



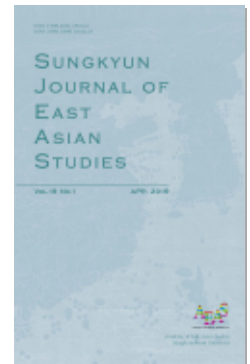
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Hexagrams on Decay and Discordance

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Coping with Contingency and Uncertainty: The *Yijing* Hexagrams on Decay and Discordance*

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ABSTRACT

As a manual for divination, the *Yijing* is filled with stern warnings about calamity, regret, and remorse, as if the world is falling apart. These warnings not only underscore the contingency and unpredictability of the universe, but also direct attention to the dark side of human existence and things such as disease, deformation, degeneration, and death. Over the centuries, many commentators have attempted to make sense of these warnings. In this article, I will compare three commentators' interpretations of four hexagrams: *Gu* 蠱 ䷑ (Decay, #18), *Daguo* 大過 ䷛ (Crossing of the Great, #28), *Kui* 睽 ䷥ (Discordance, #38) and *Jian* 蹇 ䷦ (Crippled, #39). Through the comparison, I demonstrate how the *Yijing* can be used to address the human fear of uncertainty and chance.

Keywords: Contingency, fear, hexagrams, human finitude, uncertainty, *Yijing*

Similar to other ancient Chinese texts, the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of changes) went through a long process of compilation. It began as a collection of divination records of the Western Zhou period (1100–771 BCE). Known as the *Zhouyi* 周易 (Changes of the Zhou dynasty), these divination records appear in the sixty-four hexagrams starting with *Qian* 乾 ䷀ (Aggressive, #1) and *Kun* 坤 ䷁ (Passive, #2), and ending with *Jiji* 既濟 ䷾ (Complete in Crossing the River, #63) and *Weiji* 未濟 ䷿ (Incomplete in Crossing the River, #64). But what transformed the collection of oracles into the *Yijing* (a canonized text with clear themes) was the Ten Wings (*shiyi* 十翼)—the commentarial writings from the Warring States period (475–221 BCE).¹ In various ways, the authors of Ten Wings gave meaning to the sequences of the hexagrams, the hexagram images, the hexagram statements, and the line statements.² Over the centuries, these different textual layers have been considered mutually reinforcing in elucidating the structure of the universe, the codependence between the natural realm and human realm, and a philosophy of change that helps readers to manage upheavals in life.

What connect these layers of the *Yijing* is the notion that the cosmos is an organismic process without beginning or end. As a process, the cosmos resembles a great flow in which “all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole” and all the parts “interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating process.”³ As such, there are three characteristics of this great flow:

continuity, wholeness, and dynamism. It is continuous because it never stops in renewing itself. It is holistic because it includes everything in the universe and permeates all aspects of life. It is dynamic because it is full of motion and movement, generating energy and strength all the time.⁴ In this cosmic flow, there is no distinction between the following: the natural realm and the human realm, an observing subject and an observed object, and the inner world and the outer world. Everything is part of a totality, a group dance that never stops.

Despite its optimism and positive tone, the *Yijing* is also full of anomalies and strange events. Particularly in the divination records, we find stern warnings about “calamity” (*xiong* 凶), “regret” (*hui* 悔) and “remorse” (*lin* 吝), as if the world is falling apart.⁵ These warnings not only underscore the contingency and unpredictability of the universe, but also direct attention to the dark side of human existence such as disease, deformation, degeneration, and death. This dark side of human existence is discussed at great length in the Ten Wings. By calling attention to the dark side of human existence, the authors of the *Yijing* highlight a tension in the divination records. On the one hand, they point out that the divination records are evidence of a systemic and stable universe, showing the awesome structure of the cosmos.⁶ On the other hand, they see the divination records as reminders of a fast-changing world full of accidents and unexpected events.⁷ To round out their argument, the authors claim that the goal of writing or compiling the *Yijing* is to ask readers to be constantly in the state of “worry and anxiety” (*youhuan* 憂患).⁸ To succeed, they suggest, one must accept the paradox that although the world is systematically structured, it is full of inexplicable and unpredictable events.

* This work was supported by the Global Research Network program through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2016S1A2A2912286).

¹ The Ten Wings are seven pieces of writing divided into ten segments. The Ten Wings are: *Tuan* 象 (Commentary on the judgment), *Xiang* 象 I and II (Commentary to the images), *Wenyan* 文言 (Words of the text), *Xici* 繫辭 (Appended statements, also known as *Dazhuan* 大傳, [The great treatise]), *Shuogua* 說卦 (Explanation of the trigrams), *Xugua* 序卦 (Hexagrams in sequence), and *Zagua* 雜卦 (Hexagrams in irregular order).

² For the significance of the Ten Wings in sealing the *Yijing* text, see Geoffrey Redmond and Tze-ki Hon, *Teaching the I Ching* (Book of Changes) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 140–157. See also Zhu Bokun 朱伯崑, *Yixue zhhexue shi* 易學哲學史 [History of the philosophy of Yi learning] (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1984), 38–105.

³ Tu, Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38–39.

⁵ For the usage of 凶 (calamity), 悔 (regret), and 吝 (remorse) in the sixty-four hexagrams, see Gao Heng 高亨, *Zhouyi gujing jinzhu* 周易古經今注 [A contemporary commentary on the Zhouyi] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1984), 126–138.

⁶ An example of this view is found in chapter 1 of the *Xici*. It says: 天尊地卑，乾坤定矣。卑高以陳，貴賤位矣。For further discussion of this *Xici* chapter, see below.

