

The Psychology of Divination in Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract

Yan Guocai 燕國材, in his pioneering book titled *Xian Qin xinli sixiang yanjiu* 先秦心理思想研究 (Research on pre-Qin psychological thinking; 1980), asserts that premodern China never had what might be called a science of psychology (心理學). The Daoist scholar Harold Roth, responding in part to this claim, sees no need to confine the term “psychology” (which he defines as “theories of the nature and activity of the human mind”) to Western culture simply because the West happens to be where the word first came to be coined, but he maintains that a distinction should nonetheless be drawn between psychology and psychotherapy, and that, in his view, the latter had no premodern Chinese counterpart. (Roth 1991, 600) I disagree. I would like to argue that for more than two thousand years the Chinese had a highly developed science of psychotherapy, and it was known as divination (占卜, 卜筮, etc.). The most common (and often overlapping) mantic techniques of the Chinese (and other East Asian peoples) included consultation of the hallowed *Yijing* (易經 Classic of Changes), astrology 占星, fate-extrapolation 推命, numerology 數術, physiognomy 看相, geomancy 堪輿 (“siting”), weather prediction 占候, spirit-writing 扶乩, dream divination 占夢, analysis of written characters 拆字, the selection of auspicious days 擇日, and the drawing and interpreting of “spiritual sticks” (*qian* 籤).

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I. The Social Psychology of Chinese Divination

From at least the fourth century BCE, Chinese thinkers have grappled with issues related to the “heart/mind” (*xin* 心), which for the sake of simplicity I will refer to as the “mind.” For our purposes, the salient point is that early Daoists and early Confucians alike ascribed to the mind extraordinary powers, including the capacity not only to “foreknow” events (*xianzhi* 先知), but also to both understand and become one with the Way (Dao 道) of nature itself. The process of developing these capacities involved

cultivating one's *qi* 氣 (“vital energy”) and “vital essence” (*jing* 精), thus manifesting the mind's “spiritual capacities” (*shen* 神 or *lingshen* 靈神). “Spiritual essence” (*jingshen* 精神), was the concrete manifestation of spirit; it was what enabled the spirit to “interact with all the energetic systems of the human organism.” In the words of Harold Roth: “The numinous [i.e. spiritual] essence might be thought of as the interface between the sentient and insentient, or the psychological and physical. It is a blend of both aspects and thus appropriate for a world view that did not strongly value such boundaries.” (Roth 1991, 645-46)

By about 300 BCE at the latest, in other words, most Chinese thinkers accepted the general idea that the goal of human activity was to harmonize with the natural patterns of change in the universe. How these patterns might be detected and understood, and what one might do to achieve this harmony, differed among various schools and individual thinkers, but for most Chinese intellectuals divination--particularly consultation of the *Yijing*--offered the single most useful tool for understanding the cosmos and one's place in it.

For more than two thousand years thereafter, into the twentieth century, divination remained a mainstream cultural activity in China. Virtually everyone believed in the practice. The problem was not whether to believe in it, but whom to believe. In the words of a popular proverb: “Do not say that King Wen's hexagrams are ineffective; fear only that the fortune-teller's reading is untrue” (莫道文王卦不靈只怕先生斷不真) From an elite perspective, divination was much too important a matter to be left to professional fortune-tellers. Hence, their persistent criticism of the self-interest, venality and deceit of those who divined for profit.

But diviners had an extremely important role to play in traditional Chinese society. In my book *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers* (1991), and in a more recent study titled “Divination In Late Imperial China: New Light On Some Old Problems” (2008), I have tried to indicate some of the many ways that fortune-tellers served as psychologists in premodern times--and, I might add, to a significant extent today (see esp. Smith 1991, xii, 204, 206 ff. 232-33, 241-45, 265, 268-9, 345 n. 57 etc.). I have also tried to explain why divination has been so widespread and tenacious in China. (ibid, 265 ff.) The main reasons for its wide appeal and remarkable tenacity are:

1. Although divination always had a certain heterodox potential, it was not fundamentally a counter-cultural phenomenon. In fact, it remained an integral part of the most important state and domestic rituals, from official sacrifices to life-cycle ceremonies. Enjoying abundant classical sanction and a long history, Chinese mantic practices, in their richness and variety, followed the main contours of Chinese thought. Most forms of Qing divination were eclectic, “spiritual,” associational, tradition-bound, and highly moralistic. These qualities fit comfortably in a syncretic society whose dominant class esteemed ancient Confucian values, relied heavily on correlational logic, believed in a spiritual link between Heaven, Earth, and Man (which made divination possible, after all), and saw “knowing” as an activity in which “the rational operations of the intellect

were not sharply disconnected from what we [Westerners] would call intuition, imagination, illumination, ecstasy, aesthetic perception, ethical commitment, or sensuous experience.” This approach to epistemology received classical sanction in the notion of “meanings that lie beyond words” (*yanwai zhi yi* 言外之意). The “Great Commentary” of the *Yijing* cites Confucius as authority for the radical view that “words do not exhaust meanings” (*yan bu jin yi* 言不盡意).

