

Introduction to *Shuogua*

The Way of the Eight Spirit Helpers

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***Shuogua*: Explaining the Diagrams**

One day Wu Ma-zi asked Mo-zi: Which are wiser, the Ghosts and Spirits (*guishen*) or the Sages so loved by Confucians. Mo-zi said: The Ghosts and Spirits are wiser than the Sages by as much as the sharp-eared and keen-sighted surpass the deaf and blind.

Shuogua is a classic commentary, a counterpart to *Dazhuan*. As we know it, it forms the 8th of the Ten Wings of *Yijing*, a compilation of two different documents brought together late in the Han Dynasty. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the two traditions, *Dazhuan* and *Shuogua*, were originally linked, and that the first parts of *Shuogua* represent a bridge between them. Emerging from an oral tradition like *Dazhuan*, the Explanation of the Diagrams embodies and develops a way of divinatory, spiritual and magical practice that became the *locus classicus* for the development of correlative categories and Eight Diagrams magic. Behind it lies the powerful imaginative practice of the *wu* and the *fangshi*, spirit-mediums, shaman-diviners and traveling magicians, on which the perception of categories is based.

Shuogua explains (*shuo*) the diagrams (*gua*) of Change. It explains the origin of the six-line diagrams (*gua*) and the function and fields of association of the eight three-line diagrams, the *Bagua*. From this perspective, the six-line *gua* or

hexagrams, which provide entrance to the 64 Divinatory Figures (*xiang* or *shi*) of Change, are thought to be driven and opened by the Eight Spirit Helpers. Thus the *Bagua*, the Eight Diagrams or Eight Trigrams, offer a particular way of explaining the dynamics of the 64 Figures that was used in abstruse meditation practices, philosophical thought and street level magic.

Parts I and II, the earlier documents, examine the origin of the six-line figures (*gua*) in the activity of Sages who, inspired by spirits (*shen*), came to understand the fates of all things and thus to create the 64 Figures. They introduce four pairs of three-line figures, the *Bagua* or Eight Diagrams, in what is called the “family order” (*xiang*) of linked consorts. Part III is an amalgam of early sources, compiled about 200 years later. Its first sections provide groups of associations for the Eight Diagrams that include natural powers and emblems, “dream” or totem animals, parts of the human body, colors and seasons and present the Eight Spirit helpers in what is called the King Wen or Later Heaven (*Houtian*) order. The initial associations were probably gathered from oral descriptions of individual figures and re-collated by category for rote memorization. The later sections of Part III give further groups of “miscellaneous” associations attached to each of the Eight Diagrams. This, I feel, is the earlier style. Like an incantation, it provides key images through which the spirits might be invoked, the groups of associations being deliberate invocations of the particular figure involved. They hark back to the ceremonies of the Wu, the Intermediaries described in the *Nine Songs* who call down the spirits to take their bodies and spread blessings to the human community. They also tell us much about what the *fangshi* or traveling magicians might be doing behind the scenes.

On a lucky day with an auspicious name,
Reverently we come to delight the High Lord.
We grasp the long sword’s haft of jade,
And our girdle pendants clash and chime.
Jade weights fasten the god’s jeweled mat.
Now take up the rich and fragrant flower offerings,
The meats cooked in meliotis, served on orchis mats,

Libations of peppered cinnamon wine.
Flourish the drumsticks and beat all the clay drums.

The singing begins softly, a slow, solemn measure;
As pipes and zither join it grows shrill.
Now the priestesses come, splendid in their gorgeous robes.
The hall is filled with their penetrating fragrance.
The five sounds mingle harmonious.
The god is merry and takes his pleasure.

We have bathed in orchis water and perfumed our hair,
Dressed like flowers in embroidered robes.
The god halts, swaying above us,
Shining with a persisting radiance.
He goes to rest in the Shrine of Life, the Hidden Temple,
His brightness like the Sun and Moon.
He yokes the steeds of god to his dragon-car
And flies wandering through the heavens. He descends in bright majesty
And whirls, soars into the clouds again.
He looks down in blessing on our Ji-Zhou and all the lands beyond,
No place on the Square Earth does he pass over.

I have presumed these old invocations are poetically coherent and evocative, and have added many other associations to the overall field, including hexagram names, to complete the picture. I have taken great liberties with the order of the second part, putting the “cyclic order” (III/ 5th paragraph) at the center of the whole, breaking up the categories and gathering the qualities around individual figures. I have deliberately personified the *gua*, using archaic word meanings to emphasize their character as spirits and guides, semi-autonomous powers of the imagination that drive and open the Matrix of Change.

Myths of Origin

The invention of the Bagua is described in a late section of *Dazhuan*. There, the origin of the Eight Diagrams is ascribed to *Fuxi*, who created them through a sort of “imaginative induction” (*xiang*) in what appears to be the early Neolithic, before bronze age city culture with its palaces of rammed earth walls or stable field agriculture developed. He did this, it is said, in order to organize and

facilitate contact with the spirit-world and insure the flow of blessings to humans.

