Hermeneutical translation of classics and cultures: the case of the \textit{I Ching} and China’s inter-civilizational dialogue

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ABSTRACT

Based on observations of strategies adopted in Western interpretation and translation of the Chinese classic \textit{I Ching}, this paper draws parallels between such strategies and Western developments in hermeneutics philosophy. In relation to this parallelism, three approaches of Western encounters with Chinese ancient literature – “conservative,” “dialogical,” and “radical” – will be identified. Cultural manifestations of such developments in twentieth century poetry, music, and the arts will be discussed.

1 Introduction

The \textit{I Ching} (\textit{yi jing}, or the Book of Changes, often referred to as \textit{yi}, or \textit{zhouyi}) has inspired and accommodated a variety of approaches to inter-civilizational dialogue between China and the West. We can broadly identify three categories of encounters of the West with this classic corresponding to three parallel approaches to translation and interpretation strategies, strategies that are in turn analogous to the historical developments in Western philosophical perspectives and cultural milieu. What we can call a “conservative” encounter with the \textit{I Ching} has been basically attempts for faithful translation of the text with minimal intervention of the translator, a common practice in various cultures and civilizations, yet in terms of its meticulous methodology influenced by Western modernity with its linguistic objectivism and traditional philological practices. The second category, a “dialogical” encounter with the text, has been marked by interpretive translations at times influenced by religious perspectives, as well as interpretation of the \textit{I Ching}’s philosophical import, often a cognitive encounter influenced by Western rational philosophy and science. The third category has been a “radical” representation of the classic primarily by poets, and by artists in various forms of arts, and also in works of literature. This approach was informed
by Western postmodernism and corresponded to the US counterculture movement of the latter half of the twentieth century, a movement which also spread to Europe.

In this paper we will first explore certain Western philosophical hermeneutics concepts in relation to making sense of and representing the literature of cultures distant in time and space. We will locate in Western translation and interpretation thought and theories the three aforementioned strands. This will be followed by a review of a few exemplary cases of manifestation of these theories in the practices of translation and interpretation of the *I Ching*, including cultural, literary, artistic, and creative renderings of the classic.

2 Hermeneutics, interpretation and translation

There are two hermeneutics concepts particularly pertinent to the topic of this paper, “hermeneutic circle” a technique for improved understanding by going back and forth between two different perspectives (such as what can be understood from a part of a text versus the whole of the text), and Gadamer’s concept of “fusion of horizons” or the merger of different perspectives. These concepts can be applied to more than understanding the written text. In relation to intercultural discourses we can apply them to a circular reiterative comparing and analysis of cultures distant in time and/or space, what leads to the fusion of cultural horizons (Gadamer 304). This often entails a self-reflexivity that is informed by both the horizon of the “self” and its present *Weltanschauung*, and that of the “other” – the one belonging to the past, “a historically other” (Gadamer 304), or a foreign culture. Such activity leads to establishing a dialogical relationship with the “other,” as will be discussed later. Likewise, one can engage in a dialogical interaction with the classics – a “hermeneutical conversation” (Gadamer 389). These practices have been applied consciously or intuitively to interpretations and translations of the *I Ching*, what has led to a dialogue between Chinese culture and the West, as we will discuss.

Gadamer assigns great importance to tradition as one’s cultural history shapes one’s understanding of the world: “in all understanding whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work” (Gadamer 300). Still, in view of the contemporary hermeneutics thought, it is not only the past that needs to be recognized and valued; the present also needs to be acknowledged, but this acknowledgement should take into consideration the traditional past. If there is no affinity between the new and what we already know, understanding of the new will not be possible (Bernstein 142). Thus, an ongoing and open dialogue across time is needed to resolve the incommensurability between the past and the present. This involves translation of the distant past into the present, and vice versa: “contextualizing the past in the present, and the present in the past, hence preserving the expanding text that is the culture” (Becker 51). It will have implications for one’s attitude towards ancient classics: “To understand the meaning of classical texts requires an application of what these texts have to say here and now, for me and my generation” (Vasterling 154–55). Thus the task entails simultaneously an insightful understanding of the present and a new interpretation of the past.