2. Divination also had a visceral appeal, quite apart from the obvious aesthetics of geomancy. Even mundane mantic practices took place in comforting and familiar environments, either at home or in religious temples. Professional fortune-tellers, for their part, employed a colorful and universally resonant symbolism in conveying their often poetic messages.

3. Fortune-tellers invariably surrounded themselves with culturally familiar paraphernalia. Even the most rudimentary fortune-telling table on the street would be adorned with writing materials, books, and calligraphic inscriptions---the marks of scholarly refinement and moral cultivation. More elaborate settings in homes or divination parlors might boast religious icons or spirit tablets, as well as incense and candles, in the fashion of temples and shrines. Visual representations of cosmic power such as the *Taiji tu* and the eight trigrams, which often adorned divination handbooks, almanacs, and fortune-telling stalls, were also ubiquitous as decorative elements (and charms) in elite and commoner households alike.

4. The rituals of divination were satisfying and culturally familiar to all clients. Ceremonies such as the burning of incense, which invested divinatory procedures with an explicitly spiritual if not a magical aura, had a truly universal appeal. The use of writing by diviners not only enhanced their social prestige, but it also gave them cosmic leverage, since so many Chinese believed that written words had magical power.

5. The close link between divination and traditional Chinese medicine in the Qing period probably contributed to the tenacity of both. Much of *lingqian* (“spiritual stick”) divination revolved around illness and remedies for it (including prescriptions), and physiognomy overlapped considerably with the professional practice of physicians. Despite the great diversity of medical and mantic theory in late imperial times, doctors and diviners shared many of the same cosmological assumptions about systematic correspondence as well as demonology.

6. In late imperial China (into the 20th century), divination did not stand as starkly opposed to either “science” or religion as it did in Europe, especially after the seventeenth century. To be sure, Chinese scholars in the late imperial era were well aware of the expanding parameters of knowledge about the natural world, and of an increasing ability to predict accurately; but scientifically-minded individuals of the Qing period had neither a religious belief in “order” of the sort that inspired their European contemporaries nor did they hold the conviction that in time all phenomena would yield their ultimate secrets. The typical belief was that “natural processes wove a pattern of constant relations too subtle and too

multivariant to be understood completely by what we would call empirical investigation or mathematical analysis. Scientific explanation merely expressed, for finite and practical human purposes, partial and indirect views of that fabric.”

7. Divination thus passed often for science in late imperial China. Although the 18th century witnessed a burst of interest in mathematics, mathematical astronomy, and geography, stimulated in part by the Jesuit educational effort, astrology remained integral to the Chinese scientific tradition. The Jesuits themselves apparently practiced divination in the Imperial Bureau of Astronomy. New technologies for exploring the heavens brought valuable scientific knowledge to China, but they did not pose a significant challenge to traditional mantic methods--at least in part because the great number of invisible operators in Chinese astrology, such as “empty” stars or star-spirits, made astronomical falsification difficult.

8. The “spiritual” preoccupations of diviners did not necessarily preclude empirical investigation. It is true that experts in wind, rain, and cloud divination--like other types of Chinese fortune-tellers (and most of the rest of the Qing population)--believed in the influence of supernatural forces. But they were also close and insightful students of meteorology. Exponents of *qimen dunjia* and other numerological systems, although concerned primarily with cosmological calculations to determine auspicious times and locations, often studied military science as part of their training. Geomancers used mystical “compasses” to identify lucky sites and times for building and making repairs, but they also knew a great deal about land forms and hydraulic systems--information of value in public works as well as military affairs. In all, geomancy probably exerted a more profound influence on the physical environment, and the way the Chinese responded to it, than most other “natural sciences” of the time.

9. An especially significant reason for the prevalence and persistence of divination in Qing China was the multi-faceted social role it played.

A. In the first place, it contributed to social order by regulating the rituals and rhythms of daily life. Few devices were more powerful as mechanisms for structuring society than the stipulations regarding lucky and unlucky days in Chinese calendars and almanacs. In fact, private *tongshu* were sometimes proscribed precisely because they did not follow the official calendrical model closely enough, thus inviting confusion of the social order.

B. Secondly, Chinese fortune-tellers served as the functional equivalent of modern-day psychologists. As therapists and personal counsellors, they helped individuals in China to cope with their anxieties, whether inspired by bureaucratic problems, the examination system, or more mundane concerns. Divination clarified the source and nature of difficulties, alleviated doubt, and invested lives with longed-for meaning. It also

empowered people with a special kind of cosmic knowledge and perhaps endowed them with greater self-confidence.

