The *Book of Changes*

A Modern Adaptation & Interpretation

Paul G. Fendos, Jr.

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Foreword

I have known Dr. Paul Fendos over thirty years, dating back to the Spring semester of 1981 when he was a graduate student in East Asian Languages & Literature at the University of Wisconsin – Madison and an enrollee in a course I was teaching at that time—Chinese Philosophical Texts. He had recently returned from East Asia, having finished a period of study at the Yonsei University Graduate Department of Chinese in the Republic of Korea. Because his main interests lay in the classical period of Chinese literature, specifically philosophical prose, he chose me as his graduate advisor and a long period as my student, colleague, and friend began.

From the beginning, it was clear that Paul had a special interest in the *Book of Changes*. The central philosophical work of the Chinese tradition, I remember well the many discussions we had on it in my office. These discussions laid the foundation for his main area of graduate research, research which culminated in May of 1988 with the completion of his dissertation, *Fei Chih's Place in the Development of I-ching Studies*, for which he received a Doctorate of Philosophy. It comes as no surprise to me, then, that Paul continued to be engaged in studying the *Book of Changes* after graduation, or that it led to him writing this new work, *The Book of Changes: A Modern Adaptation and Interpretation*.

The Book of Changes: A Modern Adaptation and Interpretation takes a novel approach to understanding the *Book of Changes*. Gone is the emphasis on divination and the correlative *Yin/Yang* system that served as its foundations during the last 2,000 years. In its place are a set of sixty-four newly fashioned patterns of change that are the core of what Paul refers to as a modern Chinese philosophy of change. The book sets out to give an account of what this philosophy of change is in three stages: first by setting forth a clear timeline explaining the origins and early development of the *Book of Changes* (chapters 2-3); then by fashioning what Paul refers to as metaphorical interpretations of the line texts in the *Zhouyi* (or Basic Text) portion of the *Book of Changes* (chapter 4); and finally by showing how the patterns of change embodied in those interpretations might be used in better understanding the dynamics of everyday situations and circumstances and the problems they often engender (chapter 5).

The timeline on the origins and early development of the *Book of Changes*, something I believe will be especially useful and interesting to readers without a basic understanding of the background of the *Book of Changes*, is unlike

many such timelines because it takes some clear positions on important issues that might not be attempted by others. A good example of this centers on the question of when hexagrams in the *Book of Changes* transformed from numeric diagrams to diagrams written using *Yin*/*Yang* lines. Extrapolating on archaeological evidence from the Zhou Dynasty, Paul argues that this change occurred sometime during the Eastern Zhou, perhaps as late as the 4th century BCE—a unique if not bold assertion, one which upends a common belief in the more ancient origins of the *Yin*/*Yang* and their place in the *Book of Changes*.

However, the metaphorical interpretations of the *Zhouyi* line texts are the centerpiece of this work and the part that will probably most interest students and scholars of the *Book of Changes*. Drawing on primary source materials that span the length of Chinese history, along with more recent modernist ideas and theories on the meanings of the line texts, Paul has fashioned engaging and documented explanations of these materials, explanations that are easily adapted to different situations and circumstances—four examples of which he provides.

During a period when knowledge of China and things Chinese is in increasingly greater demand, it is clear *The Book of Changes: A Modern Adaptation and Interpretation* is an attempt to instill new life into an ancient Chinese text. I believe Paul has succeeded admirably in doing so, in a book that is both stimulating and enjoyable to read.

Tsai-fa Cheng 鄭再發
Emeritus Professor
University of Wisconsin – Madison

To

Cheng Tsai-fa

鄭再發

Special thanks go out to a number of people for their help with this book. For taking the time to read and comment on my manuscript – Professor Edward Shaughnessy (University of Chicago), Emeritus Professor Kidder Smith (Bowdoin College), Emeritus Professor Yang Lee (Gyeongsang National University [ROK]/Haskins Laboratories, Yale University), and Dr. Ronald Roberts (retired, University of San Francisco). For facilitating the publication of this book – Carolina Sanchez, Argiris Legatos, and Javier Rodriguez, all of Vernon Press. And for their comments and suggestions on preparing my manuscript – Dr. Catherine Marie Pulling (Normandale Community College) and Dr. Justin Eric Fendos (Fudan University [PRC]).

The hexagrams represent situations, the lines the stages of these situations. Separated into three, then doubled, they suffice to include the many patterns. Extended and expanded on, drawing analogies and increasing, all possible things in the world are encompassed in them.