Having reviewed certain hermeneutical concepts, the fusion of horizons that can take place through dialogue with one’s own tradition and/or that of the “other,” we will next review alternative approaches to interpretation and translation as these activities can contribute positively or negatively to the dialogue between civilizations. We can broadly
identify three hermeneutical approaches with their parallels in translation strategies. In such analysis the intention is not to define distinctive stages of historical developments in these disciplines as all such strategies have been adopted more or less throughout the history of Western literature and culture. Yet, we see that the last of these three approaches seems to have had a particularly strong manifestation in twentieth-century popular literature and culture.

Traditionally, hermeneutics has been primarily about rules of understanding and interpretation of religious texts. In this respect, Western hermeneutics is commonly known to be “the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation. For both Jews and Christians throughout their histories, the primary purpose of hermeneutics, and of the exegetical methods employed in interpretation, has been to discover the truths and values of the Bible” (Augustyn et al. n.p.). With such understanding of hermeneutics the purpose is to discover and show the author’s sacred intent and any interpretation and exegesis is aimed at demonstrating the moral and spiritual truths of the divine revelation rather than offering a creative and imaginative rendering of the text. Compared to other strategies this is the most conservative approach as although it involves analysis, weighing of alternatives, and articulation, it attempts at minimizing the role of the self of the interpreter. The outcome should be an elucidation of the original message of the divine without any alterations by the interpreter.

This approach to hermeneutics parallels what Dryden defines as the “metaphrasing” approach to translation. His metaphrasing is a word for word and literal representation of the text. In this approach the translator aims at being transparent, rendering the text as much as possible close to its original in the source language. In fact, the translator’s creativity and imaginative interpretation are considered to be obstacles to faithful translation. However, such factual and word for word translations, which are in line with the traditional philological research, are handicapped in terms of transferring meaning and intent of the text. Dryden characterizes the metaphrasing approach to translation in this manner: “‘Tis much like dancing on ropes with fettered legs: a man may shun a fall by using caution; but the gracefulness of motion is not to be expected: and when we have said the best of it, ’tis but a foolish task; for no sober man would put himself into a danger for the applause of ’scapeing without breaking his neck” (qtd. in Hopkins 146).

As opposed to the conservative hermeneutic principles traditionally employed for the interpretation of the Bible, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics advocates a dialogical interaction with the text in which the reader actively participates in interpretation and sense-making. In this approach the specific situatedness and historical consciousness of the interpreter and the interpreter’s self-reflexivity play an important role. The interpretation of the text is inevitably to a certain degree influenced by the unique life experience and worldview of the interpreter. As such, the text can have different meanings for different interpreters or for the same interpreter at different times. But the interpreter does not neglect the text or the author’s intent, rather establishes a dialogical relationship with the text, echoing the source but in perhaps a new form, a variation² of it.

This second approach to hermeneutics shares some common characteristics with Dryden’s second approach to translation, “paraphrasing.” Compared to metaphrasing this is a more liberal approach to translation. It is as Dryden explains: “translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense, and that too is admitted to be amplified,
but not altered” (qtd. in Hopkins 145). This would be what Gentzler ([1998] 2001, 167) seeks: “to capture the sense of the original in an analogous rather than identical form, one that functions in a similar fashion within the target culture.” In this approach the translator relegates the “word for word” translation approach, adopting instead a “sense for sense” translation. The rigid rule of translating words is replaced by conveying the sense of the original text as understood by the specific translator.

Such sense-making is clearly at least to a degree subjective as the result can be different for different translators. The translator inevitably develops a dialogical relationship with the text, interpreting the text based on personal insight. The emphasis is not on keeping the self of the translator fully transparent. It rather invites a hermeneutical engagement of the translator. In this dialogical relationship, the translator might even adopt a more liberal approach, searching for the “sense behind sense,” as Paul Ricoeur puts it, to search for the “hidden sense behind the obvious sense” (qtd. in Stolze 61).

