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DID CONFUCIUS STUDY THE "BOOK OF CHANGES"?

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"The Master said, 'If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the *Book of Changes*, and then I might come to be free from great faults.'" *Analects* VII, XVI.

This saying has been almost universally accepted as a genuine saying of Confucius. The best and most critical Chinese scholar of the day, Prof. Hu Shih ¹⁾, has based an account of Confucius' logical theory on the assumption that he wrote or edited the *Book of Changes*, altho he has not given us any evidence that Confucius actually used the Book beyond this one saying. And yet the proposal to spend an added fifty years of life studying a manual of divination does not fit in with what one would expect of a man who became a great leader of his people, and who emphasized morality rather than ritual observances. While the mere presence of this saying in the midst of the only genuine collection of the sayings of Confucius does not of itself guarantee its genuineness, yet its presence in such a collection is very strong evidence for its trustworthiness, unless we can find stronger reasons for doubting it.

1) In his book 中國哲學史大綱 *Chung kuo ché hsio shih ta kang*.

It is indeed always the unexpected saying which is less likely to have been interpolated. If we are to impugn the authenticity of this saying we must show that it is contrary to the spirit of Confucius and also that there were good reasons why someone else should have wished people to think that Confucius had said it.

Now it is a curious fact that outside of this one saying attributed to Confucius, there is no mention of the *Book of Changes* in contemporary literature earlier than the third century B.C. In the commentary of Tso Ch'iu-ming on the *Spring and Autumn*, there are a number of quotations from the *Book of Changes*. Ssü-ma Ch'ien in his monumental *Historical Record* states that in the closing years of Confucius' life, he became fond of the *Book of Changes*, and wrote various appendixes to it, that he read his copy of it so much that the leathern thongs by which his copy was bound together were thrice worn out, and that he said, "Give me several years more, and I should be master of the Book of Changes" ¹⁾. Likewise he says that Confucius wrote all but two of the appendixes to the *Book of Changes*. This last statement is plainly an inference from statements in the text of the *I ching*, while the rest of his statement is probably an inference and a loose quotation of the saying which has been placed at the head of this paper. Legge shows that the attribution of the whole of the appendixes in the *Book of Changes* to Confucius, which is the popular view, is contradicted by the text of the *Book* itself, and that we cannot be sure that any of it is from the pen of Confucius himself. Indeed from the character of the *Book of Changes*, Legge says, "It is a relief not to be obliged to receive them as his" ²⁾. They are too trivial and unworthy of a great man. So we can not

1) *Historical Record*: Life of Confucius, p. 12; quoted by Legge, *The Yi King*, in *Sacred Books of the East*, XVI, p. 1; cf. also Chavannes, *Mém. hist.*, V, 400-402.

2) *Ibid.*, p. 31. Cf. also pp. 29-31.

conclude from the *Book of Changes* itself that Confucius had any connection with it, rather the contrary. Likewise Ssü-ma Ch'ien's evidence must be ruled out as secondary and based on insufficient evidence.

The attitude of Confucius himself to religious observances, as we find it in the *Analects*, is quite out of harmony with the supposition that he put great value upon divination and the *Book of Changes*. He preserves a complete silence as to both of them, except in this one saying. Confucius' comment upon ancestor worship was: "If you cannot serve the living properly, how can you serve the dead?" and "If you do not know life, how can you know about death?"¹⁾ Such sayings would not come from a man who is vitally interested in the interpretation of divination. As for prayer, he holds it is useless. The just punishment of Heaven cannot be averted by any prayers²⁾. So he rejects prayer for the sick; a righteous life is the only true prayer, and particular petitions in time of trouble should not be offered³⁾. If prayer is useless, how can divination be useful? In the *Book of History*, which Confucius studied and probably revised, we find the statement, "Divination, when fortunate, may not be repeated"⁴⁾. Such a statement implies that intelligent men previous to the time of Confucius had not taken a wholly credulous attitude towards divination. Confucius' attitude towards the popular religion was clearly one of agnosticism; refusing to attack it, but also refusing to do more than go thru the prescribed ritual, and clearly indicating that he did not accept the religious superstitions which lay behind those practises.

Had Confucius esteemed the *Book of Changes* as highly as the

1) *Analects* XI, XI.

2) *An.* III, XIII.

3) *An.* VII, XXXIII.

4) *Book of History* II, II, 18.

saying which is our text implies, we should expect that he would have spoken to his pupils about it. Had he supposed, as did medieval Chinese scholars, that it is not primarily a book of divination, but a storehouse of metaphysical knowledge, and consequently had he studied it, we should expect him at least to recommend it to his pupils. We find him quoting from the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of History*, especially the former¹⁾; we find it said that he frequently discoursed on the *Odes*, the *History* and the *Rites*²⁾; he recommended the *Odes*, the *Rites*, and the *Music*³⁾, but nowhere is it recorded that he spoke about the *Changes*. In fact it is expressly said that he did not speak about extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spirits⁴⁾, whereas he taught about literature, morality, loyalty, and trustworthiness⁵⁾. If that was his character, we are not surprised that there is no mention of this book of divination.

