Laval théologique et philosophique

The Unity of Form and Content
The Philosophical Patterns of the Great Commentary to the Book of Changes

Flaminia Pischedda

Volume 78, numéro 3, octobre 2022

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1097882ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1097882ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval
Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)
1703-8804 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Pischedda, F. (2022). The Unity of Form and Content: The Philosophical Patterns of the Great Commentary to the Book of Changes. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, *78*(3), 421–441. https://doi.org/10.7202/1097882ar

Résumé de l'article

Cet article s'intéresse à l'un des textes fondamentaux de la tradition du Classique des changements (Yijing 易經) : le *Xici* (Commentaire sur les sentences attachées), également connu sous le titre Grand commentaire (Dazhuan 大傳) au Classique des changements. Nous procédons à une analyse formelle du texte, afin d'explorer ses motifs argumentatifs et philosophiques. Sans ignorer la nature composite de ce texte, qui est faite de plusieurs couches superposées, notre analyse sera conduite autant dans le détail du texte que dans ses articulations globales. Nous entendons éclairer la manière dont la structure du texte reflète son contenu. Ainsi, nous montrerons comment un ensemble d'éléments structurels et lexicaux font du *Xici* un texte élaborant et défendant ses propres arguments, sans qu'il lui soit besoin de recourir à des ressources extra-textuelles.

Laval théologique et philosophique, 78, 3 (octobre 2022) : 421-441

THE UNITY OF FORM AND CONTENT

THE PHILOSOPHICAL PATTERNS OF THE GREAT COMMENTARY TO THE BOOK OF CHANGES*

Flaminia Pischedda

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
Pembroke College, University of Oxford

*RÉSUMÉ : Cet article s'intéresse à l'un des textes fondamentaux de la tradition du Classique des changements (*Yijing 易經*) : le* Xici *(Commentaire sur les sentences attachées), également connu sous le titre Grand commentaire (*Dazhuan 大傳*) au Classique des changements. Nous procédons à une analyse formelle du texte, afin d'explorer ses motifs argumentatifs et philosophiques. Sans ignorer la nature composite de ce texte, qui est faite de plusieurs couches superposées, notre analyse sera conduite autant dans le détail du texte que dans ses articulations globales. Nous entendons éclairer la manière dont la structure du texte reflète son contenu. Ainsi, nous montrerons comment un ensemble d'éléments structurels et lexicaux font du* Xici *un texte élaborant et défendant ses propres arguments, sans qu'il lui soit besoin de recourir à des ressources extra-textuelles.*

ABSTRACT : This paper focusses on the Xici 繫辭 *([Commentary to the] Appended Sentences), also called* Dazhuan 大傳 *(Great Commentary), which is included in the commentarial section attached to the* Zhouyi 周易 *(Zhou Changes), or* Yijing 易經 *(Classic of Changes), a pre-imperial Chinese divination text. I provide a formal analysis of the text, exploring its argumentative and philosophical patterns : without sidestepping the composite and multi-layered nature of this text, my analysis, conducted both on a micro and macro-level, highlights how the textual structure fundamentally reflects its content. The analysis will also show how structural and lexical elements make the* Xici *a kind of argument-based text as the philosophical argumentations are exhausted within the text itself.*

While recognizing that the "Commentary" is a patchwork which was subject to a continuing process of reworking even after it began to be transmitted in written form, I would

* This article was supported by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange under DD011-U-20, and by a research stay at the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities "Fate, Freedom and Prognostication" at the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg, which is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). I would like to thank my colleague Raphaël Van Daele for inviting me to contribute to this fascinating project and for helping me develop some of the ideas exposed herein. I am grateful for the support provided by my supervisor, Dirk Meyer, and by my colleagues from the ECT seminar at Oxford. I am also immensely indebted to Fabrizio Pregadio who read many versions of this article, providing useful insights and criticisms. Any mistake remains mine.

> also emphasize that it does present a coherent intellectual position. As I shall try to show, it is not a random miscellany of scraps about an old divination text, but is a subtly presented selection of statements intended to convey a particular world view.
>
> W. PETERSON, « Making Connections » (1982)

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the strategies of philosophical meaning construction of the *Xici* 繫辭 ([Commentary to the] Appended Sentences ; *ca.* 3rd-2nd century BCE) by analysing its textual macro-structure and lexical usage.[1] It therefore does not focus on reconstructing the supposed philosophical and intellectual lineages — indeed, both "Daoist" and "Confucian" elements are present in the text.[2] Rather, this paper is concerned with identifying the manner of philosophical reasoning of a specific type of text : the commentary. By doing so, this paper aims at contributing to the understanding of "the polymorphous nature of philosophising in early China."[3] It will show how the individual building blocks[4] of this text are part of a larger network of *internal* self-referential links. In addition, the constant use of terminology pertaining to the *Yi* 易 (The Changes) traditions allows the textual network to point *outward*, that is, to those communities which share what had become by the end of the Warring States period (*Zhanguo* 戰國, 475-221 BCE) a well-established corpus of cultural capital. This latter point is relevant for a discussion on the issue of readership, which, however, will not be treated in the present work.

While the philosophical significance of the *Xici* has long been acknowledged and discussed at length by previous scholarship,[5] the formal aspects of philosophising embedded in this text still deserve attention. The relationship between form and content in early Chinese texts features prominently in the first works of Dirk Meyer. In his monograph *Philosophy on Bamboo*, when discussing the corpus of bamboo manuscripts called "Guodian 郭店 1",[6] Meyer proposes two categories of texts : "argu-

1. The text used in this paper is : *Zhouyi Zhengyi* 周易正義, ed. *Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben* 十三經注疏整理本, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000.
2. Edward L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, Leiden, Brill, 2022, p. 476.
3. Dirk MEYER, "Truth Claim with no Claim to Truth : Text and Performance of the '*Qiushui*' Chapter of the *Zhuangzi*," in Joachim GENTZ, Dirk MEYER, ed., *Literary Forms and Arguments in Early China*, Leiden, Brill, 2015, p. 297, n. 3. See also Alain ARRAULT, *Shao Yong (1012-1077), poète et cosmologue*, Paris, Collège de France, 2002, p. 43, were he writes : "Il n'y a pas en Chine un discours spécifique à la pensée, […] celle-ci est à cheval sur plusieurs discursivités."
4. On the notion of building blocks, see William BOLTZ, "The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts," in Martin KERN, ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2005.
5. See among others : E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 475 ; Willard PETERSON, "Making Connections : 'Commentary on The Attached Verbalizations' of The *Book of Change*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 42, 1 (1982).
6. The name Guodian 郭店 (Jingmen 荊門, Hubei 湖北) refers to the village where tomb no. 1 is located. The tomb was scientifically excavated in 1993 and included manuscripts versions of the *Laozi* 老子 (or *Daodejing* 道德經), the *Ziyi* 緇衣 (now a chapter in the *Liji* 禮記), and other previously unknown texts. These manuscripts date roughly to the beginning of the third century BCE and are written in Chu 楚 script, predating the standardization of the script that took place during the Qin 秦 dynasty (221-202 BCE) ; they thus represent a precious material for the understanding of Old Chinese language. On the Guodian corpus,

ment-based texts" and "context-dependent texts."[7] This heuristic distinction serves to investigate the relationship between the oral and written ways of philosophising in early China. Moreover, it facilitates the discussion of how textual forms can affect the understanding of the text's main philosophical stance. For instance, in the analysis of the *Qiushui* 秋水 (Autumn Flood) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (Master Zhuang), Meyer argues that the textual macro-structure represents a crucial element of the *act* of philosophising in early China.[8] Leaving aside the debate on oral and written composition, in this paper I shall focus on the second aspect, illustrating how the textual form of the *Xici* fundamentally mirrors its content. Furthermore, the analysis also shows how structural and lexical elements make the *Xici* a kind of argument-based text as the philosophical argumentations are clarified *within* the text itself.