With the advent of postmodern thought and philosophy we enter a new stage, observing a different perspective on hermeneutics, what we can call a radical approach to interpretation. This third approach is informed by postmodern notions of anti-essentialism, deconstruction, relativism, language games, and the instability of meaning. Such an attitude towards interpretation is associated with particular intellectual orientation of the time and its cultural manifestations, deviating from what we know as hermeneutic principles. Its philosophical components can be traced in what John D. Caputo in his Radical Hermeneutics locates in the thought of “radical thinkers like Kierkegaard and Husserl, Nietzsche and Meister Eckhart, […] the late Heidegger who drops the term [hermeneutics] from his vocabulary and criticizes hermeneutic phenomenology and Derrida, who is an outspoken critic of hermeneutics” (3). Caputo himself is in favour of “non-dogmatic interpretation, novelty, and diversity (Baruchello 137). If we want to characterize in a short phrase Caputo’s book Radical Hermeneutics, what is clearly a serious philosophical work, we can say it is about “being playful” (admittedly, a restrictive representation of this work). We will address the concept of “play” later.

Whereas Gadamer strives for a fusion of horizons that leads to the emergence of truth, albeit that truth can be relative and subject to change, such postmodern perspectives proclaim that there is no “truth” of anything to be discovered. This we can call radical relativism: “Taking as their slogan Nietzsche’s contention that there is no truth but only an array of interpretations, the radical relativists insist that any text allows innumerable readings” (Armstrong 1). Accordingly, all one represents as truth is essentially a suspected makeshift. In that sense, there is no truth claim of the text that can be discovered through a dialogical engagement with the text. In contrast to this perspective, in Gadamer’s view “interpretations that consist in nothing but the imposition of the interpreter’s perspective on the text are definitely invalid […] Interpretations are valid insofar as they succeed in bringing out the Sache, the meaning of the text” (Vasterling 173). In the same way that “[d]ialogue requires that the interlocutors take seriously what the other says, understanding requires that the interpreter takes seriously what the other text says” (Vasterling 159).

The postmodern radical approach to interpretation parallels Dryden’s translation strategy of “imitation,” what he even hesitates to call “translation,” as it is “where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion, and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork as he pleases” (qtd. in Hopkins 146).
This perspective resonates with the contemporary views on translation epitomized by the adages of “the death of the author,” or the “rewriting of the text.” In terms of translation of texts distant in time or culture, in this radical approach one assumes that there is no point in attempting to make a bridge between the perspective of the alien – the unfamiliar author – and one’s own perspective. As such, one can take the liberty to interpret, translate, and represent the “other” as one wishes, what often leads to a radical localization of the text. The text becomes readily domesticated, accommodating the needs and desires of the target culture. This indeed has been the case with the playful interpretations and translations of the I Ching, a liberal imitation of the classic, as we will discuss.

Gadamer allows for mimicking but not a casual and unconstrained one. His “mimesis, imitation” and “play” (Gadamer 102) involve constraints that would not allow for radical playful practices. While Dryden’s “imitation” is “radical,” Gadamer’s is essentially “dialogical.” For him imitation cannot be the product of a wild and open-ended imagination about what is being imitated. It should rather be based on factual knowledge, what leads to the “recognition” of the source. Imitation should be informed by the cognitive understanding of what is being imitated and “the cognitive import of imitation lies in recognition [of what is being imitated].” Accordingly, recognition of that which is being imitated is an essential prerequisite and any interpretation should bring such knowledge and recognition to life: “When a person imitates something he allows what he knows to exist and to exist in the way that he knows it” (Gadamer 113), i.e. not in the way he wishfully imagines it to be. In that sense one should obtain adequate knowledge about that which is being imitated – to “recognize” it.

