

***Yijing*: A Self-Circulating and Self-Justified Chinese Cultural Discourse**

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Abstract

The *Yijing*, as a divination manual and a book on fate, is a mystery. Why has it been so spiritually and intellectually influential in China that even the most rational and sophisticated minds, such as Confucius, Mencius, and Laozi, have consulted it for their fortunes? In this essay I provide two explanations for the effectiveness and endurance of this classical text. First, as a system of discourse it operates under perfect mechanisms of self-circulation and self-justification. Second, despite its religious discussion of fate, it is also an active form of moral discourse.

Introduction

The *Yijing* or *Book of Changes* ranks first of the six greatest Chinese classical books, preceding the *Shijing* (Book of Songs), the *Shangshu* (Book of Historical Documents), the *Liji* (Book of Rites), the *Yuejing* (Book of Music), and the *Chun chiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals). Yet despite this extreme sublimity, its beginning is an intellectual embarrassment. It was originally a divination manual. In the mind of a contemporary reader, the book is a mystery: why has it been so spiritually and intellectually influential in China that even the most rational and practical minds, such as Confucius, Mencius, and Laozi, have consulted it for their fortunes?

Chinese scholars have taken two general approaches to defining the significance of this classic book. One moves away from the inglorious practice of fortune telling and identifies the book as a work of philosophy and ethics that expounds the way of *yin* and *yang*, the two primal forces of the cosmos (e.g., Ren, 2001; Zeng, 2003; Lu, 2005). The other approach focuses on the practical use of the text and views it as primarily a book that aims at forecasting and explaining changes of fate. Some holders of this view are radical cultural critics. The mainland Chinese scholar Shangsi Cai (1991), for instance, condemns the book for representing the ignorant and superstitious aspects of Chinese culture. There are still many, however, who are fascinated with the book's power of prediction. Some scholars believe that the *Yijing* expresses the timeless wisdom of the Chinese people (e.g., Wang, 2001; Pang, 2004). Some seek to discover the scientific basis of its prophecies. Others are concerned with the possible application of its predetermination in management, decision-making, strategic planning, trading, cooking, Chinese medicine, and so forth (e.g., Cheng, 1999; Jia & Zhang, 1993; Wang, 2001; Zhou, 1999; Liu, 1999; Wu & Zhang, 2001; Dong, 1998; Wang, 2003; Yang, 1995; Chang, 2002).

The two general approaches are significant in their own right, but at the same time they have been restricted in their frame of view. The purely philosophical and ethical approach can help to reveal the far-reaching significance of this classical book, but regretfully has ignored

its immediate purpose to prophesy and explain good or evil luck. The “wisdom” theory and the “scientific” approach can help to explain the effectiveness of its fortune telling, but have failed to understand the profound meaning of its operation as a cultural practice. Regardless of how much wisdom that the *Yijing* provides and the good or bad fate that it forecasts, it cannot exactly anticipate the ever changing outside world.

In this essay I seek to explore the *Yijing*’s profound cultural significance from the perspective of discursive practice. For me, the telling and explanation of fortune is a unique cultural discourse. Whether or not it matches real fate, the discourse itself is the reason for its own existence. In this essay, two explanations are provided for the effectiveness and the enduring of this discursive practice. First, as a living system of discourse it operates under perfect mechanisms of self-circulation and self-justification. Second, despite its religious discussion of fate, it is also a very active form of moral discourse.

With this essay I will answer the following three questions. What did the Chinese concept of fate (*ming*) mean to the Chinese in the classical period? How is the *Yijing* able to reasonably and even accurately predict this fate? In particular, what kinds of self-circulating and self-justified mechanism are employed to guarantee the reasonableness and accuracy of its prophecies? How does this discourse on fate develop into an active form of moral discourse?