Should Confucius have honored and admired it, we should expect that his disciples and followers would have likewise studied and spoken of it. On the contrary they maintain a complete silence for centuries after his death. The superstitious author of the *Doctrine of the Mean*, who believed that the spirits of the ancestors were present in almost visible form, around and over the heads of the worshippers at the sacrifice, does believe in divination⁶⁾, but he nowhere mentions the *Book of Changes*, altho we should naturally expect him at least to speak of the book, had Confucius really recommended it to his disciples. Mencius maintains a complete silence upon the matter, as does his equally great successor, Hsüntzü. Not until the commentary of Tso on the *Spring and Autumn*,

1) *An.* I, XV; II, II, etc.; II, XXI, etc.

2) *An.* VII, XVII.

3) *An.* VIII, VIII.

4) *An.* VII, XI.

5) *An.* VII, XXIV.

6) *Doctrine of the Mean*, XXIV, 1.

which was the last of the three great commentaries to be written on that book, do we get the *Book of Changes* mentioned or quoted.

Still more remarkable is the mention of the Confucian canon in the Chou period. The canon of the Five Books was not finally fixed until the Han period, and the Four Classics not until many centuries later. But in the latter part of the Chou period, we find Hsüntzū giving a list of the five books which are all important for the study and life of the Confucian ¹⁾. They are the *Odes*, the *History*, the *Rites*, the *Music*, and the *Spring and Autumn*. This was the first attempt to fix a list of canonical books, and it is striking that the *Book of Changes* is absent from the list. Instead we have the *Book of Music*. Confucius had mentioned the first four books on Hsüntze's list at various times, and Mencius, in addition, had praised Confucius' sole original work, the *Spring and Autumn*. So there was adequate precedent for fixing the Confucian canon as Hsüntzū stated it. That canon was composed of the four books Confucius had recommended, together with the one book of his composition.

We have seen that there seems to be quite sufficient evidence for concluding that Confucius did not concern himself about the *Book of Changes* any more than about spirits. If we can find an adequate motive on the part of someone before the fixing of the text of the Confucian books by the Han emperors, for adding the saying attributed to Confucius in which he praises the *Book of Changes*, our evidence will be complete.

As to by whom or when this saying was attributed to Confucius

1) Hsüntzū was a younger contemporary of Mencius. He lived about 320—235 B.C., and was the recognized leader of Confucianism all thru his long life. He probably did as much as or more towards moulding Confucian teaching into its present form than anyone else except Confucius himself. For further data and references with regard to his part in fixing the canon of the Five Books, cf. *Hsüntze, the Moulder of Ancient Confucianism*, by Homer H. Dubs, chap. XII. Probsthain & Co., London.

and added to the *Analects* we have no historical evidence. But from what we have seen about the way in which the Confucian canon was determined, we are able to infer pretty correctly how it happened.

At the time of Confucius, the authority of the Chou emperor was fast waning. By the time of Hsüntzū, the feudal states of China were entirely neglecting the Chou ruler, and were using their whole strength in fighting with each other. Finally one of them subdued all the others, deposed the effete Chou emperor, abolished the feudal system, and established the dynasty of Ts'in. Now the conquering state was not one of the more civilized group of central states, but it was located on the western border of the civilized area, up in the mountains of Shensi and Kansu. Its people were consequently less civilized, more virile, and more superstitious. Hsüntzū, who visited its king in his youth, is said to have remarked that Ts'in possessed no Confucian scholars. But when the active and able Ts'in Shih Huangti completed the conquest of China, he evidently intended to repair that defect, for he selected Li Ssū for his prime minister. Li Ssū was a Confucian scholar of high attainment; he had been a disciple of Hsüntzū, and his scholarship is attested by the fact that he invented a new form of script, the "Lesser Seal" writing, and compiled a list of all the extant characters in the new writing. However, even the appointment of a Confucian to the highest post in the empire did not appease the conservative Confucians when Ts'in Shih Huang abolished the feudal system. That system had been established in the hoary past, and had been sanctioned by the idolized King Wen, King Wu, and Duke Chou. It was presupposed by Confucius' political philosophy. Consequently the Confucians wrote and agitated against the change, until Ts'in Shih Huang had to take active steps against them. Just what happened is difficult to determine. The popular account is that all

books were burned and the Confucians put to death. Ssü-ma Ch'ien says that only the recalcitrant were killed; the Classics were destroyed, yet copies of all books were preserved in the imperial library, only to be burned in the conflagration of the palace during the troubles at the end of the Ts'in dynasty. The accounts agree in two things: Li Ssü proposed the measure, and books on "medicine, divination, and husbandry" were excepted from burning. Evidently Ts'in Shih Huang wished to spare books on practical subjects, including *books on divination*. Since it was to the interest of the Han dynasty to blacken its predecessor as much as possible, the second account is more probable. It is not likely that Li Ssü should have tried to exterminate the philosophy in which he was reared. At least we do not find that copies of the works of Hsüntzū were scarce when in the Han period it was decided to publish an authoritative text¹).

