

A SOURCE BOOK IN
CHINESE
PHILOSOPHY

TRANSLATED AND COMPILED BY
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THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE

THE *Book of Changes (I Ching)*¹ grew out of the ancient practice of divination. Its text is very cryptic and no definite philosophical conclusion can be drawn from it. In the commentaries, however, which have been ascribed to Confucius by tradition but to unknown writers three or four centuries later by some scholars, there is a clear outline of a rational approach to a well-ordered and dynamic universe. It is a universe of constant change, and whatever issues from it is good. One is reminded of "perfect sincerity" in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, which is the source of the good and is unceasing.²

Change is simple and easy. (The Chinese word for change, *i*, also

¹ The *Book of Changes* is one of the basic Confucian Classics. It is also much cherished by the Taoists. It is divided into the texts and commentaries. The texts consist of sixty-four hexagrams and judgments on them. These hexagrams are based on the Eight Trigrams, each of which consists of three lines, divided or undivided, the divided representing the weak, or yin, and the undivided representing the strong, or yang. Each of these eight corresponds to a direction, a natural element, a moral quality, etc. For example, *ch'ien* (Heaven) ☰ is heaven, *k'un* (Earth) ☷ is earth, *chen* (activity) ☳ is thunder, *sun* (bending) ☱ is wind, *k'an* (pit) ☵ is water, *li* (brightness) ☲ is fire, *ken* (to stop) ☶ is mountain, and *tui* (pleasure) ☴ is a collection of water. Each trigram is combined with another, one upon the other, thus making sixty-four hexagrams. These hexagrams symbolize all possible situations. For example, the hexagram with the water trigram over the fire trigram symbolizes conquest, success, etc.

Each hexagram is followed by two texts, namely (1) the *kua-tz'u* or the explanation of the text of the whole hexagram and (2) the *yao-tz'u* or the explanation of the component lines. The commentaries number seven. First is (3) the *tuan-chuan* or the commentary on (1) and then there is (4) the *hsiang* or abstract meaning of (1) and (2). For the first two hexagrams (the *ch'ien* or Heaven and *k'un* or Earth), there are in addition (5) the *wen-yen* or commentary on the first two texts to stress their philosophical or ethical meaning. Following these sixty-four hexagrams and their discussions, there are (6) the *hsi-tz'u* or the appended remarks, (7) the remarks on certain trigrams, (8) the remarks on the order of the hexagrams, and (9) the random remarks on the hexagrams. Nos. 3, 4, and 6, each in two parts, and nos. 5, 7, 8, and 9 form the "ten wings" of the book.

The most important parts are the texts (1 and 2) and discussions (5) on the first two hexagrams, the appended remarks (6), and the remarks on the trigrams (7). It is here that much of Chinese philosophical speculation has been based.

Tradition has ascribed the Eight Trigrams to legendary Fu-hsi, the sixty-four hexagrams to King Wen (r. 1171-1122 B.C.), the two texts (1 and 2) to him or Duke Chou (d. 1094 B.C.) and the "ten wings" to Confucius. Most modern scholars have rejected this attribution, but they are not agreed on when and by whom the book was produced. Most probably it is a product of many hands over a long period of time, from the fifth or sixth century B.C. to the third or fourth century B.C.

For English translations, see Bibliography.

² Ch. 26.

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means easy.) It engenders the two forces, yin, the passive or the female element, and yang, the active or the male element, and their interaction in turn gives rise to all multiplicity. Whether this idea of interaction between yin and yang is originally a borrowing from the interaction of the male and the female is unimportant. The important point is that the universe is not just a well-ordered state of existence in which all things are correlated and man and Nature form a unity, as envisaged by the Yin Yang School. What is more, it is a continuous change, for things are forever interfused and intermingled. The universe is a realm of perpetual activity.

In certain respects, the activity takes the form of cycles, as in the Yin Yang School. But the far more important aspect of the interaction of yin and yang is its progressive direction leading to the development of society, morality, and civilization. In the beginning there is the Great Ultimate (*T'ai-chi*). It engenders yin and yang, which in their turn give rise to the four forms. These refer to major and minor yin and yang. But the word for form (*hsiang*) also connotes symbols, patterns, and ideas. This means that out of the interaction of the two cosmic forces, all patterns, ideas, systems, and culture are evolved. The earlier trigrams are now given an entirely new interpretation. Their divided and undivided lines are no longer considered elements of good and evil fortune, but cosmic forces. When the Eight Trigrams, each containing three lines, multiply themselves to become sixty-four hexagrams, they are taken to represent all possible forms of change, situations, possibilities, and institutions. Thus a complex civilization is conceived of as a process of systematic and progressive development which can be traced to its simplest beginning. The cosmology may be naïve and crude, but the philosophical spirit is clear. Instead of a universe controlled by spiritual beings whose pleasures can only be discovered through divination, we have a natural operation of forces which can be determined and predicted objectively. The word "spirit" does not denote spiritual beings any more but natural forces or, as one is tempted to say, natural law. It is interesting that things are even assigned numbers in an attempt to reduce existence to the simplest formula. As we shall see, the rational character of the book had a tremendous appeal to Neo-Confucianists, who quoted it frequently. Philosophically speaking, it has exerted more influence than any other Confucian Classic.

