



## A Textual Note on the I Ching

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*A Textual Note on the I Ching*

This brief textual study makes a number of general observations on the divinatory functions of the *I Ching* "line statements" and how their various parts may be related among themselves and to the hexagrams. Emphasis is placed on the poetical features of the "line statements" and it is argued that the names of the hexagrams are in fact titles of elliptical poems contained in the "line statements." The study concludes with a solution to a line in the *K'un* section of the text which serves to illustrate how such an approach to the *I Ching* may contribute to our understanding of its more difficult passages.

This brief note offers at its conclusion a solution to a passage in the *K'un*<sup>a</sup> (i.e., Hexagram 2) section of the *I Ching* which has long defied correct interpretation.<sup>1</sup> The proposed reading was arrived at through a particular approach to the early, somewhat poetical, passages of the classic derived in part from a methodology presented by Hellmut Wilhelm in an article which appeared in volume 79 of this journal.<sup>2</sup> In that article Wilhelm claims to have restored the original version of the "line statements" (*yao tz'u*<sup>b</sup>) of the first hexagram, *Ch'ien*<sup>c</sup>, by removing passages which he takes to be later elaborations. These additions he identifies as "diviner's formulae which are frequently couched in the terminology of the bone oracle," interpolated commentaries,<sup>3</sup> and Confucian terminology which "was alien to

early Chou times and, for that matter, spoils the pristine logic and rhythm of the texts."<sup>4</sup> What remains is a poetical text, reminiscent of *Shih Ching* verses in diction, rhyme, and meter, which constitutes an independent part of the "line statements."

The full present version of the *K'un* "line statements" is given below in Appendix A. A poetical piece could be isolated within these "line statements" consisting of little more than the first two words of the first five lines and the last two words of line 6. These form a rhymed series of two-word phrases—*lü shuang, chih fang, han chang, kua nang, huang shang, hsüan huang*<sup>e</sup>—which is precisely what is given in a quote of the "line statements" preserved in a fragment of the now lost *I Ching* commentary of Cheng Hsüan (127–200).<sup>5</sup> But since I find no evidence of interpolated commentaries or Confucian intrusions within the remainder of the "line statements" of this hexagram, we are left with a sizable portion of the non-poetical text to be classified as "diviner's formulae." Thus the textual categories recognized by Wilhelm

<sup>1</sup> This note is among the results of a research project conducted with the assistance of the American Council of Learned Societies, with funds provided in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

<sup>2</sup> H. Wilhelm, "I-ching oracles in the *Tso-chuan* and *Kuo-yü*," *JAOS* 79 (1959), 275–280. Wilhelm's work is considerably more ambitious than what I have undertaken here in that he attempts to date all the various texts and commentaries which form the transmitted version of the *I Ching*. In light of the *I Ching* manuscript discovered in Ma-wang-tui Tomb Three (dated 168 B.C.), some of his conclusions, particularly with regard to the dating of some of the "Ten Wings," will need to be re-examined. For discussions of the Ma-wang-tui manuscript, see *Wen-wu*, 1974, no. 9, 42; Ngo Van Xuyet, *Divination Magie et Politique dans la Chine Ancienne* (Paris, 1976), 162, n. 1; and Michael Loewe, "Manuscripts found recently in China: a preliminary survey," *T'oung Pao* 63.2–3 (1977), 117–118.

<sup>3</sup> I find the example of this cited in Wilhelm, 275, n. 2, conjectural and difficult to accept. I would suggest as an example of an interpolated commentary elsewhere in the *I*

*Ching*, the Hexagram 47 "line statements," where the words *i yüeh*<sup>d</sup> of line 5 are probably an interpolated gloss on the much rarer *i wu*<sup>e</sup> of line 6.

<sup>4</sup> On this basis, Wilhelm, 275, eliminates the words *chün tzu*<sup>f</sup> from the text. If the term referred to "the concept of the gentleman" as Wilhelm believes it could be regarded as a Confucian intrusion. But we should note the possibility that it may have had another, earlier sense more appropriate to the *I Ching* context. Akatsuka Kiyoshi, *Chūgoku kodai no shūkyō to bunka—In ōchō no saishi* (Tokyo, 1977), 395, argues convincingly that *chün tzu* in Mao 123 of the *Shih Ching* refers to a spirit personator. It may be as such or in a related meaning that we should understand the *chün tzu* of Hexagram 1.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Wen I-to, *P'o T'ang Tsa Shih*, reprinted in *Wen's Ku Tien Hsin I* (Peking, 1956), 587–588.

in connection with Hexagram 1 passages appear somewhat limited as a means to analyze other sets of "line statements."

