
Preface

‘. . . the Book of Changes is to be explained in the light of its own content and of the era to which it belongs . . .’¹ When Richard Wilhelm wrote these words in 1923, he believed they described what he had done in his great German translation. Yet within ten years archaeology and philology had shed new light on ancient China, revealing that what Wilhelm had produced was a Book of Changes smothered by philosophical theories that were unknown in the era to which it belongs. Three-quarters of a century later, Chinese sinologists have shown that the book is really a Bronze Age diviner’s manual dealing with war and human sacrifice, giving advice to rulers at the dawn of literature.

During the 1950s I lived in a Korean village community among men who needed no translation. They loved the Book of Changes and initiated me into the philosophers’ way of reading it. Before long I was enthused by Waley’s essay of 1933 and got to know about modern studies; but I had to put off serious involvement until I retired five years ago. Then I read the recent work of the American sinologists Edward Shaughnessy and Richard Kunst, the latter generously presented as a ‘kit of tools’ for use by others. I was delighted to find them confirming, often with the same vocabulary, conclusions I had arrived at independently – but also adding a great deal to what I could have done.

The work of professional scholars is tucked away in specialist journals and libraries: this report on twentieth-century *Zhouyi* studies is intended for readers who know little or no Chinese. Necessary technicalities are placed, I hope, so that they can

easily be skipped. It should be clear that the translation is a possible one, not one to be staunchly defended at all points: for the time being, perhaps for ever, all translations of *Zhouyi* must be provisional. The notes will show students of Chinese how the work has been done and by whom, and where authoritative expositions may be found.

Writing in Cornwall has meant being far from the daily conversation with interested friends that would have helped to make a better book; but I am grateful to Professor Keith Pratt of Durham for his encouragement; to Zhong Hong of the East Asian Department at Durham for his patient work on my glossary; and to the Reverend William Hussey of Falmouth. Always willing to help me think aloud, Bill has contributed more than he may imagine. For books I have relied on the kindness of Falmouth Library staff, as well as on the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, which, although not my *alma mater*, has been for more than fifty years an *alma matrina*.

Richard Rutt
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