Gadamer’s recognition of a work is not a simple knowledge of it, rather it is the knowledge of the text’s essence, “a recognition which has the character of a genuine knowledge of essence” (Gadamer 114). Such genuine recognition of the essence is a dialogically gained knowledge in which the interpreter’s self plays a role: “The joy of recognition is rather the joy of knowing more than is already familiar. In recognition what we know emerges, as if illumined, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence . . . ” (Gadamer 2113). This level of recognition paves the way for the emergence of an authentic but novel representation of the classic: “the presentation of the essence, far from being a mere imitation, is necessarily revelatory. In imitation, one has to leave out and to heighten. Because he is pointing to something, he has to exaggerate, whether he likes it or not . . . ” (Gadamer 114).

In this relationship with the text the role of the self of the interpreter is essential. But this does not mean an arbitrary alteration of the text. To Gadamer “correct presentation (Darstellung)” (Gadamer 118) and “right” representation (Gadamer 117) are important elements of hermeneutical mediation. I relation to the I Ching, indeed it could have not been a careless representation of the classic that has made it a contributor to the world literature. Rather, the book has been recognized as a world literature classic to the degree it has been “recognized” in its essence. In this process the classic is “raised, as it were, to its own validity and truth” (Gadamer 114).

3 Western representations of the I Ching

In the Western world, Chinese classics have been abundantly translated and interpreted, particularly within the scholarly field of sinology. A remarkable case of cross-cultural
reception of Chinese classics that goes beyond the academic arena, extending its influence to Western popular culture is the interpretation and translation of the I Ching – considered by the Chinese people to be “the essence of Chinese thought and wisdom” (Shaughnessy 197). Certain Chinese scholars namely Chung-ying Cheng have observed that Chinese philosophy and in particular the I Ching possess a high hermeneutical nature, engaging readers of all backgrounds in a reflexive and affective interaction with the text (Nelson 125). This quality of the I Ching has made it particularly amenable to various interpretation strategies.

In its motherland, the classic has been interpreted throughout history since ancient times. What in the very remote antiquity was only composed of different combinations and arrangements of broken and unbroken line symbols progressively throughout history was expanded and enhanced by adding to it layers of textual interpretations. With these textual interpretations and commentaries the classic that originally was merely used for divination became the foremost source of wisdom throughout China’s history. Considering the I Ching’s strong interpretive tradition, it is reasonable to assume that certain Chinese hermeneutics principles traditionally employed by the Chinese scholars for its interpretation should have been adopted, if only implicitly and informally, by Western sinologists and translators working under the guidance of Chinese masters, as was the case with Richard Wilhelm. We come across research published during the last decade on the I Ching interpretation methodologies in relation to contemporary Western hermeneutics, namely papers by Professor Ming Dong Gu of University of Texas at Dallas: “Elucidation of Images in the Book of Changes: Ancient Insights Into Modern Language Philosophy and Hermeneutics” and “The ‘Zhouyi’ (Book of Changes) as an Open Classic: A Semiotic Analysis of Its System of Representation.” A more generic and comprehensive study of the Chinese hermeneutical tradition has been done by Professor Zhou Yukai of Sichuan University in a volume titled Classical Chinese Hermeneutics (中国古代阐释学研究) – with its English translation forthcoming. This work explores “the rich and varied theories of hermeneutics that have formed the Chinese tradition” based on “a thorough collection and analysis of discourses on textual interpretation that is scattered throughout ancient codes and records” (Zhou Yukai 1). The book addresses distinctive characteristics of specific historical eras, also addressing equivalents of these practices and concepts in contemporary Western hermeneutics.

In Western interpretations and translations of the I Ching we can locate the three strategies of interpretation with their parallels in translation methodology discussed above: conservative, dialogical, and radical. The general trend has been historical in nature, a move from conservative to radical, in parallel with Western transition of thought and culture from modernity to postmodernism. Yet, the main factor in adopting a particular strategy has been the nature and purpose of interpretation and translation. Academic sinology research for instance has been by nature more objective and conservative whereas cultural and artistic interpretations have been creative and often highly subjective. In the following pages certain examples of Western interpretations and translations of the I Ching will be reviewed, each fully or predominantly characterized by one of the three identified strategies.

The West became aware of and paid special attention to understanding and translating the Book of Changes in a noticeable way as of the mid-nineteenth century. As was the case with Daoist texts – the most important one being the Tao Te Ching – missionaries
were the ones who initially translated and introduced the text to the West. Among them was Legge (1815-1897) the sinologist who made a practically word for word English translation of the *I Ching*.