This contribution is comprised of three parts. In the first, I shall outline the main features of the commentary *genre*, paying particular attention to the many ways in which this specific text-type is conceived of in the early Chinese tradition. As we shall see, the text under consideration does not belong to the more common category of line-by-line commentary ; rather, it is a lengthy treatise appended to what is arguably one of the most influential texts of the entire Chinese literary production : the *Zhouyi* 周易 (Zhou Changes), also known as *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of Changes), or simply *Yi.* The *Zhouyi*, which from roughly the beginning of the 9th century BCE until at least the 2nd century BCE served as a divination manual, became the first of the "Confucian Classics" in 136 BCE, under the auspices of the Imperial Academy established by emperor Wu 武 (*ca*. 141-87 BCE) of the Han 漢 dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE). The *Xici* is part of the commentarial section of the canonised *Zhouyi.* Throughout this paper, I shall refer to the *Yi* traditions when discussing the texts related, directly or indirectly, to the *Zhouyi*. Next, I shall briefly discuss the notions of divination and philosophy and how they relate to one another in early China. Lastly, I shall reconstruct the patterns of philosophising of the *Xici*. Since the present paper is not meant to be an exhaustive study of this text, I shall draw examples only from part A of the received version.[9] The structural features of the texts and its division in part A and B are detailed in the last part of this paper as this distinction is essential for the understanding of the textual patterns.

---

see Scott COOK, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian* : *A Study & Complete Translation*, Ithaca, East Asia Program Cornell University, 2012.

7. The first type, being closely linked to writing, produce a "stand-alone philosophical exercise". Context-dependent texts, on the other hand, "require reference to (typically oral) commentators and participate in a triangular relationship of meaning transmission consisting of the text, a mediator of meaning, and the receiver of the message" (Dirk MEYER, *Philosophy on Bamboo* : *Text and Production of Meaning in Early China*, Leiden, Brill, 2012, p. 1).

8. ID., "Truth Claim with no Claim to Truth", p. 297.

9. Following the established practice, I shall refer to the "received version" of the text. The manuscript version unearthed at the archeological site of Mawangdui 馬王堆 in 1973 shall be briefly discussed later in this paper. On the Mawangdui manuscript of the *Zhouyi*, see Edward L. SHAUGHNESSY, *I Ching* : *The Classic of Changes*, New York, Ballantine, 1997.

I. TEXTS THAT TALK ABOUT TEXTS : WHAT IS A COMMENTARY ?

Defining the commentary text-type might seem an easy task. However, there is no unified definition which can encompass what is regarded as commentaries in different cultural traditions. Let us start with an authoritative study on this genre, the volume *Commentaries-Kommentare* edited by Glenn Most.[10] In the preface, Most stresses that in order for a commentary to be considered such, it must necessarily talk about an authoritative text, that is, a text which has been composed by an authoritative author. Most thus proposes to address the following question : "Whose text ?" This is indeed a reasonable starting point when referring to the ancient and premodern Graeco-Roman literary production. Unfortunately, the situation in early China is complicated by the fact that most preimperial texts present a convoluted textual history as well as a composite authorship.[11] The one under consideration in this paper is no exception. For this reason, a more accommodating and efficient definition of commentary might be the following :

> […] as a rule, commentaries bear on whole base texts (or whole sections of base texts), and not just on individual bits scattered here and there throughout a base text. Unlike annotations, which often are intended only for the use of the reader who wrote them, commentaries are intended to address a real or imagined audience and they result from a more or less comprehensive project, which suggests that it makes sense to look at them not only in terms of their local details but also as large-scale pieces of writing *stricto sensu*.[12]

As we shall see further below, the *Xici* is a lengthy philosophical commentarial text appended to what was originally one of many divination manuals, as recent archaeological discoveries have proved.[13] Therefore, there is a gap between the original function of the *Zhouyi* and the later interpretations which exploit the possibility to extract cosmological and philosophical principles out of a guide for divinatory practice. To be sure, the presence of this *gap* is perhaps inherent in any text and its commentarial tradition(s). If we accept the notion of commentaries being composed to elucidate the meaning of texts which would otherwise appear obscure to the readers, it follows that the gap between the original meaning and the one imposed by the commentators is somewhat inevitable. Newell Ann Van Auken points out that this aspect might be seen as the opportunity to "set forth new interpretations."[14] This is the case, for instance, of the *Jie Lao* 解老 (Explaining the *Laozi*) chapter of the *Hanfei zi* 韩非子 (Master Han Fei), a chapter entirely devoted to the explanation to

10. Glenn MOST, ed., *Commentaries-Kommentare*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999.
11. ZHANG Hanmo, *Authorship and Text-Making in Early China*, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter Mouton, 2018 ; Mark E. LEWIS, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999.
12. Glenn MOST, Karine CHEMLA, ed., *Mathematical Commentaries in the Ancient World* : *A Global Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022, p. 12.
13. See Constance A. COOK, Andrea BRÉARD, "Stalk and Other Divination Traditions Prior to the Changes Canon : Views from Newly-Discovered Texts," in HON Tze-ki, ed., *The Other Yijing* : *The Book of Changes in Chinese History, Politics, and Everyday Life*, Leiden, Brill, 2021 ; Edward L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes.
14. Newell Ann VAN AUKEN, *The Commentarial Transformation of the Spring and Autumn*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2016.

the *Laozi* 老子 (Master Lao), also known as the *Daodejing* 道德經 (Classic of the Way and its Potency).[15] The *Laozi* has been the object of a long commentarial tradition — one the most remarkable in terms of quantity — as it is the foundational text of the Daoist tradition. In addition, its overly concise and obscure literary style calls for an explanation. The same holds true for the *Zhouyi*, the language of which is notoriously difficult to decipher. Considered the dating proposed by most scholars for the composition of this divination manual, i.e. approximately the 8th century BCE,[16] we could infer that the explanation of the obscure lines of the *Zhouyi* might have happened in a different manner other than the one we find in the *Xici* : (1) it was improvised (and uttered orally) by the diviner(s) during the divinatory act ; *or* (2) it was based on earlier exegetical texts which have not come down to us because they were written on perishable materials, like bamboo or wood. I believe both hypotheses are entirely reasonable.

In light of this, we could say that the main purpose of the *Xici* is not to explain the meaning of the *Zhouyi*, or at least not exclusively. In fact, the main innovation of the *Xici*, as a unique example of hybrid text-type — hybrid because it is simultaneously a commentary and a treatise of its own right — is that of providing a relatively coherent cosmo-philosophical framework to a textual tradition which lacked this fundamental feature.[17] Even though the *Zhouyi* was originally devoid of any philosophical value, can we still talk about philosophy of divination ? And how do we relate the *Xici* to the genre of "philosophical divination commentary" ? The next sections are devoted to exploring these important issues.

II. DIVINATION AND PHILOSOPHY

What do we talk about when we talk about divination ? In early cultures, divination, or mantic activity,[18] was nearly ubiquitous. It was performed in many distinctive ways in different cultural contexts, during different periods of time. This is reflected by the diverse terminology which has been used by each ancient culture to refer to this phenomenon.[19] Despite this diversity, it is still possible to identify the following

15. Barbara HENDRISCHKE, "The Commentarial Strategies of 'Jie *Lao*' (Explaining the *Laozi*)," *Monumenta Serica*, 70, 1 (2022), p. 71-98.

