

# Classical Exegesis and Social Change: The Song School of *Yijing* Commentaries in Late Imperial China

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## ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that for centuries, the civil service examinations played an important role in promoting social mobility in late imperial China. The examinations not only broke down the monopoly of the power of the aristocrats, but also created literati-bureaucrats who helped the imperial court to rule China. In this paper, I will use the *Yijing* commentaries to elucidate this momentous social change. Viewing these commentaries as historical documents rather than mere explanations of this Classic, I compare three major *Yijing* commentaries: *Yichuan yizhuan* of the Northern Song period (960-1127), *Zhouyi daquan* of the Ming period (1368-1644), and *Zhouyi zhezong* of the Qing period (1644-1911). The three commentaries are chosen to highlight the three epochs in the social history of late imperial China: the rise of literati-bureaucrats during the Northern Song period; the strengthening of the state-lineage alliance during the Ming period; and the expansion of the role of the literati in the print market during the Qing period. The focus of my comparison will be the seemingly insignificant change in state orthodoxy regarding the order of Cheng Yi's (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi's (1130-1200) *Yijing* commentaries. Rather than putting Cheng Yi ahead of Zhu Xi as in the *Zhouyi daquan* of the Ming, the Qing editors of the *Zhouyi zhezong* reversed the order by placing Zhu Xi ahead of Cheng Yi. This change from Cheng-Zhu to Zhu-Cheng, I will argue, was not only a strategic adjustment in interpreting the *Yijing*, but also a potent symbol of the social transformation in early Qing China.

**Keywords:** Cheng Yi, Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism, literati-bureaucrats, self-identity, social mobility, *Yijing* commentaries, Zhu Xi

It is commonly known that the "Song School of *Yijing* commentaries" (*Song Yi*, hereafter, Song School) dominated the studies of this classic in late imperial China. From its rise to prominence in the Northern Song (960-1127) through its codification and canonization in the early Ming (ca. 1415) to its decline and fall in the mid Qing (ca. 1750), the Song School defined the textual body of the *Yijing*, established the parameters for its interpretation, and facilitated its circulation among the educated elite. At the core of the Song School were two commentaries: *Yichuan yizhuan* (A Commentary on the *Changes* [by a reader] from Yi River) by Cheng Yi (1033-1107), and *Zhouyi benyi* (The Original Meanings of the *Changes of the Zhou Dynasty*) by Zhu Xi (1130-1200). As

the twin leaders of the Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism, Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's commentaries were promoted by the imperial court as the standard reading of the *Yijing*. Tested in the civil service examinations, they jointly shaped the cultural agenda of the literati-bureaucrats and the self-identity of the educated elite.

On the surface, since Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi were the twin leaders of the Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, it seems logical that they must have shared similar views on the *Yijing*. But, in reality, their commentaries were quite different. As a follower of Wang Bi (226-249), the founder of the *yili* (meanings and principles) exegetical method, Cheng Yi read the *Yijing* as a moral and philosophical treatise. As a supporter of Shao Yong (1011-1077), the major figure of the *xiangshu* (images and numbers) exegetical method, Zhu Xi read the *Yijing* as a manual of divination. Thus, from the beginning, the followers of the Song School had to find ways to reconcile the differences between the *yili* and *xiangshu* methods. To this end, they had to constantly reinterpret Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's commentaries to keep pace with the changes in the two methods and the needs of the audience. Therefore, the questions this study seeks to answer are: Why was the Song School built on a precarious balance between two competing exegetical methods? What was so profound in Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's commentaries that made combining them the best option for building an exegetical paradigm? What changes were adopted in the Song School to make the two commentaries compatible and meaningful?

In what follows, I will answer these questions by giving a brief account of the Song School in the Ming and Qing periods (roughly from the 1400s to the 1750s). This survey serves two purposes. First, with respect to the *Yijing* exegesis, it draws attention to the tremendous efforts that were made to revive and reshape the Song School over those three hundred years, showing that the Song School was a living tradition that evolved over time to cope with the momentous changes in late imperial China. Second, with respect to methodology, this survey underscores the connection between classical exegesis and social change. Focusing on the two most influential state-sponsored *Yijing* commentaries in late imperial China—the *Zhouyi daquan* (The Compendium of Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's Commentaries on the *Changes of the Zhou Dynasty*, 1415) and the *Zhouyi zhezong* (Balanced Annotations of the *Changes of the Zhou Dynasty*, 1715)—this survey shows how the Song School was transformed from the “Cheng-Zhu paradigm” in the Ming into the “Zhu-Cheng paradigm” in the Qing. This change, I contend, reflects a major shift in the literati's self-identity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To prove my point, I will draw upon recent social studies of late imperial China to show the parallels between the changes in the Song School and the changes in Chinese society. These parallels, I argue, indicate that the changes in the Song School were not only a strategic adjustment in classical learning but also a potent symbol of social transformation.

