

BOOK OF CHANGES STUDIES IN KOREA¹

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INTRODUCTION

In China the *Book of changes* has long been considered a central work of the Confucian classics. It has traditionally been believed to contain the words and wisdom of ancient sages who date back to the beginnings of Chinese civilisation. It has also served, through the ages, as the basis for a great deal of the metaphysical speculation in Chinese thought. In Korea the *Book of changes* has occupied an almost equally important central position. Unfortunately, most previous studies of the *Book of changes* have concentrated on some aspect of this work as it relates to China and Chinese culture, and very little has been written outside Korea on the place of the *Book of changes* in Korea or Korean culture—I myself have seen no such English-language publications.²

This paper is an attempt to fill some of this vacuum. However, the scope of this paper is a very limited one. It aims to explain *Book of changes* studies only as they relate to one specific group in contemporary Korea—that group which is known as *Yŏkhak-in*.³ It is hoped that the present work on *Book of changes* studies in Korea will serve to promote further research into this topic and also to shed some light on the Korean personality.

This paper is broken into three main sections, each of which deals with one aspect of the study of the *Book of changes* by the *Yŏkhak-in*: their general approach to the study of the *Book of changes*; their views on the origins and history of *Book of changes* studies in Korea; and *Book of changes* organisations they have founded. These three sections will be followed by concluding remarks and some of the author's own impressions about the *Yŏkhak-in* and their study of the *Book of changes*.

APPROACH TO STUDY OF THE *BOOK OF CHANGES*

Korean *Yōkhak-in* regard themselves as part of an ancient yet still living tradition. On the one hand, they are staunch believers in the efficacy of *Book of changes*-related methods of divination and prognostication.⁴ In fact, most individual *Yōkhak-in* are usually recognised for their particular skill in practising one or more such method or technique. On the other hand, they also consider themselves to be scholars and thinkers whose knowledge of the *Book of changes* provides them with a deep and subtle understanding of the fundamental principles of both the world in which they live and their methods of prognostication. Modern rationalist philosophies tend to portray “fortune telling” as pure superstition and much of the speculation that accompanies it as outdated metaphysics. One might think, therefore, that the formulation of theoretical arguments supporting the validity of their methods of prognostication would be an important task for *Yōkhak-in*. However, this does not seem to be the case.

Generally speaking, most of their arguments are lacking in both originality and depth. Many seem to be nothing more than passing references to traditional phrases or doctrines that are thought to represent the essence of the philosophy of change as expressed in the *Book of changes*. One such example is Ch’oe Yun-sōk’s short explanation of the “essential principles of the study of the laws of destiny” (Ch’oe 1982, 31–32). It starts out with a very general summary of some of the main elements of Neo-Confucian metaphysics (*Ihak*, the “Study of Principle School”).

The state [of things] in remote antiquity—namely, in the Great Beginning—before the appearance of the universe is called Non-Being, the Great Absolute. But as an entity which gradually came to possess infinite power and harmony, when at rest the Great Absolute also refers to that state of emptiness without material and movement.

However, the one Vital Force first appeared, and in it there was motion and rest, from which arose the Two Primary Modes, and in this manner the Great Absolute became the main body creating the myriad things of the universe. This is called Being.

In that way, from Non-Being appeared the one Vital Force, from it were separated the *Ŭm* and *Yang*, and from them were created all things in the universe. The universe we are living in is said to have been produced in this way.

The Great Treatise says: “. . . there is the great source of all things, the Great Absolute, which acting in the capacity of the Prime Force that fills the universe, is separated into two and becomes the *Ŭm* and *Yang*. This *Ŭm* and *Yang* are again separated into the four, forming the Four Forms, and they are once more separated, producing the Eight Trigrams.”⁵

Moreover, in Zhu Xi's (1130–1200) *Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Absolute* it is said: "The Great Absolute moved and produced *Yang*, rested and generated *Ŭm*. The separation into *Ŭm* and *Yang* is called the Two Primary Modes. The *Ŭm* and *Yang* changed and combined, becoming the Four Forms. The Five Vital Forces were mixed in, forming the Eight Trigrams, and the Eight Trigrams were doubled, forming the Sixty-four Hexagrams.

In that way, the *Ŭm* and *Yang* are identical with the Great Absolute, and the Great Absolute is intrinsically limitless. But the essential vital force of the limitless and the passive principle of the *Ŭm/Yang* and Five Elements mysteriously combined, the Way of the Creative became male, the Way of the Receptive became female, and in accordance with this the myriad things were transformed and given birth to for the first time. The infiniteness of these changes can not be measured. Singularly, as only humans were born with the pure vital force, they are, when compared to all the [other] myriad things, more intelligent, have developed spirits and wisdom, can distinguish between right and wrong, and live their lives in accordance with the many kinds of worldly laws they fix."⁶

It follows this general summary with short discussions of some of the more elaborate developments of these basic principles in numerological and symbolic correspondences between hexagrams (or their trigrams and lines) and other phenomena (including in these discussions presentations on the [Yellow] River Diagram, the Lo [River] Writing, and the Sixty Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches System⁷). Unfortunately, none of what Ch'oe offers amounts to what might be called real argumentation. His views are founded on the traditional belief that there is a correlation between the cosmos and the world of man (macrocosm versus microcosm), and that the patterns or laws of this correlation are duplicated in the *Book of changes*, which is a kind of "master key"⁸ to these two worlds. But neither the underlying rationale for this conviction nor its relevance to modern society is ever discussed. Instead, the old and trusted formula is simply restated.