16. E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 15-64.

17. Richard J. SMITH, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World* : *The Yijing (i Ching or Classic of Changes) and Its Evolution in China*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2008, p. 7.

18. The term divination comes from the Latin *diuinus* ("pertaining to a deity," "inspired by a god"), "which establishes a connection with the gods — it is a craft that involves a conversation with the gods and an engagement with the signs they send, through a variety of methods ; the implication is that divination comes from the gods." It is first attested in Cicero's *De Diuinatione*. See : Federico SANTANGELO, "Text and Practice in Roman Divination : Five Themes for a Comparative Debate", *I Quaderni del Ramo D'oro*, 12 (2020), p. 155-175. The term mantic (*mantis* μάντις, "seer, prophet, soothsayer") is a Graecism attested for the first time in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (*ca*. 460 BCE).

19. The international conference "Deciphering the Uncertain : Sociological & Epistemological Aspects of Divination in Early Text Cultures" (June 2019, Oxford) was conceived as an up-to-date, comprehensive overview of divination in early text cultures. Participants were invited to consider a framework of five questions to draw out the principal features of the divinatory practices for comparison. From the first question — "How is divination defined and conceptualised in each society ?" — it emerged that each culture

common features. (1) Divination was almost always prompted by a human universal concern : *uncertainty*. (2) This concern was often soothed by gaining *knowledge* of the hidden meaning of events, situations or things of the past, present or future. (3) Gaining such knowledge was primarily related to drawing conclusions to aid personal and community *decision-making*. (4) This knowledge was not regularly accessible to people as it usually came from a different realm, which, for lack of a better term, can be called *extra-human realm*. The extra-human realm includes, among others, gods, ancestors, spirits, or a universal cosmic order. (5) Extra-human knowledge often manifested itself in the form of *signs*. (6) The divinatory act generally involved a human expert, a *mediator*, who was able to decipher these signs and translate them into a language which was shared within a specific cultural context. (7) The divinatory sign — either directly found in nature or deliberately obtained — could be, but need not be limited to, the result of a communication with *extra-human entities*. (8) In most of the cases the divinatory act implied that these non-human entities were closely *related to humans*, and for this reason directly *affected* different aspects of their life. (9) In many cultures, divination was also related to *power* as it concerned the elite's need to link the mundane enterprise to the divine realm ; in this perspective, divination overlaps with rituality, and it was a means to obtain political legitimacy. (10) Divination played a key role in the *private sphere of everyday life*, and it was derivative of people's conception of life and death, divinity and nature, and the relationship between humans and the different dimensions of experience. In short, divination should not be regarded as the mere act of foretelling the future ; rather, it represents a significant feature at different societal levels, embedded in a somewhat coherent hermeneutic system — or indeed shared within a specific community.[20]

According to both palaeographical and the received textual evidence, divination appears to have played an important role in various parts of the territory of what is today mainland China. By the time of the Qin 秦, the first imperial dynasty (221-207 BCE), it was performed arguably on a daily basis by people of all walks of life. Even though there were many different techniques, only two were the most widely used : turtle shell and stalk divination.[21] For space reasons, I shall not discuss further the divinatory techniques ; rather, I would like to pay attention to the notion of how divination was conceptualised in early China, which, in turn, bears on the philosophical significance of divination.

---

does have its own peculiar way of conceptualising this extremely complex phenomenon. This is particularly evident from the terminology used. See F. SANTANGELO, "Text and Practice in Roman Divination", p. 156-158.

20. Recent monographs which investigate divination adopting different cross-cultural perspectives are Sarah I. JOHNSTON, Peter T. STRUCK, ed., *Mantikê* : *Studies in Ancient Divination*, Leiden, Brill, 2005 ; Amar ANNUS, ed., *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 2010 ; Michael LACKNER, ed., *Coping with the Future* : *Theories and Practices of Divination in East Asia*, Leiden, Brill, 2018 ; Lindsay DRIEDIGER-MURPHY, *Ancient Divination and Experience*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019.

21. See E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, in particular p. 65-66, n. 1 and 4, for bibliographical reference on divination in early China.

In his monograph on the origin and early development of the *Zhouyi*, Edward L. Shaughnessy, one of the world leading experts in the field of *Yi* studies, explores the theoretical foundations of divination in China. He suggests that divination might have been regarded as a complementary means to sacrifice and it was meant to facilitate the interaction with extra-human beings.[22] He takes up examples from classical texts, such as the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (The Zuo Tradition) and the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Venerated Documents), but also excavated texts, such as oracle bone inscriptions and bamboo manuscripts of the late Warring States period. In light of this, I disagree with Lisa Raphals when she argued that, after the Shang 商 (1600-1045 BCE) dynasty, divination "progressively de-emphasize direct communication or negotiation with divine powers".[23] In the Chinese context, the constant search for compliance can be an indication of a rather strong consideration of the extra-human realm. In addition, divination, as noticed by Jao Tsung-I 饒宗頤 back in 1989, required a significant amount of human *will* as the main goal of the practice was not to ask about the outcome of the diviners' decision ; rather, it was the search for approval of the decision made *a priori*.[24] In other words, divination in pre-imperial China was more "a statement on the part of the diviner of what they wished to happen, hoping that the spirits would receive their prayers and bestow blessings in return."[25]

According to Shaughnessy, the "prayerful" nature of divination is well reflected in the *Xici*.[26] This text can be regarded as the first coherent and systematic work which contains philosophical reasoning while commenting on a base text, a divination manual, which clearly does not include such kind of philosophical features. To

22. *Ibid*., p. 74.

23. Lisa RAPHALS, *Divination and Prediction in Early China and Ancient Greece*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 381. I should point out that divination which did not involve the presence of an extra-human entity did exist (e.g. see the emergence of the *fangshi* 方士 during the late Warring States period) ; however, both received and palaeographical sources show the importance of such entities in the contexts of divinatory practices as late as the 4th century BCE. A well-known example might be the records written on bamboo excavated at Baoshan 包山. On the different kinds of divination in China and the role of the diviners, see Marc KALINOWSKI, "Technical Traditions in Ancient China and Shushu Culture in Chinese Religion", in John LAGERWEY, ed., *Religion in Chinese society*, vol. I, *Ancient and Medieval China*, Hong-Kong, Chinese University Press, 2004. On divination in China, see also Michael LACKNER, ZHAO Lu, *Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China*, Leiden, Brill, 2022.

24. JAO Tsung-I (RAO Zongyi) 饒宗頤, "Forum : Jao Tsung-i 饒宗頤," *Early China*, 14 (1989), p. 133-138.

25. E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 84.

26. *Ibid*. From the Han onwards, the *Zhouyi* has been subject to different exegetical interpretations ; the two main traditions are the *yili pai* 義理派 (school of meanings and principles) and the *xiangshu pai* 象數派 (school of images and numbers). Following Richard Smith, we could say that "individuals associated with the so-called school of images and numbers emphasized elaborate, New Text-style correspondences between the various features of the natural world (both physical and metaphysical) and the hexagrams, trigrams, and individual lines of the Changes, with comparatively little attention given to the written texts of the classic… The idea was that an appreciation of these correlations would help to illuminate the cryptic written text, shedding light on the past and providing both divinatory guidance and 'scientific' explanations of the cosmos for the present (and future). Numbers, then, and the images they represented depicted the principles, relationships, and processes that yielded not only an understanding of nature but also, ultimately, control over it. Exponents of the so-called school of meanings and principles, by contrast, paid primary attention to what they saw as the moral content of the judgments, line statements, and commentaries to the Changes." For an elaborated discussion on this issue (and the related bibliography in both Western and Chinese language), see R.J. SMITH, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World*, p. 60.

be sure, we cannot exclude that, prior to the composition of the *Xici*, similar texts existed. The archaeological discoveries of the past decades may allow us to speculate on the possible existence of works comparable to the *Xici*. Perhaps one day archaeology will bring to light new evidence which will help us deepen our understating of early divination commentaries.[27]

III. PATTERNS OF PHILOSOPHISING IN THE *XICI*

Even though the main focus of the present paper is the *Xici*, it is essential to have some basic knowledge of the base text, namely the *Zhouyi*. In what follows, I first briefly discuss its main components (trigrams and hexagrams). Next, I introduce the *Xici*, paying particular attention to the textual history and structure. Lastly, I reconstruct the patterns of philosophising by analysing its macro-structure and lexical usage.