### **Differences between Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi**

Generally speaking, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi shared similar views on the Confucian classics, but they differed tremendously in their readings of the *Yijing*. One of their differences concerned the contents of the classic. For Cheng Yi, the *Yijing* was a

combination of the core text (i.e., sixty-four hexagrams) and the *Ten Wings*.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the Han, five of the *Ten Wings*—*Tuan I*, *Tuan II*, *Xiang I*, *Xiang II*, and *Wenyan*—were inserted into the core text, so that all the statements concerning the same hexagram would appear in one place.<sup>2</sup> In the *Yichuan yizhuan*, Cheng Yi went a step further. He inserted another *Wing*, the *Xugua* (The Sequence of the Hexagrams), into the core text to explain the meaning of the sixty-four hexagrams.<sup>3</sup> For Cheng Yi, the inclusion of the *Ten Wings* into the core text was necessary. It underscored the fact that the meaning of the sixty-four hexagrams could not be fully understood without the guidance of the *Ten Wings*. A key point of Cheng Yi's view was the historical progression of the classic. For him, the *Yijing* began from a series of primitive symbols of the natural world, and gradually developed into a sophisticated system of moral-metaphysical teachings. The highpoint of this historical progression was the *Ten Wings* written by Confucius.<sup>4</sup> Viewing the evolution of the *Yijing* in this light, the different layers of the *Yijing* text—the trigrams, the hexagrams, the hexagram statements, the hexagram line statements, and Confucius' reflections on the hexagrams—were one cohesive system revealing the profound teaching of the ancient sages. Being the final and the most advanced stage in the formation of the *Yijing* text, the *Ten Wings* not only included everything that had been said in the sixty-four hexagrams, but also went beyond them by espousing a moral philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, Zhu Xi regarded the sixty-four hexagrams as the “original version” (*guben*) of the *Yijing*. Adopting Lü Zuqian's (1137–1181) view, Zhu Xi believed that the true meaning of the *Yijing* lay in the imagery of the hexagrams, not the *Ten Wings*. To distinguish the core text from the *Ten Wings*, Zhu Xi created two separate categories in his *Zhouyi benyi*. One category was “the classic” (*jing*) which covered the sixty-four hexagrams; the other was “the commentarial materials” (*zhuan*) which included the *Ten Wings*. With these two categories, Zhu made clear that the *Ten Wings* were at best supplementary materials in understanding the hexagrams.<sup>6</sup> Underlying his view was a

<sup>1</sup> The *Ten Wings* refer to seven pieces of commentarial materials (some divided in two parts) written during the end of the Eastern Zhou period and the beginning of the Han dynasty. The *Ten Wings* are: *Tuan I*, *Tuan II*, *Xiang I*, *Xiang II*, *Xici I*, *Xici II*, *Wenyan*, *Shuogua*, *Xugua*, and *Zagua*. In most of the *Yijing* texts today, *Tuan I*, *Tuan II*, *Xiang I*, *Xiang II*, and *Wenyan* are combined with the sixty-four hexagrams.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the Han and Wei-Jin views on the *Yijing*, see Kong Yingda's eight essays at the beginning of *Zhouyi zhengyi* (The True Meaning of Changes of the Zhou Dynasty) (Taipei: Yinyin wenyuange siku quanshu edition, 1983-1986).

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of Cheng Yi's view on the *Yijing*, see his “*Yichuan yizhuan xu*” 伊川易傳序 in *Yichuan yizhuan* (Taipei: Yinyin wenyuange siku quanshu, 1983-1986).

<sup>4</sup> Current scholarship has shown that Confucius was not the author of the *Ten Wings*. However, in late imperial China, the majority of *Yijing* exegetes took for granted Confucius's authorship of the *Ten Wings*, particularly *Xici I* and *Xici II*.

<sup>5</sup> For Wang Bi, the *Ten Wings* (particularly *Tuan I* and *Tuan II*) unravel the philosophical underpinnings of the hexagrams. See Wang Bi, “*Zhouyi lüeli*” 周易略例 in Kong Yingda, *Zhouyi zhengyi*. For Cheng Yi, the *Ten Wings* (especially the *Xici I* and *Xici II*) summarize Confucius's moral teaching. See Cheng Yi, “*Yichuan yizhuan xu*.” For the historical significance of Wang Bi's and Cheng Yi's views, see my book, *The Yijing and Chinese Politics: Classical Commentary and Literati Activism in the Northern Song Period, 960-1127* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 28-48.

<sup>6</sup> See the summary (*tiyao* 提要) of the *Siku quanshu* editors of Zhu Xi, *Yuanban Zhouyi benyi* 原版周易本意. For the significance of this separation of *jing* from *zhuan*, see Zhu Bokun 朱伯崑, *Yixue zhhexue shi* 易学哲学史 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1984-88), 416-37; Liao Mingchun 廖明春, Kang Xuewei 康

different understanding of the history of the *Yijing* text. Unlike Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi did not see the formation of the *Yijing* as a progression from graphic representations of nature to moral-metaphysical philosophy. For him, the sixty-four hexagrams are the foundation of the *Yijing* because they are the visual representations of the constant changes in the natural and human worlds. This pictorial depiction of transformation—begun by Fu Xi and completed by King Wen and the Duke of Zhou—was later turned into a moral-metaphysical discussion by Confucius. As a result, the *Yijing* ceased to be a pictorial description of the awesome and awe-inspiring transformation in the universe; it became merely another text (like the *Book of Poetry* and the *Book of History*) that taught morality to kings, nobles, and government officials.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Zhu Xi asked his readers “to separate Confucius’s *Yijing* from King Wen’s *Yijing*, and separate King Wen’s *Yijing* from Fu Xi’s *Yijing*.”<sup>8</sup>