Other arguments are either so weak or confusing that they would probably persuade only the most ardent of believers. Kwŏn Chae-pŏm, for instance, points out that the *Book of changes* is studied (and applied) in a wide range of foreign countries, suggesting that this is proof that there must be some truth to it. He also asserts, in trying to argue from analogy, that *Book of changes* prognostication is a lot like "science". Both manipulate unseen natural laws ("the operating principles of the Great Absolute" likened to "the laws of physics"). Both utilise unseen forces ("*Ŭm/Yang*" and the "Five Elements" compared with "protons, electrons, and neutrons"). And both are influenced by an element of chance⁹ (Kwŏn 1970, 61–65).

Hong Mong-sŏn gives a somewhat more interesting defence of *Book of changes* prognostication (Hong 1973, 139–47). The *Book of changes*, Hong begins, has long been considered both a work of philosophy and a work of divination. This has led to two distinct schools of interpretation, one of which emphasised the development and application of its numerology-based methods of prognostication (the *Sangsu* school¹⁰), and the other of which was interested in integrating its principles of change into a moral philosophy (the *Ŭiri* school). The division between these two schools is evident early in Chinese history, going back at least to the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), but it is epitomised by the contrast between the two Song Dynasty (960–1279) scholars Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi. Neither man, Hong continues, denied the philosophical and divinatory nature of the *Book of changes*. Cheng Yi, however, “believed that the true meaning of the *Book of changes* could only be grasped separately from divination, in careful reading and pondering [of the judgments]”. Zhu Xi “took the position that to the extent the *Book of changes* had originally been a ‘book of divination’, to ignore that when making one’s interpretation was unpardonable”.¹¹ Like Cheng Yi, Hong can envision using the *Book of changes* as a kind of handbook for understanding the philosophy of change. He also agrees with Zhu Xi that the divinatory elements of the *Book of changes* probably developed first. This, he seems to suggest, means that Zhu Xi was following the original and thus correct approach to the study of the *Book of changes* and, therefore, that divination was a credible practice. Of course, this makes sense only if one is standing inside the tradition of the *Book of changes*, as a believer in the principles on which it is based, and it is the question of these very principles that must really be addressed. Hong does seem to be aware of this problem, but he chooses to sidestep it, preferring instead to point out that in every person’s life there comes a time when he or she is at a loss over what to do, a time (he claims) when divination using the *Book of changes*—whether one accepts its philosophical foundations or not—cannot but help.

This relative absence of theoretical argument seems to reflect two things. First, like many of their Chinese counterparts, Korean *Yŏkhak-in* seem to believe that the authority of tradition generated by the long and eminent history of *Book of changes* studies is more than enough to override any scepticism about it. Secondly, it appears that *Yŏkhak-in* are more practitioners than philosophers,¹² and it is not the sophistication of their argument, but the complexity and coherence of the systems of correspondence that make up their methods of prognostication, which lend an aura of profundity and legitimacy to them as scholars and thinkers.¹³

VIEWS ON THE ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF THE *BOOK OF CHANGES*

Yökhak-in views on the origins and history of the *Book of changes* in Korea are somewhat more complicated than their approach to its study.¹⁴ They include ideas on general developments in *Book of changes* studies as well as information on specific schools of prognostication. Views concerning general developments of the *Book of changes* are clearly the more elaborate and interesting.¹⁵ They can be divided into three main categories: the traditional, the sceptical, and the nationalistic.¹⁶

Traditionalists advocate the consensus view that the *Book of changes* originated in China, was transmitted to Korea some time in the distant past, and has, over the ages, continued to be influenced by China (and Chinese ideas surrounding it). The prevalent conviction among traditionalists is that, in accordance with some combination of the following theories from early Chinese textual materials, the *Book of changes* was probably created in stages by ancient Chinese sages.

Trigrams

In ancient times Bao Xi (Fu Xi, legendary) ruled all under heaven. He looked up and observed the images in the sky. He looked downward and contemplated the patterns on earth. He saw the decorative markings of birds and beasts and the harmonious order of the land. He took as an example his own person, and at a distance [other] things. In this way, he invented the trigrams . . . (Hung 1966, *Xi ci xia*, section 2, 45).

Hexagrams

Concerning the doubling of the trigrams, the many scholars do not agree. There are some four theories. Wang Fusi (226–249) and his followers believed Fu Xi drew the hexagrams. The disciples of Zheng Xuan (127–200) believed that Shen Nong (legendary) doubled the trigrams. Sun Sheng (fl. 4th to 5th cent.) believed that Yu (legendary) of the Xia Dynasty (trad. 2200–1766 BC) doubled the trigrams. And Sima Qian (145–86 BC) and his followers believed Wen Wang (d. 12th cent. BC) doubled the trigrams (Yang 1987, *Zhouyi zhengyi*, preface, 2b).

Hexagram texts and line texts

There are two theories on the hexagram and line texts of the *Book of changes*. One theory says that both the hexagram and line texts were written by Wen Wang. The second theory believes that an examination of the line texts shows many of them to be concerned with affairs after Wen Wang . . . [so] the hexagram texts [must be] Wen Wang's, the line texts Zhou Gong's (fl. 12th cent. BC) (Yang 1987, *Zhouyi zhengyi*, preface, 3a–3b).

The Ten wings

Confucius (551–479 BC) made the Commentary on the Judgments, the Commentary on the Images, the Great Treatise, the Commentary on the Words of the Text, and the Commentary on the Order of the Hexagrams which are in the ten chapters (Yang 1979, *Yiwen chih*, 1704.5–6).