C. Furthermore, the optimistic thrust of techniques such as *qian* divination and dream book interpretation provided hope in time of uncertainty and fear, as did geomancy, with its alluring promise of cosmic control. Exponents of fate extrapolation and physiognomy gave individuals a glimpse of their long term future, as well as concrete advice on how to contend with seemingly inescapable problems. Methods such as word analysis did the same for more immediate issues, while personal consultation of the *Yijing* offered ways of “resolving doubts” that emphasized introspection and personal initiative. Spirit-writing associations not only provided a sense of group identity outside the family, but also offered hope for individuals excluded from conventional routes to social and economic advancement. By various means, not all equally effective, divination in Qing China restored “value and significance to lives in crisis.”

10. But fortune-tellers were more than personal therapists. In a society such as China’s, where so many aspects of life and thought hinged on compromise and conciliation, and where intermediaries were essential to all forms of social intercourse, diviners proved to be cultural middlemen par excellence, mediating not only between the client and the cosmos, and between Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist versions of “reality,” but also between contending elements within their own local communities, from quarreling couples to feuding clans. Some relied primarily on their psychological skills and verbal ability to settle disputes. Others made use of their comparatively intimate knowledge of the personal histories and local connections of many community members. Still others, notably shamans, called upon supernatural authority to develop and maintain group consensus, thus bringing “order out of confusion.”

11. The special talents of diviners, from weather prediction and siting to the evaluation of personnel, made them valuable not only to Qing officials but also to the leaders of their own communities. Fortune-tellers helped to maintain the mechanisms of local defense and control, undertook famine relief, managed schools, and supervised public works projects. Some used their special talents to help neighbors find lost or stolen property, while others provided free advice and medical assistance to their local areas in times of crisis. These altruistic activities helped diviners to overcome the common stereotype of being devious and selfish, and brought them more fully into the mainstream of Chinese community life.

12. Finally, in attempting to account for the remarkable staying power of divination in China, we should bear in mind institutional factors.

A. For one, the Chinese religious establishment did not actively attempt to suppress divination in the fashion of the Christian Church in the West. Rather, Buddhist and Daoist temples and monasteries supported a wide

range of divinatory activity, undertaken by religious functionaries and professional fortune-tellers as well as lay persons. Furthermore, Chinese monks and priests did not have the institutional power to challenge long-standing mantic traditions, even if they had the will, for the Buddhist and Daoist establishment in China remained ever subordinate to the imperial Confucian state.

B. The Qing government, for its part, reinforced the inherited cosmology and sanctified orthodox mantic practices at all levels. Edicts and other official announcements constantly referred to auspicious and inauspicious dates, times, events and omens; the state calendar institutionalized divination empirewide by designating certain days as "appropriate" and "inappropriate" for various activities; and bureaucrats availed of divination in all kinds of civil and military situations. Without fully realizing it, the Qing government was as much in the grip of the future as it was of the past. For the emperor to dispense with divination would be to abandon his cosmological claim to kingship--an abdication of his role as mediator between Heaven and Earth.

In short, divination was a time-honored "ordering device" in premodern China for managing data and for making sense out of everyday experience. And even in today's China, certain mantic texts and practices—particularly those connected with the *Yijing*—continue to be esteemed in certain circles.

II. Chinese Divination in Comparative Perspective: The *Yijing* and Jungian Psychology

As is well known, a distinctive feature of Carl G. Jung's approach to psychology is his "dialogue" or "interaction" with various Asian philosophies and texts, including those associated with the thought systems known generally as "Buddhism" and "Taoism" [aka Daoism]). Jung was, in the words of Stanislav Grof, willing "to enter the realm of the paradoxical, mysterious, and ineffable [which] included . . . an open-minded attitude towards the great Eastern spiritual philosophies [and works such as] the *I Ching*." (Grof 1985, 190) Of course, as J. J. Clarke has discussed at length in *Jung and Eastern Thought* (1994), Jung has often been accused of using unreliable translations and thus of misunderstanding Asian thought, causing a number of Western critics to accuse him of "defending all kinds of superstitions and dubious metaphysical beliefs." But are such criticisms justified or even relevant?

I would like to argue that whatever the limitations of Jung's sources (and some of the translations he used were indeed flawed), his fundamental insight that "Eastern" ways of knowing have much to offer "Western" psychology in terms of both theory and practice, has an importance that goes well beyond the rather obvious need for a greater acceptance of philosophical diversity. Indeed, what an ever closer engagement with Asian philosophy reveals are a number of tools of understanding that enable a more substantial appreciation of the common ground of humanity, whether we call it the "collective unconscious" or simply "human nature." At the same time, this sort of engagement highlights important cultural differences. Clearly, in order to explore both the similarities

and the differences in human experience, cross-cultural cooperation and comparative studies of the sort encouraged by this conference are absolutely essential.