⁷ An example of this view is found in chapter 2 of the *Xici*. It says: 聖人設卦觀象，繫辭焉而明吉凶。剛柔相推而生變化。是故吉凶者，失得之象也。悔吝者，憂虞之象也。

⁸ For the discussion of “worry and anxiety,” see chapter 7 of the *Xici* part 2. The opening line of the chapter says: 《易》之興也，其在中古乎。作《易》者，其有憂患乎。

Of the sixty-four hexagrams, four are particularly clear in revealing this tension between structure and anomaly: *Gu* 蠱 (Decay, #18), *Daguo* 大過 (Crossing of the Great, #28), *Kui* 睽 (Discordance, #38) and *Jian* 蹇 (Crippled, #39). *Gu*, for instance, suggests disease because the character for *gu* 蠱 is a picture of a bowl of worms, probably a result of rotten food.⁹ *Daguo* suggests a crumbling building because its hexagram image ䷛ looks like a damaged structure with a weak foundation (the *yin* line at the bottom) and an unprotected roof (the *yin* line at the top). *Kui* evokes an image of discordance because of “two women of opposing views being placed in the same room” (*er nü tong shi, qi zhi bu tong* 二女同室, 其志不同) as the *Tuan* 象 commentary suggests. *Jian* describes a situation where one should abandon a planned journey after seeing signs of “danger” (*xian* 險). Together these four hexagrams direct our attention to the devastating impact of disease (*Gu*), deformation (*Daguo*), discord (*Kui*), and obstacles (*Jian*) that no one can predict or prevent. They pose a daunting challenge to commentators who read the *Yijing* as a text about the stability and structure of the universe. More importantly, they raise questions about the possibility of the malfunction of the universe, the unpredictability of the world, and the failure of human beings to take care of themselves.

Beginning in the Eastern Han (25–220) and continuing on in the Tang (618–907) and the Song (960–1279) periods, these four hexagrams received different renditions as commentators attempted to come to grips with anomalies and strange events. In what follows, I will compare the commentaries of Yu Fan 虞翻 (164–233), Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). These three commentators are selected because of their distinctive styles of interpretation. Whereas Yu Fan interpreted the hexagrams based on cosmology and numerology, Wang Bi read the hexagrams as symbols that provided guidance to make difficult decisions. For these two commentators, divination (although important) no longer played an essential role in interpreting the *Yijing*. Instead, it was the other aspects (such as the Ten Wings or the new hexagram sequences developed by commentators) that informed the reading of the *Yijing*. In contrast, Zhu Xi focused attention on divination as a concerted effort to comprehend the unknown and unknowable. Although he did not resolve the tension between structure and anomaly, he gave new meaning to events that seemed incomprehensible and unreasonable. In addition, by reading hexagrams as divination tools, Zhu Xi expanded the readership of the *Yijing* to include those who might not be members of the educated elite, but were perplexed by the contingency and serendipity in everyday life.

Hexagrams as Symbols of the Cosmic Order

Rulers of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) were obsessed with building an eternal empire, a humanly-made system that not only mimicked the recurrent pattern of the universe but also responded proactively to the ebb and flow of

⁹ Gao Heng emphasizes the significance of reading *gu* as a bowl of worms caused by rotten food. He argues that Hexagram *Gu* is about disease (sexual disease, in particular), as line statements refer to diseases caused by one’s parents. See *Zhouyi gujing jinzhu*, 214–15.

cosmic forces.¹⁰ This everlasting structure was stable and flexible, massive and specific, synchronizing human activities for the unfolding of the universe. Its goal was to merge the natural and human realms, such that the two became one and the same.¹¹ Known as correlative cosmology, the purpose behind this fusion of the natural and human realms was to focus attention on “the mutual responsiveness of heaven and humanity.”¹² This mutual responsiveness of nature and humankind was based on two assumptions. First, the cosmos is orderly and stable. Its orderliness and stability are shown in the regular succession of time, such as the four seasons, the twelve months, and the 365 and ¼ days. Second, the same orderliness of the natural world is found in the human realm in the forms of life cycles, the rhythm of work and rest, and the rise and fall of family fortunes. Despite the vicissitudes on the surface, the natural and human worlds are balanced, systematic, and predictable. They are perfect mirrors of each other, such that when one moves, the other responds.

The goal of correlative cosmology was not to develop a comprehensive understanding of the universe. Rather, it was to legitimize the transition “from the concept of imperial sovereignty based on might into the need to support a claim to rule with intellectual sanctions.”¹³ Thus, the emperor was said to be the crucial link between the natural and human realms. In fact, according to the Han scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195–105 BCE), the sinograph for king (王) reflected the solemn responsibility of the emperor (symbolized by the vertical stroke in the middle) for connecting the three potencies ☰: heaven (*tian* 天), earth (*di* 地), and humankind (*ren* 人).¹⁴ As such, the emperor was indeed the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子)—omnipotent, omnipotent, and omniscient.¹⁵

Like other Han commentators, Yu Fan considered the *Yijing* as a cosmological manual in support of political absolutism. From the perspective of correlative cosmology, he did not view *Gu*, *Daguo*, *Kui* and *Jian* as warnings about disease, degeneration, and disorder. Rather, he saw them as symbols elucidating the unfolding of the cosmos. The basis of Yu Fan’s reading came from the Ten Wings that treated the sixty-four hexagrams as a system of signs. Of the Ten Wings, Yu Fan drew heavily from the *Xugua* 序卦 (Hexagrams in Sequence), which gave the order of the sixty-four hexagrams a special meaning. The beginning lines of the

¹⁰ Regarding the Han project of building an eternal empire, see Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009) and *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹¹ See Michael Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹² Sarah A Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–53.

¹³ Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*, 121–141.

¹⁴ Redmond and Hon, *Teaching the I Ching (Book of Changes)*, 159–161.

¹⁵ On the significance of Dong Zhongshu, see Michael Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu* (Leiden: Brill 2011), and Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon*.

