares,” the “link between [the] Chinese and Hebrew languages,” and the identity between the twenty-two symbols of the stem-branch (*gan zhi*) system and the 22 letters of the Kabbalah, and “Middle East legends in Chinese ideograms.” He asserts that the long (“dragon”) is the winged “seraphim” of the Bible, and that the character for boat (*chuan*), depicting eight persons in a boat, refers to Noah’s ark [Bouvet makes the same leap]. He also equates Fu Xi with Adam and Noah with Shen Nong. But there is no mention in his book of Bouvet or other Figurists.

Another writer who employs Figurist techniques without acknowledging a debt to the Jesuits is the prolific Korean author Jung Young Lee. His book, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (1996) employs Figurist logic throughout. For instance, in describing the traditional attributes of the trigram Qian, as laid out in the *Shuogua* (Explaining the Trigrams), he shows how each represents aspects of God. He is the Heavenly Creator, who fashioned the dome-like sky (Genesis 1:7-8). He is also the sovereign and the father of all things. He is strong and hard, like jade and metal, and cold as ice. He is deep red—“the color of blood, which is the source of life.” As the fruit from a tree, God nurtures, brings joy, and sacrifices his only Son. The various horses described in the *Shuogua*

(fine, old and emaciated, and wild), represent, respectively, devotion, diligence, and the “strength and power that transcend ordinary existence.” Lee cites the passage from John 5:17: “My Father is still working, and I am also working.” Finally, Lee argues that the Heavenly Father is analogous to the dragon. He writes: “In China the dragon was used as symbol of extraordinary power, . . . which manifests itself in a thunderstorm.” The name of Yahweh, he goes on to say, has its origin in “the mighty power of lightning and thunder.” Another name for god, *El*, also expresses this notion of power. Thus, “God the Father is closely associated with the image of a dragon in *The Book of Change*.” As the “hidden dragon,” He is the source of [all] creativity.”

Looking back over the long history of the *Changes* in China and elsewhere, it is clear that there is no “authentic” or “essential” *Yijing*. There are only versions of it—amalgamations of material that are always and inextricably linked to specific times and places (cf. Coleman, 2001). Indeed, in my more post-modern moments, I am even inclined grant a place in the “evolution” of the *Changes* to works such as *Golf Ching: Golf Guidance and Wisdom from the I Ching*, *I Ching Divination for Today’s Woman*, and *The I Ching of Management: An Age-Old Study for New Age Managers*. Certainly they are part of a long, complex and significant story of cross-cultural textual transmission. But to be brutally frank, the story interests me in ways that the books themselves do not.

With this point in mind, I would like to look briefly at the *Changes* in relation to several other great classical works—specifically the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, the Qu’ran, and the Four Vedas of Hinduism. My purpose is to bring these works into conversation.

### **The *Changes* in Comparative Perspective**

At first glance it may seem that there is little to talk about. Unlike the *Yijing*, all three of the other great works are prolix, rich in myth, and possessed of powerful narrative structures. Furthermore, each is grounded in a major religious tradition—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism.

From the standpoint of origins, the Four Vedas were presumed to be magical, revealed texts, to be transmitted orally rather than in writing in order to preclude the possibility of their divine power falling into the wrong hands. The Bible and the *Qu’ran*, for their part, also lacked “human origins.” They were supposed to represent the holy word of a transcendent God—divinely revealed in the fashion of the Vedas, but then written down in addition to being passed along as oral documents. The *Yijing*, by contrast, claimed to be based solely on the natural observations of human beings—mere mortals—and the order or *Dao* which it purported to reflect had no personality or particular identity. Lacking any sort of elaborated myth, the *Changes* posited neither a purposeful beginning nor an apocalyptic end; only recurrent, cyclical patterns of change.

These stories of origin have had enormous cultural importance, but they tell us little if anything about the actual evolution of what came to be considered sacred texts. We know from both archeological research and linguistic analysis that all four documents developed in stages, and that their content is not only diverse but also often contradictory. So how did they become revered classics? The answer is through commentaries. In the remainder of this paper I would like develop a few ideas inspired largely by my friend and colleague, John Henderson, whose excellent book, *Scripture, Canon and*

*Commentary*, should serve as an inspiration to us all. I am way out of my depth here, but enjoying the swim.

My first point, a fairly obvious one, is that, like the *Yijing*, the *Bible*, the *Qu'ran* and the Vedas demonstrated an early openness to additional material. In part, this was because they had such heterogeneous content to begin with. For example, Northrup Frye, in *The Great Code*, describes the Hebrew *Bible* as a veritable mosaic of literary forms, including “commandments, aphorisms, epigrams, proverbs, parables, riddles, pericopes, parallel couplets, formulaic phrases, folktales, oracles, . . . legends, snippets of historical documents, laws, letters, sermons, hymns, ecstatic visions, rituals, fables, genealogical lists and so on almost indefinitely.”

