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1

Origins

Our object is to spend some hours together discussing the Book of Changes. Of course, such an undertaking is not without hazards. This book is difficult to understand; it is so full of cryptic sayings and seemingly abstruse matters that an explanation is often not readily available, and we are tempted to fall back on interpretation to get at the meaning. To us children of an essentially rational generation it poses a problem we are at first reluctant to face; we are led into a region in which we do not know the terrain, and which we have forbidden ourselves to enter except possibly in rare moments of imaginative daring. We ask ourselves if what we are to meet there is not a kind of speculation that lacks any connection with our world. Worse, are we perhaps entering that twilight realm which seduces our generation away from meeting its tasks in the here and now? It is no accident that, of the early Jesuit scholars who were pioneers in making China's culture known in Europe, those who concerned themselves with the Book of Changes were all later declared to be insane or heretic. Indeed, to the Chinese themselves the study of the *I Ching* is not a thing to be undertaken lightly. By an unwritten law, only those advanced in years regard themselves as ready to learn from it. Confucius is said to have been seventy years old when he first took up the Book of Changes.

If nonetheless we undertake to devote some hours to this book, it is because we have important reasons. A

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book that has stood in such high repute among the men who have determined the fate of China, and that beginning with Leibniz (we shall have more to say on this point later), has had so much influence on the leading minds of Europe, will have something to offer us also. If we can obtain from it some insight into the minds of our hosts in this country whose guests we are, that in itself will be rewarding. And if, moreover, we should succeed in deriving from it not only understanding, but also genuine illumination, our undertaking will have been entirely justified. We shall do well, though, to keep our doubts in mind as we proceed, rather than suppress them. So may we avoid overenthusiasm and its resulting undertow.

Let us first glance at the appearance and composition of the Book of Changes, in order to get a summary view of the material we are to discuss. The book is based on sixty-four hexagrams, that is, sixty-four six-line figures, each figure or complex being composed of undivided and of divided lines. These hexagrams form the point of departure for what the book has to say. Later we shall deal in detail with the meaning of these lines and with the way in which they are grouped. In the hexagrams, situations are symbolized; they are characterized by the appended names, and these names already take us into the sphere of the book. We find images representing the primary needs of man—for instance, The Corners of the Mouth, symbolizing nourishment—and also images that picture the evolution of personality: Youthful Folly, Molting, Biting Through, Possession, Return (The Turning Point), The Obstacle, Oppression, Standstill, Waiting, Decrease, Retreat; then Break-Through, Pushing Upward, Development, Increase, Abundance, and (the two last images) After Completion and Before

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Completion. Then there are situations taken from social life: The Marrying Maiden, The Clan, The Well, Fellowship with Men, Holding Together, Approach, Wooing, Coming to Meet, Following, The Power of the Great, Peace; but also Opposition and Conflict. Further, individual character traits are singled out: Modesty, Grace, Innocence, Enthusiasm, Inner Truth. Finally, we find images of suprapersonal significance: The Clinging, The Arousing, Holding Still, The Gentle, The Joyous, and, above all (the first two hexagrams), The Creative and The Receptive.

The linear complexes with their appended titles provide the framework of the subject matter discussed in the Book of Changes. Various categories of Texts elaborate the material in detail. In each hexagram we find at the beginning a brief text, often rhymed, called *T'uan*, a word that originally meant "pig's head" and has been tentatively translated "judgment" or "decision." This judgment sums up the situation, what one may expect of it, and what its chief attributes are.

A second text of more recent date is called *Hsiang*,^b "image." This starts from the symbolic meaning of the linear complexes and indicates their basic application to a human, social, or cosmic situation. These image texts, also concise and brief, often have a remarkable beauty of expression. We frequently find in them references to historical situations, or to typical actions and attitudes of compelling symbolic force, and which therefore arouse a desire to emulate. For example, in hexagram 36, Darkening of the Light, it is said:

The light has sunk into the earth:
The image of darkening of the Light.