However, exactly when and how the *Book of changes* was transmitted to Korea is not very clear. In 136 BC, during the reign of Emperor Wu, the *Book of changes* was designated a “professorship text” and became part of orthodox Han Dynasty Confucian ideology (including the exam system) (Yang 1979, *Wuti chih*, 159.4). Since there is no sign of the *Book of changes* in Korea before this time, most traditionalists have concluded that it was probably transmitted to Korea, as part of Chinese state ideology, some time during the Four Commanderies period of Chinese rule in Korea (108 BC–313 AD). References to the *Book of changes* or to the principles of change embodied in it which are purported to date to this period can be found scattered throughout the *Samguk saki*.¹⁷ For example:

In the summer of the sixth month of the twenty-ninth year [of the reign of King Yurimyǒng (10 AD)], there were swarms of black and red frogs fighting on the Mo river. The black frogs were killed. The discussants said: Black is the color of north. This is an omen that North Puyǒ will be destroyed (Cho 1986, *Kokuryǒ pongi*, 251).¹⁸

T'alhae (r. 57–80) originally made a living by fishing. He provided for his mother, never once dallying. His mother said: You are not an ordinary person. Your physical features are special. You should study so as to distinguish yourself and achieve renown. He concentrated his energies on studying, and also knew about the principles of the land. He observed Ho Kong's house below Yang Mountain, and knew that it was [located on] auspicious land. He devised a scheme to get a hold of and occupy it (Cho 1986, *Sinla pongi*, 25).¹⁹

Such references, and the fact that not long after the Four Commanderies Period—during the reign of King Sosulim (371–84)—the Chinese system of higher learning (including the study of the *Book of changes*) was adopted in the kingdom of Kokuryō (37 BC–668 AD) (Cho 1986, Kokuryō pongi, 299), suggest at least the possibility of just such a scenario.

This early study and adaptation of the *Book of changes* and related methods of divination are thought to have continued uninterrupted until the end of the Koryō Dynasty (918–1392) and the beginning of the Yi Dynasty (1392–1910).²⁰ It was at this time that Korean *Book of changes* studies, under the influence of Neo-Confucianism, began to flower into the Korean “Study of the Nature and Reason of Man and Things”. So great, in fact, was the intellectual fervour produced by this movement, that it dominated philosophical speculation in Korea down to the modern era.²¹

Both the sceptics and the nationalists take issue with part of the traditionalist view.

The sceptics take a relatively reasonable position. They question the accuracy of the traditional Chinese theories on the origins of the *Book of changes*, suggesting that these may be nothing more than legends created to give a sense of legitimacy (Yi Cho 1973, 113–15; Hong 1973, 153–58; Hong 1977, 330). Their position is similar to that of the early twentieth-century scholars Gu Jiegang and Yang Kuan in China.²² However, unlike those earlier Chinese scholars, these sceptics offer little documented proof to support their view. Neither do they offer any well-argued alternatives to explain the origins of the *Book of changes*.²³

The nationalists advocate a much more radical line. They are concerned not with challenging traditional Chinese theories on the origins of the *Book of changes*, but with contesting the more basic supposition that the *Book of changes* was even a Chinese creation. I have uncovered two variations on this theme, both of which suggest a Korean role in the process.

From the fourth to the first millennium before the common era, what is now northeastern China and Korea was occupied by a number of different ethnic groups. Many Chinese scholars have referred to these different ethnic groups as the Eastern Barbarians (thereby distinguishing them from Han Chinese). Some nationalists maintain that the *Book of changes* should be seen as a product of the general sphere of culture associated with these Eastern Barbarians, and therefore something with which early Koreans can clearly be associated. They argue, for example, that the assumed creator of the trigrams (and hexagrams), Fu Xi, “being an ancient leader of the Eastern Barbarians, was of the same blood line as the Korean race” (Ch’oe Han 1973, 105). They also contend that Kija, who many believe founded the Korean state of Kija Chosŏn (trad. ca. 11th–5th cent. BC), but who is also thought to have “transmitted the Nine Categories of the Great Plan²⁴ to King Wu of the Zhou”, was a member of the royal family of the Shang, itself one group of the Eastern Barbarians (Ch’oe Han 1973, 109). They even maintain

that “[Confucius, the supposed creator of the Ten Wings,] as a descendant of the Yin (Shang) aristocrat and virtuous man Weizi . . . originated in a lineage of the Eastern Barbarians, namely, the country of Yin (Shang)” (Ch’oe Han 1973, 110).

Other nationalists go one step further. The *Book of changes*, they argue, was not a product of Eastern Barbarian culture (something in which the Koreans merely shared), but a direct creation of the early Koreans themselves. This view has been influenced by the belief that over the years much of Korean history was suppressed either by foreigners or Koreans subservient to them (*sadae chuõi*),²⁵ and that therefore the truth regarding Korea’s real position in East Asia has been lost. It is this general belief which seems to have contributed much to the popularity (among modern *Yõkhak-in*) of Kim Il-bu’s (1826–98) “ChõngYõk” interpretation²⁶ of the *Book of changes* and given rise to the following theories on the origins of the *Book of changes*.

In the *Samguk yusa*²⁷ version of the Tangun myth, mention is made of three “Heavenly seals”.

The *Book of Wei* says: Two thousand years ago there was Tangun Wanggõm. He established his capital in Asadal, founding a state called Chosõn. He was a contemporary of Yao [a mythical emperor of China]. The *Ancient Records* say: In ancient times there was Hwanung, a son of Hwanin by concubine. Hwanung often thought of all under Heaven, and desired to help the human world. His father knew of his intentions. Looking below at Samwi Mountain and T’aebaek Mountain and seeing that they could widely benefit humanity, [Hwanin] gave [Hwanung] the three Heavenly seals and sent him to order things . . . (Koryõ University 1983, *Samguk yusa*, 32).

The term “Heavenly seals” really refers (some *Yõkhak-in* maintain) to the *Classic of Heavenly seals* (Yi Chun-u, 114–15), an ancient (fourth to second millennium before the common era) text of eighty-one characters.

The One begins in the One with no beginning. Divided into the Three Absolutes, it is the boundless source. The oneness of Heaven is one; the oneness of Earth is two; the oneness of Man is three. The One is stored up, becoming the ten; but nothing is lacking when transforming into the three. In Heaven there are the two and the three; on Earth there are the two and the three; in Man there are the two and the three. The Great Three combine in six, generating seven, eight, and nine, and give play to three and four, completing the cycle of five and seven. The One mysteriously thrives, waxing and waning, but its principle of change is immutable. Its true mind was founded in the sun, and became

illuminated in the unity of Heaven and Earth in Man. The One ends in the One with no ending.