Xugua read:

After [the mixing of] Heaven [Qian] and Earth [Kun], the myriad beings are created. When the myriad things fill up the world, *Zhun* 屯 follows. *Zhun* means abundance and symbolizes the birth of the myriad beings. After the myriad things are born, they must receive training; hence *Meng* 蒙 follows. *Meng* means uncultivated and refers to the myriad beings in early form. When the myriad things are in early form, they need nourishment; hence *Xu* 需 follows. *Xu* means drinking and eating. Drinking and eating lead to argument, hence *Song* 訟 follows. Argument leads to public dispute; hence *Shi* 師 follows. *Shi* means the mobilization of the public...¹⁶

In matching the order of hexagrams with key moments of social evolution, the *Xugua* elucidates the process of building a human community. This process continues on from satisfying basic human needs (such as food, shelter and security) to founding a patrilineal family structure based on gender distinctions (*nannü* 男女) and matrimony (*fuqi* 夫妻).¹⁷ Later, the patrilineal family structure is expanded into a complex socio-political system based on the distinctions between kings and officials (*junchen* 君臣) and rulers and ruled (*shangxia* 上下).¹⁸

While this process of development seems inevitable, occasionally the *Xugua* calls attention to challenges and obstacles in creating a stable community. It identifies moments where the socio-political order is corrupt (*Kui* 睽 #38 and *Jian* 蹇 #39)¹⁹ or has disintegrated (*Huan* 渙 #59).²⁰ Because of the danger of corruption and disintegration, the *Xugua* stresses the need for renewing the system by replacing corrupt leaders (*Ge* 革 #49) and re-structuring the entire system (*Ding* 鼎, #50).²¹ And yet, occasional interruptions do not interfere with the steady unfolding of the cosmic/human order. Rather, they highlight the need for vigilance and constant renewal. For this reason, the *Xugua* ends with an observation that the sixty-four hexagrams must conclude with *Weiji* 未濟 because the hexagram symbolizes that “things cannot be exhausted” (*wu bu ke yi qiong ye* 物不可以窮也).²²

For Yu Fan, this steady unfolding of the cosmic/human order is reflected in the sixty-four hexagrams. Take, for instance, *Kui* 睽 #38. Although the character for *Kui* means discordant, Yu Fan sees it only as a symbol for *Li* 離 ☲ at the top and *Dui* 兌 ☱ at the bottom. For him, the significance of *Kui* 睽 must be found in its

¹⁶ This is my translation of the opening lines of the *Xugua*. The original reads: 有天地，然後萬物生焉，盈天地之間者唯萬物，故受之以〈屯〉。屯者，盈也。屯者，物之始生也。物生必蒙，故受之以〈蒙〉。蒙者，蒙也，物之穉也。物穉不可不養業，故受之以〈需〉。需者，飲食之道也。飲食必有訟，故受之以〈訟〉。訟比有眾起，故受之以〈師〉。師者，眾也。

¹⁷ The second half of the *Xugua* discusses the establishment of the family system. The beginning lines read: 有天地，然後有萬物；有萬物，然後有男女；有男女，然後有夫妻；有夫妻，然後有父子。

¹⁸ The *Xugua* continues: 有父子，然後有君臣，有君臣，然後有上下，有上下，然後禮義有所錯。

¹⁹ The *Xugua* says: 家道窮必乖，故受之以〈睽〉。睽者，乖也。乖必有難，故受之以〈蹇〉。蹇者，難也。

²⁰ The *Xugua* says: 兌者，說[悅]也。說而後散之，故受之以〈渙〉。

²¹ The *Xugua* says: 非道不可不革，故受之以〈革〉。革物者莫若鼎，故受之以〈鼎〉。

²² The *Xugua* says: 有過物者必濟，故受之以〈既濟〉。物不可以窮也，故受之以〈未濟〉終焉。

connection with two other hexagrams, *Dazhuan* 大壯 ䷡ (The Strength of the Great, #34) and *Wuwang* 无妄 ䷘ (No Errancy, #25). In *Dazhuan*, when the yang third line exchanges position with the top yin line (*shang zhi san* 上之三), the hexagram turns into *Kui*. In *Wuwang*, when the yin second line switches position with the yang fifth line (*er zhi wu* 二之五), the hexagram becomes *Kui*.²³ By linking these three hexagrams, Yu Fan reminds readers that the sixty-four hexagrams are intricately connected. And from the various ways in which the hexagrams are connected, readers are able to see the awesome structure of the universe.

A prime example of this correspondence between hexagrams and the cosmic/human order is *Daguo* 大過 ䷛ (Crossing of the Great, #28). The hexagram statement of *Daguo* reads: “*Daguo*, the ridgepole sags to the breaking point. It furthers one to have somewhere to go. Success.”²⁴ For Yu Fan, “the ridgepole sags to the breaking point” (*dongyao* 棟橈) refers to the two yin lines of the hexagram. The yin line at the bottom indicates a weak foundation and the yin line at the top shows an uncovered top. Hence, both the foundation and the top of *Daguo* are weak (*ben mo ruo* 本末弱).²⁵

But why is there “success” (*heng* 亨) in this seemingly dangerous situation? Yu Fan’s answer is that “success” comes from the implicit connections between *Daguo* and *Dazhuan* ䷡ (The Strength of the Great, #34) and *Dui* 兌 ䷹ (Joyous, #58). In *Dazhuan*, when the fifth yin line changes position with the yang first line (*wu zhi chu* 五之初), it turns into *Daguo*; in *Dui*, when the yin third line switches position with the yang first line (*san zhi chu* 三之初), it becomes *Daguo*. More importantly, Yu Fan argues, the “success” of *Daguo* comes from the fact that in the hexagram ䷛ the second yang line avoids a direct confrontation with the fifth yang line by focusing attention on the first yin line (*er guo chu yu wu* 二過初與五). Likewise, the yang fifth line decides to keep a peaceful relation with the second line by turning its attention to the top yin line (*wu guo shang yu er* 五過上與二).²⁶ In this way, the bottom yin line and the top yin line are not liabilities to the hexagram. On the contrary, they are the reason for a peaceful coexistence between the yang second line and the yang fifth line which do not match.

This graphic reading of hexagrams also allows Yu Fan to find a positive message in *Gu* 蠱 (Decay, #18). For Yu Fan, *Gu* ䷑ comes from *Tai* 泰 ䷊ (Peace, #11). When the yang first line exchanges position with the top yin line, *Tai* turns into *Gu*. Hence, *Gu* does not mean “decay” as the character 蠱 may suggest.²⁷ Instead, it

²³ See Li Dingzuo 李鼎祚, *Zhouyi jijie* 周易集解 (The collected commentaries on the *Changes* of the Zhou dynasty) (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, reprint, 1984), *juan* 卷 8: 3A. (Because one page in this text is printed on two sides, I identify the first side of the page by A and the second side of the page by B.)