My particular interest is in the way that the Chinese classic known as the *Yijing* (aka *I Ching* or *Zhou Changes* [*Zhouyi* 周易]) can help to expand and perhaps clarify our understanding of certain fundamental human psychological processes, both conscious and unconscious. To be sure, in speaking of “free association,” Jung notes that “one can reach the center from any point of the compass, from Cyrillic letters to “meditations upon a crystal ball, a prayer wheel, or a modern painting, or even from casual conversation about some quite trivial event.” (Jung 1964, 26-27) But, as Jung himself recognized clearly, there is much to be said in favor of looking at Asian culture for instruments that yield insights into the human psyche.

The *Yijing* has long had an explicitly psychological dimension, not only as a divinatory instrument but also as a means of achieving self-awareness and self-understanding. In the words of one Chinese commentator, Tu Yongfeng 屠用豐: “The *Changes* is a book that teaches people to be fearful and to cultivate introspection.” According to another, He Yufu 何毓福, “The *Changes* is the mirror of men’s minds.” (Smith 2008b, 2 and 211)

The basic text of the *Yijing* consists of sixty-four six-line symbols known as hexagrams (*gua* 卦), each comprised of two primary three-line trigrams (also *gua* 卦). Every hexagram has a name 卦名 (*guaming*), which refers to a physical object, an activity, a state, a situation, a quality, an emotion, or a relationship; thus: Ding 鼎 (“Cauldron”), Dun 遯 (“Retreat”), Meng 蒙 (“Youthful Ignorance”), Yu 豫 (“Enthusiasm”), Song 訟 (“Conflict”), Tongren 同人 (“Human Fellowship”) and so forth. In addition, each hexagram possesses a short, cryptic description of several words, called a “judgment” (*tuan* 彖 or *guaci* 卦辭), as well as a brief written interpretation for each line of each hexagram (*yaoci* 爻辭). Usually the lines describe a developmental process, from the bottom up, although they can also refer to relative social positions. The images (*xiang* 象) associated with these hexagrams, trigrams and lines offer a vast symbolic repertoire, a language partially beyond words, for use in interpreting all kinds of human experience.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, to find that the *Yijing* was one of the most important psychological instruments employed by Jung. He used it in his practice and wrote a forward to the most influential translation of the book by Richard Wilhelm. (Wilhelm 1967) In this preliminary essay, Jung expressly ignored the “spiritual” and metaphysical assumptions of the work--namely that (1) it duplicates relationships and processes at work in the realm of Heaven-and-Earth; (2) these relationships and processes are knowable, since the mind of Heaven and the mind of Man are considered one (天人合一); and (3) as a reflection of the cosmic Way (*Dao*), the *Yijing* provides guidance for proper conduct in the present and for the future. Rather, he used his own actual consultation of the *Changes* to illustrate the way that the document can provide insight into one's “unexpressed state of doubt.”

Jung believed that the *Yijing* both embodied and expressed two of his most basic ideas: archetypes and synchronicity. Jungian archetypes are often described as instinctive, universal and unconscious psychological forces or patterns that shape the way human beings think and act. These archetypes are expressed in symbols (archetypal images), which appear in our art, our myths, our literature and our dreams. Although relatively few fundamental patterns exist at the unconscious level, a myriad of specific images may point to them. Thus, for example, the archetype of the Shadow (i.e. the dark and threatening side of human experience) might become manifest in tales about bandits, orges, and other enemies, or in stories about the wilderness. To understand ourselves, then, it is necessary to understand the role that archetypes and archetypal images play in our lives, and in order to do this, we must bring the unconscious to consciousness, so to speak--to understand that the object of every perception is inextricably bound to the “psychic condition” of the observer. Clearly the *Yijing* was, in Jung’s view, an important symbolic medium by which this might be done.

Jung’s conception of “synchronicity” appears explicitly and prominently in his foreword to Wilhelm’s translation of the *Changes*. He defines it as a “coincidence of events in space and time . . . [that means] something more than mere chance, namely, a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer or observers.” From Jung’s perspective, nothing ever occurs by chance; every event and circumstance has a meaning that expresses “transpersonal patterns and powers.” In the words of M.D. Faber, the *Yijing* interested Jung precisely because

it was based on psychological projection, on the participant’s capacity to find in a specific passage a link to his own idiosyncratic preoccupations. It was not mere chance that made the book work; it was the user’s creative ability, his flare for reading his own personal agenda into the cryptic message. Here was an obvious link to synchronicity: a coincidence, an accident, brings to the surface a connection one could not quite see on his own. (Faber 1998, 21)

Jung provides a simple example of a synchronic opportunity: “If a handful of matches is thrown to the floor, they form the pattern characteristic of that moment. But such an obvious truth as this reveals its meaningful nature only if it is possible to read the pattern and to verify its interpretation, partly by the observer’s knowledge of the subjective and objective situation, [and] partly by the character of subsequent events.” (Faber 1998, 15) What Jung clearly appreciates about the *Yijing* is that it provides a means by which a person’s subjective concerns can be connected with the symbolism of the hexagrams. As his example indicates, any object or configuration of things can be read symbolically, but the *Changes* offers a particularly rich set of images for contemplation.