The Classical Chinese Concept of Ming

As a crucial concept in classical China, “*ming*” had a wide and interrelated range of meanings, from command, decree, mandate, destiny, life, and mission to fate. The concept of *ming* initially pointed to the commands of the *Di*, a supreme anthropomorphic deity, and of the dead sage kings. An earlier cognate of the term “*ming*” was “*ling*”, meaning command (Liu, 1993, pp. 191-192). Its pictographic form looks like a person kneeling upon their knees and listening to a higher authority.

When the people of the Shang prayed to the gods and asked about the future by divination, they wanted to receive specific “commands.” As recorded in the oracle bone inscriptions, people asked whether the gods would command to a gale, a downpour, a thunderstorm, a famine, or an epidemic (Liu, 1993, p. 193).

The term “*ming*” first appeared in the bronze inscriptions during the middle of the Western Zhou dynasty (1111-723 B.C.). At first, it meant exactly the same as its cognate *ling*, but later it became associated with the notion of Heaven and took on a new meaning. Heaven was an all-pervading cosmic power. It did not issue direct orders as a personal god did. Its *ming* (decree) thus differed from the commands of gods. Although *ming* was still seen as the underlying force that accounted for the abrupt outbreak and unpredictable outcome of both natural and social disasters, the commands of gods were no longer reasonable explanations. The notions of fate and Heaven’s mandate thus came to be seen as more characteristic interpretations of the concept of *ming* in the period of the Zhou. Heaven gave no commands, but it did do something to establish or to change the *ming* (fate) of a state and of a person. It was widely believed that Heaven governed on the basis of moral principles, and by giving mandate to rulers who assumed the responsibility for the welfare of their people. The concept of Heaven’s mandate was used by the rulers of the Zhou to justify their taking of political power from the lords of the Shang. As the Duke of Zhou claimed, “I do not presume to know and say, ‘the dynasty of Yin (Shang) was to enjoy the favoring decree of Heaven for so many years,’ nor do I presume to say, ‘it could not continue longer.’ The fact simply was that, for want of the virtue of reverence, the decree in its favor prematurely fell to the ground. The king

has now inherited the decree, the same decree, I consider, which belonged to those two dynasties. Let him seek to inherit the virtues of their meritorious sovereigns; especially at this commencement of his duties” (*Shangshu*, p. 430).

Unsurprisingly, this divine concept became a popular subject of early Chinese religious discourse. The oracle bone script of the Shang dynasty (1751-1112 B.C.), the earliest available written language in China, was essentially a record of the *ming* (command) from a god after each divination. The subject of *ming* as a decree from on high or the fate of royal elite also figured significantly in the early bronze inscriptions of the Zhou dynasty (1111-249 B.C.). The first Chinese historical text, the *Shangshu* (Book of Historical Documents), abounded with discussions on *ming* (mostly on fate, decree, and mission). Among all ancient Chinese discussion of *ming*, however, that with the most bearing on the *ming* or the fate of Chinese people was the *Yijing*.

The *Yijing* is primarily a book on *ming*, and on the fate of Chinese people in particular. The term “*yi*” (change) in *Yijing* means no more than the changing of fate. The early part of the *Yijing* serves as a manual of fate or fortune telling. It includes the 64 Hexagrams, the hexagram statements, and the line statements, which were compiled probably at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty. The later part of the book provides a systematic discussion of changes of fate as predicted by the early part. This part consists of 10 layers of commentaries (termed “the Ten Wings”), which were traditionally attributed to the early Confucian schools.

A Self-Circulating and Self-Justified System of Discourse on Fate

How can the *Yijing* possibly predict and discuss fate in any reasonable way if fate is seen as ever changing and beyond the reach of human knowledge? To answer this question, we first will have to see that the divination manual and the discussion about fate in the *Yijing* are actually dependent on each other. In short, the book tells what it discusses, and discusses what it tells. The fortune telling is reasonable because it can be reasonably explained and talked about. This means that what the book tells and discusses has nothing to do with real fate, if that exists. The fact that the *Yijing* has kept generating discussion about fate for more than two millennia is due largely to this self-circulating and self-justified system of discourse.