Legge’s nineteenth century work was in line with European traditional philology. With his literal translation method, he attempted to make his own self as the translator transparent. Regarding his work he writes: “When I made my first translation of it in 1854, I endeavoured to be as concise in my English as the original Chinese was” (Legge 1963, xv). Legge had followed the example set by the Jesuit missionary Jean-Baptiste Régis and his assistants in their 1730’s translation of the *I Ching* into Latin. After twenty years, when he looked again at Regis’ and his own translations he found both unintelligible and came to the conclusion that “it is vain therefore for a translator to attempt a literal translation” (Legge xv). As such, he revised his method, but still taking a conservative approach. Regarding the translator’s task he wrote: “It will be his object to express the meaning of the original as exactly and concisely as possible. But it will be necessary for him to introduce a word or two now and then to indicate what the mind of the writer supplied for itself” (Legge 1xv-xvi). What he did in his revised translation was enclosing in parentheses, with some exceptions, the words not in the original such as: “Khien (represents) what is great and originating…” (Legge 57). This obviously does not seem significantly different than his original approach.

According to Richard Smith, Legge, with no personal affection for the Chinese culture, nor a special reverence for the *I Ching*, rendered a literal translation (184). Legge’s conservative style could have been partially due to the pressure exerted by the missionaries who wanted to draw a clear line between Christianity and Chinese traditional thought. More than twenty of the Protestant missionaries signed a letter protesting his translation of *ti* (帝) and *shang ti* (上帝) as “God” in his third volume of *The Sacred Books of the East*. This protest letter and a response to it in support of Legge by the editor of these publications Professor F. Max Muller were published in the December 30, 1880 issue of the ‘Times’ newspaper. Legge disregarded the missionaries’ resistance to this case of cultural translation. He continued rendering *ti* and *shangti* as “God,” or the latter as “Supreme God” (Legge xix-xx). Still, this incidence demonstrates the extent of difficulties he might have faced in the academic and cultural setting of the 19th century, by deviating from a conservative translation approach.

But the West and generally the rest of the world paid significant attention to the *I Ching* after a translation into German by Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930) in the early twentieth century and particularly when his German translation was through the encouragement of Carl Gustav Jung retranslated into English by the Jung’s student Baynes. Wilhelm took the freedom to include his own commentaries and interpretations in his translation. As opposed to Legge who attempted to show what the *I Ching* says, Wilhelm’s objective was to explain what the book means (Smith 189). With his son Hellmut, the two lectured on the *I Ching* and its philosophical perspectives and these were published and disseminated for the English language readers.

Legge’s translation was certainly loyal to the source but did not lead to a significant intercultural dialogue. Wilhelm, on the other hand, accepted the fact that he cannot disregard his own culturally and historically effected consciousness. As such, he allowed himself to take a more liberal approach. In effect he attempted establishing a conversation
between this Chinese classic and the West – a fusion of horizons of distant civilizations. Consequently, Wilhelm made the I Ching an important contribution to world literature. Such attempts for fusion of horizons can be transformative as they allow for contemplation and reflexivity of the translator, as well as the target reader. A comparative analysis and examination of both the source and target cultures takes place in the process of interpretation and translation. Academic research on classics and their scholarly interpretations generally adopt such a dialogical approach. Western scholarly books and dissertations fall in this generic category, analyzing and interpreting distant cultures, but not creatively and playfully altering them or changing their import. There has been a numerous amount of such scholarly research conducted in the West on the Chinese tradition and classics.

But dialogical engagement with the I Ching has not been limited to academic research. Certain prominent intellectuals who were neither involved in translation of texts, nor were sinologists, admired the I Ching and were inspired by it. Going back to the 17th century, philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz found the Yin-Yang theory of the I Ching in compliance with his binary numbering system. His paper on this topic was titled “Explanation of the binary arithmetic, which uses only the characters 1 and 0, with some remarks on its usefulness, and on the light it throws on the ancient Chinese figures of Fu Xi.” Leibniz was the one in the West who for the first time drew great attention to the I Ching.