In the end, Jung’s attitude was that the value of the *Yijing* rested in its pragmatic utility. In his words:

The *I Ching* insists upon self-knowledge throughout. The method by which this is to be achieved is open to every kind of misuse, and is therefore not for the frivolous-minded and immature; nor is it for intellectualists and rationalists. It is

appropriate only for thoughtful and reflective people who like to think about what they do and what happens to them--a predilection not to be confused with the morbid brooding of the hypochondriac. As I have indicated above, I have no answer to the multitude of problems that arise when we seek to harmonize the oracle of the *I Ching* with our accepted scientific canons. But needless to say, nothing “occult” is to be inferred. My position in these matters is pragmatic, and the great disciplines that have taught me the practical usefulness of this viewpoint are psychotherapy and medical psychology. (Wilhelm 1967, xxxiv)

A 1994 translation of the *Changes* by Rudolf Ritsema and Stephen Karcher represents an effort to reconcile a traditional “Chinese” understanding of the text with an explicitly Jungian perspective. “This book,” they write,

is an attempt to present the oracular core of the *I Ching* as a psychological tool. The purpose is to recover oracular language and the use of divination as a connection between the individual and the unseen--the world of images [*xiang*] described by myth, dream, shamanic journey or mystery cult The fundamental concern is to give people the means to live and choose in a meaningful way by making them aware of its imaginative value. For the *I Ching* fills an important gap in the modern approach to the psyche. Its oracular texts connect the study of what C.G. Jung called the archetypes, and what the ancient world called the Gods, directly to individual experience. The present translation is an attempt to go behind historical, philological and philosophical analysis to revive the divinatory core, the psychological root of the book as a living practice. (Ritsema and Karcher 1994, 15)

In short, Ritsema and Karcher seek to provide a rendering of the *Yijing* that is based on a comparatively recent redaction of the text (the Qing dynasty compilation known as the *Zhouyi zhezhong* 周易折中, but theoretically not limited to the commentaries that this particular version imposes upon it. Theirs is a self-described effort to draw upon the “Old Chinese” of the earliest layers of the *Changes*, in “an attempt to make the imaginative power [of its primal images] available to the modern user.” Hence, they maintain that

no *a priori* meaning is assumed or imposed [on the words of the basic text]. The possible meanings are gathered together with no presumption that they must conform to a single interpretation. The terms are seen as the centers of force-fields in the imagination that have gathered meanings over time. They are translated as functions, all of which can exist in any individual. (Ritsema and Karcher 1994, 16)

In fact, however, as rich and evocative as the Ritsema and Karcher rendering is in terms of the interpretive possibilities that it provides (and encourages), their translation is still incomplete. For instance, their understanding of the character *fu* 孚 (often translated as “faithfulness” or “sincerity”) in the Judgment of the Kan hexagram (#29), does not include the most probable of its early meanings: “a human captive”--an expression that would seem to be especially redolent as a source of primal symbolic significance.

We should not be surprised to find that despite such limitations, the Ritsema/Karcher version of the *Changes* quickly found its way to China--not, of course, because of their rendering of the terms and phrases of the classic, which, as we have seen, Chinese scholars have explored far more exhaustively, but rather because of their Jungian understanding of *Yijing* symbolism. Jungian psychology came to the People's Republic after the inauguration of the Open Policy, at a time when a great many other Western theories and practices attracted the attention of Chinese intellectuals, including Freudian psychoanalysis.

Of the many realms of Western knowledge that were introduced to China in the twentieth century, therapeutic psychology has been relatively slow to catch on, in part because of inherited Chinese attitudes toward mental illness and mind-body relationships, and also because of a certain cultural aversion to explicit discussions of sexual ideas and imagery that are common in Jungian analytical psychology and especially in Freudian psychoanalysis. Yet despite a certain general resistance to Freud's theories in China, dozens of his writings have been rendered into Chinese. According to Alf Gerlach:

Today [1999] every Chinese university has a psychotherapeutic advice centre for students, and almost every general hospital has a psychotherapy department, in which the staff up to now have had to derive their knowledge and skills largely from the literature available to them. As far as the field of psychoanalysis is concerned, the practical work often resembles "wild psychoanalysis", since it has not yet been possible to acquire a deeper understanding of the therapeutic processes of transference and countertransference and their difficulties, or to encounter them first-hand through psychoanalytic self discovery. (Gerlach 1999)