^b[Part of the Third and Fourth Wing. See p. 86—TRANS.]

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Thus does the superior man live with the
great mass:
He veils his light, yet still shines. [140]

In hexagram 28, Preponderance of the Great, the image reads:

The lake rises above the trees:
The image of Preponderance of the Great.
Thus the superior man, when he stands alone,
Is unconcerned,
And if he has to renounce the world,
He is undaunted. [112]

In hexagram 52, Keeping Still, we have:

Mountains standing close together:
The image of Keeping Still.
Thus the superior man
Does not permit his thoughts
To go beyond his situation. [201–202]

A third text, *Yao*, adds words to each of the six lines of a hexagram, counting the lowest line as the first and going upward. This group of texts is charged with images and symbols; their immediate relevance to the situation is often hard to see, and at first we must simply accept them as they are, bearing in mind that in the course of our study an explanation may emerge. It is said, for example, that one is:

Wrapped in the hide of a yellow cow. [190]

Or it is said:

The wild goose gradually draws near the
shore.
The younger son is in danger.
There is talk. No blame. [205—206]

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Or,

A crane calling in the shade.
Its young answers it.
I have a good goblet.
I will share it with you. [237]

Or,

Someone does indeed increase him.
Ten pairs of tortoises cannot oppose it.
Supreme good fortune. [161]

Or,

One sees the wagon dragged back,
The oxen halted,
The man's hair and nose cut off.
Not a good beginning, but a good end. [149]

These texts, six for each hexagram, often have a common leitmotif that runs through all six lines. Often this is taken from the name of the hexagram, but often too, a metaphor is introduced and different aspects or stages of it are appended to the individual lines.

To these three categories of texts, which are regarded as the basic parts of the book, still other material has been added. First, for each hexagram there is a commentary on the *t'uan* text, or the judgment, which is known as the Commentary on the Decision (*T'uan Chuan*) and often gives the reason for the choice of the words in the *t'uan*; and often there is an exposition and elucidation of the attributes of the hexagram.

Another text complex is regarded as a commentary on the words appended to the individual lines. It is made up of brief, often rhymed mnemonic verses that have a connection with the imagery of the line texts.

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Still another important text complex is the *Wên Yen*, or Commentary on the Words of the Text. This seems to be a very early commentary, or rather collection of commentaries, of which only fragments concerning the first two hexagrams are extant.

Then there follow two collections of texts, one of which explains the sequence of the hexagrams, giving in many instances interpretations of their names, while the other gives a brief definition of each hexagram as a whole, often drawing a contrast between two of them.

Together with these five texts that can be divided up and allocated to the individual hexagrams, two essays representing a sort of introduction to the work have been incorporated in the book. They are, first, the *Shuo Kua*, Discussion of the Trigrams [262 sqq], which interprets the two primary trigrams making up each hexagram, and the symbolic values represented; and second, the so-called Great Treatise, known also under the name *Hsi T'zu*, or Appended Judgments [280 sqq], which gives a general introduction to the text of the book as a whole. Further on, we shall discuss this commentary in more detail.

As to the purpose of the *I Ching* and the kind of environment that gave rise to it, these are questions to which a simple answer is not easy to find. It is certain that it was regarded as an oracle book and used as such at a very early date. If, as a starting point, we stick to this fact, something can be deduced about the nature of the soil in which the book grew.

The mental attitude which leads a person to consult an oracle, is, after all, not foreign to our own culture either. We too, are familiar with sybils, prophets, and places from which prophetic sayings emanated.

