

**THE OLDEST BOOK OF THE  
CHINESE, THE YH-KING,  
AND ITS AUTHORS. VOL.  
I: HISTORY AND METHOD**

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The Oldest Book of the Chinese, the Yh-king, and Its Authors. Vol. I: History and Method by A. Terrien de Lacouperie

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you

THE OLDEST BOOK OF THE CHINESE

THE YH-KING

AND ITS AUTHORS.

BY

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VOL. I.

HISTORY AND METHOD

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## INTRODUCTION.

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SUMMARY.—I. How the discovery that the *Yh-King* was based upon old documents and vocabularies has been misunderstood for a foreign origin. II. New translators and writers on the subject since 1883-4. III. Symbolism of *Yh* in *Yh-King*. IV. The *Yh* of *Chou* was probably an adaptation of parts of the *Kwei-tsang*. V. Instances of very ancient lore hidden in the *Yh-King*.

### I.

THE *Yh-King*, the first in rank of the canonical books of China, was the result of a transformation in the twelfth century B.C. of an older work made of documents very ancient in date, and which entitles it to be called the oldest book of the Chinese. I came to that conclusion twelve years ago, and since that time the proofs on which it was based have grown stronger every year. The discrimination of its various strata and sources does away with the apparently insoluble meaning of the work, insolubility shown by the 2,200 or more explanations which have been suggested in China, and the remarkable discrepancies appearing in the European renderings of the text.

The views put forward in several previous papers and in the first part of the present work are simply that the basis of this most abstruse book of the Chinese consisted, for the greater part, of vocabulary lists or *glossarial explanations* of the ideograms forming *the heading of every chapter*, and that these lists had been *framed by the early Chinese leaders* for the benefit and teaching of their followers, in imitation of similar lists used in Anterior Asia, with which they

were acquainted, explaining the various uses and meanings of the ideographical characters of the writing which had been taught to them. Now there is a great difference between that contention and an assumed western origin of the work. It has been erroneously and repeatedly stated, at first by *The Athenæum*, Jan. 21, 1882, that we wanted to acknowledge in the *Yh-King*, an Akkadian book, a Babylonian work, or a foreign vocabulary, all statements equally false and inaccurate, as if to throw discredit on our researches.

Although, as shown by the previous exposé, the question of West Asiatic origin of the Chinese civilisation is distinct from the suggested explanation of the *Yh-King*, this side-question (the most important at large, but secondary with special reference to the *Yh-King*) has overshadowed the principal, and the chief point of my views concerning that most ancient Chinese book, viz., that the main portion of it rests on lists of the meanings special to the written symbols headings of the chapters, has been overlooked. In the thoroughly unscientific condition of present sinology, where routine and vested interests take the lead over science, our first communications on the subject could be but variously received. Abused by some, even before anything was published yet, or after the first part of my paper; received scientifically by others, they have been however praised and accepted by not a few independent scholars and colleagues in sinology. In order to avoid personal allusions and remain in the serene atmosphere of scientific research, I refrain mentioning any name. Buried in the fascicula of periodicals my purpose has often been misconceived.

Notwithstanding this unsatisfactory state of things, the little that has been known of the present researches, contemporary with the most disappointing translation by the venerable Dr. J. Legge, in the *Sacred Books of the East*, has awakened a greater and wider interest than could be expected in the matter. Several publications have been made, which we

shall notice directly in this introduction. But the awakened interest has not yet received satisfaction, and we may say cannot be satisfied until our new method of translating the *Yh-King* has been proved. In these conditions it has been thought necessary to re-publish separately, as the first part of the present work, the extensive paper of mine which appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, for 1882-83. The paragraphs 1 to 41 are exactly the same, while the others, viz. 42 to 117 have been slightly altered and improved for a second edition. The actual printing of pp. 1 to 101 was made in 1883, and had remained in sheets at the printers since that time. The pp. 102-121 are new.

## II.

The first writer in the field,<sup>1</sup> after the publication of our first articles on the subject, was Dr. J. Edkins, of Peking, in an elaborate article on the *Yh-King as a book of divination*,<sup>2</sup> where he has re-translated from his own point of view with a good deal of extraneous matter the chapters vii. xiii. xv. xx. xxx. and xxxi., translated below (pp. 69-91). His contention is that the work has been devised as a book of divination, and that the internal arrangement of the text and augural words, show a wilful connection with the symbolic meanings attributed to the separate lines composing the *Kwas*. This we are quite disposed to admit, as the result of the transformation undergone by the work under the pencil and interpretation of Wen Wang and Chōu Kung.

The first part of the French translation by Mr. C. L. F. Philastre, mentioned below (p. 49) has appeared in 1885, including the *Kwas* 1 to 30, but the second part with the conclusions of the author have not yet appeared (May 1892). All that has been published is free of anything like the self-

<sup>1</sup> We leave aside the many articles which were only reviews of the subject.