Leibniz’s binary system is a mathematical representation of numbers, using only digits zero and one. Such binary numerical representation is observed in a particular arrangement of hexagrams3 in the I Ching. This arrangement is called Fu Xi arrangement4 as it is derived from Fu Xi’s “Earlier Heaven” arrangement of the eight trigrams. In this arrangement, if the Yin and Yang lines represent zero and one respectively, the hexagrams in a sequential order represent numbers zero (binary calculus 000000) to sixty-three (binary calculus 111111). Despite the fact that a sinologist like Shchutskii does not see this mathematical relationship important to the essence of the I Ching – “we categorically deny that the essence of our document is hidden in this conformation or that it represents the document’s [...] forgotten content” (20) – this observation by Leibniz and his associated philosophical interpretations are of significance in terms of cross-cultural exchange between China and the West. In fact, when Leibniz discovered the compatibility between his binary mathematics and the I Ching, he became highly motivated to continue his research, what possibly led to a technological revolution – today’s digital computers and information technology. Philosophically, he believed that as the I Ching’s trigrams and hexagrams are derived from Yin and Yang, all matters and situations can be derived from various arrangements of polar concepts.

As we move to the twentieth century, Western interest in Chinese philosophy heightens. We observe Western intelligentsia, poets, writers and artists paying particular attention to China and its spiritual and philosophical heritage, some directly engaging with the I Ching. Several prominent scientists were inspired by the Chinese ancient philosophy. Among them was the physics 1922 Nobel Prize winner Niels Bohr, one of the pioneers of quantum mechanics. In his fascination with the Chinese culture Bohr travelled to China. He even made sure his family Coat of Arms included the taijitu symbol. Bohr’s complementarity principle considers the wave and particle theories of light as complementary explanations of one and the same essentially inexplicable reality,
a notion resonating with the Yin Yang symbolism as Yin and Yang both appear from an original oneness, *taiji* (Blofeld 219). Bohr “was also convinced of the extraphysical relevance of complementarity” (Atmanspacher) and applied this concept and his other related theories to philosophical problems (Bokulich, Alisa and Peter), in essence establishing a philosophical dialogue between a highly advanced modern viewpoint of the West and the most ancient Chinese paradigm.

In the twentieth century we also come across the aforementioned Carl Jung, known for his analytical psychology. Jung became highly interested in the *I Ching*. In this regard he wrote: “For more than 30 years I have interested myself in this oracle technique, or method of exploring the unconscious, for it has seemed to me of uncommon significance. I was already fairly familiar with the *I Ching* when I first met Wilhelm in the early 1920s; he confirmed for me then what I already knew, and taught me many things more” (Wilhelm and Baynes 34). Jung tried divination with the *I Ching* and considered the result quite enlightening and related this success in divination to his theory of synchronicity.

Yet, the reception of Chinese thought in the West and particularly in the US was not limited to scholarly investigations but also assumed a popular character, what led to a widespread cultural phenomenon beyond intellectual spheres. At times it would be even difficult to assess the reception and interpretation of the *I Ching* in the West as being more of a scientific and intellectual phenomenon or a literary and cultural one. Generally speaking, scientific interpretations of the *I Ching* such as the well written Katya Walter’s *Tao of Chaos, DNA & the I Ching* and similar works are not accounted as mainstream scientific research; rather they possess a cultural appeal. In relation to this we read:

> Still another fruitful approach to the spread of the *Yijing* in the West would be a systematic examination of the many books and articles on the mathematical and scientific applications of the [Book of] *Changes* that have appeared over the past few decades. I have perused dozens of such works, with titles such as *Bagua Math, I Ching Philosophy and Physics*, and *DNA and the Yijing*, both in print and in manuscript form. These studies are, to say the least, of remarkably uneven quality, but they are invariably fascinating” (Smith 209).