We will also have to understand that this self-circulation and self-justification is secured by a set of linguistic and explanatory mechanisms. In short, it is doubly secured by an open system of prophecy and a dynamic frame of explanation. It can be said that the *Yijing* makes no mistakes in fate telling because it never prophesies anything definite, and that it predicts nothing that is absolutely certain because by its own definition fate is never determined in itself.

A Reasonable and Dynamic Frame of Explanation

Despite the fact that the 10 layers of commentaries were compiled and appended to the divination manual after it was written, it was not until the commentaries were appended that the fortune telling in the *Yijing* began to be understood reasonably and even rationally. That fortune telling is reasonable and rational in the sense that it can be reasonably and rationally explained in terms of the way or the natural course of Heaven. It no longer has to resort to the arbitrary commands of gods.

All of this becomes possible because the commentaries effectively construct or reconstruct a perfect theory to explain the good fortune and misfortune that is predicted by the divination manual. This is the *yin-yang* theory of the classic period, which has three basic assumptions.

(1) All lives originate from the interaction of *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are two opposing yet complementary cosmic forces or energies, and their combination and interaction give birth to all things in the world (*Yijing*, pp. 280, 343). This view of *yin-yang* interaction as the source of life is used in the commentaries to explain the rise and fall, the flourishing and decline of life. As a living being relies so much on the harmony and balance between the *yin* and *yang* elements within it for being what it is, the lack of harmony and balance thus becomes its inexorable doom.

(2) The *yin-yang* opposites depend on each other and give way to each other in a natural cycle. When *yin* waxes, *yang* wanes, and vice versa: for example, *yang* gives way to *yin* in winter, and *yang* replaces *yin* in summer. This *yin-yang* cycle serves in the commentaries as a reliable frame of reference for fortune telling. One should be safe as long as one stays within the natural cycle of the waxing and waning of *yin* and *yang*, whether it turns cold when *yin* waxes such as in winter, or gets warm when *yang* waxes such as in summer. However, there are certain periods in the cycle that carry with them a certain sense of difficulty and danger. This is especially the case when either *yin* or *yang* is extremely strong: life then becomes extremely fragile or tempted off the natural path. For the seventh layer of commentary (“Commentary on the words of the text”), the stage when *yang* rises to its apex is comparable to an arrogant dragon that “knows how to press forward but not how to draw back . . . knows existence but not annihilation, knows something about winning but nothing about losing” (*Yijing*, p. 383). It then comes very close to danger.

(3) The potential good or bad lot of a living being at a specific point of time is thus predictable according to both its location in the *yin-yang* cycle and its position in the cosmic order that is reflective of a greater cycle of *yin-yang* interaction and alternation. It was generally believed in classical China that misfortune would occur to anyone who failed to move with the times or to act according their station. As Bo Zong clearly said in sixth-century B.C., “when the seasons of heaven are reversed, we have calamities; when the productions of the earth are reversed, we have prodigious things; when the virtues of men are reversed, we have disorders. It is those disorders which give rise to the calamities and prodigious things” (*Zhuozhuan*, p. 328).

With these basic assumptions, the *yin-yang* theory that is constructed or reconstructed in the appended commentaries of the *Yijing* serves as a reasonable and rational frame of explanation for understanding the fortune-telling exercise in the divination manual. The fortune-telling practice, in contrast, can be reasonably and rationally explained within the framework of *yin-yang* theory, because the ideas that underlie its divinatory structure and methods are themselves in favor of the *yin-yang* explanation. According to the eighth layer of commentary (“Discussion of the trigrams”), the divination manual was itself made out of the ideas of *yin* and *yang*. The holy inventors of the manual, it is told, “contemplated the changes in the dark [*yin*] and the light [*yang*] and established the hexagrams in accordance with them. They brought about movements in the firm and the yielding, and thus produced the individual lines. They put themselves in accord with tao [*dao*] and its power, and in conformity with this laid down the order of what is right. By thinking through the order of the outer world to the end, and by exploring the law of their nature to the deepest core, they arrived at an understanding of fate (*Yijing*, p. 262).