1. *Zhouyi* : Textual History

The relevance of the *Zhouyi* was officially established in 136 BCE, during the Han, when the editors of the Imperial Academy attached the core text (*Benjing* 本經) to the commentary section known as the *Ten Wings* (*Shiyi* 十翼) ; in this way, the book surged to the position of first among the so-called "Confucian" Classics, alongside the *Shangshu*, the *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry), the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals), and the *Li* 禮 (Records on the Rites).[28]

What makes the *Zhouyi* unique is its peculiar basic constituents : the sixty-four hexagrams (*gua* 卦), which, according to Richard Smith, reveal the "fundamental processes and relationships of the universe."[29] According to the traditional narrative, these six-line diagrams purportedly owe their symbolic origin to the ancient Chinese cosmic concept of the two primary forces : *yin* 陰 (the yielding, the dark, the feminine, which is graphically represented by the broken line and by the even numbers 6 and 8), and *yang* 陽 (the rigid, the light, the masculine, which is graphically represented by the unbroken line and by the odd numbers 7 and 9).[30] When combined in a three-line diagram, the *yin* and *yang* lines yield the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦). In order to encompass the whole multiplicity of reality, the eight trigrams were doubled in all the possible combinations, eventually generating the above-mentioned sixty-

27. The remarkable number of archaeological discoveries occurred in the last forty years has hugely changed our understanding of early Chinese textual production. For a discussion on the *Yi* tradition, see Edward L. SHAUGHNESSY, *Unearthing the Changes* : *Recently Discovered Manuscripts of the Yi Jing (I Ching) and Related Texts*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014. For a broader discussion on how these discoveries have revolutionised our conception of early Chinese intellectual history as a whole, see ID., *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2006.

28. On the Five Confucian Classics, see Michael NYLAN, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, New Heaven, Yale University Press, 2001.

29. R.J. SMITH, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World*, p. 38.

30. It should be noticed that the *gua* were made up of numbers since at least the late Shang. Current scholars call this kind of divinatory symbols *shuzi gua* 數字卦 (numerical cypher). On this subject, see JIA Lianxiang 賈連翔, *Chutu shuzi gua wenxian jishi* 出土數字卦文獻輯釋, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 2021.

four hexagrams.[31] The French sinologist Jacques Gernet has defined these symbols a representation of the "transitory state" of all the elements of reality.[32] That is to say, the hexagrams do not symbolise things as they will transpire in the future but, rather, they "figurate" the divinable trends of a given situation embedded in a reality in constant change.[33] Accordingly, the word "*Yi*," which can refer to both the title of the book, *Zhouyi*, and to the broader tradition to which this book belongs, is rendered as "*Changes*".[34]

Within the core text, each of the sixty-four hexagram is described in four parts :

1) *guahua* 卦畫 : hexagram picture
2) *guaming* 卦名 : hexagram name
3) *guaci* 卦辭 : hexagram statement
4) *yaoci* 爻辭 : line statement

The hexagram picture is further analysed by identifying the two trigrams of which it is composed, as shown in the following example, hexagram 53, *Jian* 漸 (Gradual Approach) ䷴ :

[*trigram/hexagram picture*]
☴ outer/upper trigram *Xun* 巽 (the gentle, wind, wood)
☶ inner/lower trigram *Gen* 艮 (still, mountain)
[*hexagram name*]
Jian 漸, Gradual Approach (Development ; Gradual Progress)
[*hexagram statement*]
The women return home. Auspicious. Beneficial divination.
女歸, 吉. 利貞.[35]
[*line statement*]
Six in the first (bottom) line : Wild geese gradually approach toward the riverbank. For the young man, danger. There are words, no trouble.
初六鴻漸于干. 小子厲. 有言無咎.[36]

---

31. Richard WILHELM, Cary F. BAYNES, *The I Ching : Or Book of Changes*. *The Richard Wilhelm Translation*, 3rd ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978.
32. Jacques GERNET, *L'intelligence de la Chine : le social et le mental*, Paris, Gallimard, 2008, p. 324-325.
33. Anne CHENG, Amina CRISMA, *Storia del pensiero cinese. Dalle origini allo "Studio del mistero" (Vol. 1)*, Torino, Einaudi, 2000, p. 282-284 ; Anne CHENG, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise,* Paris, Seuil, 1997, p. 277.
34. Apart from the *Zhouyi*, the *Yi* traditions include other two texts : *Guicang* 歸藏 (Returning to [the Originary] Depository) and *Lianshan* 連山 (Joined Mountains) ; the three texts are collectively called *San Yi* 三易 (Three Changes). Traditionally, the *Yi* system, as well as what is known as the *Shifa* 筮法 system (Method of Stalk Divination ; a recently published 4th century BCE bamboo manuscript), only include two different kinds of *gua* : three-line *gua*, or trigram, and six-line *gua*, or hexagram. These texts are best known for being associated with ancient Chinese stalk divination (*shi* 筮). This is a highly sophisticated kind of cleromancy (divination by sortition of lots), in which a heap of stalks, presumably *achillea millefolium* or simply yarrow, is randomly manipulated according to a specific procedure in order to create the line-tower divinatory symbol called *gua*.
35. The word *zhen* is perhaps one of the most disputed of the whole *Yi* tradition. Here is rendered in the sense of its supposed original meaning, i.e. "to divine", or better, "to determine". On this word, see E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 336-342.
36. *Zhouyi*, "*Jian*," trans. Geoffrey REDMOND, *The I Ching (Book of Changes)* : *A Critical Translation of the Ancient Text*, London, Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 281 (modified).

Such is the kind of material contained in the core text of the *Zhouyi*. For each of the sixty-four hexagrams, a hexagram picture, a hexagram name, and two kinds of statements, one concerning the hexagram, the other explicating the symbolism of each of its lines,[37] are given. As one can see from the example above, these statements are far from clear : what is the relationship between the "wild geese gradually approach toward the riverbank" and "a young man" in danger ?[38] The *Ten Wings* are supposed to provide explanations to this cryptic material. This corpus includes seven sections, three of which are comprised of two parts :

1) *Tuan* 彖 (On the Hexagram Statements), in two parts
2) *Xiang* 象 (On the Images),[39] in two parts
3) *Xici* 繫辭 (Appended Sentences or), also known as *Dazhuan* 大傳 (Great Commentary or Great Tradition), in two parts
4) *Wenyan* 文言 (Sayings on the Words of the Text)
5) *Shuogua* 說卦 (Explanations of the Trigrams)
6) *Zagua* 雜卦 (Hexagrams in Irregular Order)
7) *Xugua* 序卦 (Hexagrams in Regular Order)