In some respects, Jungian psychology seems to be more compatible with long-standing Chinese beliefs and practices than Freudianism--particularly, many have argued, Jung's emphasis on archetypes and synchronicity. It is not surprising to find, therefore, a number of Chinese-language websites devoted exclusively to Jung's analytic psychology. But Jung has suffered in Chinese academic circles from the same comparative neglect that he has experienced in many Western universities. Moreover, certain key Jungian concepts, such as "individuation" (the development of a "psychological individual," who is distinct from the "general, collective psychology") have not found a particularly receptive audience among collectively minded Chinese psychologists. Nonetheless, at this writing, about thirty books on Jung's thought have been translated into Chinese and the first Chinese Institute of Analytical Psychology has recently been established. The first International Conference on Analytical Psychology and Chinese Culture was convened in 1998, the second in 2002, the third in 2006 and the fourth in 2009. We can even see Jung's name invoked in mainstream *Yijing* scholarship.

One of the most visible and influential exponents of a Jungian approach to psychology in contemporary China is Shen Heyong 申荷永, a Jungian analyst and Professor of Clinical Psychology at Fudan University in Shanghai. Professor Shen has written widely on topics such as "Rongge xinli xue yu Zhongguo wenhua 榮格心理學與中國文化" (Jung's psychology and Chinese Culture) and "Yijing yu Zhongguo wenhua xinli" 易經

與中國文化心理 (The *Classic of Changes* and Chinese Cultural Psychology). He is an ardent advocate of the notion of “synchronicity,” and enthusiastic about the translations of the *Yijing* by both Ritsema and Karcher and Richard Wilhelm.

In a recent article co-authored with his colleague, Professor Gao Lan 高嵐, which has been reprinted on countless Chinese websites, Professor Shen claims that China is the “homeland” (guxiang 故鄉) of psychology--a country with a long history of scholarly and practical preoccupation with problems of the “heart/mind” (*xin*). This preoccupation, Shen argues, is clearly reflected in the *Yijing*, where one can find a great many psychological insights that are expressed not only in the commentary known as the Ten Wings, but also in a number of psychologically potent hexagrams, including Bi 比 (#8; “Closeness”), Kan 坎 (#29; “The Constant Sinkhole”), Xian 咸 (#31; “Reciprocity”), Mingyi 明夷 (#36; “Suppression of the Light”), Jiaren 家人 (#37; “The Family”), Yi 益 (#42; “Increase”), Jing 井 (#48; “The Well”), Gen 艮 (#52; “Restraint”) and Lü 旅 (#56; “The Wanderer”).

As one of several examples of the psychological orientation of the *Changes* and the primal power of its “archetypal” images, Shen cites a line in the “Explaining the Trigrams” commentary 說卦傳 that refers to the duplicated trigrams of Kan (“The Constant Sinkhole”) as the symbols for anxiety (*you* 憂), and “heartsickness” (*xinbing* 心病) in the realm of human affairs. He goes on to say that a number of traditional Chinese commentators, including both Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1300-1200), have identified Kan as a hexagram reflecting not only the problems but also the potential powers of the mind. Thus, for example, in glossing the Judgment of Kan, which refers explicitly to the “success” or “prevalence” (*heng* 亨) of the heart/mind of a person who possesses true sincerity, Cheng Yi avers that “With the most highly developed sincerity, [the heart/mind of a human being] can penetrate metal and stone, and overcome water and fire, so what dangers and difficulties can possibly keep it from prevailing?”

Shen then puts forward the Xian (“Reciprocity”) hexagram as a prime example of the psychological orientation of the *Changes*. His analysis, which posits affinities between the symbolism of this hexagram, Western-style “Stimulus-Response” theory, and “a combined psychology of consciousness and unconsciousness,” draws upon a number of time-honored exegetical techniques, including references to the Ten Wings, an examination of various line relationships (both within the Xian hexagram and involving comparisons between the line statements of Xian and other hexagrams), trigram symbolism, and even the “dissection of characters” into their constituent elements.

Shen begins by quoting from the Commentary on the Judgment 象傳 of Xian, which states: “Reciprocity is a matter of stimulation. Here the soft and yielding [Dui trigram] is above and the hard and strong [Gen trigram] is below. The two kinds of material force [*qi*] stimulate and respond and so join together. The one is passive, and the other joyous. The male takes place below the female . . . It is by the mutual stimulation of Heaven and Earth that the myriad things are created. It is by the sage stimulating the hearts-and-minds

of human beings that the entire world finds peace. If we observe how things are stimulated, the innate tendencies [*qing*] of Heaven and Earth and the myriad things can be seen.”