The construction of the *Yijing*’s complex system of divination started with two very simple line segments: one is divided (“⚊”) and termed the “*yin* line”, and the other is continuous (“—”) and termed the “*yang* line”. Together they symbolize the two primal powers

in the universe. The ancient inventors first constructed the Eight Trigrams by various combinations of three *yin* or *yang* lines. They are known as “*qian*” (☰), “*dui*” (☱), “*li*” (☲), “*zhen*” (☳), “*sun*” (☴), “*kan*” (☵), “*gen*” (☶), and “*kun*” (☷), which symbolize the eight basic categories of natural objects: heaven, marsh, fire, thunder, wind, water, mountain, and earth. They then put together any two of the Eight Trigrams to make 64 hexagrams (重卦), and used them to represent more complicated natural and social phenomena. The eighteenth hexagram (the *gu* hexagram), for instance, is as one with the *sun* trigram below and *gen* above. The implied image that “the wind blows low on the mountain,” according to the third layer of commentary (“Commentary on the images”), is indirectly referred to as “the superior man stirs up the people and strengthens their spirit” (*Yijing*, p. 76). In the divination manual, the 64 hexagrams are arranged in an order that, according to the ninth and tenth layer of commentaries (“Sequence of the hexagrams” and “Miscellaneous notes on the hexagrams,” pp. 369-718), illustrates the cosmic flow of *yin* and *yang*.

The *Yijing* prophesies one’s fate mainly by identifying one’s position in the cosmic cycle of *yin-yang* interaction and alternation, and then one’s specific location in the relatively small cycle of *yin-yang* interaction and alternation within that position. The position in the cosmic cycle is determined by the hexagram that the fate consultant constructs using a unique divinatory method, normally the “Yarrow Stalk Method.” The method generates by chance a series of six numbers for the fate consultant. With even numbers predetermined as *yin* or *yin* lines and odd numbers as *yang* or *yang* lines, the fate consultant then obtains a hexagram composed of six lines. The hexagram tells where the fate consultant is in the cosmic order of 64 hexagrams. The fate consultant’s specific location within his or her cosmic position is further determined by his or her line position: that is, the position in the hexagram’s six-line scale. Each of the six lines represents a specific stage of a complete process. This line position is determined by using another divinatory method. The fate-consultant finally gets to know their fortune from their constructed line position and from the line statement that is dedicated to it.

From this perspective, “fate” is no more than the presumed trend of *yin-yang* interaction and alternating succession. It has nothing to do with the actual trend, just as one who is lucky enough to obtain a good hexagram position and a good line position will not necessarily meet with good fortune. This fate can only change and evolve within the range of the *yin-yang* cycle – it cannot go beyond. One can only predict it accurately to the extent that one is not predicting one’s actual fate.

In fact, the commentaries in *Yijing* not only provide a reasonable and rational frame of explanation for its divinatory methods and fate statements, but they also leave sufficient room for dynamic and dialectic interpretation when it becomes necessary. We again need to return to the philosophy of the commentaries to understand the possibility of this dynamic and dialectic interpretation. The commentaries are not merely systems of the ideas of *yin-yang* interaction and alternation, they are also very dynamic systems of thought. This dynamic feature allows them to often exceed the confines of a particular position in time and space (e.g., the line position and the hexagram position). It is true that the commentaries emphasize very much the importance of time and space, which contextualize and give meaning to every fate statement in the *Yijing*. Yet at the same time they also state explicitly that the time and space in the *Yijing* are constantly changing. “The Changes is a book from which one may not hold aloof. Its tao [*dao*] is forever changing – alteration, movement without rest, rising and sinking without fixed law, firm and yielding transform each other. They cannot be confined

within a rule; it is only change that is at work here” (*Yijing*, p. 348). From this very dynamic point of view, the specific time and space appear less important. The fate statements in the *Yijing* are thus able to transcend their hexagram positions and line positions and prophesy things of universal significance.