Inevitably, these different views of the formation of the *Yijing* led to vastly dissimilar interpretations of the text. In the *Yichuan yizhuan*, using the *Ten Wings* to interpret the sixty-four hexagrams, Cheng Yi interpreted the hexagrams as a series of battles between the “great men” (*junzi*) and the “petty people” (*xiaoren*).<sup>9</sup> He equated the ebb and flow of *yang* as the rise and fall of honest officials in the government. He regarded the wane and wax of *yin* as the gain and loss of corrupt officials who used their power to pursue private interest. To drive home his point, Cheng Yi began his commentary to each hexagram by quoting from the *Xugua* that explained their meanings in the sequence of the sixty-four hexagrams. The quote was to remind readers that the sixty-four hexagrams were, as a whole, a continuous saga of political struggles between honest and corrupt officials.<sup>10</sup> Their battle began with *Qian* (hexagram #1) and *Kun* (hexagram #2), respectively symbolizing the great men and the petty people. It continued on by taking different forms and shapes as the balance of power between the two camps shifted in the struggle for control of the government. In the end, this saga of battles began anew upon reaching *Weiji* (hexagram #64), the last hexagram, which pointed to a breakdown of order after a brief stalemate before the two camps of officials. The breakdown of order ushered in another round of battles beginning with *Qian* and *Kun*, and hence, the reading of the *Yijing* became a constant re-reading of the text.

By contrast, in the *Zhouyi benyi*, Zhu Xi focused on the hexagram images and the rituals of divination. To underscore the importance of understanding the *Yijing* visually, he attached nine diagrams to his commentary.<sup>11</sup> In these diagrams (some of

学伟, and Liang Weixian 良韦弦, *Zhouyi yanjiu shi* 周易研究史 (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1991), 290-94.

<sup>7</sup> Dong Kai 董楷, “Zhu zi yi gangling” 朱子易綱領, *Zhouyi zhuan yi fulu* 周易傳義附錄 (Added Comments to the Combined Commentaries of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi on the *Changes*) (Taipei: Yinyin wenguanke siku quanshu, 1983-1986), *juanshou*: 7a-10a.

<sup>8</sup> See Dong Kai, “Zhu zi yi gangling,” *Zhouyi zhuan yi fulu*, *juanshou*: 20a.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion of Cheng Yi’s commentary, see my book *The Yijing and Chinese Politics*, 116-34.

<sup>10</sup> For the significance of Cheng Yi’s inclusion of *Xugua* into the sixty-four hexagrams, see my book *The Yijing and Chinese Politics*, 121-29.

<sup>11</sup> The nine diagrams are: The [Yellow] River Diagram, the Luo [River] Document, the Sequence

which were developed by Shao Yong), Zhu Xi explained how the trigrams and hexagrams are interrelated as symbols of *yin* and *yang*. In addition, he wrote five treatises, the *Wuzan*, reiterating the two goals of reading the *Yijing*: understanding the visual images of hexagrams and using divination as a means to comprehend the constant changes in the natural and human worlds. To further elaborate on the latter point, he compiled a set of rituals for performing divination. He specified, in detail, the procedure for creating a sacred environment and a spiritual mind-set needed to perform divination properly.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's differing interpretations of the *Yijing* were aimed at different audiences. For Cheng Yi, the moral philosophy of the *Ten Wings* spoke directly to the educated elite who, in daily life, had to choose between acting righteously and acting for private benefit. Constantly under pressure to make decisions on competing claims, the educated elite found moral lessons in the *Ten Wings*. They aspired to be the "great men" (*daren*) who knew intuitively how to apply moral principles in daily life.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, Cheng Yi's *Yichuan yizhuan* is full of detailed instructions for resolving specific problems, such as how to handle oneself in factional politics, how to befriend like-minded colleagues, and how to run a government under an arrogant ruler.<sup>14</sup> As Kidder Smith points out, being morally didactic, Cheng Yi's commentary "reflects how eleventh-century China provided enormous opportunities for literatus advancement into real power – as politicians, within a vigorous economy, as litterateurs, as members of influential families, etc."<sup>15</sup> In particular, the commentary offered both encouragement and warnings to honest officials who were locked in partisan politics. It cautioned them of impending dangers when they were in power, and urged them to fight on when they were out of favor.

While Cheng Yi aimed his *Yijing* commentary at the literati-bureaucrats in the government, Zhu Xi directed his toward those who were outside of it. By privileging Fu Xi's hexagrams over Confucius's *Ten Wings*, Zhu Xi underscored the importance of divination as a method of self-cultivation. For him, divination was not a superstitious act of asking guidance from a deity. Rather, it was a method of self-reflection used to gain a better understanding of the multiple forces shaping human life.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, by focusing on the visual imagery of the hexagrams, Zhu Xi highlighted the uniqueness of the *Yijing* vis-à-vis other Confucian classics. Instead of being limited to kings, nobles and government officials, the *Yijing* addressed a broad audience who, literate or

of Fu Xi's Eight Trigrams according to Fu Xi, the Directional Positions of Fu Xi's Eight trigrams, the Sequence of Fu Xi's Sixty-four Hexagrams, the Directional Positions of Fu Xi's Sixty-four Hexagrams, the Sequence of King Wen's Eight Trigrams, the Directional Positions of King Wen's Eight Trigrams, and the Diagram of the Changes in the Hexagrams.

<sup>12</sup> See "Yuanban Zhouyi benyi tiyao" in *Yuanban Zhouyi benyi* (Taipei: Yinyin wenyuange siku quanshu, 1983-1986). In the *Yuanban Zhouyi benyi*, the five treatises on divination (*wuzan*) and the treatise on casting hexagrams (*shiyi*) appear after the sixty-four hexagrams and the *Ten Wings*.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Adler, "Chu Hsi and Divination," in *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*, eds. Kidder Smith, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 142-56.