The exact meaning of these eighty-one characters is not known.²⁸ However, they are believed to incorporate many of the numerological and philosophical principles found in or associated with the *Book of changes*.²⁹ And this has led, it seems,³⁰ to the idea that they were somehow connected with the creation of the *Book of changes*, a process, according to the following excerpt from the *Samsǒng Kijǒn*,³¹ in which the person associated with the *Classic of Heavenly seals*—Hwanung—was involved.

. . . [Hwanung] sacrificed to the spirit of Heaven. He avoided outside things, locked his doors and cultivated himself. He prayed for recognised achievement. He took elixirs and became an immortal. He drew the hexagrams and knew the future, grasped the images and put in motion the [workings of] the mysterious . . .³²

According to these nationalists, this suggests that the *Book of changes* originated among Koreans, and that it must have been the Koreans who transmitted it to the Chinese, not vice versa.³³

The nationalist theme cannot be easily substantiated—nor do most of the *Yǒkhak-in* who adhere to it attempt to do so in more than a cursory way.

There are compelling reasons that the *Yǒkhak-in* might hold to some version of the first theory. The belief that Fu Xi was an early leader of the Eastern Barbarians, for example, is both old and widespread—and therefore considered to be correct.³⁴ In addition, Chinese historical records note that Kija was a relative of Zhou (Di Xin) (Yang 1979, Song Weizi shijia 1609.1), the last ruler of the Shang Dynasty, and that after the fall of the Shang he either went or was sent to Korea (Yang 1979, Song Weizi shijia, 1620.3; Yang 1979, Dili zhi, 1658.1–2). Such records also list Confucius in a line of descent that can be traced back to the Shang (Yang 1979, Kongzi shijia, 1905.1–3; Yang 1984, Ben xing jie, 93–94). Research on early Korean and Shang myth also suggests the possibility of some kind of relationship between Korea and the Shang.³⁵ However, the arguments of Gu Jiegang and Yang Kuan rather convincingly prove the legendary/mythical nature of Fu Xi. The “Nine Categories of the Great Plan” are generally thought to have been a product of the Spring and Autumn (722–481 BC) or Warring States (403–221 BC) periods (Watson 1962, 21–36), and could not, therefore, have been transmitted from Kija to King Wu. There is no unequivocal proof that the Shang were really Eastern Barbarians (which would lessen the probability of any relationship—blood or otherwise—between either Kija or Confucius and Koreans).³⁶ This whole theory also assumes that some version of the traditional Chinese view of the

origin of the *Book of changes* is accurate, something which even Korean sceptics question.

Evidence in support of the second theory is less convincing. In fact, materials on which it is based come from quite late and, therefore, generally unreliable sources—sources that even most Korean historians give little credibility.³⁷ Take, for example, the *Classic of Heavenly seals*. It exists in two slightly different versions, both of which are usually traced back to the ninth-century scholar Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn:³⁸ the “Historical Remnant of Ch'oe Ko-un Version”; and the “Myohyang Mountain Cliff Version”.³⁹ However, the former comes from the *Complete collection of Marquis Ch'oe Mun-ch'ang*, a collection of Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn's “writings” compiled in 1925 by Ch'oe Kuk-Sul, a modern-day descendant of Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn to whom these characters are said to have been transmitted as part of a long oral tradition. The latter was supposedly found in the early twentieth century by Kye Yŏn-su on a mountain in North Korea (Yi Chun-u, 108–11; Ha 1992, 97–101). Such circumstances alone are probably more than enough to elicit some doubt as to whether the *Classic of Heavenly seals* really dates back even to the ninth century (or is a recent forgery). In addition, some historians have pointed out that the term “Heavenly seal” seems to be of Buddhist origins.⁴⁰ Accordingly, even if we accept the idea that the *Classic of Heavenly seals* really was an ancient text transmitted through Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn to the present, we would still be forced to conclude that, at best, it could be traced back to no earlier than the fourth century (when Buddhism was introduced into Korea).

It is not important whether one concurs with the traditionalists, the sceptics, or the nationalists. Of greater significance is what their views tell us about *Yŏkhak-in*. Although the majority of *Yŏkhak-in* adhere to the traditional view of the origins of the *Book of changes*, some also agree that this traditional view needs to be revised to comply with the sceptics' position. Still, neither the traditionalists nor the sceptics offer much in terms of well documented explanations of their views, prompting one to again note the almost perfunctory approach to scholarly analysis mentioned above as one characteristic of *Yŏkhak-in* theoretical argumentation. The nationalists may very well present the most complicated (but least credible) arguments of the three. Their importance, however, lies not in this complexity, but in showing that other elements—patriotism and international politics—have also functioned as motivating forces in shaping the Korean understanding of the origins and development of the *Book of changes*.

BOOK OF CHANGES ORGANISATIONS

In general, *Book of changes* studies in Korea were traditionally conducted within the framework of the competing and at times secret philosophical and

numerological theories of different schools or sects. However, the new society which emerged in the middle of the twentieth century—following the Japanese Occupation (1910–45) and Korean War (1950–53)—heralded in a different era of *Book of changes* studies, one characterised by both greater cooperation and greater openness among *Yōkhak-in*. This atmosphere was reflected in the appearance of a variety of previously unseen *Book of changes* organisations.