He goes on to suggest that this passage embodies a central truth about the nature of all human interactions, including sexual ones, and he drives home his point about the link between the psychology of such relationships and the Xian hexagram by noting that the Chinese character for “stimulation” (*gan* 感) is the same as Xian with the addition of the “heart/mind” radical (*bushou* 部首) at the bottom. Further, he points out, the characters for “stimulus” and “response,” which occupy such a prominent position in the Changes, and in Chinese philosophy more generally, both contain the “heart/mind” radical.

Finally, Shen links certain references in the Great Commentary 大傳--notably, sentences such as “The sages used . . . [the meanings inherent in the Changes] to cleanse hearts and minds” and “Through its pronouncements of good fortune and misfortune, [the Yi] shows that it shares the same anxieties as the common folk”--explicitly with Jungian efforts to explore the psyche and the unconscious by means of both “spirituality” and “wisdom.” In Shen’s view, the symbolism of the *Yijing* provides a natural but somewhat neglected tool to achieve these therapeutic ends. This approach, one might add, seems more productive of psychological insight than that of individuals such as Jiang Zutong, whose recent book, *Yixue xinlixue* (Changes Learning Psychology; 2005), pays lip service to Western theories of mind, including those of Jung, but devotes far more attention to typologies of personality and character (for example “five phases” correlations) that are linked rather mechanically to the *Yijing*, and seem to be designed primarily to appeal to the newly emergent management mentality in China.

III. Concluding Remarks

Divination attempts to bridge the gap between “hard” science, which purports to describe impersonally the way the universe works, and religion, which attempts to invest human lives with cosmically-derived but individualized meaning. Like science, divination is concerned with natural phenomena and predictable, orderly processes; but like religion, it relies heavily on faith and presupposes some sort of personal connection with the constantly unfolding but mysterious patterns of cosmic change. Divination satisfies a basic human need to know about the future, and to make sense of it all. Thus, it is well suited to various comparative approaches.

Westerners who pray to God for guidance and assistance, and Chinese who consult fortune-tellers and use charms, are, it would appear, motivated by the same basic impulses. To put the matter another way, the sharp lines drawn in the early modern (seventeenth century) West between religion and sacramental magic, between prayers and spells, and between sovereign deity and manipulable divine being(s), begin to blur on closer inspection and in cross-cultural perspective.

What about the distinction between religion and science? If anything, the lines seem to be drawn more sharply, not only in the West but also in other parts of the modern world. In a book entitled *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality*, Stanley Tambiah

asserts that “it is possible to separate analytically at least two orientations to our cosmos, two orderings of reality that woman and man everywhere are capable of experiencing.” One, which he labels “causality,” is “quintessentially represented by the categories, rules and methodology of positive science and discursive mathematico-logical reason.” The other, which he relates directly to religion and calls “participatory,” exists when “persons, groups, animals, places, and natural phenomena are in a relation of contiguity . . . [translated into] existential immediacy and contact, and shared affinities.” (cited in Smith, 1991, 284)

The epistemological dichotomy identified by Tambiah seems to be drawn in large measure from the early twentieth century analytical philosopher Lucien Levy-Bruhl, who divided human mental processes into “primitive”—which he characterized as mystical, precausal (or prelogical), and above all participatory—and “modern,” which he described as causal and bound by the principles of modern logic, including the laws of contradiction and the rules of inference and proof. Participation, as an aspect of “primitive” thought, signified to Levy-Bruhl an association between persons and things that invested them with mutual identity and consubstantiality. Thus, what modern Westerners would presumably consider logically distinct aspects of reality, such as a man and an animal, or the living and the dead, so-called primitives might fuse into a single “mystic unity.” Unfortunately, as Don LePan points out, the thinking of “primitives” bore the stigma of inferiority, since Western scholars have long tended to assume that a close relationship exists between rationality and moral goodness.

Although this idea of moral inferiority is as untenable as the term “primitive” is unfortunate, the effort by Western scholars to distinguish modes of thought across cultures continues to be defined primarily by Levy-Bruhl’s interpretive paradigm. Drawing upon the influential writings of Walter Ong, who pointed out that discourse in oral cultures bears a strong resemblance to what Levy-Bruhl called precausal, and Jack Goody, whose work on literacy has suggested that writing permits one “to stand back from his creation and examine it in a more abstract, generalised, and ‘rational’ way,” Gale Stokes observes that “the oral/literate dichotomy appears to tap much the same differentia as the precausal/logical one,” and is therefore useful as a tool for analyzing cognitive styles. He warns, of course, that the differentiation must not be made too sharp or too determinate, but he argues that it is nonetheless well worth making. Stokes also finds it worthwhile to distinguish between the cognitive effects of scribal and print culture. He writes: “As long as European civilization remained chirographic, that is with writing but without printing, the cultural balance remained oral, that is, characterized by many of the strategies that previously were called precausal.” When this changed, so did the contours of European thought.