<sup>14</sup> See my book, *The Yijing and Chinese Politics*, 121-34.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Adler, "Chu Hsi and Divination," 139.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

illiterate, were concerned with the uncertainty of life.<sup>17</sup> For him, the hexagrams were meant to reach different walks of life, regardless of the reader's social station, educational background, and command of written language.

Overall, one may say that Cheng Yi adopted an “elitist” approach to the *Yijing*, and Zhu Xi took a “populist” approach. Yet, ironically, it was their different approaches to the *Yijing* that drew later scholars to synthesize their commentaries. First, despite their differences, Cheng and Zhu shared the view that the *Yijing* was a composite text with multiple layers of meaning. This common belief in the multiplicity of the *Yijing* formed the core of the Song School. Second, precisely because Cheng and Zhu aimed at different audiences, combining their commentaries became even more tempting, especially for those who wanted to make the *Yijing* a classic for a wide range of audiences – the educated and the uneducated, the officials and the civilians, the powerful and the powerless. To a large extent, the Song School was built on this desire of making the *Yijing* a living text for the widest possible audience.

### **Four Sages and Two Virtuous Persons**

Since the thirteenth century, attempts had been made to merge Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's commentaries. From the existing records, it can be seen that the Southern Song scholar Dong Kai was the first to attempt to combine the two. Later on, the Yuan scholars Hu Yigui, Dong Zhenqing and Hu Bingwen continued this work. The collective efforts of these four scholars were summarized and systematically presented in the *Zhouyi daquan*, completed in 1415. In the *Zhouyi daquan*, Cheng's and Zhu's commentaries were united on the basis of a genealogy of the “four sages and two virtuous persons” (*sisheng erxian*). The genealogy goes like this: (1) the *Yijing* began as a set of visual images created by Fu Xi to denote the awesome transformation in the universe; (2) this set of visual images was put into writing by King Wen and the Duke of Zhou, creating a written code for understanding the changes in the natural and human worlds; (3) based on the writings of King Wen and the Duke of Zhou, Confucius developed a sophisticated system of moral-philosophical teachings in the *Ten Wings*; (4) after the burning of books in the Qin period (221-206 BCE), the teachings of the *Yijing* were lost due to erroneous transmission and corruption by the Daoists; (5) in the eleventh century, Cheng Yi recovered Confucius's teaching in the *Ten Wings*; (6) in the twelfth century, Zhu Xi recovered the meaning of Fu Xi's hexagrams.<sup>18</sup>

As a justification for synthesizing Cheng's and Zhu's commentaries, this narrative of transmission was significant on several levels. First, it affirmed the composite nature of the *Yijing* core text, which was first formed by the combined efforts of Fu Xi, King

<sup>17</sup> See Zhu Bokun, *Yixue zhexue shi*, 428-37; Joseph Adler's “Introduction” in *Introduction to the Study of the Classic of Chang (I-hsüeh ch'i-meng)*, trans. Joseph A. Adler (Provo, Utah: Global Scholarly Publications, 2002), i-xxv; Joseph Adler, “Chu Hsi and Divination,” 177-88.

<sup>18</sup> Dong Kai, “Zhouyi zhuanyi fulu yuanxu” 周易傳義附錄原序 *Zhouyi zhuanyi fulu, yuanxu*: 1a-2b, and Dong Zhenqing, “Zhouyi huitong yuanxu” 周易會通原序, *Zhouyi huitong* 周易會通 (A Comprehensive Study of the Changes of the Zhou Dynasty) (Taipei: Yinyin wenyuange siku quanshu, 1983-1986), *yuanxu*: 1a-1b.

Wen, and the Duke of Zhou. The work of the three sages was later expanded by Confucius into a moral-philosophical system. These two stages – one natural and primordial (*xiantian*), and the other human-made and moral (*houtian*)—formed a single unit that elucidated the constant changes in the natural and human worlds.<sup>19</sup> Compared with the histories of the *Yijing* text offered in the original Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's commentaries, this genealogy of sages provided a smooth transition among the *Yijing* authors. Instead of choosing between Fu Xi (as Zhu Xi suggested) and Confucius (as Cheng Yi recommended), all “four sages” were recognized as the authors of the *Yijing*. Particularly, the genealogy gave King Wen and the Duke of Zhou the special role of linking divination with moral philosophy. By attaching written statements to the hexagrams, King Wen and the Duke of Zhou were said to have transformed the “ancient *Yijing*” (*guyi*) into the “contemporary *Yijing*” (*jinyi*).<sup>20</sup>

Second, the genealogy of the sages affirmed the validity of both Cheng Yi's and Zhu Xi's approaches to the classic. In the transmission of the *Yijing*, Cheng and Zhu were the “two virtuous persons” who jointly recovered the teaching of the *Yijing* after it had been lost for hundreds of years. To make sure that Cheng and Zhu received equal credit for recovering the *Yijing*, each commentator was given a specific role in its recovery. Whereas Cheng revived Confucius's teachings in the *Ten Wings*, Zhu retrieved the meanings of Fu Xi's hexagrams. In this way, the apparent incongruity in Cheng's and Zhu's commentaries was resolved. Their differences were nothing but a function of the temporal and spatial layering of the *Yijing*, and therefore both commentaries should be equally valued for recovering the sagely wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