The earliest such organisations were small friendship associations located in the provinces: for example, the Kwangju City Korean Association of *Book of changes* Scholars (1964) and the Pusan City Korean Philosophers' Society (1964). These small associations were soon followed by the formation of larger more focused groups, most of which were centred in Seoul: the Korean Philosophical Society of the Principles of the *Book of changes* (1966), the Korean Association of Principles of *Book of changes* Prognosticators (1968), the Korean Association of Proponents of the Principles of the *Book of changes* (1968), the League of Korean Proponents of the Way of the *Book of changes* (1969), the Korean Society for the Study of the Principles of the *Book of changes* (1971), and the Korean Association of *Book of changes* Prognosticators (1972)—just to name a few.

These larger organisations have been involved in a wide range of scholarly activities relating to *Book of changes* studies. They have sponsored classes and lectures,⁴¹ hosted international conferences,⁴² and started sister relationships with organisations in foreign countries.⁴³ Most importantly, they have published numerous periodicals, which are distributed mainly in Korea.⁴⁴

These periodicals deserve special mention, as they also shed light on the turn which recent *Yōkhak-in* scholarship in Korea has taken. The best of them are “organisational journals”. They consist of a potpourri of materials, some of which are not directly related to the *Book of changes*—including essays on “life philosophy”, social commentaries, short stories, and even poetry. However, they focus on what their editors apparently consider to be the main interests of *Yōkhak-in*: general introductions to different aspects of both *Book of changes* philosophy and the history of *Book of changes* studies, and precise explanations of the workings and practical applications of the many *Book of changes*-related numerological theories of prognostication.

In addition to their scholarly activities, these organisations have participated in a number of “social” activities.⁴⁵ They have, for example, conducted comfort missions to military units, inspected facilities and workers in industrial complexes, held prayer services for national salvation, and sponsored lecture meetings on defeating the Communists (in North Korea).

The rationale for this social function (something not particularly common in corresponding groups in the West) is not clear. It may well be the result of a Korean propensity to explain the worth of things in terms of their contribution

to society—a thread of Confucian pragmatism found in all East Asian countries. However, it should probably also be seen as a by-product of the political climate in Korea from the early 1960s to the 1990s, a time during which military governments closely regulated both the establishment and activities of organisations, sanctioning only those which closely conformed to established guidelines.

The best evidence of this probably lies in the “Ethical Guidelines for *Book of changes* Studies”. In 1980, a new Korean administration, as a prelude to sweeping political changes, banned all social organisations and non-government publications—including the Korean Association of *Book of changes* Prognosticators, the Korean Society for the Study of the Principles of the *Book of changes*, and the latter’s monthly organisational journal, *Friends of the Book of changes*. The promulgation of and adherence to these “Ethical Guidelines” appear to have been the main requirements for the legal reestablishment of these two organisations and the sanctioning of their new organisational journal, *Principles of the Book of changes* (in which the guidelines were printed⁴⁶). In addition to discussing scholarly activities, these guidelines advocate a wide range of wholesome social activities, as well as political neutrality, a clear indication of government pressure.

Independent publishing companies have also contributed to the growth and spread of *Book of changes* studies in Korea. Numerous publishing firms have been involved in the printing and distribution of *Book of changes*-related works. Of these, Myŏngmuntang (est. 1977) is probably the most well known. It has marketed a wide variety of books, the majority of which focus on methods of prognostication and almost exclusively target *Yŏkhak-in*.⁴⁷

In addition, there have been three *Yŏkhak-in* operated enterprises: the New Village Company (est. 1972); the *Book of changes* Book Distributing Company (est. 1976), which was the old New Village Company renamed; and Oriental Books (est. 1976, and the only one of these three still in operation). Like the independent commercial firms, each of these companies has marketed large numbers of the more practical books dealing with methods of prognostication—the most representative probably being Oriental Books’ *Collectanea of Book of changes studies*, a twelve-volume set of useful handbooks for *Yŏkhak-in*.⁴⁸ The greatest contribution of these companies, however, lies not in such handbooks, but in the compilation and publication of compendiums on the history of Korean *Book of changes* studies. Three such works, one by each company, have been put out: *Compendium to Korean Book of changes studies* (New Village 1973), *General survey of notable scholars of modern Korean Book of changes studies* (*Book of changes* Distributing Company 1977), and *1987 General survey of notable scholars of modern Book of changes studies* (Oriental Books 1987). The content of all three volumes is very similar. *Compendium to Korean Book of changes studies*, however, is the best and most exhaustive of the three (and the model for the latter two). It incorporates a wide range of what

Yōkhak-in consider to be important information about *Book of changes* studies in Korea, including:

- a list of virtuous men from Korean history, some⁴⁹ of whom are connected with *Book of changes* studies;
- short introductory histories of the development of the *Book of changes* and *Book of changes* studies in China and Korea;
- a simple bibliographic history of some *Book of changes* materials—especially those relating to particular schools or methods of prognostication;
- a simple explanation of the nature of the *Book of changes*;
- short introductions to the histories and theories of different methods of prognostication;
- a list of the 108⁵⁰ most important (at the time of publication) *Yōkhak-in* in Korea.⁵¹

This work is the first source any reader interested in Korean *Book of changes* studies should peruse.

CONCLUSION

The three sections above suggest that (*Yōkhak-in*) *Book of changes* studies in Korea might best be described as being dominated by tradition, but affected by a variety of modern western and Korean influences.

The element of tradition is most conspicuous in the consensus on the origins and development of the *Book of changes*, a view based for the most part on ancient Chinese and Korean textual materials. It may also be at work, however, in the *Yōkhak-in* emphasis on “methods of prognostication”, an approach which some might maintain reflects the *Yōkhak-in* decision to stand in the camp of the numerology-based schools of interpretation that Hong Mong-sŏn said were epitomised by the Song Dynasty scholar Zhu Xi.⁵²

Modern western and Korean influences seem to have played the role of questioning and transforming this tradition. The now familiar method of interpreting ancient texts from the perspective of the mythologist or folklorist, for example, appears to be at least partially responsible for the sceptic challenge to the accuracy of parts of the traditional view of the origins and development of the *Book of changes*. Modern western concepts of democracy and an open and free society also seem to have contributed to the flourishing of new *Book of changes* organisations and greater association both among *Yōkhak-in* and between Korean *Yōkhak-in* and their foreign counterparts. Modern Korean nationalism and domestic

political developments have also made their mark on the study of the *Book of changes* in Korea, shaping it to fit an international and domestic agenda.