There can be little question that the poetical parts of Hexagram 2 have a formal integrity not only independent of but also obscured by the non-poetical portions. Nevertheless, once the distinction between the two has been recognized, there remains the task of identifying the divinatory function of the various poetical and non-poetical elements which form the "line statements." There is, moreover, the even more fundamental question of the original connection between the "line statements" and the hexagrams.

While many of the passages which make up the more poetical parts of the "line statements" may be literary counterparts to the hexagrams couched in the terms of omens and portents,<sup>6</sup> others do not seem to be so. Some appear to be inquiries made of the yarrow oracle and are perhaps then analogous to the sets of "charges" addressed to ancestors by Shang dynasty practitioners of oracle bone divination.<sup>7</sup> Still other poetical portions appear to be accounts of ritual practices whose connection with divination is not clear.<sup>8</sup> The rhymed series of two-word phrases within the *K'un* "line statements" should perhaps be interpreted as examples of this latter category (see Appendix A). As for the non-poetical portions, Li Ching ch'ih noted long ago that many phrases, such as those found after the initial two-word formulas in lines 4 and 5 of Hexagram 2, are comparable to the "notations" which record the ancestral response obtained when the Shang bones were cracked.<sup>9</sup> It should be added that rather than relating directly to the poetical parts, such notations in the context of *I Ching* divination may have served to record the relative auspiciousness of the broken or unbroken lines of the hexagram. It is moreover possible that

<sup>6</sup> This is in essence the view of the "line statements" put forth by Arthur Waley, "The Book of Changes," BMFEA 5 (1933), 121-142, and by Li Ching-ch'ih, "Ku tai te wu chan," *Ling-nan Hsüeh Pao* 2.4 (1932). This and related essays by Li on the *I Ching* have recently been reprinted in *Chou I T'an Yüan* (Peking, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> For example, the poetical portions of Hexagram 18 appear to be an attempt to determine whether a male or female ancestral spirit is responsible for an incident of *Ku* magic. For the "charges" of Shang divination, see David N. Keightley, *The Sources of Shang History* (Berkeley, 1978), 33-36.

<sup>8</sup> The Hexagram 12 "line statements," for example, contain a description of the preparation of wrapped offerings evidently presented in repayment of some spiritual blessing.

<sup>9</sup> Li Ching-ch'ih, "Chou I Shih Tz'u Hsü K'ao," *Chou I T'an Yüan*, 73 ff. For the Shang crack "notations," see Keightley, 40.

phrases, such as those following the initial two-word phrases in lines 1, 2, and 3, are "prognostications" derived from an interpretation of the hexagram lines.<sup>10</sup> These tentative observations are offered only to suggest the complex ways in which the various parts of the "line statements" may be related among themselves and to the hexagrams.

That the "line statements" should not be treated as elaborations on themes suggested by the hexagram "names," e.g., *Ch'ien* and *K'un*, can be demonstrated with more certainty. Of the sixty-four hexagram names, fifty-nine occur within the poetical parts of their respective "line statements." This correspondence has been noted by others<sup>11</sup> to show that to understand the meaning of the hexagram "names" we should examine how these words are used within the poetical portions. What has not been appreciated is that this correspondence means that what have been identified as hexagram "names" are in fact the titles of these fragmentary poetical pieces derived from them in the same way that titles of the *Shih Ching* poems are taken from the words which appear within them. Since they are derived from parts of the "line statements" it would be wrong to search for the meaning of the hexagram "names" in the symbolic significance of the hexagrams and, further, through the medium of those "names," to read, as is often done, that significance into the poetical and non-poetical parts of the "line statements."<sup>12</sup>

Let us turn from such general considerations to an example of how distinguishing the various elements within the "line statements" aids our understanding of the meaning of the text of Hexagram 2, particularly the second line. The first three words of that line, *chih fang ta*<sup>h</sup>, are usually read together and understood as "straight, square, and big"—the three characteristics of the Earth, assumed improperly to be the subject of the *K'un* "line statements" on the basis of the cosmological symbolism associated with the hexagram.<sup>13</sup> The

<sup>10</sup> They may perhaps be comparable to the Shang oracle bone "prognostications" described by Keightley, 40-42.