More important, the genealogy of the “four sages and two virtuous persons” presented Cheng and Zhu as the authentic and authoritative commentators of the *Yijing*. In so doing, the genealogy excluded large numbers of commentators from the Han to the Tang. Even Wang Bi, who had had a strong influence on Cheng Yi, was left out of the honored list of transmitters. At the same time, by honoring Cheng and Zhu, the genealogy was in effect a declaration of a mission to fully recover the ancient wisdom of the *Yijing*. It signaled a determination to integrate Fu Xi's divination with Confucius's moral philosophy. In short, the genealogy announced the beginning of a new era in *Yijing* studies when all previous exegetical methods would be synthesized and integrated into a complex philosophy about changes in the natural and human worlds.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Two-Fold Recovery and the “Cheng-Zhu” Paradigm**

At the same time, the compilers of the *Zhouyi daquan* emphasized that while the

<sup>19</sup> Dong Kai was especially explicit in the importance of separating the *xiantian* from the *houtian* layers of the *Yijing*. See his “*Zhouyi zhuanyi fulu yuanxu*,” 3a-3b.

<sup>20</sup> Dong Zhenqing, “*Zhouyi huitong yuanxu*,” 4b.

<sup>21</sup> Dong Kai, “*Zhouyi zhuanyi fulu yuanxu*,” 3b-4a; Dong Zhenqing, “*Zhouyi huitong yuanxu*,” 4b.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion of the structure and contents of the *Zhouyi daquan*, see my article “A Precarious Balance: Divination and Moral Philosophy in *Zhouyi zhuanyi daquan* (周易傳義大全),” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 35 (2): 253-71.

formation and transmission of the *Yijing* had to be understood chronologically (i.e., starting from the four sages and then extending to the two virtuous persons), the recovery of the true meaning of the *Yijing* had to proceed in reverse order (i.e., tracing from the two virtuous persons to the four sages). To this end, the compilers structured the commentary based on Cheng Yi's commentary, and supplemented it with Zhu Xi's commentary. In adopting Cheng's commentary as the basis of the *Zhouyi daquan*, the compilers did not claim that it was better than Zhu's. Instead, they saw it as the point of departure for understanding the teachings of the *Yijing*. As Cheng Yi led readers to understand the *Yijing* through the moral-philosophy of the *Ten Wings*, Zhu Xi guided them to understand the *Yijing* from the perspective of Fu Xi's divination.

According to the compilers of the *Zhouyi daquan*, this twofold recovery of the *Yijing* was, in essence, a process of expanding one's horizons. Intellectually it began from what was tangible and knowable to what was intangible and unfathomable. Socially it began from what preoccupied the educated elite in their public duty to what everyone would be concerned with in their daily life. This expansion of horizons is clearly shown in the way that the compilers of *Zhouyi daquan* presented *Qian* (hexagram #1 ☰). As the first hexagram in the *Yijing*, *Qian* symbolizes the *yang* cosmic force. In *Qian*, for instance, the *yang* rises in stages from the bottom of the hexagram to the top. As the *yang* rises, it transforms from a hidden dragon to an emerging dragon (the first and second lines), and then from a pensive dragon to a leaping dragon (the third and fourth lines). The *yang* force reaches its zenith when it becomes a flying dragon (the fifth line), and begins its descent after turning into an arrogant dragon (the sixth line). In each of these stages, the *yang* force gains strength and determination until it reaches its limits.

In the *Zhouyi Daquan*, readers first find Cheng Yi's interpretation of *Qian*. Interpreting the hexagram from a moral perspective, Cheng draws parallels between *Qian* and the biography of King Shun. He links the first two lines of *Qian* – the hidden dragon and the emerging dragon – to the early years of Shun when he was unknown and his political skill was still unrefined. He regards the fourth and fifth lines of *Qian* – the leaping dragon and the emerging dragon – as metaphors for Shun's political skills that enabled him to become the leader of China.<sup>23</sup> Just as readers are convinced that Cheng Yi provides a coherent interpretation of *Qian*, they find excerpts from Zhu Xi's comments where he points out Cheng's limitations.

Zhu complains that Cheng's interpretation is limiting because it restricts *Qian* to political matters and reduces it to a moral treatise.<sup>24</sup> For these reasons, Zhu suggests broadening the scope of interpretation by linking *Qian* to a wider variety of issues. He reminds readers that "[In interpreting *Qian*,] we must apply it to different walks of life. When the emperor reads the hexagram, he will find it useful to him as an emperor. When an official reads the hexagram, he will find it useful to him as an official. When a

<sup>23</sup> In this paper, I use the *Siku quanshu* edition of the *Zhouyi daquan*. In the *Siku quanshu*, edited by Hu Guang 胡廣, the *Zhouyi daquan* is known as the *Zhouyi zhuanyi daquan* 周易傳義大全. For Cheng Yi's commentary on *Qian*, see *Zhouyi zhuanyi daquan* 1: 9a, 11b, 15b.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 9a.



father reads the hexagram, he will find it useful to him as a father. When a son reads the hexagram, he will find it useful to him as a son. And so on and so forth. If we follow Master Cheng's interpretation, then for thousands of years, only Kings Shun and Yu found the hexagram meaningful.<sup>25</sup> In comments like this, the readers of the *Zhouyi Daquan* are introduced to what Zhu Xi calls "the original intent" (*benyi*) of Fu Xi. As abstract signs, the sixty-four hexagrams have no specific reference. But as visual images, they symbolize the interaction and intermixing of *yin* and *yang*, thereby calling attention to the complex alignment of forces in the natural and human worlds. As such, the hexagrams are not the property of any group of people; instead, they belong to everyone who is interested in finding meaning in life.<sup>26</sup>