This theme of a “changing tradition” of *Book of changes* studies can be found in other countries in East Asia—the Republic of China and Japan in particular. The picture portrayed here, however, while in some ways similar to those in other countries, is a uniquely Korean one—one which offers insights into both the Korean personality and the changing society in which it exists.

NOTES

¹This paper is based on research conducted in South Korea during the summer of 1993 and funded by the Korea Foundation.

²This excludes studies which introduce elements of the *Book of changes* while explicating the particulars of a specific Korean tradition—e.g., Neo-Confucian metaphysics during the Yi Dynasty (1392–1910).

³The term *Yōkhak-in* (or *Yōkhak-ga*) is a nebulous one. This is mostly due to its rather wide and loose use. Nevertheless, it does denote a specific body, the real nature of the members of which should be clearer to the reader after perusing this paper. Such ambiguity makes an exact translation of the term quite difficult. I have translated it as “those who study the *Changes*” (that is, the *Book of changes*, but also the principles of change embraced by it). Even this translation, however, is not precise. Usually, therefore, I simply use the term *Yōkhak-in*.

In this paper, the McCune-Reischauer system is used for romanisation of Korean terms, names, and book or article titles (including terms of Chinese origin that have been adopted by the Koreans). The Hanyu *pinyin* system is used to romanise Chinese names and book or article titles (except those names or titles for which there is a recognised spelling).

⁴The *Book of changes* is generally associated with yarrow-stalk hexagram divination, the origins of which can be traced back to the late Western Zhou Dynasty (1122–770 BC), but which many *Yōkhak-in* usually trace back to an even earlier time. There are, however, numerous later forms of prognostication which are based on the principles of “change” that are manifest in or have been developed from the *Book of changes*. The more popular of these methods include the “Four Pillars and Eight Characters”, geomancy, physiognomy, onomancy, and “Marital Harmony”—to mention only a few. It is not this writer’s intention to offer detailed explanations of these different methods of fortune telling, as such explanations would be complex and occupy an inordinate amount of space. Accordingly, I simply refer the interested reader to some of the more important individual works and collections mentioned later in this paper.

⁵This quote seems to be Ch’oe’s interpretation of the following passage from the *Book of changes*: 是故易有太極是生兩儀兩儀生四象四象生八卦 (Hung 1966, Xi ci shang, section 11, 43).

⁶The Diagram of the Great Absolute was created by Zhou Dunyi (1017–73). He also wrote the original *Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Absolute*. (See facsimile ed. of the *Wenyuange sikuquanshu* 697.7–12 [Taipei: Commercial Press, ?]). I have scanned much of what Zhu Xi wrote on the Diagram of the Great Absolute, but have not been able to determine exactly of which passage this excerpt is a translation or interpretation.

⁷Ch’oe describes these three systems as embodying the following main corresponding elements: Yellow River Diagram—*Ŭm/Yang*, trigrams, numbers 1–9, Five Elements, five directions, and

Heavenly Stems; Lo River Writing—*Ŭm/Yang*, trigrams, numbers 1–9, Five Elements, nine directions, stars, and colours; Sixty Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches—*Ŭm/Yang*, Heavenly Stems, Earthly Branches, numbers 1–9, directions, colours, seasons and their subdivisions, year, month, day, and time of day (just to mention a few). The latter is by far the most complicated of all such systems, and required knowledge for all skilled *Yŏkhak-in*.

⁸The *Book of changes* is, then, a “simulacrum” or “doppelganger” of these cosmic patterns. The term “master key” is taken from John B. Henderson (Henderson 1984, 13–14).

⁹Kwŏn seems to be referring to an element of “chance” or “randomness” at the level of perceived phenomena, not at the quantum level.

¹⁰Also referred to as the *Sulsu* or *Chŏmsŏ* school.

¹¹Hong cites no specific supporting passages from the works of either Cheng Yi or Zhu Xi. He simply refers the reader to the preface of Cheng Yi’s *Yi Cheng zhuan* and all of Zhu Xi’s *Yi ben yi*. See both works in vol. 2 of *Zhuzi xiaoxueh ji sishu wujing duben*, ed. Yang Jialo (Taipei: World Books, 1987).

¹²This is not, of course, all that surprising, given that the apparent goal of most *Yŏkhak-in* is to set up shop as professional fortune tellers. Unfortunately, only those with a large clientele succeed, the rest being forced to find conventional employment, a condition which allows them to spend only their free time in such a pursuit.

¹³This is not to downplay or underestimate their knowledge of these correlative systems. Their ability to understand and apply them in their prognostications is at times truly impressive.

¹⁴However, the best Korean works that I have seen dealing with the origins, history, or development of the *Book of changes* in Korea were compiled not by *Yŏkhak-in* but by more serious scholars. Unfortunately, like most English-language works, they focus not directly on the *Book of changes*, but on other traditions of which elements of the *Book of changes* are only a part. (Two good examples are Pae 1992 and Chŏng 1991.) As a rule, *Yŏkhak-in* works on the origins and history of *Book of changes* studies in Korea are fragmentary in nature, eclectic, and lacking in exact bibliographic notation (See Ch’oe Han 1973, 102–12). In fact, the author is left with the impression that their research in this area, like their interest in theoretical speculation, is almost perfunctory, something required of *Yŏkhak-in*, but done only in passing and sacrificed for the higher goal of understanding and applying the systems of “prognostication”. Nevertheless, some of the *Yŏkhak-in* views on the origins and history of the *Book of changes* and its study in Korea offer interesting insights into the Korean personality.