²⁴ This translation is from Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes. See *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 111. The original hexagram statement reads: 大過，棟橈，利有攸往，亨。

²⁵ Li Dingzuo, *Zhouyi jijie*, *juan* 6: 10a.

²⁶ Li Dingzuo, *Zhouyi jijie*, *juan* 6: 10a.

²⁷ According to Gao Heng, *gu* was taken to mean a bowl of worms in the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, a dictionary compiled in the Eastern Han. Probably Yu Fan would have known that *gu* could be read as “disease.” But since the *Xugua* stated explicitly that *gu* means “event,” Yu Fan did not need to change the meaning of *gu*.

evokes a healthy mixing of the *yin* force and the *yang* force (*qian kun jiao* 乾坤交) when the *yang* first line of *Tai* moves up to take the top position and the *yin* sixth line moves down to take the first position (*gang shang rou xia* 剛上柔下).²⁸

On the whole, it was this strong emphasis on the orderliness, stability, and predictability of hexagrams that distinguished the Eastern Han commentators from commentators of other times. By linking individual hexagrams to a web of hexagrams, the Eastern Han commentators confirmed that the cosmos is orderly, stable, and predictable. Like the hexagrams, the cosmos is orderly because it is governed by a few simple rules, such as the ebb and flow of the *yin* and *yang* forces. Like the hexagrams, the cosmos is stable because it follows a fixed pattern such as the four seasons, solstices, and pitch-pipes. Like the hexagrams, the cosmos is predictable because one thing will automatically transform into something else based on the predetermined rules and patterns.

Hexagrams as Guidance for Making Important Decisions

The fall of the Han dynasty in 220 CE revealed a fundamental problem of correlative cosmology, namely that human beings are incapable of fully discerning the cosmic pattern, nor can they completely apply the cosmic pattern to human affairs. Even if they try to mimic the cosmic rhythm in governing it, the human world is far too complicated for any one individual to handle. In the following seven hundred years, *Yijing* scholars retreated from fathoming the cosmos. Instead, they turned their attention to ordering the human world and looking for its deep structure.

The major figure who started this turn to the human world was Wang Bi (226–249). Born six years after the collapse of the Han dynasty, Wang Bi was thrown into a situation in which there seemed to be few certainties in life. With China divided into three separate kingdoms—the Wei 魏, the Shu 蜀, and the Wu 吳—there was widespread disorder in the country. When everything was in ruin, fewer and fewer people followed the Confucian precepts of honesty, loyalty and filial piety.²⁹ Instead, trickery, usurpation, and pragmatic calculation became the accepted strategies for survival. Apparently, Wang Bi's experience after the collapse of the Han dynasty brought him face to face with fear and anxiety—the two recurrent themes in the *Yijing*.³⁰ Before his premature death at the age of 23, Wang wrote a commentary on the *Yijing*, the *Zhouyi zhu* 周易注 (Commentary on the

²⁸ Li Dingzuo, *Zhouyi jijie*, juan 5: 3a.

²⁹ For a biography of Wang Bi, see Richard John Lynn, "Wang Bi and Xuanxue," in *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, edited by Xiaogan Liu (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 365–395; *The Classic of Changes: A Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 10–15.

³⁰ For the contributions of Wang Bi as a *Yijing* scholar, see my two articles: "Human Agency and Change: A Reading of Wang Bi's *Yijing* Commentary," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30, no. 2 (June 2003) 223–242; 2010, and "Hexagrams and Politics: Wang Bi's Political Philosophy in the *Zhouyi Zhu*," in *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China*, edited by Alan K. L. Chan and Yuet-keung Lo (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 71–96. See also Yu, Dunkang 余敦康. *He Yan Wang Bi Xuanxue xintan* 何晏王弼玄学新探 (New Research on He Yan and Wang Bi's Philosophy) (Beijing: Fangzhi Chubanshe, 2007).

Changes of the Zhou dynasty), along with a commentary on the *Laozi*.³¹

In his *Zhouyi zhu*, Wang Bi treats the sixty-four hexagrams as sixty-four distinct situations, not a system of signs. Among these situations, some are favorable and some are not; some demand immediate action and some require passivity. Given these sixty-four situations as a kind of pre-destined fate, Wang ascribes human activism to the hexagram lines. The six lines in each hexagram are six different responses to the same environment or circumstance. They represent the room for maneuver in each particular situation. Precisely in this juncture that exists between what is required and what can be done, Wang Bi sees the fluidity of human affairs. With proper action, one can turn what appears to be a failure into a blessing. Conversely, lacking appropriate action, one can render what appears to be flourishing into a disaster.

This fluidity of human affairs is unequivocally spelled out in Wang Bi's commentary on *Qian* 乾 ☰ (The Creative, #1). The *Tuan* statement of *Qian* says: "Because the holy man is clear as to the end and the beginning, as to the way in which each of the six stages completes itself in its own time, he mounts on them toward heaven as though on six dragons."³² Wang Bi explains:

Thus each of the six positions forms without ever missing its moment, its ascent or descent not subject to fixed rule, functioning according to the moment involved. If one is to remain in repose, ride a hidden dragon, and if one is to set forth, ride a flying dragon. This is why it is said: "When it is the moment for it, ride one of the six dragons."³³

The "six dragons" or the six stages that are discussed here are the six *yang* lines of the *Qian* hexagram. In the *Qian* hexagram, each *yang* line is a type of dragon: the first line is "the submerged dragon" (*qianlong* 潛龍); the second is "the emerged dragon" (*xianlong* 見[現]龍); the third is "the superior man in constant self-reflection" (*junzi zhongri qianqian* 君子終日乾乾); the fourth is "the dragon pondering to jump out of an abyss" (*huo yue zai yuan* 或[惑]躍在淵); the fifth is "the flying dragon" (*feilong* 飛龍); and the sixth is "the arrogant dragon" (*kanglong* 亢龍).