An alternative myth also inserted into *Dazhuan* says that the *Bagua* and their “predecessors” (the *hetu* and *luoshu* diagrams) rose from the River Ho inscribed on a river-horse and a magic turtle. A modern scholarly perspective shows that although the 6-line diagrams or hexagrams actually seem to have *preceded* the three-line diagrams historically, these trigrams figured in very early divinatory practice, a sort of interlocking parallel stream that developed into a quite sophisticated interpretive tool.

Shuogua also codifies a set of emblems or symbols for the Eight Trigrams that were used throughout later philosophical practice - *qian*/sky or heaven, *kun*/earth, *zhen*/rousing thunder, *dui*/mists and still, open water, *sun*/wind and wood, *li*/fire and brightness, *kan*/rushing water or the pit and *gen*/mountain. This provided a wide-ranging set of correlations, quite possibly derived from an attempt to integrate *Bagua* with Five Phase or Five Process thinking (*wuxing* and its pervasive Earth, Wood, Fire, Metal and Water), a sort of interface between archaic practices and their later conceptual development. The names of the diagrams, however, seem to preserve much of the archaic world and its ritual concern with spirits which underlies the later development of the categories.

Bagua became the primary system used to organize the proliferating systems of correlates that emerged in the Han Dynasty and acted as the basis for much of traditional science, medicine and magic. The primary experience is, I feel, a sort of epiphany that was later codified and categorized. Another section of the Ten Wings, the *Daxiang* or Great Symbol portion of the *Xiangzhuan* or Symbol Tradition (3rd and 4th Wing), reflects the concerns of *Shuogua* into the moral sphere by juxtaposing the behavior proper to the *junzi* (Noble One or Realizing Person) with the new symbols. This became a Confucian ideal, a way to postulate proper (*li*) behavior as a moral reflex of the symbolic relations of the

trigrams. In popular culture, *Bagua* remains to this day a powerful magic, specific against demons and angry ghosts.

Sequences of the Eight Diagrams

The Eight Figures are seen as combining in several ways. The primary way is in forming the 64 Figures of *Yijing*, the Classic of Change. Early on, each hexagram (*gua*) came to be seen as a combination of two trigrams (*gua*), one associated with the inner world (*zhen*, the divination or foundation), one with the outer (*hui*, the trouble or distress to be confronted). This sponsored an analysis of the interaction of the two spirit-energies involved and their interlocking sets of categories and processes. It also produced the Eight Palace System of organizing the 64 figures of Change in Houses or Mansions ruled by those hexagrams consisting of doubled trigrams (1, 2, 29, 30, 51, 52, 57, 58.)

There are three well-known sequences of the *Bagua* or Eight Diagrams in common use in philosophy, mediation, medicine and popular culture. Each shaped a style and tradition of thought and practice. The *houtian*, the King Wen or Later Heaven sequence, was probably the first to develop, well before the early Han. It is used to organize many versions of the Universal Compass used by geomancers that correlates all the various categories. The King Wen sequence is *process-oriented*, portraying a world in constant action and interaction. This order has no mathematical logic but is yin-yang symmetrical along the ESE-WNW axis and is reflected in section 5 of *Shuogua*. It is found on Han Dynasty TVL divining mirrors and the *Lopan* locating compass of *feng shui* practitioners and geomancers.

This is the primary organizing order in *Shuogua*. When it is read mythically in terms of the hexagrams produced by the linked trigrams and their inversion, it highlights certain hexagram figures as important transformative sites. Note that the circular diagrams are formed with the lowest line of each figure *facing in toward the center*. Each set can thus be read both forwards and backwards to produce the converse of the Pair formed by the original figures. This reflects

the way of “comings and goings” (*wang lai*) on the river of time and the inversion of figures so prominently displayed in the construction of *Yijing*. Though the order was later superimposed on a compass of the directions, its main function seems to be mythic and seasonal.

The vertical axis of the order is formed by *Li* and *Kan*, “burning water,” reflected in the Pair 63:64. These are the middle son and the middle daughter in the family order and mark the seasons of summer and winter. The horizontal axis is formed by *Zhen* and *Dui*, the Rouser/Exorcist and the Joyous Dancer, the Intermediary who gives the spirits voice. Oldest son and youngest daughter in the family order, they act here as the Gates of Spring and Fall. The two cross or diagonal sets reflect the Primal Powers acting through their “agents,” mother and youngest son, father and oldest daughter. *Qian*/Force acts through *Sun*, the Lady of Fates and *Kun*/Field acts through *Gen*, the Sacrificer and limit, the mountain. This order yields a process-oriented or shamanic picture of the world of experience, the All-under-Heaven. It emphasizes several special sites of transformation, represented by pairs of figures from the Change: 9:10, 17:18, 23:24, 31:32, all containing zones of transformation between the limits and the thresholds of this world that point at a conjunction of the four Operators or Intermediaries. They offer a major paradigm of death and rebirth, receiving a spirit influx and fixing the omen that has been given.