¹⁵In fact, works providing information on the history or development of particular schools of prognostication are usually the more perfunctory—simple short pieces which endeavour to create an impression of well-rounded scholarship by touching on some of the major highlights, practitioners, or works of a certain tradition. I have omitted even a cursory introduction to such works, and instead merely direct the reader to some good examples of them. (See Cho 1973; Tong 1982; and Hong 1992, preface.)

¹⁶As noted in n. 14, *Yŏkhak-in* works on the origins and history of the *Book of changes* are eclectic in nature. Those who read widely of their literature, therefore, may very well become confused because many authors include elements of more than one of these categories.

¹⁷Compiled in 1145 by Kim Pu-sik et al.

¹⁸This is apparently a reference to the principles of change manifest in the Five Elements Position Diagram. This diagram, components of which can be found in the *Shuo gua zhuan*, is a correlative system matching colours, seasons, directions, and the Five Elements (Hung 1966, *Shuo gua zhuan*, section 4, 50).

¹⁹An obviously legendary account of part of T'alhae's life and character which may still reflect some early ideas on the principles of change embodied in *Book of changes*-related methods of divination (in this case, physiognomy and geomancy).

²⁰Some of the more well-known individuals associated with the *Book of changes* during this period were: the Buddhist monk To Sŏn (posthumous title Yo Kong Kuksa, 827–98), an important figure in the development of Korean geomancy; Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn (style name Ko Un, posthumous title Marquis Mun Ch'ang, 857–?), who studied in China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and in whose remaining work (*Kyeuŏn p'ilgyŏngjip*) there are numerous references to the *Book of changes* and related principles of change; and Ch'oe Ch'ung (style name Ho Yŏn, pen name Sŏng Chae, posthumous title Mun Hŏn, 984–1068), a Confucian scholar of the classics.

²¹This movement is one of the most studied in all the history of Korean philosophy. Most good research on it has centred on tracing the transmission of Neo-Confucianism from China, describing the thought of its two main figures (Yi Hwang [pen name T'oegye, posthumous title Mun Sun, 1501–70]; and Yi I [pen name Yulgok, posthumous title Mun Sŏng, 1536–84]), and delineating the developments in their respective schools. As *Yŏkhak-in* do not appear to be particularly interested in in-depth research on either the historical or philosophical aspects of this movement, I leave the interested reader to pursue his or her own study of it using any of the fine books already published (see Pae 1992).

²²Gu Jiegang and Yang Kuan were also “sceptics” who believed that much of what was thought to be early Chinese history was really “historicised myth or legend” (with their main concern being uncovering this myth/legend, not the *Book of changes*). (See Gu 1926; Yang 1926.)

²³Hong Mong-sŏn advocates the more modern view that the *Book of changes* probably developed over a long period of time, not attaining its present form until perhaps as late as the Early Han. However, even he does not make a passing reference to research that might help to explain when or how this process started—for example, research on Shang Dynasty (1766–1122 BC) and Zhou Dynasty (1122–256 BC) “numeric *gua*” which purports to explain the origins of hexagrams and trigrams. Cf. Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu, *Cong Shang Zhou bagua shuzi fuhao tan shifa de chige wenti*. *Kaogu* no. 2, 1981:1 55–63; Zhang Zhenglang, *Shi shi Zhou chu qingtongqi mingwen chong de Yi gua*. *Kaogu xuebao* no. 4: 403–16; and Boshu liushisi gua ba. *Wenwu* no. 3, 1984: 9–14.

²⁴The Great Plan refers to a correlative cosmological system thought to explain political, moral, and even religious conduct or manners in terms mostly of the principles of change embodied in the Five Elements (and the *Book of changes*). The Nine Categories are the nine different classes of things incorporated in the Great Plan. The Nine Categories of the Great Plan can be seen in the Song Weizi shijia section of the *Shi ji* (Yang. 1979. Song Weizi shijia, 1611.4–1620.2).

²⁵An attitude exemplified in Sin Ch'ae-ho (?–1936) (Sin 1972).

²⁶Kim Il-bu saw the *Book of changes* as having developed in stages, each of which reflected the rise of a particular culture. Stage one centred on the creation of the trigrams and hexagrams by Fu Xi and reflected the rise of the Eastern Barbarian sphere of culture. Stage two is represented by the creation of the hexagram texts and line texts (by Wen Wang and Zhou Gong) and the Ten Wings (by Confucius), and reflected the rise of Zhou China. Stage three, which seems to be embodied in Kim Il-bu's interpretations of *Book of changes*-related material, is reflected in the imminent rise of Korea as *the* power in East Asia (and the world?). Yi Chŏng-ho (1913–) is one of the modern standard-bearers of this school (Yi 1992).

²⁷Compiled in 1285 by the Buddhist monk Il Lyŏn.

²⁸Nor is there a long tradition of interpretation of this text on which to draw. My tentative translation is based on the different interpretations introduced by Yi Chun-u and Ha Ki-rak (Yi Chun-u, 115–20; Ha 1992, 98–101).

²⁹These eighty-one characters are also thought to embody the essence of all world religions and forms of thought (Yi Chun-u, 111–12).

³⁰*Yōkhak-in* whose work I have read do not explicitly make this point. Yi Chun-u, for example, seems to suggest that early Korean thought as represented in the *Classic of Heavenly seals* may have developed separately but parallel to Chinese *Book of changes* philosophy (Yi Chun-u, 114). Ha Ki-rak, who probably should be classified as a “quasi-historian/philosopher” and not a true *Yōkhak-in* (although he is popular among *Yōkhak-in*) is clearly of the opinion that the *Book of changes* was influenced by Koreans. However, even he does not explicitly state that the creation of the *Book of changes* was influenced by the *Classic of Heavenly seals*, although his overall chronology would suggest just such a conclusion (Ha 1992, 174–80).