In Ming times, the compilers of the *Zhouyi dachuan* had plenty of reasons to broaden the scope of interpreting the *Yijing*. As John Chaffee has shown, beginning with the Southern Song, the "thorny gates of learning" were increasingly tightened as the percentage of successful candidates in the civil service examinations continued to fall.<sup>27</sup> This "paradox of declining success and increasing participation," as Peter Bol aptly calls it, indicates a drastic change in the function of the examinations. After decades of being "a ladder of success" for educated elites of non-aristocratic heritage to enter into the government, the civil service examinations quickly became a mechanism for granting elite status to the educated.<sup>28</sup> The key to this change was the limited number of positions available in the government and the huge financial burden on the state that putting extra people on its payroll entailed. Further complicating the matter was the internecine competition for power among different factions in the bureaucracy that made the life of an official miserable and unrewarding. Finally, the brief termination of examinations in the early Yuan period forced educated elites to look for other options outside the government. All of these political, social, and cultural developments from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries led to a situation where even if educated elites still saw the civil service examinations as a venue to join the government, the majority of them were not given appointments in the bureaucracy. Most of them had to be content with being the leaders of local communities or finding odd jobs in their native areas. In this context, the "Cheng-Zhu" paradigm in interpreting the *Yijing* was a necessary measure to broaden its appeal beyond the small circle of literati-bureaucrats.

Crucial to the "Cheng-Zhu" paradigm was that the two-fold recovery of the true meaning of the *Yijing* had to begin with Cheng Yi. This stress on Cheng reflected the continuing relationship between the imperial court and the educated elite, even though the latter was becoming less dependent on the former. While the literati found more opportunities in local areas rather than in the government, they still needed to be certified by the imperial state in order to have the proper credentials to be local leaders. Thus, regardless of the remote chance of securing an appointment in the government,

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., I: 13b-14b.

<sup>26</sup> "Zhouyi daquan gangling," 15a-b. See above, note 23.

<sup>27</sup> John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), xxi-xxx, 182-88.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Bol, "Review Article: The Sung Examination System and the Shih," *Asia Major*, third series, 3 (1990), 149-71.

passing the civil service examinations was still an essential step to becoming a member of the cultural elite. To put it differently, without being certified by passing the examinations, one would lack the cultural capital to be an influential local leader, a successful businessman, or a respected teacher. For this reason, the compilers of the *Zhouyi daquan* gave Cheng Yi's commentary a more prominent role than Zhu Xi's. In this way, the "Cheng-Zhu paradigm" indicated that although distant and remote, the power of the imperial state could still penetrate into local areas through the mediation of the educated elite.

### From "Cheng-Zhu" to "Zhu-Cheng"

Dominating *Yijing* studies for close to three hundred years, the *Zhouyi daquan* was replaced by the *Zhouyi zhezhong* in 1715. Compiled on the orders of the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661-1722), the *Zhouyi zhezhong* was the third and the most successful attempt of the early Qing rulers to standardize the *Yijing* commentary. Before the *Zhouyi zhezhong*, there were the *Yijing tongzhu* (Combined Commentaries of the *Yijing*, 1658) under the auspice of Shunzhi Emperor (r. 1644-1661), and the *Rijiang Yijing jieji* (Notes of Daily Explanations of the Meanings of the *Yijing*, 1680) at the order of the young Kangxi Emperor. The reason for the Qing emperors to be so keen on producing a standard *Yijing* commentary was that during the Ming-Qing transition, many Ming loyalists took the occasion of interpreting the *Yijing* to express their "sorrow and worry" (*youhuan*) about the end of the Ming dynasty.<sup>29</sup> While most of these *Yijing* commentaries did not explicitly challenge the Qing rule, the melancholy and frustration expressed in them were alarming and potentially subversive. As political statements, these commentaries gave voice to the painful memories of the Ming loyalists and provided a forum for them to express their anti-Manchu sentiments. Out of political concern, the early Qing emperors were determined to reshape the cultural landscape by producing a new standard *Yijing* commentary. Signifying the beginning of a new era, this commentary would replace the Ming's official *Yijing* text, the *Zhouyi daquan*, in the civil service examinations.

In addition, the violence and destruction during the Ming-Qing transition reopened the question of the textual history of the *Yijing*. Again, the followers of the *yili* and *xiangshu* methods hotly debated about the superiority of their respective approaches in capturing the original meaning of the classic. On the whole, there were three groups of scholars participating in this debate – the moderates, the reformists, and the extremists. At one end of the spectrum, there were the moderates such as Diao Bao (1601-1667) and Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) who supported the eclecticism of the *Zhouyi daquan*, especially its advocacy of the genealogy of "Four Sages and Two Virtuous Persons." They argued that no major change was needed in terms of interpreting the *Yijing*. At the other end of the spectrum, there were the extremists who fiercely opposed the eclecticism of the *Zhouyi daquan*. Many of them, including Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) and Huang Zongyan (1616-1686), were

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Sun Qifeng 孫奇逢 (1585-1675), *Du yi da zhi* 讀易大指 (Main Points in the Changes) (Taipei: Yin Yin wen yu an ge siku quanshu, 1983-1986), *juan* 3: 45a-46b.

