

A Short History of Change

The tradition of Change has its source in pre-history, in the myth time of the Paleolithic hunting groups and Neolithic farming communities. It is associated with the activities of the *wu*, the spirit-mediums and Intermediaries, and with the early Moon cults that read the Changes at the time of the Moon Almost Full (*yue ji wang*) to determine the precise point where change was entering the world (*ji*). It is also connected with the cult of jade and jade objects like the moon-shaped *bi*-discs and pig-figures buried with the dead, and the first tomb burials, where the returning soul was surrounded by gifts designed to help him or her on the way to the other shore.

Plant and Number Divination

This Way of Water begins in a kind of divinatory practice known all over the world that links water, plants, numbers and words. It uses plant substances, like the sacred yarrow stalks or the palm nuts of *Ifa* divination, to produce numbers that key emblematic words and phrases. The words act as the center of a complex series of associations held in the mind of the diviner, who chants or dances them when a divination is made through the performative linguistic act.

The Bronze Vessels

As the Bronze Age began the divinatory stream of Change crossed over and picked up images and practices from the other major divinatory stream, what we call Fire and Bone divination. This stream is based on animal sacrifice, using fire to produce cracks in bone or shell, cracks whose patterns are read by the king or power-person. In China it was directly associated with the rise of the Bronze Age kings and the Royal Cycle of ancestral rituals and sacrifices. The tradition of Change is full of references to these rituals. It took over the image of the beautiful cast-bronze sacrificial vessels covered with dragon and animal images, particularly the tripod vessel known as *ding*, used to make the sacrifices and hold

the ritual meal shared with the spirits. It became an image of Change itself, the act of divining and offering sacrifice in order to connect with the spirit.

The Books of Change and the Mandate of Heaven

By about 1000-800 BCE this divinatory stream of images had become a written tradition known as *Yi* or Change, also called the yarrow, after the yarrow stalks used in the consultation process. There were at least three *yi*-books in existence and a class of diviners who used them called book-people, literally bamboo-shamans, after the bamboo strips used to make early books.

Only one of these books of change has survived, the *Zhouyi* or Changes of Zhou. Through this text, probably first transcribed about 1000 BCE and re-edited about 800 BCE, the tradition was associated with a series of historical events that acquired mythic proportions, the Change in the Mandate of Heaven (*tian ming*) that brought the Zhou Kings to power, enabling them to overthrow their corrupt feudal Lord, the Shang.

The Flowering of a Hundred Schools

By about 500 BCE, the last of the Zhou influence had fallen apart and the culture entered what is called the Warring States period, a period of disintegration and civil war that was, paradoxically, a cultural flowering that saw the development of all the major ideas in later culture.

In this period, Change and yarrow-divination was widespread and its images and omens became proverbial. It carried an entire world of myth and ritual, omens, magic signs and emblematic histories from the ancient Wu and the Bronze Age kings, to a rising class of iron-age nobles, merchants and spiritual seekers. In later periods, it was used in noble courts by a wandering class of specialist diviners (*fang-shi*) to determine the potentials inherent in an action and the correct stance or attitude, spiritual and strategic, to adopt in a given situation.

The Great Enterprise

The Warring States period (c. 500-220 BCE) also saw a radical evolution of the ritual practices associated with the ancient sages and magicians who originated the Way of Water. The religious feeling in these new practices centered on a union between personal and ritual acts, acts that shape the participant's imagination through a cycle of images that mark critical moments or gates of change. These rituals were felt to produce a significant transformation in the awareness and state of being of those who participate in them, an inner change that in turn has a profound affect on the world around us. The Warring States Sages inscribed this re-imagining of the power of ritual action in a complex and Matrix, seeing it as a way to change the world by changing individual awareness. This is the Great Enterprise (*Da yeh*) described in *Dazhuan*, the Warring States text on Change as a vehicle of transformation.

***Yijing*: The Classic of Change**

In the Han Dynasty (202BCE-220CE), the dynasty that emerged after the short-lived universal empire of Chin ended the Warring States period, Change became a Classic or *Jing*, a book recognized as carrying ancient wisdom.

Han Dynasty scholars codified and organized the old language of Change around a set of radicals or "roots." They assembled and transcribed the old divinatory texts in this new modernized form of writing, a system that was used for the next 2000 years. A range of oral interpretive traditions were also collected, transcribed and added to the basic text as the *Ten Wings*.

This period also saw the development of Confucianism as the official Imperial philosophy. Confucians enshrined an official set of meanings in the tradition of Change that were later made a part of the great civil service examinations. This split off another version of Change, a populist Daoist under layer associated with the imaginative use of the old vocabulary of the ghosts and spirits.

Yijing became the most revered sourcebook in the culture. It reflected and assimilated many of the influences that entered Chinese culture over the

centuries, most notably the development of Buddhist practice that culminated in the Tang. It provided the basis for poetry, magic and philosophical speculation, particularly the Song dynasty re-visioning of Confucianism by philosophers such as Zhuxi. It also sponsored both the growing magical use of the diagrams and numbers that became Religious Daoism and the predictive divinatory tradition called *Wenwang Bagua*.

Change in the West

The stream of Change spread into Japan, Korea, and Tibet and was carried by the Chinese diaspora throughout the east. The twentieth century saw one of the most dramatic moments in its evolution, its globalization and the re-discovery of its mythic roots. Archeological discoveries and historical scholarship, both eastern and western, have revealed the layers of myth and ritual practices hidden in the old word meanings of the *Yijing* and its World of Change. Archetypal psychology and chaos theory, coupled with an enormous dissatisfaction with formal religious systems, opened a window for this thought in the west. A series of usable translations beginning with the landmark Wilhelm-Baynes version of 1950 and Wilhelm's encounter with the depth psychologist C. G. Jung has made versions of the text available worldwide. Change has become a part, albeit often an underground part, of western imagination and spirituality. It is to this bend in the river, this entrance of the World of Change into western spirit and culture, that this translation is particularly addressed.