Such places and institutions owe their existence to

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the desire for greater understanding inherent in every aspiring individual. To be aware of the situation in which he finds himself and of the consequences that may grow out of it must be the aim of every person who wants to guide his life rather than merely drift with the current. Search for this knowledge by way of oracles has occurred at all times and everywhere, and even today has not wholly died out. Modern psychology has shown us the substructures of the human psyche, which are the source of our strivings to see meaning and order in what is apparently coincidental. Our of this grows our conscious attempt to fit ourselves into the content of this order, so that, in the parallelism between what is without and what is within us, the position and course of the one may also be meaningful for the other. This attitude is old; indeed, it is inherent in human nature. The continents and eras differ only as regards the place where this dark door is sought. Vapors arising from the earth and the stars in their courses have been enlisted again and again as means of obtaining the much sought-for knowledge. In addition, clues that should give the key to this parallelism have been sought in the forces of organic life, especially animal life. Animal oracles of various kinds have existed everywhere. In China, the bone oracle was extensively used from the earliest times.

In contrast to these and even more mechanical efforts, it is important to point out that the oracle of the Book of Changes uses as its key the forces of vegetable rather than animal life. It was a plant growing in sacred places, the yarrow, whose stalks gave access to the oracle when manipulated in a certain way. Clearly, this distinction between the vegetable and the animal indicates not only a difference in method but also a difference in the nature of the oracle.

Another thing that distinguishes the oracle system of the Book of Changes from other similar phenomena is the circumstance that it makes the questioner independent of the mediumistic gifts, or intuition, of an oracle giver. Thus all sorts of influences to which an oracle priest may be exposed were eliminated. It was not a human medium that was consulted but a collection of texts whose authority and value the oracle seeker accepted unquestioningly. For these texts represented to him a fully rounded system, an ordered framework, within which a point to be established would give his momentary situation and what it implied. This system was created by men of ancient times, whom the questioner revered as custodians of a wisdom full of awareness of the connection between what is decreed and what happens. It was from them that he drew his information. This means that the oracle was not born overnight, but must have been preceded by a coherent idea of the cosmos, a definite system of the images of life, that is, a picture of the world, which was then laid down in the Book of Changes.

This brings us to the thing that makes the Book of Changes interesting to persons other than those consulting the oracle. Even if we shrink from approaching the book with the willing faith of an oracle seeker, we can still meditate on this image of the cosmos for its own sake and seek to understand it. The history of the book's origins shows us what can be gained from these reflections.

From what we know of its origins, we cannot say with certainty whether the logical precedence taken by the book and its philosophy over its oracle system corresponds to a precedence in time also; that is, whether the Book of Changes and its picture of the world ante-

dated oracle-taking and, as many persons still think today, did not originally serve the oracle system.

We have seen that the material out of which the book has been composed is heterogeneous throughout, that it does not stem from one period, much less from one man. Chinese tradition concerning its sources, disputed by modern research in every point with more or less reason, places the origin of the different parts in different eras. Tradition says that the legendary culture hero Fu Hsi first devised the linear complexes of the book. Fu Hsi is usually represented as a mountain out of which a leaf-crowned human head emerges. Though this ascription does indeed seem legendary, it is certain at least that the fundamental idea of complexes of whole and divided lines goes back to remote antiquity. Then we are told that the present book has resulted from the revision of two earlier books, also based on the hexagrams, but differing from the present book in the arrangement and names of the individual hexagrams. Of these two books almost nothing trustworthy is preserved to us today except the titles. The first was called *Lien Shan*, "Mountains Standing Together," and is placed in the Hsia dynasty (2205–1766 B.C., traditionally); the later book had the name *Kuei Ts'ang*, "Reverting to the Hidden," and was in use in the Shang era (1766–1150 B.C.). The fact that the Hsia book began with the hexagram for mountain and the Shang book with that for the earth agrees with what we know of the religious beliefs of those times. But these two books contained little of importance besides the linear complexes and their names. A few cryptic sayings of uncertain authenticity that have come down to us in connection with the books tell us but little today. Obviously, various accretions to the saga occurred, if not in writing then in an oral tradition, and these were made

use of in the later version. Modern Chinese research has shown that historical allusions harking back to the Shang period are to be found in our texts, indicating that this material of this book must have begun to crystallize in that early time.