strong opponents of the *xiangshu* approach. To discredit it, they criticized Zhu Xi for promoting divination and found faults in his interpretation of the classic. Between the moderates and the extremists were the reformers who saw the need for preserving the differing views of the “Four Sages” on the one hand, but found the *Zhouyi daquan* inadequate in offering a comprehensive, fair-minded interpretation of the classic on the other. These reformers (including Sun Qifeng and Fang Yizhi) pushed for a major revision of the *Zhouyi daquan* while preserving its main structure. Ultimately, these moderates paved the way for the creation of the *Zhouyi zhezong*.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, early Qing attempts to standardize the *Yijing* commentaries were not purely a political decision; they were also a response to the intellectual debates of the time. Of the three early Qing attempts, however, the *Zhouyi zhezong* was unique in rendering the genealogy of “four sages and two virtuous persons.” On the one hand, as in the past, the genealogy was designed to strike a balance between the *yili* and *xiangshu* methods. On this score, the compilers of *Zhouyi zhezong* followed in the footsteps of their Ming predecessors in creating a synthesis of Cheng Yi’s and Zhu Xi’s commentaries. On the other hand, the compilers of *Zhouyi zhezong* used the genealogy to support the “Zhu-Cheng paradigm” in interpreting the *Yijing*. In reversing the order of the “two virtuous persons,” the compilers of *Zhouyi zhezong* gave new meanings to the *Yijing*.

Fitting its mission of signifying a new era, the *Zhouyi zhezong* was clearly designed to be a new state-sponsored *Yijing* commentary. In terms of scope, the *Zhouyi zhezong* included thousands of excerpts from commentators from the Han to the Ming. To be sure, similar to the *Zhouyi daquan*, the focus of the *Zhouyi zhezong* was still on the Song commentators, thereby making it quintessentially a Song School *Yijing* text. Yet, compared to its Ming predecessors, the Qing commentary was distinctly inclusive, particularly with respect to non-Song commentators. From the names of commentators listed at the beginning of *Zhouyi zhezong*, eighteen commentators were from the Han, twelve from the Sui-Tang, twenty-two from the Yuan, and sixty-one from the Ming.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, under each hexagram the compilers provided four types of information: (1) the comments from Zhu Xi; (2) the comments from Cheng Yi; (3) the comments from the commentators of different dynasties; (4) the compilers’ comments.<sup>32</sup> With this wide range of information, the readers were assured that the *Zhouyi zhezong* was not designed to promote any particular commentarial tradition. Rather, it was to convey, in the words of its chief compiler, Li Guangdi (1642-1718), “the shared views [of the *Yijing*] from the past to the present.”<sup>33</sup>

What Li did not say, however, was that the “shared views” in the *Zhouyi zhezong* were mediated through the lens of the Song exegetes, especially Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi. This emphasis on the Song view, and in particular Zhu Xi’s, was expressed

<sup>30</sup> On the three groups of *Yijing* scholars, see Yong Rong 永瑤, ed., *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 (Siku quanshu zhenban edition), *yilei*: 6.

<sup>31</sup> See the list of commentators, Li Guangdi, *Zhouyi zhezong*, punctuated by Li Yixin (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2002), 1-9.

<sup>32</sup> For the purpose of this four-fold arrangement, see Li Guangdi “Yu zhi zhouyi zhezong fanli” 御制周易折中凡例 *Zhouyi zhezong fanli*:2-3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, *fanli*:1.

through the overall structure of the commentary. In presenting the *Yijing* text, for instance, the compilers of the *Zhouyi zhezong* adopted the format of Zhu Xi's *Zhouyi benyi*, namely, separating the sixty-four hexagrams (*jing*, classic) from the *Ten Wings* (*zhuan*, commentarial materials). In so doing, the compilers emphasized the chronological order of the "four sages." This chronological order warranted not only the adoption of the textual structure of Zhu Xi's *Zhouyi benyi*, but also Zhu Xi's precedence over Cheng Yi's. For this reason, unlike its Ming predecessor, the *Zhouyi zhezong* reversed the order in presenting Cheng's and Zhu's commentaries. Thus, in the presentation of each of the sixty-four hexagrams, Zhu's commentary appeared first, and Cheng's commentary came second.

Let us take, for example, "Qian" (hexagram #1). The line statement "In using nine, a group of dragons appear without a leader (*yong jiu, xian qun long wu shou*)," was interpreted by Zhu Xi as a qualitative change in the hexagram lines. To him, it meant a situation where all *yang* lines of "Qian" ☰ are going to transform into *yin*, their opposite, therefore creating "Kun" ☷ (hexagram #2). In this reading, "a group of dragons" (*qun long*) symbolizes the six *yang* lines, and "without a leader" (*wu shou*) signifies the *yin* nature of the transformed lines. As a whole, for Zhu Xi, "a group of dragons appear without a leader" underscores the co-dependence and interchangeability of *yin* and *yang*.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Cheng Yi read the line statement as a call for moderation when an official was dealing with a politically divisive situation. In particular, Cheng Yi saw the line as a warning to "unyielding people" who were unwilling to compromise even when they were in unfavorable position. As such, Cheng Yi argued, "without a leader" was advice to those who tended to take aggressive action regardless of the situation.<sup>35</sup> For the compilers of the *Zhouyi zhezong*, both Zhu Xi's and Cheng Yi's interpretations are valid. They advised readers to take both interpretations seriously as guidance in their lives.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, in the sequence of presenting the two commentaries, the compilers of the *Zhouyi zhezong* make clear that a reader must first contemplate the "original meaning" (*benyi*) of the *Yijing* conveyed in Zhu Xi's comments before moving on to Cheng Yi's extrapolation on the political world of an official.