The *Xici* will become the *locus classicus* of the *Yi* major concepts and terminology, especially for the Song 宋 (960-1279 CE) dynasty Neo-Confucian commentators and cosmologists.[40] Its diverse linguistic style and content suggest that the received text is most likely the result of a long editorial process, which pieced together the works of different authors.[41] While scholars generally agree on the composite nature of the *Xici*,[42] the issue of dating is, on the other hand, a particularly controversial one. Some scholars suggest that the text belong to the early Warring States period.[43] Others argue that text mostly presents a mid-to-late Warring States pedigree.[44] I am more inclined to follow the assumption that the bulk of the text was written during the transition period between the Warring States and the foundation of the Han dynasty,

37. The example above contains only *one* line statement out of six.
38. For a hypothesis of the how line statements were created, see Edward L. SHAUGHNESSY, "The Origin of an *Yijing* Line Statement", *Early China*, 20 (1995), p. 223-240.
39. In English, the word *xiang* is usually translated as "image". In French, "figure" is the preferred translation. See A. ARRAULT, *Shao Yong (1012-1077), poète et cosmologue*, p. 304-312. See also the contribution of Raphaël VAN DAELE in this volume.
40. Joseph A. ADLER, *The Original Meaning of the* Yijing, New York, Columbia University Press, 2020. It should be noticed that it was already the case for several earlier commentators, such as Wang Bi 王弼 (229-246) and Han Kangbo 韩康伯 (d. 385).
41. E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 475-499.
42. *Ibid*., p. 478.
43. JIA Lianxiang, *Chutu shuzi gua wenxian jishi*, p. 15.
44. E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 487.

that is, by the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BCE.[45] Of course, by saying this I do not intend to deny that the *Xici* does include more ancient elements.

The received text of the *Xici* is divided into two parts (A and B) ; the former includes twelve chapters (*zhang* 章), the latter includes nine chapters, according to Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 (574-648) arrangement of the text in his *Zhouyi Zhengyi* 周易正義 (Correct Meaning of the Zhou Changes). The other famous arrangement is the one by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), which includes two parts of twelve chapters each. Apart from the received text, one manuscript version has been discovered at Mawangdui 馬王堆 (Changsha 長沙, Hunan 湖南) in 1973. The Mawangdui text, written on a silk sheet, represents the oldest extant version of the commentary dating approximately to the 190 BCE.[46] It should be noticed that, to date, we do possess an earlier version of the *Zhouyi* ; however, this does not include the commentarial section.[47] The Mawangdui manuscript contains almost all of the same parts as the received Part A and Part B. Part A fundamentally presents the same ordering of the received text ; the only remarkable difference is that chapter A9, usually referred to as the *Da yan zhi shu* 大衍之數 (The numbers of the Great Expansion) passage, is missing. Part B is reorganised under different sections, i.e. *Yao* 要 (Essentials) and *Yi zhi Yi* 易之義 (The Properties of the Changes).

As I mentioned in the introduction, the *Xici* is generally regarded as a commentary on the core text of the *Zhouyi*. However, Joseph A. Adler, in his translation of Zhu Xi's *Zhouyi Benyi* 周易本義 (Basic Meaning of the Zhou Changes), argues that the *Xici* is not a commentary, but rather a collection of statements about the *Yi* as a divination book.[48] I believe that the loose definition provided above[49] allows us to consider the *Xici* a *hybrid* text which oscillates between two genres : commentary and philosophical treatise. On the one hand, the *Xici* actively engages with the base text, quoting verbatim passages of it ; on the other hand, it substantially adds philosophical value — and, I would dare say, legitimation — to what was "only", as it were, a divination manual.

2. Reconstructing the philosophical strategies of the *Xici*

As we have seen, one of the main purposes of a commentary is to cast light on the base text which should be (1) authoritative, ideally by virtue of the fact that it has been written by an authoritative author ; (2) of obscure meaning. But what happens

45. J.A. ADLER, *The Original Meaning of the* Yijing, p. 261-262 ; R. SMITH, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World*, p. 8 ; A. CHENG, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise*, p. 272 ; W. PETERSON, "Making Connections," p. 77.

46. See E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 476-478, for an updated discussion on the Mawangdui manuscript.

47. *Ibid.* ; LI Ling 李零, "Haihun zhushu *Yi zhan* chushi 海昏竹書易占初釋," in ZHU Fenghan 朱鳳瀚, KE Zhonghua 柯中華, ed., *Haihun jiandu chulun* 海昏簡牘初論, Beijing, Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2020, p. 254-267.

48. J.A. ADLER, *The Original Meaning of the* Yijing, p. 262.

49. See *supra*, p. 424.

when the commentary itself is as much (if not more) enigmatic than the base text ? This is indeed the case of the *Xici*. At first reading, the text appears to be a "random miscellany of scraps about an old divination text".[50] However, exactly forty years ago, Willard Peterson, in his excellent analysis of the *Xici*, affirmed that the text "does present a coherent intellectual position".[51] If Peterson is correct, what are the textual strategies which make this text a coherent whole, despite its indisputable composite nature ? Given its apparent difficult style, does it require further interpretation by a third "actor" (other than the base text and the commentary itself), as suggested by Dirk Meyer's typology ?[52] Can either the "context-dependent text" or "argument-based text" category be employed to describe the *Xici*'s argumentative and philosophical strategies ? Can its final form be regarded as a stand-alone philosophical piece of work ? Before attempting to provide an answer to these questions, I shall briefly review the analysis made by Shaughnessy, who insightfully pointed out the different layers of the text.

To demonstrate the different authorial layers of the *Xici*, Shaughnessy isolated two distinct strata based on their style of writing, ruling out the chapters which are not present in the Mawangdui manuscript.[53] The first stratum, which he calls "Essay on *Qian* and *Kun*" (*Qiankun lun* 乾坤論),[54] is mostly concerned with the union of the dual forces, *yin* and *yang*, and with the role that the two pure trigrams/hexagrams — i.e. *Qian* and *Kun*, which refer both to the first and second of the eight trigrams, or to the two first of the 64 hexagrams — play in this process of life generation within a "constantly changing" cosmos. This essay is mostly written in what Rudolph Wagner has defined the Interlocking Parallel Style.[55] According to Shaughnessy, this particular style, which sees the combination of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, best represents the content of the first stratum of the *Xici*, demonstrating how *Qian* and *Kun* "combine to produce the world". The second stratum is called by Shaughnessy "Essay on the Appended Statements" (*Xici lun* 繫辭論). It is written in what is known as Equational Sentences, in which a noun, or a noun phrase, is defined through a second noun or noun phrase. The typical structure of such sentences is : A *zhe* 者 B *ye* 也, or simply AB *ye* 也.[56]

While I appreciate the value of this kind of linguistic analysis, I shall not try to identify additional layers. Rather, my goal is to outline how the different textual units

50. W. PETERSON, "Making Connections," p. 77.

51. *Ibid*.

52. See *supra*, p. 422 *sq*.

53. A third stratum comprises chapter A6 and A7, B2, and the first half of B4, which provide comments on individual line statements and on the hexagram pictures. This third stratum, however, is not discussed by Shaughnessy. See E. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 479.

54. This stratum includes chapters A1, A4, and A5 of the received *Xici*.

55. Rudolph WAGNER, "Interlocking Parallel Style : Laozi and Wang Bi," *Études Asiatiques*, 34, 1 (1980), p. 18-58. By the same author, see also chapter 3 of *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator* : *Wang Bi on the Laozi*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2000.