夫卦者，事也。爻者，事之時也。分三而又兩之，足以包括衆理。引而伸之，觸類而長之，天下之能事畢矣。

Cheng Yi's (1033-1107) Commentary on the Changes

Hexagram 3, *Zhūn*, Image commentary to Line 6

易程傳1. 22b, 屯卦上六象

1.
Introduction

Joseph Needham once referred to Richard Wilhelm's translation[1] of the *Book of Changes* as a "sinological maze." He was, of course, talking about the organizational structure of Wilhelm's translation and how "unnecessarily complicated and repetitive" he thought it was.[2] But he could just as easily have been talking about the content of the *Book of Changes*. In any form, but especially in translations meant for the non-specialist Western reader, the *Book of Changes* is an enigma. Full of cryptic textual material and burdened by a system of correlative associations connecting hexagrams and their constituent trigrams and lines with a variety of natural or social phenomena and imagery, this work is of such complexity and difficulty that many Western readers, unable to really understand it, simply see and use it as a divinatory text. A manual for fortune telling, if you would, something that lies open on the living room floor as interested readers sit and toss coins or count out yarrow stalks[3] in their search for answers to pressing questions.

As will be shown, the *Book of Changes* did indeed originate in ancient China as a divinatory text. And throughout its history, the vast majority of Chinese scholars of this work, recognized and otherwise, espoused its divinatory function. Nevertheless, the *Book of Changes* today is not seen just as a manual for fortune telling. Its origins can be traced back almost three millennia. For scholars and students of Chinese civilization, therefore, it serves as a window to the past, a repository of culture and customs waiting to be discovered. Generally considered the central classic of Chinese philosophical literature, it also functions as a door to better understanding traditional Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism and Daoism, the disparate systems of thought which are reflected in the three most prominent traditional Chinese commentaries of this text that have survived to this day.[4]

Yet, in spite of its age, the *Book of Changes* is far from being a mere relic of years gone by, and much more than simply a source on China's past. In fact, to the present-day readers inhabiting our rapidly shrinking world, a world in which interactions with others can increasingly impact if not directly determine the advantages or disadvantages that are to be found in everyday situations or circumstances, the *Book of Changes* is as useful as—if not more useful than—it has ever been, especially if one is looking for the kind of knowledge

or wisdom that will contribute to deciding how best to respond to and adapt to change. It is from just such a vantage point that this book looks at the *Book of Changes*, aiming, along the way, to introduce to the reader a philosophy of change, albeit one that takes a somewhat different approach to understanding and responding to such change than might normally be associated with this ancient work.

Much has already been written about the *Book of Changes*. Countless Chinese commentaries on this work have been authored since it became a focus of the Chinese mind. Like Laozi's (fl. 6th cent. BCE) *Daodejing* and the *Analects* of Confucius (551-479 BCE), it is a text that many Chinese can either quote from or know something about. Scholarly theses aiming to clarify or expound on some aspect of *Book of Changes* studies, as well as translations or interpretations of the text itself, can also be found in many different non-Chinese languages. So, whether one looks at a list of the most popular or the most influential works ever written, this classical Chinese text is sure to be somewhere in the mix. One might, of course, quite naturally then ask what another book can add to all that has already been written. The answer is a simple one. China is again on the rise and China and things Chinese have become the object of more and closer examination. Consequently, now seems the best of times to look at the *Book of Changes* from the different perspective that this book offers.

One final matter, this on the use of the word "modern" in the title of this book. In their early dealings with China, especially during the 19th century, Western countries generally viewed China and its culture as backwards, if not semi-barbarous or heathen, and in need of major reform (even proselytization). Clearly, this was part of a rationalization to subjugate China and incorporate it into their expanding empires. These countries and the people who represented them brought to China an attitude of arrogance and self-righteousness, an obstinate smugness perhaps exceeded only by China's overconfidence in its own moral and cultural preeminence. Ultimately, steam-powered Western gunships settled the contest, and China was dragged along unwillingly by the West in an attempt to create a country more in the West's own image. During this era of imperialism, the West equated its own culture and much that was associated with it to all that was desirable and good. This struggle for cultural hegemony stopped after the Revolution of 1949 when China closed its doors to the outside world. But it has only really been since 1978—when China began to implement new economic policies and slowly reopened those doors—that this condescending attitude of superiority among many Westerners has started to change.

In much of the argument surrounding this clash of cultures, the word "modern" has often been bandied around as if it was one of the defining character-

istics of Western superiority, its concomitant "lack" in China being the reason for China's own backwardness. In this book the term modern is used in a much more narrowly defined way, as reflecting a standard of rationality wherein the 'mysterious' (or 'mystical') numerological system on which *Book of Changes* divination is based is not seen as a reliable index or method of forecast for future events, and the *Book of Changes* itself is seen as something more than that manual of divination mentioned above. Such a standard precludes the possibility of explaining *Book of Changes* divination—yarrow stalk counting or coin tossing—even within the context of "chance hits" and the principle of "synchronicity" that is sometimes used to explain them,[5] i.e., "[as] coincidences of events in space and time…[as] something more than mere chance…[but states of] peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer or observers [interpreting them]."[6] Nevertheless, this more reasoned approach does contribute to bringing the *Book of Changes* back to life as something relevant to our time and day, not as a reliable barometer of future events, but as a guide of sorts, a semi-codified system that helps one understand change in one's life, even if that system is centered around the limited number of models or patterns for such change that will be introduced in this book.

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