The composition of the present Book of Changes, henceforth named *I Ching* or *Chou I*, is attributed to King Wên, father of the founder of the Chou dynasty (1150–249 B.C.), the name of which has been identified with the book ever since. He is said to have established the present arrangement and to have added the *T'uan* texts (Judgments). It is recounted that he completed this work at a time when the last Shang ruler held him captive in his capital. There is nothing in itself improbable in this tradition. Modern Chinese research, which for a long time held widely divergent views as to the time of origin of the *I Ching*, has now come back to placing this stratum of text in the time of King Wên. The reversal of the positions of the first two hexagrams, giving the father predominance over the mother, clearly carries the imprint of the patriarchal Chou dynasty. And whatever else we know about the man Wên, who is honored as a culture hero, does indeed bear out the notion that he occupied himself with the *I Ching*. It is possible, of course, that our present text does not transmit the exact words of King Wên. This reservation applies especially to the auguries “good fortune,” “misfortune,” “remorse,” “humiliation,” and so on, which are often appended to the judgments. These terms are so very reminiscent of the tortoise oracle, with which the Book of Changes is otherwise not connected, that we are more or less forced to believe them to be additions made by later adepts in divination who were still familiar with the technique of the tortoise oracle.

These additions probably stem from the same period

as the third stratum of text, the *Yao*, or explanations of the individual lines. Tradition has it that these originated with King Wên's son Tan, Duke of Chou, the man who, after the death of his brother, King Wu, carried out the regency for his nephew, Ch'êng in so exemplary a fashion. It is questionable whether Tan's authorship can be validated, but it is certain that this textual stratum also belongs to the early Chou period. In writings of the pre-Confucian period we find it cited along with other oracle books that are no longer extant. If we recognize in whose hands divination rested in the early Chou period, it will be easy to show in what circle the editors of these texts are to be sought. We know that Chou society, in which the use of oracles probably had no place originally, was in the habit of employing a class of the Shang people—a class that had fulfilled like functions in the time of their own dynasty—for divination and related professions. These persons may have filled out the compendium of the *I Ching* by adding the texts to the individual lines. It may be assumed that, in doing this, they made use of the oral traditions connected with the book. Allusions that go back to the early period of the Chou have also been incorporated. Furthermore, one often has the impression that elements of living folklore, such as farmers' sayings and forecasts, were taken into the book. Naturally, it is quite possible that all of this happened under the direction of the Chou court, which wished to see the work of its ancestors completed, and thus the tradition crediting Duke Tan with this stratum of text might, after all, have a certain validity.

The whole group of additional texts, known collectively under the name "Wings," is ascribed by tradition to Confucius. But this summary ascription cannot be left unchallenged today. It can no longer be said with

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certainty whether any of the material—and if any, how much—comes from Confucius' own hand. Much of it undoubtedly does come from a source close to him; other parts are clearly stamped as the work of later disciples.

We know that Confucius did occupy himself intensively with the *I Ching*, for even in the remnants of his conversation that have come down to us, we find it mentioned several times. The most plausible assumption is that he discussed this book with his disciples, just as he did other classics, and told them his thoughts about it. Then disciples of a later generation must have gathered these opinions together as commentaries or introductory chapters. In particular, the school of disciples deriving from Tzŭ Hsia appears to have occupied itself with the *I Ching*. He and his pupil K'an-pi Tzŭ-kung may be responsible for many of the present formulations. And it is altogether possible that the older texts also received their final form from these men.

We see, then, that about a thousand years have gone into the making of this remarkable book. Its beginnings go back to times when a rational separation of objective from subjective nature did not yet exist. Those who have collaborated in making it are the personalities who have formed China and its culture. It was completed in the epoch that brought Chinese philosophy to maturity.

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