There are three kinds of fate statements or prophecies in the *Yijing*. The first kind concerns the natural trend of development, such as the general statement of the first hexagram “*qian*”: “the creative [force of Heaven] works sublime success, furthering through perseverance” (p. 4). The second kind of statement predicts the available time for human action based on the natural trend of development, such as the first, second, fourth, and fifth line statements of the *qian* hexagrams (pp. 7-9). “Hidden dragon. Do not act.” “Dragon appearing in the field. It furthers one to see the great man.” “Wavering flight over the depths. No blame.” “Flying dragon in the heavens. It furthers one to see the great man.” The third kind of statement points to the probable outcome of human action, such as the third and the last line statements of the same hexagram (pp. 8-9). “All day long the superior man is creatively active. At nightfall his mind is still beset with cares. Danger. No blame.” “Arrogant dragon will have cause to repent.”

From a dynamic and dialectic perspective, which is also the perspective of the commentaries, all of these prophecies can hardly go wrong. What they predict, whether trends, opportunities, or outcomes, are actually around us. To use the above examples, the creative power of the universe is seen everywhere. There are always chances for doing something important in our lives, and there is always a possibility of running into a certain danger when doing something. In good fortune always lurks calamity and in calamity always lies good fortune. This is what ensures the constant changing of fate. Therefore, we always have to act creatively and be careful at the same time.

An Open System of Prophecy

To understand the *Yijing* as a self-circulating and self-justified system of discourse on fate, we also need to consider its divinatory manual as an open system of prophecy. The manual never uses words such as “inevitably good/bad,” “must be good/bad,” “absolutely good/bad,” and “always good/bad” to forecast certain good fortune or misfortune. It only shows a great deal of certainty when it says “eventually good” or “good in the end”.¹ Yet it still leaves some uncertainty about when. Obviously, the *Yijing* merely prophesies probability, not inevitability.

Very often the prophetic statements involve particular things like “dragon” and “yellow lower garment,” or particular activities such as “walking on ice” and “riding on a horse to propose marriage.” Certainly these are not something often seen and done in our daily lives. Yet everyone knows that these prophesied things and activities should be understood symbolically.

The prophetic language of the *Yijing* is symbolic and metaphorical. The language features a great variety of meaning and openings for multiple interpretations. The “dragon,”

¹ The following are examples. “Waiting on the sand. There is some gossip. The end brings good fortune” (2nd line, 5th hexagram, *Yijing*, p. 26). “One falls into the pit. Three uninvited guests arrive. Honor them, and in the end there will be good fortune” (6th line, 5th hexagram, p. 27). “If one does not perpetuate the affair, there is a little gossip. In the end, good fortune comes” (1st line, 6th hexagram, p. 29).

for instance, symbolizes the active force of *yang*, the lord, the superior man, and an arrogant person. If one such symbol has a variety of meanings, then how much wider a range of possible interpretations would there be for a composition of two or more symbols or images? Simply look at the compound image of the *gu* hexagram mentioned earlier, with the mountain image above and the wind image below. Although the third layer of commentary (“Commentary on the images”) already defines this odd composition in a somewhat understandable whole, as “the wind blows low on the mountain,” its implication still much depends on the eye of the interpreter. According to the first layer of commentary (“Commentary on the decision,” *Yijing*, p. 477), this is a great sign showing that “order comes into the world.” Yet not everyone has always taken this view. In 540 B.C., the lord of Jin was seriously ill, and the physician Ho compared his worsening condition to the image of the *gu* hexagram. For him, that was the image of “wind throwing down [the trees of] a mountain,” and also the image of “a woman deluding a young man” (*Zhuozhuan*, p. 581). There seems to be no necessary connection between these two images. The hexagrams and their images are the primal symbolic language used by the *Yijing* to indicate luck. We thus can see the great capacity and flexibility of the *Yijing*’s prophetic language. How can the equivocal hexagram images possibly be wrong when they seem to have suggested every possible interpretation from the fortunate to the misfortunate, as revealed in the case of the *gu* hexagram?