The Family Order and the Eight Houses

The Family Order originates in the Four Symbols, which also determine the Time Cycle, seen in the old magical formula that begins *Yijing*, *yuan heng li zhen*. It is based on counterchanged pairs and is thought to reflect an *ideal family*. This order is often used in popular magic and good fortune fetishes. It is the base of the sequence of figures in the *Mawangdui* text and the system of the Eight Palaces or Mansions, source of an elaborate Han Dynasty divination system that incorporates the Stems and Branches. In *Shuogua*, it is

amalgamated with the King Wen order as an additional way of seeing how the spirits represented in the diagrams interact. The primary purpose of this system here seems to be to display the connection between the consorts: *Qian* and *Kun*, *Zhen* and *Sun*, *Kan* and *Li*, *Gen* and *Dui*.

The Fuxi Order or Early Heaven

The *xiantian*, the Earlier Heaven or *Fuxi* sequence, emerged in early Han medical texts and became philosophically important through the binary chart of the Song dynasty philosopher Shao Yong. It came to epitomize Song dynasty Neo-Confucianism and is used in many philosophical and moral practices to indicate a perfect pre-lapsarian order, a world of stasis and symmetry. This system is not used in *Shuogua*.

The vertical axis here is the Primal Powers. The horizontal axis is a reflection of their interaction: *Li* and *Kan*, the Burning Water. The diagonal sets produce a paradigm of the non-symmetrical diagrams, what I have called the Operators, in all their relations. This inner square can be read horizontally, vertically, diagonally and through inversion, producing a list of the major architectural sites in the making of Change. Its purpose seems to be to give us a conceptual picture of the architecture of Change and a sort of catalogue of its major operations.

All of these sequences (and others) have played a significant part in the history of *Change* and the sorts of thinking and spiritual practice that surround it. For me, however, the fundamental experience lies in the Eight Diagrams themselves, in the spirit energy, insight and vitalizing power they bring to the imagination. This translation is designed to take us into this world of the spirits, to help us enter their dance. I will not offer any commentary on the individual sections, but simply extend the same welcome that I feel *Shuogua* extends, an invitation to enter the powerful world of the Spirit Helpers who drive and unfold the matrix of Change.

A Note on the Translation

My strategy in making this rather unorthodox translation was to assemble information on the Eight Spirit Helpers from *Yijing* itself and from associated sources that unfold the Universal Compass that the *Bagua* in the King Wen order gave birth to. Each of these portraits begins with the three line diagram doubled to form the hexagram associated with the figure in the matrix of Change and the tag line from *Shuogua* III, 6.1 that identifies and locates the spirit in the King Wen order. The commentary immediately following assembles traditional associations to the hexagram, including the EOC character that represents the Name of the trigram and hexagram. *The Scholar Speaks* is a translation of the Image Tradition (1st and 2nd Wings, *Tuanzhuan*) associated with the hexagram. The Explanation section immediately following assembles associations from *Shuogua* II, 4, 5.2 and 6 while the Invocation collects associations from sections II 7-11. The final section As a spirit guide is a combination of mythical, ritual and medical associations to the figure.

Look, there is a spirit within your person.
Now it goes, now it comes.
No one can imagine it
But if you reverently clean its abode
It will come of itself.
You will recover your own true nature,
It will be fixed in you once for all.

Part I

1 Sages made Change in ancient times.
 Inspired by spirits (*shen*)
 They invented yarrow divination.
They took three from Sky and two from Earth,
 Then all the other numbers.
They observed dark and bright transforming
 And set out the *gua*.
 They developed strong and supple
 To empower the *calling lines* (*yao*)
in accord with the power and virtue (*de*) of the Way (*dao*).
 They understood right action.
Fully encompassing the nature of things (*jing*),
They came to understand the fates of all (*ming*).

2 Sages made *Change* in ancient times,
planning it in accord with nature and the fates
 in order to help the people.
 They set forth the *dao* of Sky
 And called it yin-then-yang.
 They set forth the *dao* of earth
 And called it supple-then-strong.
 They set forth the *dao* of humans
And called it compassion-then-responsibility.
 They combined all and doubled them –
Six strokes to form the Figures of *Change*,
 Distinguishing the yin and the yang,
 Articulating the whole and the opened.

 Thus in *Change* six positions make one unit.

3 The Eight Spirit Helpers move and combine this field:

Qian/Heaven and *Kun*/Earth take fixed positions.
Ken/Mountain and *Dui*/Open Water exchange stimulating influences,
Zhen/Thunder and *Sun*/Wind excite each other and move them onwards,
Kan/Rushing Water and *Li*/ Fire do not compete with them.

 To reckon the past is to follow the time-passing.
 To know the future we move against time-passing:
Thus Change uses the diagrams to reckon time by the coming moment,
 And only then by what is going.