In his comment, Wang explains that the "six dragons" are metaphors for our timely adaptations to the ever-changing environment. The "six dragons" tell us that there is no fixed rule in human activity. At some point in time, a person may have to remain dormant due to unfavorable circumstances, but at another point in time when the situation has improved, the same person can be assertive and forward-

³¹ Wang Bi's commentaries to the *Yijing* and *Laozi* have been translated into English. See Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, and *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). For a study of Wang Bi's philosophy based on his commentary to the *Laozi*, see Rudolf Wagner, *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

³² This is the translation of Wilhelm and Baynes. See *I Ching*, 371. The original 象 statement says: 大明終始，六位時成，時乘六龍以禦天。In his commentary, Wang Bi focuses on the meaning of 時乘六龍 (Riding the six dragons based on a timely manner).

³³ Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 129. The original reads as follows: 大明乎終始之道，故六位不失其時而成。升降无常，隨時而用，處則乘潛龍，出則乘飛龍，故曰"時成六龍"也。

looking. In keeping with the changing demands of our surroundings, we have to change continuously from one “dragon” to another “dragon.” By timely shifting from one “dragon” to another, we gain control of our surroundings, take command of our lives, and immerse ourselves in the constancy of change.

Although significantly different from Yu Fan’s, Wang Bi’s reading of the hexagrams was also based on the Ten Wings, especially the discussion of “worry and anxiety” (*youhuan* 憂患) in the *Xici*. Similar to the *Xugua*, the *Xici* describes the universe as stable and predictable. The first chapter of the *Xici* reads:

Heaven is high, the earth is low; thus the Creative (*Qian* 乾) and the Receptive (*Kun* 坤) are determined. In correspondence with this difference between low and high, inferior and superior places are established. Movement and rest have their definite laws; according to these, firm and yielding lines are differentiated. Events follow definite trends, each according to its nature. Things are distinguished from one another in definite classes.³⁴

But the purpose of composing/compiling the *Yijing*, the *Xici* author argues, is not just to glorify this awesome cosmic structure, but also to alert readers about fortune (*ji* 吉), misfortune (*xiong* 凶), regret (*hui* 悔), and remorse (*lin* 吝). To make his point, the *Xici* author repeatedly states that the *Yijing* is a work from “middle antiquity” (*zhonggu* 中古) when the Shang dynasty gave way to the Zhou dynasty. The author of the *Xici* writes:

The time at which the *Changes* came to the fore was that in which the house of Yin 殷 came to an end and the way of the house of Zhou 周 was rising; that is, the time when King Wen 文 and the tyrant Zhou 紂 were pitted against each other. This is why the judgments of the book so frequently warn against danger. He who is conscious of danger creates peace for himself; he who takes things lightly creates his own downfall.³⁵

In calling attention to the historical background of the composition of the *Yijing*, the *Xici* author stresses the need for being constantly in a state of “worry and anxiety” (*youhuan* 憂患). When things are not going well, readers are advised to make extra efforts to turn them around. When things are going well, readers are advised to anticipate danger and downfall. This proactive thinking may cause anxiety when people are constantly worrying about making mistakes. But this fear of failure makes the *Yijing* unique because it helps readers to achieve security in an unsafe world.

To be vigilant, Wang Bi finds special meaning in *Gu*, *Daguo*, *Kui* and *Jian*. Wang Bi does not see *Gu* as a hexagram about disease. Instead, following the *Xugua*, he reads *gu* 蠱 as *shi* 事 (event), turning the hexagram into “a time when

³⁴ This is the translation of Wilhelm and Baynes. See *I Ching*, 280. The original *Xici* statements go as follows: 天尊地卑，乾坤定矣。卑高以陳，貴賤位矣。動靜有常，剛柔斷矣。方以類聚，物以群分。

³⁵ This is the translation of Wilhelm and Baynes (with slight modification). See *I Ching*, 352–353. The original *Xici* statements go as follows: 《易》之興也，其當殷之世，周之盛德邪，當文王與紂之事邪。是故其辭危。危者使平，易者是傾。

there are problems that await someone capable of dealing with them” (*you shi er dai neng zhi shi ye* 有事而待能之時也).³⁶ An advantage of this reading is that it is easy to explain the different forms of *gu* discussed in the hexagram, such as “father’s *gu*” (*fu zhi gu* 父之蠱) and “mother’s *gu*” (*mu zhi gu* 母之蠱). When *gu* is taken to mean “event,” these different references to *gu* become different strategies for helping one’s parents in solving their problems, such as “managing father’s events” (*gan fu zhi gu* 幹父之蠱), “managing mother’s events” (*gan mu zhi gu* 幹母之蠱), and “going easy when managing father’s events” (*yu fu zhi gu* 裕父之蠱). For this reason, Wang Bi reads the hexagram as completely positive. He concludes that since everything is in proper order (*wu yi yue sui* 物已說[悅]隨), one can take action when the opportunity arrives.³⁷

Similarly, Wang Bi sees *Daguo* as giving advice for taking proper action at the appropriate time. For him, *Daguo* does not mean “a great error” as the two sinographs 大過 may suggest; rather, it means that “[i]t is only with majority [greatness] that one can attain superiority” (*da zhe nai neng guo ye* 大者乃能過也).³⁸ According to Wang, the basis of this reading comes from the line statements of the second and the fifth lines. In both line statements, there are references to a rotten willow tree (*ku yang* 枯楊) regaining life. In the second line, the willow tree is getting new leaves (*sheng ti* 生稊); in the fifth line, the willow tree is growing flowers (*sheng hua* 生華). In the line statements, these occasions of abnormal rebirth are compared to an uncommon pairing of a male and a female. In the second line, the birth of leaves is said to be equivalent to an old man marrying a young woman (*lao fu de qi nu qi* 老夫得其女妻); in the fifth line, the flower blossom is said to be equivalent to an old woman marrying a young man (*lao fu de qi shi fu* 老婦得其士夫). For Wang Bi, both the abnormal birth and the unorthodox pairing convey the same message. They underscore the need for taking drastic action to address a dire situation.³⁹

In interpreting *Kui* and *Jian*, Wang Bi employs a slightly different strategy. At the beginning of his commentary, he admits that the two hexagrams are “dangerous” and “problematic,” as the *Xugua* suggests. But in the rest of his commentary, he identifies ways that one can turn these difficult situations into opportunities for advancement. In *Kui*, for instance, he acknowledges that the hexagram is troubled by discord due to “two women of opposing views being placed in the same room” (*er nu tong shi, qi zhi bu tong* 二女同室, 其志不同). But he asks readers to pay

³⁶ Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 250. The original statement appears in Wang Bi, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi* 王弼集校釋 (An annotated and redacted version of the collected work of Wang Bi), annotated by Lou Yulie 樓宇烈 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 308.