³¹Compiled by Wōn Dong-chung.

³²I have been unable to locate a copy of the *Samsōng Kijōn*.

³³This is a simplification of the relevant argument. In fact, many other things are also claimed, including that Fu Xi was really a descendant of Hwanung and that Five Elements theory was transmitted from the Koreans to the Chinese (Ha 1992, 173–80).

³⁴Another reflection of the power of tradition among Koreans? (See Ch’oe Han 1973, 105).

³⁵Yi Pyōng-hui and Kim Chae-won, for example, believe that several elements common to early Shang myth and the Korean Tangun myth (the rising morning sun and a sacred tree) suggest such a connection. They also point out, however, that many elements of the Tangun myth probably originated with the ancient Puyō tribe (Yi Kim 1978, 86–91, 218).

³⁶The lack of clear evidence leaves even Chinese scholars to merely speculate about this issue. Fu Sinian, for example, believes that the Shang were not themselves Eastern Barbarians, but at times dominated them and adopted some of their culture (but not *Book of changes*-related elements, as he would argue this work did not exist during the Shang Dynasty) (Fu 1934, 1112). Chang Kwangchih, on the other hand, argues that in light of the opposition between the legendary Xia Dynasty and the Eastern Barbarians, and the Shang’s own conflict with the Xia, the Shang may indeed have been one of the Eastern Barbarian states (although he too would concur, I believe, with the view that the *Book of changes* did not yet exist during the Shang) (Chang 1980, 350).

³⁷I have referred to only two of these sources in this paper—the *Classic of Heavenly seals* and the *Samsōng Kichōn*. The interested reader will discover that both the argumentation and the sources used to support it are more complex than I have delineated here.

³⁸See n. 20.

³⁹Seven of the eighty-one characters in the two versions differ. My translation is based on the “Myohyang Mountain Cliff Version”.

⁴⁰Even Sin Ch’ae-ho doubts the authenticity of the *Classic of Heavenly seals*—for this and other reasons (Sin 1972, 44–45, 67–68). (See also Yi Kim 1978, 74–75.)

⁴¹I uncovered no established or rigid program of study, the diploma from which would confer on one any special rights or standing as a “qualified” *Yōkhak-in*. Still, membership in known *Book of changes* organisations does carry some weight (as do the plaques and certificates issued by these organisations which can be found in many *Yōkhak-in* establishments). Association with a well-known teacher or *Yōkhak-in* (especially one who is thought to be transmitting an ancient tradition) also enhances one’s standing in the *Yōkhak-in* community.

⁴²The International Conference on *Book of changes* Studies was twice—in 1984 and 1988—held in Seoul (jointly hosted by the Korean Association of *Book of changes* Prognosticators and the Korean Society for the Study of the Principles of the *Book of changes*).

⁴³In 1981, for example, the Korean Association of *Book of changes* Prognosticators and the Korean Society for the Study of the Principles of the *Book of changes* forged a sister relationship with the Japanese Society for the Study of the Essential Vital Force, and in 1983 the same two Korean organisations established a sister relationship with the *Book of changes* Society of the Republic of China.

⁴⁴There does not seem to be a complete collection of these journals anywhere in Korea. The office of the Korean Society of the Principles of the *Book of changes* had the most complete set I could find, but even it was incomplete.

⁴⁵In fact, there seems to have been an attempt to create two distinct types of *Book of changes* organisations: social organisations and research groups. Such an orientation was already apparent with the establishment of the Korean Association of Proponents of the Principles of the *Book of changes*. It was the first *Book of changes* group to officially register as a “social organisation” with the government. It had the stated goals of research to elevate the quality of Korean *Book of changes* prognosticators and “service to society”. In the early 1970s, when an attempt was made to unite Korean *Book of changes* organisations, these social and research functions appear to have become institutionalised in two main organisations: the Korean Society for the Study of the Principles of the *Book of changes* (1971), primarily a research group; and the Korean Association of *Book of changes* Prognosticators (1972), a registered social organisation.

⁴⁶These ethical guidelines have been printed on the inside cover of every issue of *Principles of the Book of changes* since 1982.

⁴⁷Perhaps the best are the *Myōngmun collectanea of Book of changes studies* and the *Myōngmun collectanea of fortune telling*, two fourteen-book collections which focus on *Book of changes*-based numerological theories of prognostication.

⁴⁸Including, therefore, the *Ten-thousand year almanac* that is so important in the application of many methods of prognostication, as well as works on divining with hexagrams and hexagram lines, onomancy, “Marital Harmony”, the “Four Pillars”, physiognomy, dreams, geomancy, and efficacious talismans.

⁴⁹I say “some” because it is not clear that perhaps even a majority of them were really connected with the study of the *Book of changes*.

⁵⁰This number naturally leads one to the question “Exactly how many *Yōkhak-in* are there?” I found no clear answer to this question. *Yōkhak-in* (fortune telling) establishments, usually referred to as “Philosophy Schools”, can be found scattered up and down the streets and alleyways of almost any city in South Korea. (Invariably operated by men, these establishments are usually simply marked off by a single perpendicularly-placed rectangular wooden placard [1ft. × 4 ft.] advertising the services offered within [in stark contrast to the tall bamboo pole topped with a red flag that is used by their main competitors, the shamanesses].) I estimate that throughout South Korea the total number of these institutions exceeds one thousand, with the number of *Yōkhak-in* (including the more serious practitioners as well as the regular dabblers) numbering, at a minimum, several tens of thousands.

⁵¹There have been several such lists, the first of which was apparently published in *Pōksong* 11, 1969: 13–51.

⁵²This emphasis may also be the result of other forces: the economic realities of *Yōkhak-in* (and the need to make a living as fortune tellers); a practical bias among Koreans; or the modern decline in the credibility of *Book of changes* theory and philosophy.

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