The capacity of the *Yijing*’s prophecies is further increased when we turn to examine some of the gray areas. The *Yijing* probably leaves these gray areas on purpose for safe prophecy. One important and large gray area stems from the equivocal question of who deserves the fate statement. We normally identify this person with the fate consultant who consults about his or her own fate. Yet the question remains whether we should see the person as they really are or as they are expected to be. The *Yijing* has no indication of which approach is correct, and hence both appear acceptable. Yet these two possible approaches can lead to completely different conclusions.

It was recorded that in the sixth-century B.C., Wu Jiang, the mother of the Duke of Cheng, had illicit intercourse with a minister and involved herself in his failed intrigue against the Duke. As a result, the woman was confined in the eastern palace. She then inquired about her fate by divination, and found her hexagram position in *sui*, the seventh hexagram. This was a very good hexagram, with a statement that read “being great, penetrating, beneficial, firmly correct, without blame” (Legge’s trans., *Zhuozhuan*, p. 440). It seemed to be no coincidence that the name of the hexagram, “*sui*”, contained a meaning of getting out. The diviner therefore believed that Mo Jiang would soon get out of her confinement. Yet the woman had a quite clear estimation of herself, and took a completely different approach to understanding the hexagram statement. Here is her reply:

Now that greatness is the lofty distinction of the person; that penetration is the assemblage of excellences; that beneficialness is the harmony of all righteousness; that firm correctness is the stem of all affairs Now I, a woman, and associated with disorder, am here in the place of inferior rank. Chargeable moreover with a want of virtue, greatness cannot be predicated of me. Not having contributed to the quiet of the State, penetration cannot be predicated of me. Having brought harm to myself by my doings, beneficialness cannot be predicated of me. Having left my proper place for a bad intrigue, firm correctness cannot be predicated of me. To one who has those four virtues the diagram [hexagram *sui*] belongs; what have I to do with it, to whom none of them belongs? Having chosen evil, how can I be without

blame? I shall die here; I shall never get out of this. (Zhuozhuan, pp. 439-440)

The woman eventually died in the eastern palace; she was right about her fate. Yet this did not prove that the *Yijing* was wrong, because it had left a gray area between the diviner's orthodox interpretation and Mu Jiang's interpretation. Here, "being great, penetrating, beneficial, firmly correct, without blame" can be a predication of the fate of the consultant (Mu Jiang), or can be a fate statement for one who has the four virtues. In the first case, the lucky one "without blame" is Mu Jiang as she has failed to protect her own line. In the second case, the good fortune of being "without blame" goes to Mu Jiang as she should be an expectedly virtuous mother of the Duke. The second case suggests a moral and normative approach to a prophetic statement. It opens an alternative and safer place for the *Yijing*, where fate is predicated according to what it should be, rather than what it will be.

Another important gray area of the *Yijing*'s prophecy also concerns the party that deserves the fate statement. When the thing being inquired about involves two or more parties, such as in war or marriage, who is the lucky or unlucky party? The *Yijing* usually leaves no clue about who should claim the good or bad lot. This silence actually increases its capacity for fortune telling.

For example, in 487 B.C., the Duke of Song carried a war into the state of Zheng. The commander of Jin, Zhao Yang, was thinking about whether he should send army to relieve Zheng. His adviser, Yang Hu, consulted the *Yijing* about this subject, and received the fifth line of *tai*, the eleventh hexagram. The line statement read that "the sovereign gives his daughter in marriage. This brings blessing and supreme good fortune" (*Yijing*, p. 51). This appeared to be a good sign. Yet Yang Hu, like many ministers, did not wish to go to war with Song. He then advised the commander to abandon the relieving mission, because "luck is with Song [Song]", not with themselves (*Zhuozhuan*, p. 819).