³⁷ Wang Bi expressed this view in interpreting the *Tuan* 象 statement of the hexagram. He writes: 物已說隨, 則待夫作制以定其事也。See Wang Bi ji jiaoshi, 308. For a complete translation of Wang Bi’s commentary to *Gu*, see Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 248–253.

³⁸ Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 311. The original line appears in Wang Bi, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 356.

³⁹ Wang Bi expresses this view clearly in his commentary on the *Tuan* 象 statement of the hexagrams. He says: 危而弗持, 則將安用, 故往乃亨。是君子有為之時也。For a translation of Wang Bi’s commentary to *Daguo* see Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 311–337. For the original commentary, see Wang Bi ji jiaoshi, 357.

close attention to the *Tuan* 象 commentary where three virtues (*san de* 三德) are mentioned: clarity, caution, and courage. He argues that if one practices these three virtues, one will find a peaceful solution to this contentious situation.⁴⁰

Similarly, in a dangerous situation like *Jian*, Wang Bi sees the possibility of growth. He asks readers to be fully aware of the cause of the difficulty. But he urges them not to be frustrated; instead, they should look for resources that will help them overcome the difficulty. Particularly, he asks readers to take note of the six lines of *Jian* ䷗, which form two perfect pairs between the *yin* second line and the *yang* fifth line, and the *yang* third line and the *yin* top line. Wang believes that the two perfect pairs will create opportunities to resolve problems.⁴¹

By stressing human agency and activism in his reading of hexagrams, Wang Bi sees the *Yijing* as a series of metaphors. If indeed human beings have to constantly find the optimum balance between the demands of their surroundings and their own needs, then the purpose of studying the *Yijing* is to expand one's horizons so as to be at ease with changes. As such, reading the *Yijing* becomes an occasion to develop a mental picture of one's surroundings, such that one finds the opportunities and limitations in any given situation. As metaphors, hexagrams and hexagram lines serve different functions. While a hexagram connotes a field of action with six participants, the six hexagram lines stand for the six players in that field of action. Symbolizing the whole, a hexagram represents the complex web of relationships governing the actions and interactions of the six players. Symbolizing the parts, hexagram lines represent what the six players can or cannot do to advance their interests. Hence, in reading the 64 hexagrams and the 384 hexagram lines, *Yijing* readers are constantly reminded that every aspect of human life, great or small, is governed by the part-whole relationship, and that the key to one's success is finding out the nature of the part-whole relationship in each situation—be it in family, society, or a solitary quest for spiritual communion with nature.

One may argue that Wang Bi's reading of hexagrams limits the *Yijing* to concrete human affairs. Unlike Yu Fan, Wang Bi was not interested in cosmology. But in seeing hexagrams as pointers revealing the complexity of human life, Wang Bi refused to turn the *Yijing* into a copious system of signs to document the multifarious changes in the universe. To him, the Han scholars' attempt is a futile one because they do not accept the basic tenet of the *Yijing*—the limits of human knowledge.⁴²

⁴⁰ Wang Bi, *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 405. Regarding the "three virtues," Wang Bi draws from the *Tuan* statements which say: 說 [悅] 而麗乎明, 柔進而上行, 得中耳應乎剛。For a translation of Wang Bi's commentary to *Kui*, see Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 368–374.

⁴¹ Wang Bi expresses this view in his commentary on the *Tuan* statement of the hexagram. He says: 爻皆當位, 各履其正, 居難履正, 正邦之道也。See *Wang Bi ji jiaoshi*, 411. For a translation of Wang Bi's commentary to *Jian*, see Richard John Lynn, *The Classic of Changes*, 375–380.

⁴² I further develop this argument in my chapter "The Ontology of Change: Wang Bi's Interpretation of the *Yijing*," in *Dao Companion to Neo-Daoism*, edited by David Chai (Dordrecht: Springer, forthcoming).

Hexagrams as Tools of Divination

As a *Yijing* commentator, Zhu Xi was unique because he regarded the sixty-four hexagrams as the “original version” (*guben* 古本) of the *Yijing*. Seemingly conventional (especially after we see how Yu Fan read the hexagrams), what Zhu Xi suggested was in fact revolutionary in his time, when the majority of his peers had adopted Wang Bi’s style of interpretation. To make his point, Zhu Xi created two separate categories in his commentary to the *Yijing*, the *Zhouyi benyi* 周易本義 (The original meaning of the *Changes* of the Zhou dynasty). One category was “the classic” (*jing* 經), which covered the sixty-four hexagrams; the other was “the commentarial materials” (*zhuan* 傳), which included the Ten Wings. With these two categories, Zhu made clear that the Ten Wings were at best supplementary materials in reading the *Yijing*.⁴³

Underlying this separation of classic and commentarial materials was a different interpretation of the history of the *Yijing* text. 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. On this score, Zhu Xi followed in the footsteps of the Eastern Han *Yijing* commentators (such as Yu Fan). Zhu Xi argued that the depiction of cosmic transformation in the hexagrams—started 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 transformations 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.⁴⁴ Therefore, Zhu Xi repeatedly asked his students “to separate Confucius’s *Yijing* from King Wen’s *Yijing*, and separate King Wen’s *Yijing* from Fu Xi’s *Yijing*.”⁴⁵

By privileging Fu Xi’s hexagrams over the supposedly Confucian Ten Wings, Zhu Xi wanted to achieve two goals. First, he underscored the importance of divination as a method of self-cultivation, viewing the hexagrams as visual depictions of the constant changes in one’s life. For him, divination is not a superstitious act of asking guidance from a supernatural power. Rather, it is an enriching experience of encountering the unknown and the unfathomable. In the process of divination, one faces the multiple forces that shape human life, and thereby becomes aware of the opportunities and resources for improving one’s situation. As Joseph Adler observes, divination was “a way of learning” for Zhu Xi because it helped learners to “respond to incipient change, both in external events

⁴³ 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, *Yixue zhexue shi*, 416–437; Liao Mingchun 廖明春, Kang Xuewei 康学伟, and Liang Weixian 良韦弦, *Zhouyi yanjiu shi* 周易研究史 [A history of *Yijing* studies] (Changsha: Hunan Chubanshe, 1991), 290–294.