And even the *Qu'ran*, a much more cohesive text, still represents what has been described as “an arbitrary arrangement of short passages . . . uttered by the Prophet at various times and at various places throughout his lifetime.” Moreover, as an article in the January 1999 edition of the *Atlantic Monthly* points out, recent archaeological discoveries of early Qu'ranic texts dating from the seventh and eighth centuries reveal significant “abberations” when compared to the received text. These inconsistencies are, in a sense, comparable to the different versions of the *Yijing* found in the Mawangdui silk manuscript of 168 B.C.E. But whereas the Mawangdui manuscript has simply generated intense scholarly interest among China specialists, the *Qu'ran* fragments have produced a theological crisis.

Another common denominator of the *Yijing*, the *Qu'ran*, the *Bible* and the Vedas, is their claim that certain wise men—whether they came to be styled seers, prophets, sages, or something even more exalted—were the human conduits of revealed wisdom. They “heard” in their hearts or “saw” through symbols and various other revelations, eternal messages that bespoke some sort of unifying truth or ultimate reality: the *Dao*, Yahweh, God, Brahman, etc. In this particular sense, figures such as Moses, Confucius, and Vyasa, as well as Jesus and Muhammad, were all early commentators—interpreters of what in *Yijing* scholarship came to be called the “basic text.” Viewed from this standpoint, the New Testament as a whole becomes a commentary on, and a reading of, the Jewish scriptures.

At one or another point in time, each classical work came to be considered “closed”—at least in the eyes of certain adherents. When a work became canonical, such as the *Changes* did in 136 B.C.E.E., commentaries on it acquired a somewhat different status than they had previously enjoyed. From that point onward, scholarly and popular exegesis performed the function not only of explanation but also of legitimation.

One of the most important legitimating claims made for canonical works was that they were all-encompassing, that they contained all significant knowledge. For two thousand years Chinese scholars of every persuasion repeated the cliché of the *Dazhuan*—that the *Yijing* was “broad and great, complete in every way.” Cheng Yi, a major Song dynasty commentator, remarked that the *Changes* “conjoins everything, from the obscure and bright of Heaven and Earth to the minuteness of insects, grasses and trees.” Wang Fuzhi, a towering figure in the seventeenth century wrote that the *Yi* was

. . . the manifestation of the Heavenly Way, the unexpressed form of nature, and the showcase for sagely achievement. *Yin* and *yang*, movement and stillness, darkness and lightness, contraction and expansion—all are inherent in it. Spirit operates within it; the refined subtlety of ritual and music is stored in it; the great utility of humaneness and right behavior issues forth from it; and the calculation

of order and disorder, good and bad fortune, life and death is in accordance with it.

Similarly grand assertions were commonly made for the *Bible*, the *Qu'ran* and the Vedas. Even the original Torah, embracing only the five books of Moses, was commonly called “The Book with Everything in It.”

Yet in all of these traditions, additional writings, sometimes derived from oral sources, acquired a type of canonical authority, supplementing the main text without necessarily claiming to do so. In China, this was true for Wang Bi’s commentary on the *Yijing* from the third century to the eleventh, and for Zhu Xi’s from the fourteenth century to the twentieth. Rabbinic Judaism likewise held that the original Torah needed further elaboration, thus paving the way for the canonization of an “Oral Torah,” as well as the two *Talmuds*.

Sunni Islam, for its part, distinguished between the extant Qu’ran and its heavenly archetype. This facilitated the acceptance of oral accounts of the actions and practices of Muhammad (*sunna*) as a means of filling gaps. And in Hinduism, the idea of a fifth Veda, variously identified, left open the possibility that other texts would supercede the original four. Thus a work like the *Bhagavad Gita* could emerge as a statement of—to quote one authority—“all that is most central and important in the Hindu world of ideas, “the essence of all scriptures” (in the words of R. M. Roy).

The diversity of both basic texts and supplementary materials created difficulties for later commentators, who felt obligated to maintain that the classics were cohesive, coherent and consistent. They rose to the challenge, however. The impulse—perhaps I should say imperative—of the human mind to impose order on all that it confronts, encouraged a variety of creative solutions to these sticky textual problems.

In the case of the *Yijing*, most efforts to show some sort of thematic unity in the diverse layers of the text hinged on the idea that each stratum built upon or complemented the previous one. The noted Song dynasty exegete, Su Xun (1009-1066), maintained, for example, that each of the three main layers of the *Changes* illuminated a different aspect of cosmic reality:

[Fu Xi] observed the images of Heaven and Earth to make the lines of the trigrams. [King Wen] comprehended the alternations of the yin and yang to make the hexagrams. [And Confucius] investigated the circumstances of ghosts and spirits to make the words [which form the Ten Wings].

Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Hindu commentators came up with similar explanatory schemes.

The problem of internal contradictions seemed more acute in some realms than others. In the rabbinic tradition, for example, discrepancies had legal implications, since the Torah was widely regarded as a book of law—the record of God’s commandments for Israel. The *Qu'ran*, too, had a legalistic orientation, governing, as it did, the entire life of the Muslim community.

In Vedanta, the urge to reconcile contradictory passages in the various texts of Hinduism proceeded primarily from theological motives. This was also true of Christian biblical exegesis, particularly from the time of St. Augustine onward. In the case of the *Yijing*, neither law nor theology mattered, but commentators still strove mightily to show a fundamental unity in the multi-layered text.

Among the many hermeneutical strategies pursued by order-conscious commentators, one common approach to divergence was to posit different levels of meaning. In the West, a standard device was allegory—the legacy, Stephen Prickett maintains, of “pre-Babylonian and Egyptian hermeneutics.” Another tactic was to assert that apparent imperfections in the canon were a concession to limited human capacities, an argument that can also be found in certain Islamic writings. In Indian scriptures, both Hindu and Buddhist, a characteristic explanation for textual inconsistencies was the notion of expedience—the idea that different messages are appropriate to different audiences. In Buddhism this technique is, of course, known as “skillful means.”

As is well known, the *Qu’ran* proclaims itself free from inconsistencies. But Islamic commentators implicitly recognized and tried to resolve contradictions in the text—often through a device known as “abrogation.” According to this doctrine, later pronouncements of the Prophet had the effect of rendering his earlier pronouncements null and void. In a similar fashion, Quranic commentators argued that certain discrepancies in canonical utterances were simply the result of a particular exception to a general rule.

Rabbinical and Vedic commentators generally resisted explanations that hinged on this sort of particularity. For them, the *Torah* and the *Vedas* were both timeless documents, for which by definition there could be “neither earlier nor later.” As Joseph Neusner has said of the compilers of the Palestinian Talmud, they acknowledged “no gradations in revelation.”

One approach to the reconciliation of discrepancies in canonical texts was to claim that certain terms had different meanings, even if they occurred within the same passage. Perhaps the best known example in the West is the apparently divergent characterizations of “God” in the *Bible*—notably the mention of two “Lords” in Genesis 19: 24. One explanation by Christian commentators has been that the first refers to Jesus, that is, God the Son, and the second refers to God the Father. Some scholars have argued that the Christian notion of the Trinity “may itself have been formulated to solve the exegetical problem of explaining divergent accounts of God given in the Scripture.”

Parallel strategies can, of course, be found in other cultures. In China, for instance, the familiar philosophical distinction between substance (*ti*) and function (*yong*) allowed commentators on the *Yijing* to handle a number of discrepancies in the text with relative ease. For example, a T’ang dynasty scholar explained two different characterizations of the first hexagram, Qian, which appear in two different parts of the Ten Wings, by writing: “The *Zagua* [wing] says that Qian is ‘hard,’ speaking of its substance; [while] the *Shuogua* [wing] says that it is ‘strong,’ speaking of its function.” In a similar vein, Zhu Xi wrote that the reason one chapter of the Great Commentary associates the virtue of “humaneness” (*ren*) with Earth and the next associates it with Heaven, is that the first “speaks [of Heaven] in terms of clarity and turbidity,” while the next “speaks in terms of movement and quiescence.”

A fundamental problem facing the interpreters of all canonical works was the obscurity of certain passages. In the case of the *Yijing*, as I have tried to indicate, virtually all of the so-called basic text falls into this category. Without the Ten Wings, the *Changes* would no doubt have remained at best a peasant omen text. In apparent recognition of the *Yijing*’s combination of stark simplicity and awesome obscurity, the seventeenth century commentator Diao Bao wrote that “although a child can practice it, a white haired man cannot fathom it.” Similar statements can be found for the *Bible*, the *Qu’ran* and the *Vedas*.

Divination provided one early tool of understanding. As John Henderson has noted, the commentarial traditions of many cultures may plausibly be traced to the interpretation of omens, oracles and dreams. In rabbinic Judaism, for instance, “the techniques of midrashic interpretation were adapted from ancient procedures of dream interpretation,” down to such details as style, spelling, and vocabulary. In Christian biblical commentaries, too, the terms employed for “typological exegesis,” a specific method for interpreting the historical events of the Old Testament, had their origins in the evaluation of dreams. Qu’ranic commentary, likewise, has been identified by at least some authorities with techniques of dream interpretation. In China and India, the link between canonical writings and divination practices is especially strong and direct.