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1. SELECTIONS FROM THE COMMENTARIES ON THE *BOOK OF CHANGES*

Hexagram No. 1, Ch'ien (Heaven)

Great is *ch'ien*, the originator! All things obtain their beginning from it. It unites and commands all things under heaven.³ The clouds move and the rain is distributed, and the various things are evolved in their respective forms. Thus the beginning and the end are profoundly understood,⁴ and the six positions of the hexagram⁵ are achieved at the proper time.

[*Ch'ien*] at all times rides the six dragons (*ch'i* or material forces) [of the six lines] and controls all things under heaven. The way of *ch'ien* is to change and to transform so that everything will obtain its correct nature and destiny (*ming*) and the great harmony [of natural forces] will be self-proficient. There the result will be the advantage [derived from the harmony of all things] and firmness [throughout their existence]. [*Ch'ien*] towers above the myriad things [like a king] and all states enjoy peace. . . .

The character of the great man is identical with that of Heaven and Earth; his brilliance is identical with that of the sun and the moon; his order is identical with that of the four seasons, and his good and evil fortunes are identical with those of spiritual beings. He may precede Heaven and Heaven will not act in opposition to him. He may follow Heaven, but will act only as Heaven at the time would do. . . .

Hexagram No. 2, K'un (Earth)

Being straight means correctness, and being square means righteousness. The superior man applies seriousness (*ching*)⁶ to straighten the internal life and righteousness to square the external life. As seriousness and righteousness are established, one's virtue will not be an isolated instance. Straight, square, and great, [the superior man] works his operations without repeated effort, and is in every respect advantageous.

³ This interpretation follows Wang Pi's (226-249) commentary in the Thirteen Classics Series.

⁴ This does not refer to the understanding of any sage or holy man, as Legge, *Yi King*, p. 213, and Richard Wilhelm, *I Ching*, vol. 2, p. 3 have it, but to the operation of the Principle of Nature. See subcommentary by K'ung Ying-ta (574-648), *Chou-i cheng-i* (Correct Meanings of the *Book of Changes*), ch. 1, in the Thirteen Classics Series.

⁵ See above, n.1. Since the hexagram consists of two trigrams, it therefore consists of six lines in their six positions.

⁶ This word is not to be interpreted in the ordinary sense of reverence, which assumes an object. See Appendix.

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Comment. The two complementary ethical formulae, seriousness to straighten the internal life and righteousness to square the external life, eventually became the keystone in the method of moral cultivation for many Neo-Confucianists, especially Ch'eng I (Ch'eng I-ch'uan, 1033-1107).

2. SELECTIONS FROM THE "APPENDED REMARKS," PT. 1

Ch. 1. Heaven is high, the earth is low, and thus *ch'ien* (Heaven) and *k'un* (Earth) are fixed. As high and low are thus made clear, the honorable and the humble have their places accordingly. As activity and tranquillity have their constancy, the strong and the weak are thus differentiated. Ways come together according to their kind, and things are divided according to their classes. Hence good fortune and evil fortune emerge. In the heavens, forms (heavenly bodies) appear and on earth shapes (creatures) occur. In them change and transformation can be seen. Therefore the strong and the weak interact and the Eight Trigrams activate each other. Things are stimulated by thunder and lightning and enriched by the influence of wind and rain. Sun and moon revolve on their course and cold and hot seasons take their turn. The way of *ch'ien* constitutes the male, while the way of *k'un* constitutes the female. *Ch'ien* knows the great beginning, and *k'un* acts to bring things to completion. *Ch'ien* knows through the easy, and *k'un* accomplishes through the simple.

Ch. 4. The system of Change⁷ is tantamount to Heaven and Earth, and therefore can always handle and adjust the way of Heaven and Earth. Looking up, we observe the pattern of the heavens; looking down, we examine the order of the earth. Thus we know the causes of what is hidden and what is manifest. If we investigate the cycle of things, we shall understand the concepts of life and death.

Essence and material force (*ch'i*) are combined to become things. The wandering away of spirit (force) becomes change. From this we know that the characteristics and conditions of spiritual beings are similar to those of Heaven and Earth and therefore there is no disagreement between them. The knowledge [of spirit] embraces all things and its way helps all under heaven, and therefore there is no mistake. It operates freely and does not go off course. It rejoices in Nature (*T'ien*, Heaven) and understands destiny. Therefore there is no worry. As [things] are contented in their stations and earnest in practicing kindness, there can be love. It molds and encompasses all

⁷ Many commentators have taken this to mean the *Book of Changes*.