Another example of "giving away" a fate statement occurred in 547 B.C. After the commandant of Tang died, Cui Wuzi admired the beauty of his widow, and wished to marry her. To avoid public censure, he went to find divinatory support in the *Yijing*. He got the third line of *kun*, the forty-seventh hexagram, and the fate statement read that "a man permits himself to be oppressed by stone, and leans on thorns and thistles. He enters his house and does not see his wife. Misfortune" (*Yijing*, p. 183). What a frightening portent this was! Yet it did not matter to Cui, who had made up his mind. For him, if there was misfortune, "her former husband bore the brunt of it" (*Zhuozhuan*, p. 514), so he married the widow.

The gray area here is another safe place for the *Yijing*. No matter what its prophecies, it can always find someone to claim the good fortune when it arrives, as in the case of Yang Hu, and find someone to take the blame or to bear the misfortune when it comes, as in the case of Cui Wuzi. This gray area and the one discussed earlier offer opportunities to every fate consultant to re-interpret the fate statement received, by shifting to another equally accepted way of interpretation or simply by giving it away.

An Active Form of Moral Discourse

To understand the *Yijing*'s far-reaching influence, we should also see it as an active form of moral discourse. If, according to the foregoing discussion, the *Yijing* can hardly make mistakes as a fortune-telling device given its dynamic and dialectical perspective and the extremely open and inclusive nature of its prophetic language, then it has to be right in the light of moral discourse. Here, the accuracy of its prophecies is ethically ensured by its moral functioning.

How can the *Yijing*, a religious book of divination, function as an active form of moral discourse? We now need to turn to its second great presupposition besides the presupposition of the *yin-yang* cycle. That is, fate is earned or made, not given. The *Yijing* prophesies nothing more than a probability of future development. The probability can only be realized through human action. This presupposition allows the *Yijing* to go beyond the natural cycle of *yin-yang* interaction and succession to anticipate and discuss the good or bad lot of human beings in a moral sense.

A case of viewing good fortune or misfortune as resulting from human behavior rather than from *yin-yang* interaction is found in an early Chinese historical text, *Zhuozhuan* (Zuo's commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals). In 643 B.C., 5 meteorites fell from the sky in the state of Song, and six hawks flew backwards over its capital city. The strange flight was actually occasioned by the wind, which was so strong that the hawks could not make headway against it and were carried backwards. Duke Song asked the historiographer Shu Xing about these strange occurrences: "what good fortune or bad do they portend?" Shu dismissed them in a few words. He later told someone that "the king asked me a wrong question. It is not from these developments of the Yin and Yang that good fortune and evil are produced. They are produced by men themselves" (p. 171). Here, Shu Xing separated human conduct from *yin-yang* interaction, seeing the former as the decisive cause of good fortune or misfortune.

Shu Xing was not the only one who held this view at that time. The view actually shaped the way in which the fate-statements were constructed, or at least arranged, in the *Yijing*. My survey of the total of 384 line statements shows that an overwhelming majority point to certain human qualities and deeds, including qualities and deeds that have produced or will produce good fortune or misfortune (e.g., "arrogant dragon will have cause to repent"), and the qualities and deeds that are needed to pursue good fortune and avoid disaster (e.g., "all day long the superior man is creatively active. At nightfall his mind is still beset with cares. Danger. No blame"). The remaining few seem to be concerned only with the consequences of certain natural events: for instance, "yellow light. Supreme good fortune" (2nd line, 30th hexagram, p. 120); "Shock [coming from thunder] is mired" (4th line, 51st hexagram, p. 199); "The bird meets with misfortune through flying" (1st line, 62nd hexagram, p. 240). Yet even these statements of natural portents suggest proper actions if people are to pursue their good fortune and avoid disaster. Hence, almost all of the prophecies in the *Yijing* have been pre-tuned to reveal that human beings are responsible for their own good or bad fortune. The *Yijing* finally put one's destiny back in one's own hands. It is human beings, not Heaven, that make their own fate.