<sup>11</sup> Wilhelm, 275, n. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Iulian Shchutskii, *Researches on the I Ching*, translated from the Russian by William MacDonald with notes by Gerald Swanson (Princeton, 1979), offers a particularly misguided account of the genesis of the *I Ching* in which he claims that the "names" of the hexagrams are earlier than the "line statements."

<sup>13</sup> The hexagram consists of six broken lines<sup>i</sup> and is thus thought symbolic of Yin and of Earth. The application of these concepts to an interpretation of the "line statements" is already seen in the *Hsiang Chuan*<sup>i</sup>, but since the latter is not part of the Ma-wang-tui *I Ching* (see note 2), the antiquity of this interpretation may be questioned.

remainder of the line, *pu hsi*<sup>k</sup>, has never been rendered satisfactorily. Once proper attention is paid the existence of the series of rhymed two-word phrases noted above, it is clear that we must pause not after *ta*<sup>l</sup>, but after *fang*<sup>m</sup>. Thus the two parts of the line to be interpreted are the two-word phrase *chih fang*<sup>n</sup>, which rhymes with the other phrases of the poetical text, and *ta pu hsi*<sup>o</sup>. It is the latter which will perhaps seem most nonsensical. But the key to understanding it is to note the three-word parallel in line 1. That is, like *chien*<sup>p</sup> “hard,” *ta*<sup>l</sup> “great” is an adjective and like *chih*<sup>q</sup> “arrive,” *hsi*<sup>r</sup> is a verb—it appears originally to have meant “to flap the wings” but occurs in the *Shih Ching* only in the meaning, “to gust repeatedly.”<sup>14</sup> The problematic word is the one taken to be *pu*<sup>s</sup>, which, if the parallel with the previous line holds, occurs where we should expect not the negative but a noun—as is *ping*<sup>t</sup> “ice”—whose meaning would be appropriate to the context. That, I submit, is precisely what we have.

There occurs twice in the Ch'u Silk Manuscript, a famous relic of the mid-Warring States period,<sup>15</sup> an archaic graph<sup>u</sup> for the word *feng* “wind.”<sup>16</sup> This graph can be shown to be a version of the original graph<sup>v</sup> for *feng* which was written not with the “dragon” element, as is now common, but with the

“bird” element as signific.<sup>17</sup> The lower part<sup>x</sup> of the Ch'u Silk Manuscript graph closely resembles early forms of the graph used to write *pu*<sup>s</sup>.<sup>18</sup> In his *Shuo Wen Chieh Tzu*, Hsü Shen analyzes *pu* as “a bird which soars upward but does not come down.”<sup>19</sup> Hsü Shen is almost certainly incorrect in his analysis of the origin of this graph.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless it appears that such ideas as he expresses are reflected in scribal practice and verbal usage as early as the late Spring and Autumn

<sup>17</sup> Shirakawa Shizuka, *Kanji no Sekai* (Tokyo, 1976), vol. 1, 112–119, discusses the original graph for *feng* and notes that it is unclear when the form<sup>w</sup> with the “dragon” element attained currency.

<sup>18</sup> While the graph<sup>y</sup> for *pu* included in the Ch'u Silk Manuscript is more complex than the lower part of the graph used for *feng* in the same manuscript (see Barnard, 92–93), exemplars<sup>z</sup> found in inscriptions on the Chung-shan bronzes, dated ca. 300 B.C. are quite close. See Chang Shou-chung, ed., *Chung-shan Wang Ts'o Ch'i Wen Tzu Pien* (Peking, 1981), 10. That simplification of the ancient graphs for *pu* continued during the third century B.C. is confirmed by the graph<sup>aa</sup> used to write the word in the cache of wooden documents found at the Hupei site of Shui-hu-ti, dated 217 B.C. See *Yün-meng Shui-hu-ti Ch'in Mu* (Peking, 1981), appendix giving photographs of original text and transcriptions, *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> *Shuo Wen Chieh Tzu Chu*, 1872 woodblock edition, 12A.2a. Hsü Shen regards the graph—he gives the seal form<sup>ab</sup>—as pictographic. The next entry in his dictionary is *chih*<sup>q</sup>, which he describes as, “a bird which flies down to earth from on high.” This gloss, together with the seal form<sup>ac</sup> for *chih* which resembles an up-side-down *pu*, suggests that he regarded the latter as the *chuan chu*<sup>ad</sup> of the former. This is the opinion of Chu Chün-sheng, quoted at *Shuo Wen Chieh Tzu Ku Lin* (Shanghai, 1928), vol. 9, 953.