Not surprisingly, numerology looms large in many exegetical traditions—often provoked by the numerological content of the canonical works themselves. We have seen the prevalence of numerology in *Yijing* interpretation, but it also appears prominently in various Biblical, Qu’ranic and Vedic commentaries. In all these traditions, exegetes were at pains to explain the symbolism of numbers in sacred texts and to correlate it with both heavenly and earthly phenomena. And where numbers were not manifest, they could often be found in “codes” From medieval times to the present, both the *Bible* and the *Qu’ran* have been interpreted in this way.

Kabbalism is perhaps the best known esoteric system of decoding a sacred scripture, and the *Zohar* has been called the “Bible” of the Kabbalists. Like the basic text of the *Yijing*, it is a composite work, with diverse writings dating from different periods, including several fragments from ancient treatises. The doctrines of the Kabbala are based on a linguistic analysis of the Hebrew *Bible*, in which heavenly mysteries are assumed to be revealed in the letters, words, numbers, accents and spaces of the Sacred Text. The aim, in other words, is literally to read God’s mind, and thereby become one with the divine.

The *Zohar* contains three major interpretive schemes. One involves transforming words by interchanging letters of the Hebrew alphabet in systematic patterns—a process roughly analogous to the way lines, trigrams and hexagrams can be transformed and related in the *Classic of Changes*. Another interpretive device of the *Zohar* is to assign numerical values to the letters of certain words in order to correlate them with other words that have the same or similar combinations of numbers. This, too, suggests a basic hermeneutical strategy of the *Yijing*. A third system consists of constructing words by using the initials of several other words, or of constructing a sentence by using all the letters of a single word to stand for the initials of a string of words. Again, there are rough parallels in the Chinese divinatory practice of “character dissection.”

I have mentioned similarities between the *Zohar* and the *Yijing* to underscore a fundamental difference. The rise of the Kabbalah, as Harold Bloom has pointed out, was not simply an exercise in esotericism; it was also a response to the oppression and despair of medieval Jewry. Moreover, today Kabbalistic teachings remain outside the mainstream of Jewish culture. The *Yijing*, on the other hand, emerged out of standard elite divinatory practices, and it held pride of place as “the first of the Chinese classics” for more than two thousand years.

It is true, of course, that efforts continue to be made to find hidden meanings in the Hebrew *Bible*—as they naturally do with the *Yi* and all other great sacred texts. But ironically, secular science has provided a powerful new hermeneutical tool—the computer. One recent and striking illustration of the marriage between ancient texts and modern technology is a paper published in a statistical journal by three Israeli

mathematicians. On the basis of a computer-based analysis of “equidistant letter sequences,” or ELS, their research reveals that the Torah contains a large number of specific references which point to significant relations between people, events and dates. Michael Drosnin’s 1997 international best-seller, *The Bible Code*, goes even further, claiming to find in the Torah all kinds of ancient prophecies about contemporary events.

John Allen Paulos, in a delightful book titled *Once Upon a Number*, effectively shows, by means of an amusing parable involving the U.S. Constitution and the letters for “Bill” and “Monica,” how the ELS approach can yield highly misleading conclusions. In fact, he says, this was the main point of the paper published by the three Israeli mathematicians.

Paulos is not arguing, however, that numbers have no place in the analysis of texts. Nor does he maintain that literature has nothing to do with the development of mathematics. He claims, in fact, that concepts of logic and probability both grew out of intuitive ideas about how certain stories would or should unfold. *Once Upon a Number*, as the title suggests, is dedicated to the proposition that stories and numbers aren’t as different as we might imagine.

Paulos prizes intuition. “The fastest solvers of the Rubik cube,” he writes, are usually innocent of the algebraic group theory underlying its solution, while group theorists attempting to solve the cube usually succeed only in giving the illusion of being severely arthritic.”

What Paulos wants, it seems to me, is a traditional Chinese approach to knowing—one that does not separate mind from body or subject from object; one that does not involve a conscious elevation of “reason” over intuition; one that encourages connections between seemingly unrelated things. I shall have to introduce him to the *Classic of Changes*.

I would like to end this paper with a famous verse from the *Great Commentary* that suggests the power of mind in the Chinese tradition, and the most important kind of connection:

In the Dao of the superior person  
There is a time for going forth  
And a time for staying still,  
A time to remain silent  
And a time to speak out.  
But for two people to share mind and heart,  
Such sharpness severs metal,  
And the words of those sharing mind and heart,  
Such fragrance is like orchids.

What the *Yijing* does, or should do, is bring our hearts and minds together in exactly this way.

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