Traditional China presents a dramatic counterexample. In the first place, printing was invented in China some five centuries before Gutenberg, so that until the mid-eighteenth century or so there were probably more books printed in Chinese than in all other languages of the world combined. Secondly, China was a civilization of the written sign par excellence—a place where writing first came into being not to record human speech but to “communicate with the spirits.” The terms for writing and culture (*wen*) in China were literally the same. Yet throughout the imperial period, Chinese thought, shaped in

large measure by the *Yijing*, followed predominantly “precausal” patterns. The characterizations by Levy-Bruhl of “primitive” thought are basically applicable to the cognitive styles of both illiterate Chinese peasants and highly educated Chinese elites, at least for imperial times.

The reasons for this orientation are complex, but a few major factors can perhaps be identified. One would be the near-absence in China of concepts corresponding to “deliberate agency” or “creationism” that loom so large in Western thought. Chinese notions of “spirit”—whether rationalized in terms of *yinyang* metaphysics or expressed in various polytheistic religious systems—encouraged a mystical, personal, and participatory approach to knowledge (including an understanding of the workings of nature) rather than an approach emphasizing objective, impersonal analysis. Even Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692), harsh critic of neo-Confucian systematizers such as Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011-1077) and ardent admirer of the scientific empiricism of his contemporary, Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611-1671), believed that participation, not detachment, was the key to meaningful knowledge. This participation included “value judgment, moral commitment, and a sense of ease.” To Wang, as to all Chinese thinkers, participation was a critical function of the morally-grounded, organic and expressive universe of which he and they were a part.

Another factor contributing to the distinctive nature of Chinese thought may well be linguistic. Zhang Dongsun 張東蓀 (1886-1973) claims that whereas the subject-predicate form of Aristotelian logic predisposes Western thought to “the law of identity,” the structure of classical Chinese strongly encourages relational thinking. And Chad Hansen maintains not only that the classical language lacks a “truth” predicate, reflecting “the dominance of pragmatic over semantic concerns in theory of language,” but also that the pictographic nature of Chinese characters reduces the motivation for “abstract or mentalistic theorizing.” Hansen argues that “the most coherent explanation of Chinese thought is one which does not attribute any theory of abstract objects to the classical philosophers.” (Hansen 2008)

These generalizations certainly have not gone unchallenged, and Hansen himself is critical of blanket assertions that Chinese philosophy is “intuitive, aesthetic, right-brained, soft, non-rational, non-linear, out-of-this-world or whatever.” Nonetheless, it seems plausible to suggest that certain features of the Chinese language may indeed have encouraged a more or less precausal approach to reality. Among these, one might emphasize the concrete imagery of at least some Chinese written characters, the lack of inflection in classical texts, the aesthetics of classical composition (especially the use of rhythm, balance, and parallelism), and the employment of the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Yijing* as a supplementary system of communication and associational logic--the product of certain widely shared Chinese assumptions about the limitations of words in expressing thoughts.

Of course it is clear, as Tambiah forcefully argues, that people in all cultures have not only the capacity but also the inclination to think in a participatory or mystical fashion in some contexts and more rationally in others. There are, in other words, multiple

“orientations to reality,” defined by specific situations as well as factors such as gender and social class. Modern Western culture has no more of a monopoly on “reason” than so-called primitive cultures do on mystical intuition. The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski offers an especially apt illustration of this point. Although Malinowski, as a cultural product of twentieth century Europe, distinguishes between the language of “technology and science” and the language of “magic and persuasion,” he takes pains to point out that “word magic” can be found not only in “primitive” peoples such as the Trobriand Islanders, whom he studied, but also among modern Westerners. Advertising slogans, political campaigns, and legal formulas, for example, all provide illustrations for Malinowski of the magical power of words. (modified from Smith, 1991, 283 ff.)

Malinowski goes on to observe that word magic can describe conditions that are “objectively” false, but subjectively true--that is, language is capable of reflecting a kind of “pragmatic” truth (as per William James) that is “reasonable” in terms of addressing certain psychological needs of the individual, and sociologically true in the sense that it affects intentions, motivations and expectations.” Much of the appeal of divination as an explanatory device can be understood as a product of this sort of word power--especially in societies such as traditional China’s, where the written language exerted inordinate social influence by virtue of its seemingly intrinsic magical qualities. Efficacy, in turn, depends on the successful application of “cultural belief systems which order reality through ritualized activities.” These activities may range from individual acts as simple as randomly touching a phrase in the Bible (or the Chinese equivalent, a character in a text--not necessarily a religious one), to elaborate ceremonies involving entire communities, designed to identify and expose the source of discord.

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