<sup>20</sup> There is a substantial body of modern scholarship, e.g. Shirakawa, vol. 1, 16–17, which regards the most ancient forms of the graph for *pu* as a representation of the calyx of a flower. The use of the graph for the word *fou* “calyx-base” in Mao 164 of the *Shih Ching* as well as the occurrence of cognate words with related meanings, e.g., *pei*<sup>ac</sup> “cup” (cf. Latin *calix*), provide strong evidence in support of this. B. Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (Stockholm, 1957), entry 999, still adheres to Hsü Shen's original account. It should be noted that modern scholarship also rejects Hsü Shen's gloss of *chih* (see note 19) and regards the early forms of that graph as a drawing of an arrow striking a target. See Shirakawa, vol. II, 113.

<sup>14</sup> The word only occurs in two poems and in both it has this sense: Mao 35, stanza 1; and Mao 201, stanzas 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>15</sup> The manuscript, now in the Sackler Collection, was found in 1942 in a Ch'u tomb at Tzu-t'an-k'u in the southern suburbs of Ch'ang-sha. An introduction to its contents may be had from Noel Barnard, “The Ch'u Silk Manuscript,” Jao Tsung-yi, “Some aspects of the calendar, astrology, and religious concepts of the Ch'u people as revealed in the Ch'u silk manuscript,” and Hayashi Minao, “The twelve gods of the Chan-kuo period silk manuscript excavated at Ch'ang-sha.” All three articles appear in Noel Barnard, ed., *Early Chinese Art and its Possible Influence in the Pacific Basin* (Authorised Taiwan edition, 1974). Recent archaeological work at the original tomb site has yielded other artifacts which suggest a late fourth century B.C. date for the tomb and its contents. See the introductory note to *Ch'ang-sha Ch'u Mu Po Hua* (Peking, 1973).

<sup>16</sup> Jao Tsung-yi, 113, makes this identification on contextual grounds as well as on an analysis of the graph. As I point out below (note 22), Jao's analysis differs from my own. A transcription of the Ch'u Silk Manuscript showing the original form of the graph and its context is given at Barnard, 92–93.

period.<sup>21</sup> We should, in any case, take the lower part of the Ch'u Silk Manuscript graph as an intentional abbreviation of the "bird" element of the original graph for *feng* and the entire Ch'u Silk Manuscript graph as a shortened form of that original graph.<sup>22</sup>

I propose that the graph<sup>s</sup> which occurs in the fourth position of the second "line statement" of Hexagram 2 does not stand for the negative *pu* but is a further truncated version of the original graph for *feng*—one that eliminates the phonetic root and leaves only the signific. (This abbreviated form of the graph is an early feature in the textual history of the *I Ching* since it already appears in the as yet unpublished *I Ching* manuscript discovered in Tomb Three, dated 168 B.C., at Ma-wang-tui.<sup>23</sup>) Thus the three words following the poetical part of the line should properly be read as *ta feng hsi*. The proper name *ta feng*<sup>ai</sup>, "the Great Wind," occurs with some frequency in early literature and is even a subject of divination in the Shang oracle bone inscriptions.<sup>24</sup> The original graph used to write the word, as well as the successively abbreviated versions preserved in the Ch'u Silk Manuscript and the transmitted text of the *I Ching*, reflect those ancient beliefs which identified the wind as a

bird.<sup>25</sup> Thus it is fitting that in our *I Ching* passage the arrival of this grand wind-bird should be characterized by a verb, *hsi*, which means both "the flapping of wings" and "repeated gusting."

The use of the abbreviated graph for *feng* is not restricted to our *I Ching* passage. I submit that the occurrence of what has been taken to be *pu huang*<sup>ak</sup> in each of the three stanzas of Mao 232 of the *Shih Ching* should in fact be read as *feng huang*<sup>ai</sup> "phoenix." The three lines containing the words have been misconstrued since the Han dynasty<sup>26</sup> and should be rendered:

...  
The Phoenix has attended the dawn levee!  
...  
The Phoenix has emerged!  
...  
The Phoenix is contented!