56. See E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 479. A typical "AB *ye*"-style sentence is the following : *bian hua zhe tui jin zhi xiang ye* 變化者進退之象也 ("alternations" and "transformations" are the images of "advance" and "retreat"). *Xici* A2.16.

are intertwined in order to produce a self-contained whole. On the macro-structural level, the *Xici* unfolds in what can be described as a *spiral pattern* : it first mentions topic$_a$, it moves forward to topic$_b$, it goes back to topic$_a$, to then expand on topic$_b$. As we shall see, such format appears immediately evident already in the opening lines of the text. Another striking feature of the *Xici* is that it makes strong claims about the topics that it mentions, as though it takes for granted that the targeted audience will be able to grasp their full meaning. I shall now clarify what I refer to as spiral pattern, and what I mean with topic *a* and *b*.

Let us start with a close look at topic$_a$. Following Peterson's phrasing, I call topic$_a$ "establishing connections". I should immediately clarify that, at this point, the text does not *explicitly* state that the connections are established ; rather, the text wants us to accept the scenario described in the first chapter (A1), which reads as follows :

天尊地卑，乾坤定矣。	Heaven is venerable, Earth is low, and so *Qian* and *Kun* are established.
卑高以陳，貴賤位矣。	Low and high are displayed, and so loftiness and lowliness are positioned.
動靜有常，剛柔斷矣。	Motion and quiescence have constancy, and so the firm and the yielding [lines] are distinguished.
方以類聚，物以群分，吉凶生矣。	Dimensions are gathered in categories, things are divided in groups, and so good and bad fortune are produced.
在天成象，在地成形，變化見矣。	Images are established in Heaven and forms are established on Earth, and so alterations and transformations are made visible.
是故，剛柔相摩，八卦相盪。	This is why the firm and the yielding rub each other and the eight trigrams displace one another.
鼓之以雷霆，潤之以風雨。 日月運行，一寒一暑。	[In Heaven] they arouse by thunder and lightning ; [on Earth] they moisten by wind and rain. The sun and the moon revolve ; once it is cold, once it is hot.
乾道成男，坤道成女。	The way of *Qian* completes the male ; the way of *Kun* completes the female.
乾知大始，坤作成物。	*Qian* controls the Great Beginning. *Kun* works on the completion of things.
乾以易知，坤以簡能。	It is through easiness that *Qian* controls ; it is through simplicity that *Kun* is capable.
易則易知，簡則易從。	Being easy, one easily controls ; being simple, one easily follows.
易知則有親，易從則有功。	As one easily controls, then there is intimacy ; as one easily follows, then there is accomplishment.
有親則可久，有功則可大。	There being intimacy, one can last long ; there being accomplishment, one can be great.
可久則賢人之德， 可大則賢人之業。	Being able to last long is the worthies' virtue ; being able to be great is the worthies' undertaking.
易簡，而天下之理得矣 ；	Because of easiness and simplicity, the patterns of all under Heaven are apprehended.

天下之理得，而成位乎其中矣。	Once the patterns of all under Heaven are apprehended, completion establishes its position in their midst.[57]

The connections, supported on a textual level by the parallel structure mentioned above, involve entities which pertain to different realms of reality, i.e. among the *yi* (cosmic change), the *Yi* (the book) and the humans ; these connections can be described as "vertical". In the first two sentences, Heaven and Earth are paired with *Qian* and *Kun*, which encompass all the different combinations of the *yin* and *yang* lines. In the following sentences, we learn that (1) it is through "easiness" (*yi* 易) and "simplicity" (*jian* 简) respectively that the two pure trigrams/hexagrams operate ; (2) it is by adopting the qualities of *Qian* and *Kun* — being "easy" and "simple" — that we humans are able to apprehend (*de* 得) the patterns (*li* 理) of "all under Heaven" (*tianxia* 天下). Once the patterns of the world are apprehended, "completion establishes its position in their midst" (*cheng wei hu qi zhong yi* 成位乎其中矣).[58] This is made plain and explicit *only* in the last sentences of the first chapter.[59]

The connections between the *yi* and the *Yi* are clarified in chapter A4, facilitated by the use of terms like *zhun* 準 ("to model"), *xiangsi* 相似 ("to resemble", "being alike"), and *fan* 範 ("mould" ; "pattern" ; by extension "to imitate").[60] Furthermore, from this point we assist to the beginning of a conflation of the *Yi* system and the "human actor" who makes use of this system and of the book which contains it. This is particularly evident on a linguistic level as the text makes it extremely difficult to discern between the human and non-human subject (i.e. the *Yi*). The translation below attempts to render this conflation of subjects. Lastly, it is interesting to notice that in the text quoted below, which I labelled "*consequences* of the connections", the word *gu* 故 ("thus", "therefore", but also "reason", "cause") and *shigu* 是故 ("this is why") is repeated many times :

易與天地準，故能彌綸天地之道。	The *Yi* is equal to Heaven and Earth ; *thus* (*gu* 故) it is capable to encompass the ways of Heaven and Earth.
仰以觀於天文，俯以察於地理，	Directing one's gaze up to observe the signs of Heaven and directing one's gaze down to scrutinise the patterns of Earth ;

57. *Xici* A.1. Unless otherwise specified, the translation used for the textual analysis is : Raphaël VAN DAELE, unpublished draft (modified). See also : James LEGGE, *The I Ching* : *The Book of Changes - Republication of 2nd edition (1899) (Sacred Books of the East Vol. XVI)*, New York, Dover Publication, 1963 ; R. WILHELM, C.F. BAYNES, *The I Ching* : *Or Book of Changes* ; J.A. ADLER, *The Original Meaning of the* Yijing ; E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes.
58. An alternative translation of this passage might be the following : "[one] can establish their place in the world." The translation provided above aims to emphasise that the subject of this sentence is not the human who establishes their position within the system, but rather that the completion (*cheng* 成), or perfection, of the system is achieved once the patterns of the world (or the entire cosmos) are grasped.
59. Aside from these "vertical" connections, "horizontal" connections are also established, i.e. involving the dynamic interaction between the elements of the *Yi* system (trigram/hexagram, line, statements, *Qian* and *Kun*). I refer to the *Yi* system (with capitalised "Y") when discussing the book and all its elements.
60. Peterson notices how this is made explicit in A6 with the word *pei* 配 ("to match"). W. PETERSON, "Making Connections," p. 91.

是故知幽明之故。	*this is why* (*shigu* 是故) one [through the *Yi*] comprehends the causes of darkness and brightness.
原始反終， 故知死生之說。	Tracing the beginning and reverting to the end, *thus* (*gu*故) one [through the *Yi*] comprehends the discourses on life and death.
精氣為物，遊魂為變， 是故知鬼神之情狀。	Essence and Breath (*qi*) become the creatures ; their floating becomes alterations. *This is why* (*shigu* 是故) [one] comprehends the dispositions and the manifestations of the spirits.
與天地相似，故不違。	[The *Yi*] is *alike* Heaven and Earth ; *thus* (*gu* 故), one does not go against them.
知周乎萬物，而道濟天下，故不過。	Its comprehension encompasses the myriad things, its way equalises all under Heaven ; *thus* (*gu* 故), one does not err.
旁行而不流，樂天知命，故不憂。	Since it goes everywhere and does not drift away, one is content with and comprehends Heaven's mandate ; *thus* (*gu* 故), one is not troubled.
安土敦乎仁，故能愛。	One finds safety in their land and shows sincerity in humaneness ; *thus* (*gu* 故), one is capable of caring.
範圍天地之化而不過， 曲成萬物而不遺， 通乎晝夜之道而知， 故神无方而易无體。	One *models* oneself on the transformations of Heaven and Earth and does not err ; one has many methods to accomplish the myriad things without any loss. It thoroughly pervades the ways of day and night and comprehends them. *Thus* (*gu* 故), the spirit is boundless, and the changes are indeterminate.[61]

The vastness and greatness of the *Yi*, its ability of "tracing the beginning and reverting to the end", thus encompassing all the different aspects of reality, far as well as near, past as well as present, is again treated in chapters A6 and A7, where the qualities of the *Yi* as a book are described. Here, we can observe the primary role of *Qian* and *Kun* as both the two pure hexagrams (A6), but also as the epitome of Heaven and Earth (A7). Once these are established in their proper positions, "cosmic change takes place in their midst" (*yi xing hu qi zhong yi* 易行乎其中矣).[62] In A6 we assist once more to the literary strategy of a conflation between the *Yi* and the human subject, which in the Chinese text is evidenced by the fact the subject of the sentence is not explicit. While when the text refers to *Qian* and *Kun*, it uses the demonstrative pronoun "*qi* 其", which helps the reader identify the subject of the following sentence.