Nevertheless, despite varied degrees of scientific and philosophical depth attributed to the literature related to the *I Ching*, these works have been inspired by the harmony felt between the Chinese traditional thought and the West’s present time cultural milieu.

In the 20th century we come across hermeneutical engagements with the *I Ching* that are in important ways different from both the sober and solemn philosophical and methodological works of sinologists (or traditional translators), and the works approximating popular science. They have been rather characterized by a playful and creative engagement with the classic. While certain scholars have been weary of the “playful, puckish” (Armstrong 2) attitude of the postmodern approach, “playful interpretation” epitomizes the work of many artists, writers, and musicians of the twentieth century – including Nobel Prize winners – whom I categorize as radical interpreters of the *I Ching*; those who took the classic seriously but also took a high degree of liberty in interpreting it. They creatively employed the *I Ching* for their works in ways that neither the Chinese who have interpreted this classic for more than three millennia have dreamed of, nor the earlier Western translators and interpreters of the *I Ching* could have imagined.
The radical cultural translation of the *I Ching* is a phenomenon particularly relevant to the twentieth century engagement of the West with the book, highlighted by the counterculture sentiments and its manifestation in literature, poetry and arts of the latter part of the century. Smith (10–11) observes:

The *Yijing* has touched many realms of modern Western culture, from the psychology of Carl G. Jung to the architecture of I. M. Pei. The choreographers Merce Cunningham and Carolyn Carlson have found inspiration in the *Book of Changes*, as have such noted composers as Joseph Hauer, John Cage, Udo Kasemets, and James Tenney. It has been a significant element in the art of individuals such as William Littlefield, Eric Morris, Arnaldo Coen, Arturo Rivera, Augusto Ramírez, and Felipe Erenberg, and in the writings of a wide range of Western authors, including Philip K. Dick, Allen Ginsberg, Octavio Paz, Herman Hesse, Raymond Queneau, and Jorge Luis Borges.

There is much to be said about Western works of art, including avant-garde art, literature and poetry that were inspired by the *I Ching* and Chinese philosophy. The *I Ching* and Taoist thought were associated with a multitude of cultural trends in music, and youth culture. The connection of the American counterculture movement of 1960s to 1980s (also spread throughout Western Europe), with the Taoist thought can be understood in the light of the Taoist critique of rigid regulations and mechanical patterns of life and thought, what has been a salient characteristic of modernity and its institutional establishments. Anti-establishment and antiwar sentiments, concerns for environment, nostalgia of a life in harmony with nature, an emphasis on mysticism, spirituality and intuition (in the face of modernity’s positivism), and a self-cultivation that is not associated with traditional Western institutional religions; these were hallmarks of the counterculture movement of the youth, informed by Taoist and Buddhist perspectives arriving from the East.

Of the heralds of the counterculture movement, many were familiar with and inspired by the *I Ching*. Bob Dylan, the 2016 controversial Literature Nobel Prize winner whose influence on popular culture lasted for more than half a century, revered this classic for its truth and poetry declaring: “the only thing that is amazingly true, period [ . . . ] besides being a great book to believe in, it’s also very fantastic poetry” (qtd. in Smith 199). Certain of his song lyrics, prose, poems, and works of visual art were inspired by this classic. Another musician John Cage employed the *I Ching* not only for his music compositions but also in his visual art, “drawings, watercolor and etchings” (Smith 206). Cage and his collaborators also used the *I Ching* for dance choreography. His novel and playful experimental music had a great influence on the likeminded networks of artists and composers in the US, Europe, and Asia. According to Smith, “he was, until his death in 1992, the foremost practitioner of *Yijing*-related music composition in the United States, with a global reputation and a worldwide network of followers” (Smith 204). He also exerted a particular influence on Latin America.