<sup>2</sup> J.R.A.S. 1884, vol. xvi. p. 371, 372.

<sup>3</sup> *Annales du Musée Guimet*, tom viii.

enlightened theories we have mentioned, and deserves all praise. The author has added nothing of himself, being satisfied with a close rendering of the text of the work which he reproduces with the characters, and a copious translation of the wings, besides the extensive commentaries of Cheng tze and of Chou tze, the two famous philosophers of the Sung dynasty.

The fictitious character of the *Yh-King* as a book, and the impossibility of making out any sense by itself, are plainly shown by the rendering of the text, which the author admits in many cases to be words *sans suite*, which can be made out but by the commentaries.

Another French version, complete, has been published by Prof. Ch. de Harlez<sup>1</sup> in 1889. He has given us a perfect *Yh-King*, an ideal work, perhaps more like it might have been than like it ever was. Starting from my discovery that the written character attached to the *Kwa*, and not the *Kwa* itself, is the subject-matter of the chapter, the great orientalist of Louvain has understood the book as a "repertoire de réflexions philosophiques et grammaticales sous 64 titres," and with the help of the commentaries, *Twan* of Wen Wang, and *Siang* of Chōu Kung<sup>2</sup>, he has endeavoured to justify his view. Later commentators have also proved useful to his work under that respect. In his very creditable performance he has shown, leaving aside the augural words, that the descriptions, thoughts, and statements of the work in the hands of Wen Wang and Chōu Kung, correspond generally to the meanings and acceptations of the written symbol heading of each chapter. This view differs from ours in that it takes the *Yh* at a later period of its existence than we do, and after it had undergone the transformations, modifications and changes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. de Harlez, *Le texte originair du Yih King, sa nature son interpretation*, pp. 35. Journal Asiatique, 1887.—*Le Yih King, texte primitif, rétabli, traduit et commenté*, 4to. pp. 155. Bruxelles, 1889.—*Le Yi-King, sa nature et son interpretation*, pp. 164-170 of Journal Asiatique, Jan.-Feb. 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, pp. 5-6.

of individual characters, the numerous changes in the headings of the chapters, the mutilations of text, and additions of new matters, studied by us, which are traditionally ascribed to Wen Wang. His rendering shows what the latter and Chōu Kung fancied the work was, or ought to be, outside the words and sentences of fortune-telling of which they had largely increased the number; but from the very fact that this aspect of the work corresponds to their own interpretations, it does not follow that tradition is wrong in ascribing its transformation, incomplete and partial as it ever was, to Wen Wang. To describe this temporary stage of the work, while it was in the hands of Wen Wang, as the original or primitive text of the *Yh-King* is therefore a misnomer, since the quotations given in the *Tso chuen* of the *Yh*, previously to this transformation, do not show it in that condition, nor otherwise than already a book of good fortune.

In the *Tsun-nan yat po*, a Chinese journal published at Shang-hai, of which the chief editor is Wang T'ao, the well known Sien Seng, who assisted Dr. J. Legge in his labours on the classics, there is an interesting note concerning the *Yh-King*; and as this note has been translated by the Rev. John Chalmers, I quote from his translation:

"... Now according to my judgment, while not expressing any rash opinion as to its Babylonian origin, there must have been some amount of text appended to the names of the hexagrams before the time of King Wan (1100 B.C.). Otherwise, how could Kao-tsung (1200 B.C.) have managed his divinations about 'attacking the Demon regions' (Hexagrams 63, 64), or King Yi-yh, his about 'the marriage of his younger sister' (Hexagrams 11, 64) or the Count of Ki, his about 'injured intelligence' (Hexagrams 36)? Moreover, King Wan and the Duke of Chou were both wise men, and in those paragraphs on the hexagrams and lines ascribed to them, there are absurd and irrelevant phrases combined in a manner which makes it evident that being wise they could only have let them remain out of respect for those who had gone before. And further in the time of King Wan and the Duke of Chou, the *Lien shan* and the *Kwei-tsang* were still extant, and they surely would have made some quotations from them. I send this for information to your paper, in the hope that some Chinese learned in the *Yh* may be induced to throw light on the subject. I may also quote a few words from Mao Si-ho's commentary. He says, 'According to Hwan T'ans *Ssu lun*, the *Lien shan* consisted of 80,000 characters, and the *Kwei-tsang* of 4,300 characters. The former was deposited in Lan t'ai, and the latter in T'ai pub.' Therefore the Hsia and Shang dynasties had texts of the *Yh* (as well as figures). Ch'ang Kia-tsi (of the Sung dynasty) also says, the *Lien shan* was lost; but there was a commentary on the *Kwei-tsang* by Sze-ma Ying (? Ying-chi) in 13