夫易，廣矣大矣， 以言乎遠，則不禦； 以言乎邇，則靜而正；	The *Yi* (易) is vast and great. Using [the *Yi*] to speak of what is distant, [one] has no limit ; Using [the *Yi*] to speak of what is near, [one] is quiescence and correct.

61. *Xici*, A.4.
62. *Xici*, A.1.

以言乎天地之間，則備矣。	Using [the *Yi*] to speak of what is between Heaven and Earth, [one] is fully equipped.
夫乾，其靜也專，其動也直，	As for *Qian*, in quiescence it (*qi* 其) is collected, in motion it (*qi* 其) is straight ;
是以大生焉。	in this way, greatness is therein brought forth.
夫坤，其靜也翕，其動也闢，	As for *Kun*, in quiescence, it (*qi* 其) is shut ; in motion, it (*qi* 其) is open ;
是以廣生焉。	in this way, breadth is therein brought forth.
廣大配天地，	Breadth and greatness correspond to Heaven and Earth ;
變通配四時，	alterations and continuities correspond to the four seasons ;
陰陽之義配日月，	the meaning of *yin* and *yang* corresponds to the sun and moon ;
易簡之善配至德。	the goodness of the easiness and simplicity corresponds to the utmost potency.[63]

The interaction between these elements — the *Yi* (the book) and the *yi* (cosmic change), *Qian* and *Kun* — is finally mentioned in chapter A12 which Wilhelm rightfully calls "summary", where once again we read :

乾坤其易之緼邪？	May we not say that *Qian* and *Kun* are the secret and substance of the *Yi* [the book] ?
乾坤成列，而易立乎其中矣。	*Qian* and *Kun* having achieved their arrangement, the *Yi* was established in their midst.
乾坤毀，則无以見易，	If *Qian* and *Kun* were taken away, there would be no means of seeing the *yi* [cosmic changes] ;
易不可見，則乾坤或幾乎息矣。	and if the *yi* were not seen, *Qian* and *Kun* would almost cease to act.[64]

In this passage *Qian* and *Kun*, being the purest expressions of *yin* and *yang*, are presented as the essential elements of the *Yi* system ; without these two elements, the system cannot operate, and, as a consequence, the transformations which happen in the cosmos remain unseen. Which is to say, without the "system of signs" devised by the sages, the intricacies of the entire cosmos would not be intelligible to humans. Furthermore, in the translation I deliberately distinguished between *Yi* and *yi* : in the first sentence, the text is obviously referring to the [*Book of*] *Changes*, while in the sentence "there would be no means of seeing the *yi*" (*yi bu ke jian* 易不可見), the word "*yi"* should be understood as "[cosmic] changes". In fact, as repeatedly stated in the *Xici*, the *Book of Changes* and its system are modelled after the changes underlying the cosmos ; however, without them, the *Changes* and the system it contains could not exist.

From the passages analysed above, it appears clear that the connections and conflations of meanings can also be identified on a lexical level. Polysemantic words are used throughout the text, with the word *yi/Yi* 易 ("change," or the "[*Book of*] *Changes*," but also, as we have seen, "easy," "easiness") being arguably the most striking of

63. *Xici* A.6.

64. *Xici* A.12.3.

all.[65] Despite the apparent ambiguity, which is indeed confusing as the example of chapter A12 has shown, the *Xici* in most cases does signal how we should understand these words depending on the context. For instance, in chapter A1, the word *yi* undoubtedly means "easiness", the quality of *Qian*, as it is paired with *jian* ("simplicity"), the quality of *Kun*. On the contrary, in the opening sentence of chapter A4, *Yi* refers to the *Book of Changes* as "it is modelled after Heaven and Earth". Indeed, the distinction between *Yi* (the book) and *yi* (cosmic change) is more difficult to establish, but this aspect should not surprise us given that one of the main arguments of the *Xici* is that the *Changes* is a duplication of, and thus overlaps with, the cosmic changes.

I shall now look into topic$_b$ which I call "the *Yi* and the humans" and starts in chapter A2. As it appears from the first line, the passage discusses the creation of the *Yi* by the sages, and then moves to detail the different elements which make the system operative. First, specific concepts, which occur formulaically in the core text (e.g. "good and bad fortune", "regret and repentance", "alterations and transformations", "firm and yielding lines") are related to their images. Next, the movement of the basic element of the *Yi* system (the lines) are equalised to what in the *Yi* tradition have become symbols of Heaven, Earth, and humans : *san ji* 三極 ("Three Ultimates"). Finally, the text assesses the usefulness of the *Yi* for the noble man as it provides the means he needs to act properly according to the (incipient) situation. Let us now have a look at the text.

聖人設卦觀象，繫辭焉而明吉凶，剛柔相推而生變化。	The Sage devised the hexagrams and scrutinised the images therein ; he appended the statements to them so that the good and bad fortune [indicated by the statements] were made clear. The firm and yielding [lines] push each other, thus bringing forth [the representation of] alterations and transformations.
是故，吉凶者，失得之象也。	This is why good and bad fortune are the images of gain and loss.
悔吝者，憂虞之象也。	Repentance and regrets are the images sorrow and worry.
變化者，進退之象也。	Alterations and transformations are the images of advance and retreat.
剛柔者，晝夜之象也。	The firm and yielding lines are the images of day and night.
六爻之動，三極之道也。	The movements of the six lines [of a hexagram] are the Way of the Three Ultimates.

65. The etymology of this word is highly debated among scholars. According to the *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字 (Explaining the Signs and Analysing the Characters), the first Chinese etymological dictionary completed in the early years of the 2nd century CE by Xu Shen 許慎 (58-148 CE), it originally meant "lizard" (*yantian* 蜴蜓 ; *xiyi* 蜥蜴). The oracle bone graph and the bronze graphs show a vessel being poured with water or spilling out water ( ; *Jicheng* 集成 3733). It should be said, as a general principle, that most of the terms related to the *Yi* (the book) are still object of debate among scholars Just to mention another example, the names of the two primary trigrams/hexagrams, *Qian* 乾 and *Kun* 坤, are also of obscure origin. To complicate the situation even more, the different manuscript versions of the *Yi* present several graphic variants which do not help us tracing the origins of these important terms. For an interpretation of these and other *Yi* related terms, see E.L. SHAUGHNESSY, *The Origin and Early Development of the* Zhou Changes, p. 481-482.