To return to our *I Ching* passage, I would translate the opening of the "line statements,"

Treading on frost.<sup>27</sup> The Hard Ice will descend.  
Directed toward the (proper) quarter.<sup>28</sup> The Great  
Wind will gust.

<sup>21</sup> Shirakawa, vol. 1, 17, finds evidence in Spring and Autumn bronze inscriptions that scribes of that time perhaps regarded the graph for *pu* as symbolic of a bird rather than a calyx. Moreover, the graph was used to write a verb *fou* meaning "to soar" in the *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu*. See B. Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa*, entry 999. The antiquity of Hsü's analysis is also demonstrated with respect to the *chuan chu* graph for *chih*. Chu Chün-sheng (see note 19) observes that the line *feng niao pu chih*<sup>af</sup>, "The Phoenix does not descend," from *Lun Yü* 9.9, shows that as early as that text the alighting of a bird was thought to be at the root of the meaning of *chih*. Thus we should not regard Hsü Shen's accounts of the origins of these graphs as his invention just as we should allow the possibility that beliefs and concepts, which were not only extra-linguistic in nature but also alien to those which actually led to the creation of the graphs, influenced their subsequent history as well as contemporary interpretations of the words for which they stood.

<sup>22</sup> Jao Tsung-yi, 113, n. 1, regards the Ch'u Silk Manuscript graph as a variant of the later form<sup>w</sup> of *feng* with the "dragon" element. Indeed what he takes as the lower part<sup>ag</sup> of the former he identifies as a variant of *ch'ung*<sup>ah</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> This was reported to me in a conversation on September 14, 1982, with Chang Cheng-lang, the editor in charge of transcribing the Ma-wang-tui version.

<sup>24</sup> Akatsuka, 415–442, adduces evidence for both of these points.

<sup>25</sup> Shirakawa, vol. 1, 112–119, reviews the literary evidence of such beliefs. Perhaps the most graphic manifestation of the persistence of beliefs in the "wind-bird" even after the adoption of the later graph with the "dragon element," is the drawing of a bird, standing erect, labelled with the caption *ta feng*<sup>aj</sup> "Great Wind," found in the top register of the Ma-wang-tui Tomb Three silk manuscript on astrological and weather portents. For a full reproduction of this manuscript see *Chung-kuo Wen-wu* 1 (1979), 1–4.

<sup>26</sup> B. Karlgren, "Glosses on the Book of Odes," *BMFEA* 14 (1942), Gloss 744, summarizes earlier "forced" attempts to understand these lines and adds his own.

<sup>27</sup> We should understand "treading on frost" as it is described at *Li Chi, Shih-san Ching Chu Shu*, 1816 woodblock edition, 47.1a; that is, as a ritual performed at the autumnal sacrifices in expectation of the coming of the spirits.

<sup>28</sup> In this tentative rendering I take text *chih*<sup>am</sup> as it occurs in the phrase *chih tung*<sup>an</sup> "face east" in the *I Li, Shih-san Ching Chu Shu*, 1816 woodblock edition, 2.13a. *Fang*<sup>m</sup> refers perhaps to the particular direction from which the wind is anticipated. The two words together may denote a ritual performed in conjunction with the autumnal "treading on frost."

My interpretation of the remainder of the *K'un* "line statements" must await further research.

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Appendix A

6/1 履 霜 堅 冰 至  
 6/2 直 方 大 不 習 无 不 利  
 6/3 含 章 可 貞 或 從 王 事  
 无 成 有 終  
 6/4 括 囊 无 咎 无 譽  
 6/5 黃 裳 元 吉  
 6/6 龍 戰 于 野 其 血 玄 黃

GLOSSARY

a 坤	n 直方	ab 不
b 爻 辭	o 大 不 習	ac 直
c 乾	p 堅	ad 轉注
d 剝 別	q 至	ae 杯
e 龜 危	r 習	af 鳳 鳥 不 至
f 君 子	s 不	ag 巾
g 履 霜 直 方 含 章	t 冰	ah 虫
括 囊 黃 裳 玄 黃	u 麻	ai 大 鳳
h 直 方 大	v 鳳	aj 大 風
i ䷋	w 風	ak 不 皇
j 象 傳	x 不	al 鳳 皇
k 不 習	y 不	am 直
l 大	z 不	an 直 東
m 方	aa 不	