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transformations of Heaven and Earth without mistake, and it stoops to bring things into completion without missing any. It penetrates to a knowledge of the course of day and night.⁸ Therefore spirit has no spatial restriction and Change has no physical form.

Comment. Exactly what is meant by "spirit" is not clear, but it is surely not the spirit of a deceased person that influences human affairs. Traditionally *kuei-shen* means either simply spirits of ancestors or spiritual beings. In the latter case, it may mean either good or evil spirits or the positive and negative aspects of the soul, respectively. But here it is simply the unfathomable force behind all transformations. Later in Neo-Confucianism, it is to be understood purely as the spontaneous activity of yin and yang.⁹

Ch. 5. The successive movement of yin and yang constitutes the Way (Tao). What issues from the Way is good, and that which realizes it is the individual nature. The man of humanity (*jen*)¹⁰ sees it and calls it humanity. The man of wisdom sees it and calls it wisdom. And the common people act according to it daily without knowing it. In this way the Way of the superior man is fully realized.¹¹ It [spirit] is manifested in humanity but is concealed in its functioning. It promotes all things without sharing the anxiety of the sage. How perfect is its eminent virtue and great achievement! Its achievement is great because it possesses everything, and its virtue is abundant because it renovates things every day.

Comment. The idea of renewing every day has already been found in the *Great Learning*¹² and will be reiterated again and again in the Neo-Confucian philosophy.¹³

Changes mean production and reproduction. *Ch'ien* means the completion of forms, and *k'un* means to model after them. Divination means to go to the utmost of the natural course of events in order to know the future. Affairs mean to adapt and accommodate accordingly. And that which is unfathomable in the operation of yin and yang is called spirit.

⁸ According to Han K'ang-po (of Chin, 265-420), the foregoing descriptions refer to spirit, whereas K'ung Ying-ta thought they refer to the sage. See the *Chou-i cheng-i*. Sun Hsing-yen (1753-1818), in his *Chou-i chi-chieh* (Collected Explanations of the *Book of Changes*), supports Han K'ang-po.

⁹ See below, ch. 30, B, 10, 11, 31, 56; ch. 32, sec. 65, 70, 73, 78; ch. 34, B, 130-133.

¹⁰ Various rendered as benevolence, love, human-hearted, etc.

¹¹ The word *hsien* here does not mean few, as all translators have understood it, but means to the fullest extent. See Sun Hsing-yen, *Chou-i chi-chieh*.

¹² Ch. 2.

¹³ See below, pp. 558, 693, 752, 760.

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Comment. The concept of production is new and will form an important part of Neo-Confucianism. Both change and the characteristic of the universe are described in terms of life-giving.

Ch. 10. . . . Change has neither thought nor action, because it is in the state of absolute quiet and inactivity, and when acted on, it immediately penetrates all things. If it were not the most spirit-like thing in the world, how can it take part in this universal transformation? The system of Change is that by which the sage reaches the utmost of things and examines their subtle emergence (*chi*, subtle activating force). Only through depth can the will of all men be penetrated; only through subtle activation can all undertakings in the world be brought to completion; and only through spirit is there speed without hurry and the destination reached without travel. . . .

Comment. What is quiet is substance and what penetrates things is function. This sets the pattern for the Neo-Confucian theory of substance and function.

Ch. 11. . . . Therefore *k'un* means closing and *ch'ien* means opening. The succession of closing and opening constitutes transformation. The alternate going and coming [of yin and yang] is called penetration. What is manifested is called form (*hsiang*). What has taken physical form is called a concrete thing (*ch'i*).¹⁴ To control and use things is called method. And [when they are] used to advantage, either in this or that way, so all people utilize them, that is called spirit.

Therefore in the system of Change there is the Great Ultimate. It generates the Two Modes (yin and yang). The Two Modes generate the Four Forms (major and minor yin and yang). The Four Forms generate the Eight Trigrams. The Eight Trigrams determine good and evil fortunes. And good and evil fortunes produce the great business [of life]. . . .

Ch. 12. . . . The system of Change is indeed intermingled with the operations of *ch'ien* and *k'un*. As *ch'ien* and *k'un* take their respective positions, the system of Change is established in their midst. If *ch'ien* and *k'un* are obliterated, there would be no means of seeing the system of Change. If the system of Change cannot be seen, then *ch'ien* and *k'un* would almost cease to operate.

Therefore what exists before physical form [and is therefore without it]¹⁵ is called the Way. What exists after physical form [and is therefore with it] is called a concrete thing. That which transforms things and

¹⁴ Literally an implement, a utensil, a particular thing. For a discussion of this term, see Appendix.