As shown in the above example, the compilers of the *Zhouyi zhezong* tried hard to be impartial to Zhu Xi's and Cheng Yi's interpretations. They took pains to praise the two exegetes for carefully explaining the meaning of the *Yijing*. But the fact of the matter is that the Song School in the *Zhouyi zhezong* was not the same Song School in the *Zhouyi daquan*. In the *Zhouyi zhezong*, the Song School meant the dominance of Zhu Xi's view over Cheng Yi's, the *xiangshu* over the *yili*. By transforming the "Cheng-Zhu paradigm" into the "Zhu-Cheng paradigm," the compilers of the *Zhouyi zhezong* ushered in a new era of *Yijing* exegeses that emphasized the broad appeal of the classic, especially its relevance to readers who had multiple, complex, and interchangeable roles in political, commercial and cultural fields.

In many respects, this new image of the *Yijing* was directly linked to the rapid

<sup>34</sup> Hexagram Qian, *Zhouyi zhezong*, 47-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-9.

economic growth and social mobility in the lower Yangzi River valley during the late Ming and the early Qing. Due to the expansion of commercial publishing, hundreds of thousands of literati in the lower Yangzi River valley became professional publishers, craftsmen, editors, art connoisseurs and book traders. Consequently, in addition to being government officials and local leaders, the literati could become what Kai-wing Chow calls *shishang* (literati-merchants-businessmen) who gained respect in society as the liaison between the political, commercial, and cultural fields.<sup>37</sup> Still certified by the state through the civil service examinations, the *shishang* operated in an arena which was categorically commercial and profit-making. They made money by supplying preparation materials to the examination candidates; they won readers by writing best-selling books that were exciting and entertaining; they made friends by forming literary groups and book clubs. All of these opportunities were made possible by advances in printing technology and the print market that sprouted up in many towns and cities of the lower Yangzi River valley. As Kai-wing Chow points out, the rise of *shishang* was “both supportive and subversive to the imperial system.”<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, the elite status of the *shishang* was still dependent on their performance in the civil service examinations.<sup>39</sup> To be successful, the *shishang* had to be certified as literati (*shi*) before they could venture into business and commerce (*shang*), not the other way around. On the other hand, after they established themselves in the commercial market, they flourished in an autonomous zone that was not directly controlled by the state. Controlling the media of mass communication, the *shishang* could compete, if not challenge, the imperial court in speaking for the public (*gong*).<sup>40</sup>

In view of this rise of *shishang*, the shift of the Song School from the “Cheng-Zhu paradigm” to the “Zhu-Cheng paradigm” was by no means accidental. To a great extent, the new Song School was a symbol of the literati’s further distancing from the center of political power. In the new state-literati relationship, the imperial court still controlled the licensing and certification of the educated elite. In this regard, Cheng Yi’s *Yijing* commentary must be retained to affirm the relationship between political power and cultural capital. And yet, as a reflection of the changed social structure, Cheng Yi’s commentary could not continue to occupy its prominent position in the new Song School. When the educated elite came to have a lot more opportunities outside the government, Zhu Xi’s commentary seemed to make more sense to them. In Zhu’s commentary, the readers were reminded that change is the only constant and that it applies to all people, powerful and powerless. The readers were reassured that the world is so variegated and diverse that no one can control everything, including the emperor in the imperial capital.

<sup>37</sup> Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 1-5 and 241-53.

<sup>38</sup> Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power*, 242-43.

<sup>39</sup> Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 66-124 and 239-94.

<sup>40</sup> Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power*, 189-240.

## GLOSSARY

<i>benyi</i>	本義	<i>Rijiang Yijing jieyi</i>	日講易經解義
Cheng Yi	程頤	<i>Yichuan yizhuan</i>	伊川易傳
<i>daren</i>	大人	Shao Yong	邵雍
Diao Bao	刁包	<i>shishang</i>	士商
Dong Kai	董楷	<i>sisheng erxian</i>	四聖二賢
Dong Zhenqing	董真卿	Song Yi	宋易
Fang Yizhi	方以智	Sun Qifeng	孫奇逢
<i>gong</i>	公	Wang Bi	王弼
Gu Yanwu	顧炎武	Wang Fuzhi	王夫之
<i>guben</i>	古本	<i>Wuzan</i>	五贊
<i>guyi</i>	古易	<i>xiantian</i>	先天
<i>houtian</i>	後天	<i>xiangshu</i>	象數
Hu Bingwen	胡炳文	<i>xiaoren</i>	小人
Hu Yigui	胡一桂	<i>yili</i>	義理
Huang Zongxi	黃宗羲	<i>yong jiu, xian qun</i>	
Huang Zongyan	黃宗炎	<i>long wu shou</i>	用九, 見群龍無首
<i>i</i>	義	<i>youhuan</i>	憂患
<i>jing</i>	經	<i>Yijing tongzhu</i>	易經通注
<i>jinyi</i>	近易	Zhu Xi	朱熹
<i>junzi</i>	君子	<i>zhuan</i>	傳
Kun	坤	<i>Zhouyi benyi</i>	周易本義
Li Guangdi	李光地	<i>Zhouyi daquan</i>	周易大全
Lü Zuqian	呂祖謙	<i>Zhouyi zhezong</i>	周易折中
<i>Qian</i>	乾		

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