Yet how one should act is a matter of moral choice. Fate, once determined by human action, is no longer something to be accepted unconditionally. The sacred power of morality thus takes over from the natural force of *yin-yang* in the determination of the destiny of human beings. In fact, it is the established code of morality, not the law of *yin-yang* that has a final say about good fortune and misfortune. How, then, is fortune actually determined in the *Yijing*? Surely, the *yin-yang* theory can help to forecast and talk about good fortune and misfortune in very general terms, by determining whether one behaves properly according to one's status and to the norms of the time. However, which specific type of conduct should be considered proper is a question that has little to do with the natural course of *yin* and *yang*, but with the moral orientation of the *Yijing*.

Of all of the line positions that have been pre-judged as bad, blameful, ominous, critical, or dangerous, most are associated with improper conduct, such as arrogance (6th line,

1st hexagram, p. 375), failing to get close to others (6th line, 8th hexagram, p. 429), undertaking something beyond one's strength (3rd line, 10th hexagram, p. 438), and acting thoughtlessly (6th line, 25th hexagram, p. 513). The line positions that are considered as good and fortunate, in contrast, all refer directly or indirectly to virtues of various kinds. With such a clear distinction, one cannot miss the moral tone of this positioning. This moral positioning suggests to the Chinese that people decide their own fate, but only if they are virtuous.

A closer reading of the *Yijing* reveals that the book not only has moral criteria for determining good and bad fortune, but that its criteria are also in favor of those with traditional virtue. Let us look at what the *Yijing* identifies as the best line position, which is termed "supreme good fortune" (元吉) and ranks above "good fortune" (吉) and "great good fortune" (大吉). The *Yijing* appears to be very confident with its judgment in cases of "supreme good fortune." There are a total of 13 "supreme good" line positions. The majority involve types of virtue that were popularly accepted by people of the Zhou dynasty, including harmony and being just (5th line, 2nd hexagram, p. 391; 5th line, 6th hexagram, p. 419; 5th line, 11th hexagram, p. 445; 2nd line, 30th hexagram, pp. 537-538), receptiveness (2nd line, 2nd hexagram, pp. 389-390), kindness (5th line, 42nd hexagram, p. 601), caution (6th line, 10th hexagram, p. 439; 1st line, 24th hexagram, pp. 506-507), and diligence (1st line, 42nd hexagram, p. 598). The rest involve measures for the welfare of society, such as acclimatizing farm animals (4th line, 26th hexagram, p. 518) and building a bigger community (4th line, 59th hexagram, p. 692). For the Chinese, all of these virtues and measures are already seen as aspects of great fortune in the light of traditional ethics, and there is no need for a *yin-yang* explanation.

If the *Yijing* ever offers the clear prophecy that "the good thrives and the bad deteriorates", then even if it is often wrong in practice it is morally correct. In fact, it merely confirms, as Mencius put it, that "he who finds the proper course has many to assist him. He who loses the proper course has few to assist him." "The good thrives and the bad deteriorates," this is the inescapable "fate" that the *Yijing* finally decrees for all Chinese. In speaking of this decree, the choice for the Chinese is very restricted. One is still able to choose among many possible fates, of course, but if one wants to realize the greatest potential of one's destiny, one must choose to be virtuous.

If fate is something that should be earned and fought for through one's ethical acts, then it is better seen as a "moral mission" than as already determined. Hence, the *Yijing* is by no means a rigid and inflexible system of divinatory devices. It is always seeking change and improvement by forecasting and expounding on the "moral mission" of the Chinese. The *Yijing* is therefore a living source of moral discourse, similar to the other five classical books, Confucius' *Analects*, and *Mencius*. Yet the *Yijing* is the one book that links the moral teaching of the Chinese sages to the Way of Heaven as displayed in the *yin-yang* cycle, and to the fate of Chinese culture. This great spiritual and ethical functioning explains its deep and durable value as a profound tool of divination and as a classic of Chinese wisdom. In fact, its fortune has been closely associated with the fate of the Chinese. It can enjoy this great fortune largely because it has carried out a mission to transmit the values and ideas of Chinese culture. The *Yijing* will certainly continue to live and operate to shape both the Chinese view of fate and the Chinese practice of moral discourse.

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