¹⁵ About this translation, see Appendix, comment on *Hsing-erh-shang*.

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controls them is called change. That which extends their operation is called penetration. To take them and apply them to the people of the world is called the business of life. . . .

3. SELECTIONS FROM THE "APPENDED REMARKS," PT. 2

Ch. 1. . . . The great characteristic of Heaven and Earth is to produce. The most precious thing for the sage is [the highest] position. To keep his position depends on humanity. How to collect a large population depends on wealth. The right administration of wealth, the rectification of terms, and prohibiting people from wrong doing constitute righteousness.

Ch. 5. It is said in the Change, "Full of anxious thought you come and go. [Only] friends will follow you and think of you." The Master¹⁶ said, "What is there in the world to think about or to deliberate about? In the world there are many different roads but the destination is the same. There are a hundred deliberations but the result is one. What is there in the world to think about or to deliberate about?"

Comment. The idea of a hundred roads to the same destination is a direct expression of the spirit of synthesis which is extremely strong in Chinese philosophy. It is the Confucian version of Chuang Tzu's doctrine of following two courses at the same time.¹⁷

After the sun goes, the moon comes. After the moon goes, the sun comes. The sun and the moon push each other in their course and thus light appears. After the winter goes, the summer comes. After the summer goes, the winter comes. The winter and the summer push each other and thus the year is completed. To go means to contract and to come means to expand. Contraction and expansion act on each other and thus advantages are produced. The looper caterpillar coils itself up (contracts) in order to stretch out (expand). Dragons and snakes hibernate (contract) in order to preserve life (expand). Investigate the principles of things with care and refinement until we enter into their spirit, for then their application can be extended, and utilize that application and secure personal peace, for then our virtue will be exalted. What goes beyond this is something we can hardly know. To investigate spirit to the utmost and to understand transformation is the height of virtue. . . .

Ch. 6. The Master (Confucius) said, "*Ch'ien* and *k'un* are indeed the

¹⁶ Traditionally identified as Confucius.

¹⁷ See comment on it on p. 184.

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gate of Change! *Ch'ien* is yang and *k'un* is yin. When yin and yang are united in their character, the weak and the strong attain their substance. In this way the products of Heaven and Earth are given substance and the character of spiritual intelligence can be penetrated. . . .

4. SELECTIONS FROM "REMARKS ON CERTAIN TRIGRAMS"

Ch. 1. In ancient times in instituting the system of Change, the sages, with the hidden assistance of spiritual intelligence, created the system of divination by the use of milfoil stalks. The number 3 was assigned to heaven, 2 to earth, and from these other numbers were established.¹⁸ They observed the changes in yin and yang (divided and the undivided lines) and form the trigrams. From the movements that took place in the weak and strong [lines], they produced [the principles of] the individual lines. They harmonized [these principles] with the Way and virtue, and laid down the order of moral principles. [Their teaching is to] investigate principle (*li*) to the utmost and fully develop one's nature until destiny is fulfilled.

Comment. The three subjects of principle, nature, and destiny cover practically the whole philosophy of the Neo-Confucian movement. In fact, the movement is called the Philosophy of Nature and Principle. In essence, the teaching is no different from Mencius' teaching of fully developing one's mind, knowing Heaven, and fulfilling one's destiny.¹⁹ But Mencius did not provide the metaphysical basis for Neo-Confucianism as does the *Book of Changes*. It is also to be noted that unlike the Taoists who require vacuity (*hsü*) of mind for one to become identified with Nature, here Confucianists advocate the fulfillment of one's own nature to achieve the same objective.

Ch. 2. In ancient times, the sages instituted the system of Change in order to follow the principle of the nature and destiny. Therefore yin and yang were established as the way of Heaven, the weak and the strong as the way of Earth, and humanity and righteousness as the way of man. [Each hexagram] embraced those three powers (Heaven, Earth, and man) and doubled them. Therefore in the system of Change a hexagram is complete with six lines. They are distinguished as yin and yang and the weak and the strong are employed in succession. Thus in

¹⁸ This is open to various interpretations. The interpretation by Wang Su (195-256) is adopted here. See Sun Hsing-yen, *Chou-i chi-chieh*.

¹⁹ *Mencius*, 7A:1.

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the system of Change there are six positions and the pattern is complete.

Ch. 11. *Ch'ien* is heaven. It is round, the ruler, the father, jade, metal, cold, ice, deep red, a good horse, an old horse, a lean horse, a piebald horse, tree fruit. *K'un* is the earth, the mother, cloth, kettle, frugality, the level, a young heifer, a large carriage, fibre, multitude, a handle, and black soil among the various kinds of soil. . . .