⁴⁴ Dong Kai 董楷, “Zhu zi yi gangling” 朱子易綱領, *Zhouyi zhuanyi fulu* 周易傳義附錄 [Added comments to the Combined Cheng Yi’s and Zhu Xi’s Commentaries to *Changes*] (Taipei: Yinyin Wenguanke Siku Quanshu, 1983–1986), *juanshou* 卷首: 7a–10a.

⁴⁵ See Dong Kai, “Zhu zi yi gangling,” *Zhouyi zhuanyi fulu, juanshou*: 20a.

and in the mind.”⁴⁶

Second, by focusing on the visual imagery of the hexagrams, Zhu Xi saw the *Yijing* as significantly different from other Confucian classics. Instead of being limited to kings, nobles, and government officials, the *Yijing* addressed a broader audience who, literate or illiterate, were concerned with uncertainty and the opportunity of change.⁴⁷ For him, the hexagram images are meant to reach all walks of life, regardless of social station, educational background, and command of written language. To show the importance of understanding the *Yijing* visually, he attached nine diagrams to his commentary.⁴⁸ In these diagrams (some of which were developed by Shao Yong 邵雍, 1011–77), Zhu Xi explained how the trigrams and hexagrams are interrelated as symbols of *yin* and *yang*. In addition, he wrote five treatises reiterating the two goals of reading the *Yijing*: understanding the visual images of hexagrams and using divination as a tool for embracing change. To further elaborate on the latter point, he compiled a set of rituals for performing divination. He specified detailed procedures for creating a spiritual environment and using yarrow stalks in divination.⁴⁹

To highlight the importance of divination, Zhu Xi made special efforts to clarify what each hexagram means to “a diviner” (*zhanzhe* 占者). He assumed that the diviner would have performed divination based on the rituals prescribed in his treatise, “Rituals of Divination” (*Shiyi* 筮儀), found at the beginning of his commentary. After locating a hexagram from casting yarrow stalks, the diviner proceeded to look for guidance by reading the hexagram, line by line.

In *Gu*, *Gui*, and *Jian*, in particular,⁵⁰ Zhu Xi showed an unbounded optimism about the stable structure of the universe similar to Yu Fan’s. At the same time, he also exhibited an acute sensitivity to danger and degeneration that characterized Wang Bi’s view of proactive planning. Combining a strong belief in structure with a deep fear of losing control, Zhu Xi was more willing to accept contingency and serendipity in everyday life. In *Gu*, for instance, Zhu Xi underscores the formidable challenge facing the diviner. Although he takes *gu* 蠱 to mean *shi* 事 (event), as the *Xugua* authors suggest, he asks the diviner to find out why “something has

⁴⁶ Joseph A. Adler, “Chu Hsi and Divination,” in Kidder Smith, et al., *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 191–192.

⁴⁷ Joseph A. Adler, *Introduction to the Study of the Classic of Change (I-hseuh ch’i-meng)* (Provo, Utah: Global Scholarly Publications, 2002), i–xxv. See also Adler’s chapter in Kidder Smith, et al., *Sung Uses of the I Ching*, 177–188.

⁴⁸ The nine diagrams are: The [Yellow] River Diagram, the Luo [River] Document, the Sequence 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.

⁴⁹ To emphasize the importance of divination as a method of moral cultivation, Zhu Xi’s five treatises and the manual of divination were placed at the beginning of *Zhouyi benyi* 周易本義. They continued to be placed at the beginning of Cheng Yi’s and Zhu Xi’s combined commentaries in the Ming and Qing periods.

⁵⁰ I do not include *Daguo* because Zhu Xi’s interpretation is the same as Wang Bi’s.

to be done” (*you shi* 有事).⁵¹ Implicitly linking *gu* 蠱 to a bowl of worms, Zhu Xi reminds the diviner that when something has to be fixed, it implies that something must have been “totally rotten” (*huai ji* 壞極) or that there has been a long period of “negligence” (*ji bi* 積弊).⁵² To make his point, Zhu Xi draws attention to the suggested actions mentioned in the line statements: “fixing father’s problems” (*gan fu zhi gu* 幹父之蠱), “fixing mother’s problems” (*gan mu zhi gu* 幹母之蠱), and “going easy when fixing father’s problems” (*yu fu zhi gu* 裕父之蠱). He argues that since the problems are caused by parents, the problems must be deeply rooted. Despite the severity of the problems, however, Zhu Xi is optimistic that the diviner will find a solution because the problems are caused by someone close to him. If the diviner follows the traces carefully, he will find out the causes. More importantly, as “the son of the family,” the diviner has the legitimacy and resources to resolve the problems, even though they are deep-rooted and complicated. Although in the commentary Zhu Xi does not give specific advice for fixing the problems, he uses the hexagram to remind readers of how badly people mismanage their lives.⁵³

In *Kui*, Zhu Xi adopts a different strategy to show the complexity of everyday life. Similar to Wang Bi, Zhu Xi sees the discordance in *Kui* as the result of two strong-willed women being placed in the same room, arguing and fighting all day long. In this highly tense situation, Zhu Xi advises the diviner to avoid developing any grand plan that will further aggravate the tension. Instead, the diviner should focus on “small projects” (*xiaoshi* 小事) that will keep the diviner occupied without adding more trouble. Sounding as though he has given up on *Kui*, Zhu Xi explains why developing small projects is not only safe but also “auspicious” (*ji* 吉). He writes,