是故，君子所居而安者，易之序也。所樂而玩者，爻之辭也。	This is why what the noble man resides in and feels safe in is the sequence of the *Changes* ; what he enjoys and delights with are the lines statements.
是故，君子居則觀其象，而玩其辭；	This is why, in time of rest, the noble man scrutinises their images and delights in the statement appended to them ;
動則觀其變，而玩其占。	when undertaking actions, he scrutinises their changes and takes delight in their prognostications.
是以自天祐之，吉无不利。	Therefore, “using the support which comes to him from Heaven, [the noble man] will have good fortune and there will be nothing that will not be beneficial.”
彖者，言乎象者也。	The Judgments refer to images.
爻者，言乎變者也。	The lines [statements] refer to alterations.
吉凶者，言乎其失得也。	“Good fortune” and “bad fortune” refer to loss and gain.
悔吝者，言乎其小疵也。	“Repentance” and “remorse” refer to minor imperfections.
无咎者，善補過也。	“There is no trouble” refer to it is favourable to repair previous transgressions.
是故，列貴賤者存乎位。	This is why the ranking of loftiness and lowliness resides in the [lines’] positions ;
齊小大者，存乎卦。	the equalisation of smallness and greatness resides in the [entire] hexagram ;
辯吉凶者，存乎辭。	the distinction of good and bad fortune resides in the statements ;
憂悔吝者，存乎介。	concern over repentance and remorse resides in intermediate situation ;
震无咎者，存乎悔。	the arousing of “there is no trouble” resides in repentance.
是故，卦有小大，辭有險易。	This is why the hexagrams entail [both] smallness and greatness and [that] the statements entail [both] danger and easiness.
辭也者，各指其所之。	As for the statements, each of them points at where [a hexagram or a line] is going to.[66]

The last sentence is particularly relevant as it indicates the importance of the notion of “incipiencies” (*ji* 幾), which indicate the tendencies of the situations which the hexagrams figurate. This aspect of topic$_b$ is further expanded in chapter A10 where it said that the *Yi* “contains” the way of the sages and that the book is the “means by which” (*suo yi* 所以) the incipiencies are “thoroughly understood” (*yan ji* 研幾) by the sages. This quality of the sage to identify the *ji* is called “being spirit-like” (*shen* 神), which indicates a state of complete clear mindedness.[67] We are thus brought back to chapter A2, where a sage (or more than one ?) is responsible for the creation of the entire *Yi* system in order to assist other humans to make sense of the cosmic changes.

66. *Xici* A.2.

67. *Xici* A.10.5, but also A.11.2.

Here we see the spiral pattern which mirrors the text's main topic, which in turn duplicates the movement underlying reality.

Topic$_a$ and topic$_b$ merge in chapter A5, which I call "abstracting connections" :

一陰一陽之謂道,	Once *yin* once *yang*, this is called "Dao".
繼之者善也, 成之者性也。	What ensues from it is good ; what accomplishes it is inner nature.
仁者見之謂之仁,	Those who have humaneness see it and call it "humaneness."
知者見之謂之知。	Those who have knowledge see it and call it "knowledge."
百姓日用而不知,	The common people use it daily, and yet have no knowledge [of it].
故君子之道鮮矣。	Thus, the way of the noble man is rare.
顯諸仁, 藏諸用,	[The Way of *yin* and *yang*] manifests itself in humaneness ; it is hidden in daily operations.
鼓萬物而不與聖人同憂,	It arouses the myriad things and does not share the sages' worries.
盛德大業至矣哉。	Its flourishing potency and its great undertaking are the utmost indeed !
富有之謂大業,	Possessing in abundance is called great undertaking.
日新之謂盛德。	Daily renewal is called flourishing potency.
生生之謂易,	Life perpetuating itself is called cosmic change.
成象之謂乾,	The establishment of the images is called *Qian*.
效法之為坤,	The imitation of models is called *Kun*.
極數知來之謂占,	Exhausting the procedures in order to comprehend what is to come is called prognostication.
通變之謂事,	Fathoming alterations is called pursuit.
陰陽不測之謂神。	That in which *yin* and *yang* cannot be fathomed is called spirit.[68]

In this chapter, the cosmological process of change, which is referred to as "the way" (*dao* 道), is described as the alterations of *yin* and *yang* (*yi yin yi yang zhi wei dao* 一陰一陽之謂道). Here we also learn that the dyadic nature of the cosmic change cannot be fully grasped by *all* humans, who partake in the process but do not possess the ability to comprehend it. The comprehension of this dynamic can only be experienced by the "noble man" (*junzi*). Finally, the process of giving birth to life (*shengsheng* 生生) is called *yi* (cosmic change). As Anne Cheng points out, if we combine the two meanings of *yi*, we come to the conclusions that "there is nothing

68. *Xici* A.5.

easier than change".[69] The sentence is particularly relevant if we think about the notion of the book and the world mirroring each other : in fact, the cosmological dynamic of change is once again described through the categories of the book.

CONCLUSIONS

The *Xici* presents a composite and multi-layered nature. On a macro-level, the different topics are mentioned following a system of overlapping spiral patterns : topic$_a$ is first introduced in a textual unit, followed by topic$_b$, but then the text immediately goes back to the topic$_a$, sometimes even by using the same phrasing, or at least the same sentence structure, as we have seen above. Therefore, in this sense, the *Xici* can be regarded as a kind of argument-based text, meaning that the philosophical stance is exhausted *within* the text itself. Moreover, this "moving forward and backward" resembles that of the text's main topic, i.e. the system of change underlying the entire cosmos. This is performed on both a macro-level but also on a lexical level. Form, text and object are thus conflated. I should clarify that the text is not concerned with giving explicit definitions of the concepts it mentions. For instance, we are not told what "easiness" and "simplicity" are, we must infer the meanings of these two crucial concepts by ourselves. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this section, the *Xici* takes for granted that all these meanings are familiar to the text recipient(s) because they are entirely consistent with the worldview dominant during the periods in which the text was being conceived by multiple authors (5th-2nd century BCE). The sixty-four hexagrams — which purportedly stem from the numerical progression 1, 2, 4, 8, 64 — ultimately corresponds to the "myriad things" (*wanwu* 萬物), which is the way most philosophical texts, mainly belonging to the so-called Daoist tradition, refer to the "multiplicity of reality".[70] Indeed, the *Zhouyi*, far from being *the* product of the sages of the past, "emerged from a world of diverse but related practices that fundamentally shaped it."[71] What was most likely the outcome of a stochastic distribution was given philosophical legitimacy,[72] ultimately establishing a credible cosmo-philosophical framework for the numerological system of one of the many divination manuals in 3rd century BCE China. If read in this way, the endeavour of the authors of the *Xici* appears even more remarkable.

In conclusion, to paraphrase Mark E. Lewis, with the *Xici* we are assisting to the "blurring" of not only text and object, but also of text and form.[73] We could venture to push this interpretation even further by positing that the conflation of these three elements might have facilitated the comprehension of such an obscure text during the *act* of philosophical performance, as suggested by Dirk Meyer for the *Qiushui* chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. In the case of the *Xici*, the form can also be considered part of the

69. A. CHENG, A. CRISMA, *Storia del pensiero cinese. Dalle origini allo "Studio del mistero" (Vol. 1)*, p. 277.
70. *Xici* A.11.5. For a discussion on this issue, see A. CHENG, A. CRISMA, *Storia del pensiero cinese. Dalle origini allo "Studio del mistero" (Vol. 1)*, p. 278.
71. C.A. COOK, A. BRÉARD, "Stalk and Other Divination Traditions Prior to the Changes Canon," p. 23.
72. On the statistical analysis of the *Yi*-related divinatory methods, see *ibid*., p. 45-53.
73. M.E. LEWIS, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, p. 262.

message as the form *reduplicates* the main notion discussed.[74] "Form and content are one", and they are easily (inter)changeable.

74. D. MEYER, "Truth Claim with no Claim to Truth", p. 298. On a similar point in Shao Yong, see Alain ARRAULT, "Numbers, models and sounds : Numerical speculations of Shao Yong (1012-1077)," *Monumenta Serica*, 61 (2013), p. 183-201.