Thus we find that divination was highly esteemed at the court of Shih Huangti, and that later the *Book of Changes* had taken the place of the *Book of Music* in the canon of the Confucian classics. It is hard to think that these two circumstances were not cause and effect. Parts of the missing *Book of Music* may now be incorporated into Book XVII of the present *Book of Rites*. That book is now entitled, "The Book of Music", and is quoted by Hsüntzū in his passage upon the subject of music²).

If an influential and intelligent Confucian wished to add the *Book of Changes* to the Confucian canon, how would he do it? He would know that the canon was based upon the recommendations of Confucius. Hence he would know that he would either have to find or to make a saying by Confucius recommending that *Book*.

1) Cf. *Hsüntze*, ch. III.

2) Cf. Book XX of *The Works of Hsüntze*, trans. by H. H. Dubs, Probsthain & Co., London.

But in the Ts'in period there were many spurious sayings attributed to Confucius. We find such sayings incorporated in the *Doctrine of the Mean* and in the arrangement of the works of Hsüntzū made by Liu Hsiang. But to validate the *Book of Changes* as a member of the canon, it would be necessary to have a saying of Confucius which would not be suspected of spuriousness by the sophisticated Confucius. So we find this extravagant praise of the *Book of Changes* in the middle of the one work which most certainly records the genuine sayings of Confucius, and just preceding a genuine saying in which he speaks of three other members of the canon. The interpolated saying contains only seventeen characters — not too much to be a great strain upon an ordinary person's conscience. When the imperial authority had been established by the strong hand of Ts'in Shih Huang all over the civilized world of China, it would not have been hard to secure uniformity in such a little thing as this saying in the memories of the courtly Confucians. We must remember that at the time books were still carried largely in the memories of men and written documents were rare, and also that education was universally considered to be a preparation for entrance into official life. Mencius said that the business of an educated Confucian is to govern others¹), and probably every surviving Confucian found his way into the civil service. Indeed such a saying as the one at the head of this paper would probably have commended itself to most Confucian scholars of the time. The practise of divination by the court and magistrates naturally led them to think that Confucius must have lauded it, and there were probably many Confucians who took the credulous attitude of the author of the *Doctrine of the Mean* in spite of the rationalism of Mencius and Hsüntzū. A word from those in authority

1) *Mencius* III, I, iv, 6.

as to the true text of the *Analects* would be sufficient to settle the matter. So by the time of Ssü-ma Ch'ien this saying had been accepted as genuine, and when the uncritical and superstitious Liu Hsiang came to edit the Confucian books, he accepted it as part of the received text.

We have thus found that study of the *Book of Changes* is plainly incompatible with the character of Confucius, and we have also found an adequate motive for the introduction of such a saying into the collection of genuine Confucian sayings. It seems highly improbable that he should ever have had anything to do with such a book.

MÉLANGES.

L'évêché nestorien de Khumdan et Sarag.

J'ai fait le 10 septembre 1926 à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres une communication que les *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, 1926, pp. 223—224, résumant comme suit :

„M. Paul PELLIOU fait une communication sur l'évêché nestorien de Khumdan et Sarag.

„Le plus important monument de l'ancien christianisme en Chine, l'inscription nestorienne syro-chinoise érigée en 781 et qui a été retrouvée en 1623 ou 1625 — celle-là même ou Voltaire croyait voir une fraude des Jésuites —, mentionne un évêque de Khumdan et Sarag. On a depuis longtemps reconnu, par l'accord des textes grecs de Théophylacte Simocatta et des voyageurs arabes du IX^e siècle, que Khumdan était alors le nom donné par les étrangers à tout ou partie de la capitale occidentale des T'ang, c'est-à-dire Si-ngan-fou. Mais on n'a pas encore abouti à une solution claire pour Sarag. Certains y ont vu une partie de Si-ngan-fou, d'autres un ancien nom de Kachgar au Turkestan chinois, et on l'a même localisé en Perse. Or un vocabulaire sanscrit-chinois jusqu'ici non utilisé rend par Saraga le nom de Lo ou Lo-yang, capitale orientale des T'ang. Il n'est pas douteux que le sanscrit Saraga soit le Sarag du syriaque. C'est donc Lo-yang qui est Sarag, et une fois de plus la clairvoyance et le bon sens de Yule avaient entrevu la solution.”