From the perspective of the structure of the hexagram, its inner trigram is *dui* [☱] and its outer trigram is *li* [☲]. From the perspective of hexagram change, *Kui* [☱] comes from *Li* [☲ #30] with the *yin* second line moving up to the third position. The hexagram also comes from *Zhongfu* [☱ #61] with the *yin* fourth line moving up to the fifth position. Additionally, the hexagram comes from *Jiaren* [☱ #37] with both movements of lines [as found in *Li* and *Zhongfu*]. In terms of the line-up of the six lines of the hexagram, the *yin* fifth line occupies the central position and responds to the *yang* second line. Thus, the diviner should avoid making grand plans and focus on achieving auspiciousness in small projects.⁵⁴

In demonstrating various possibilities for reading the hexagram lines of *Kui*, Zhu Xi shows that there are many ways to find resources to break the deadlock of the contentious situation. Seemingly harkening back to the Eastern Han style

⁵¹ Zhu Xi, *Zhouyi benyi* 周易本義 [The original meaning of the *Changes* of the Zhou dynasty] (Taipei: Wuzhou Chubanshe, reprint, 1971), *Shangjing* 上經, *Juan* 1: 39b. (Similar to the *Zhouyi jijie*, one page in *Zhouyi benyi* is printed on two sides, hence A stands for side one and B stands for side two.)

⁵² Zhu Xi, *Zhouyi benyi*, *shangjing*, *juan* 1: 39b.

⁵³ Zhu Xi, *Zhouyi benyi*, *shangjing*, *juan* 1: 40a.

⁵⁴ Zhu Xi, *Zhouyi benyi*, *xiajing* 下經, *juan* 2: 12a. The original reads: 然以卦德言之，內說 [悅] 而外明。以卦變言之，則自 [離] 來者，柔進居之。自 [中孚] 來者，柔進居五。自 [家人] 來者，兼之。以卦體言之，則六五得中而下應九二之剛。是以其占不可大事，而小事尚有吉之道也。

of reading hexagrams graphically, Zhu Xi stresses the stability and structure of the cosmic/human order. He also highlights the opportunity of opening up new possibility.

This forward-looking attitude is also found in Zhu Xi's commentary on *Jian*. In *Jian*, Zhu Xi sees a situation where one has to cancel a trip due to obstacles. His reading is based on the character *jian* 蹇 which means a person having difficulty walking because of a leg problem (*zu bu neng jin, xing zhi nan ye* 足不能進, 行之難也).⁵⁵ But in his commentary, Zhu Xi does not focus on the cancellation of the trip; rather, he concentrates on what the diviner should do when he gains spare time. Zhu Xi's advice is that the diviner should spend time making plans for the future. To succeed, Zhu Xi argues, the diviner should be able "to stop and yet not become completely idle" (*neng zhi er you bu ke zhong yu zhi* 能止而又不可終於止).⁵⁶

Coming to Terms with Contingency and Serendipity

As seen above, the three commentators show a range of possibilities for interpreting hexagrams that depict anomalies and strange events. As mentioned earlier, the question about anomalies first appeared in the divination records and later became a perplexing issue in the Ten Wings. But the authors of the Ten Wings were not able to provide one definitive answer to the question. On the contrary, they complicated the matter by offering a variety of answers, including affirming the structure of the universe over contingency (the *Xugua*) and acknowledging the coexistence of structure and anomaly (the *Xici*). This divergence of views in the Ten Wings increased its "hermeneutical openness" to commentators, giving them more liberty to interpret the text.

As a result, in the commentaries of Yu Fan, Wang Bi, and Zhu Xi, we see that the same hexagram can be rendered differently based on textual evidence. If textual evidence is not sufficient, a commentator can link the hexagram to other hexagrams, thereby creating additional possibilities for interpreting the hexagram. Of the three commentators, Yu Fan was the master of the technique of externalization. In focusing on the graphic images, Yu Fan avoided the question of anomaly altogether. For him, nothing is out of order (even hexagram *Gu*) because everything is a symbol of the unfolding of the cosmic/human structure, including words that ostensibly connote danger, degeneration, and disorder.

In comparison, Wang Bi was more willing to confront anomaly. In his commentary, he transformed the sixty-four hexagrams into specific situations wherein readers can find inspiration for their lives. By focusing on what is attainable, Wang Bi acknowledged the limits of human knowledge. To him, what one can do is address the problems of a specific condition. Ironically, by limiting the scope of his discussion, Wang Bi gave himself more room to discuss contingency and serendipity. Following the advice of the *Xici* author, he saw contingency and serendipity as part of the human condition.

Of the three commentators, Zhu Xi was most open to anomaly. By returning

⁵⁵ Zhu Xi, *Zhouyi benyi, xiajing*, juan 2: 13b.

⁵⁶ Zhu Xi, *Zhouyi benyi, xiajing*, juan 2: 14a.

the *Yijing* to its graphic roots, he highlighted the importance of divination in reading the sixty-four hexagrams. On the one hand, his emphasis on divination was an expansion of Wang Bi's quest for ascertaining one's options in a volatile world. On the other hand, it helped to soften Wang Bi's view by focusing attention on contingency, happenstance, serendipity, and—most importantly—disaster. An example of his sensitivity to contingency and serendipity is his reading of *Gu* 蠱. It is by far the most honest attempt at ascertaining the appalling consequences of something rotten—whether it is rotten food or a rotten marriage. Even though Zhu Xi was reluctant to investigate the causes of anomalies and strange events, he acknowledged that disease, deformation, and degeneration are undoubtedly part of human existence that must be dealt with honestly and openly.

Despite their differences, the three commentators used the *Yijing* to contemplate contingency and serendipity. They might disagree on how to cope with the “fear and worry” of human existence, but they agreed that the *Yijing* is particularly helpful when its readers are at a critical juncture in their lives. At such moments, the readers feel vulnerable and fragile, frustrated and perplexed. Yet, in the hexagram images and the oracles, the readers can find comfort and assurance. The *Yijing* reminds them that they are part of the great flow of the universe. More importantly, they are told that the key point in this great flow of the universe is not when and how they enter the great flow, but what they become and what they achieve after joining it.

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