Beyond the borders of America, in the Western world the literary and artistic interpretations of the *I Ching* are especially noticeable in the second half of twentieth century Mexico. We also come across the famous poem “Para una Versión del *I King*” (a version of the *I Ching*) by Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina (Smith 202). Smith logs an impressive list of writers who had special interest in the *I Ching*: “Of the many Mexican writers influenced by the *Book of Changes* including Salvador Elizondo, José Agustín, Jesús Gonzalez Dávila, Juan Tovar, Francisco Cervantes, Sergio Fernández, Daniel Sada,
Alberto Blanco, Francisco Serrano, and José López Guido – Octavio Paz, a 1990 Nobel Prize winner in Literature, is perhaps the best known” (Smith 202). There were a multitude of influential artists, writers, poets, and musicians among Paz’s network of associates who were inspired by the I Ching (Smith 203–204). In Europe the French poet and novelist of the twentieth-century Raymond Queneau had a great interest in the I Ching (Smith 200).

One might wonder whether it was the avant-garde, creative, and playful minds of John Cage and the like that gave the I Ching a popular appeal in the West, or was it the cultural milieu of the time, or in fact was it the Chinese ancient classic itself when it reached the West that exerted such cultural influence. With considerable certainty we can claim it has been the synergic effect of all three. Gadamer’s insightful examination of the concept of “play” can shed some light on this discussion. He applies this concept to the analysis of the nature of literature and a variety of arts: poetry, theater, and plastic arts. Taking his perspective into consideration, despite the role played by figures like John Cage, a particularly playful and innovative artist, the distinctive character of the I Ching itself – a poetic and symbolic text that is open to creative and imaginative interpretations – has been essential in the artistic cultural translation that has taken place: “what holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself” (Gadamer 106).

However, the I Ching of its own accord is not adequate for analyzing and understanding this intercultural phenomenon. The interpreter or the artist needs to be genuinely and authentically involved with the text, “seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play as someone who doesn’t take the game seriously is a spoil sport” (Gadamer 103). But even the openness of the text to creative and artistic interpretations and the sincere interest of the artist are not sufficient; the artist needs spectators, those who appreciate the work of art: “All presentation is potentially for someone. That this possibility is intended is the characteristic feature of art as play” (Gadamer 108). Gadamer emphasizes the primacy of the spectator: “He [the spectator] – and not the player – is the person for and in whom the play is played” (Gadamer 109). As such, the choices an artist makes in selecting the tools and methods he or she employs for the creation of the work of art are not: “the free discretion of the artist and are not the mere expression of his inner life. Rather, the artist addresses people whose minds are prepared and chooses what promises to have an effect on them. He himself stands in the same tradition as the public that he is addressing and which he gathers around him” (Gadamer 129).

Accordingly, we can conclude that the cultural milieu of the twentieth century Americas has played an important role in the creative and artistic interpretations of the I Ching. Comparing two different regions of the West, the Americas and Europe, and at two different eras, prior and after the mid-twentieth century, can shed some light on this. Selection of the middle of the century as the point of departure for our comparison is not arbitrary as it was the time when the English translation of Wilhelm became available, also coinciding with the arrival of the American counterculture movement. Essentially, Wilhelm’s dialogical translation inaugurated a new era in the dialogue between the I Ching and the West.

The long-held European intellectual tradition is an important factor to be taken into consideration in this comparison. Historically, objective academic studies and research
has had a much deeper roots in Europe than the Americas (Oxford University and the University of Paris were established as early as 11th and 12th centuries). Among the leading philosophers, those who contributed to the gradual development of what eventually became philosophical hermeneutics have been Europeans, among them Martin Luther, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Ricoeur, Heidegger and Gadamer. Considering this intellectually strong cultural tradition, it is not surprising that Europeans in as early as the seventeenth century engaged in a significant hermeneutical encounter with the I Ching and pioneered rigorous study, translation, and interpretation of the Chinese classics, what constitutes conservative and dialogical encounters. Before and up to the mid-twentieth century, Leibniz, Regis, Legge, and to a degree Wilhelm, attempted objective representations of the I Ching. In contrast to the Europeans’ predominantly cognitive approach, beginning with the mid-twentieth century a multitude of American artists, writers and poets, and their Latin American counterparts who were in geographical proximity to them and to a great degree influenced by them, played a significant role in the radical interpretations of the I Ching, which demonstrated a strong aesthetic component.

But despite varied regional and historical characteristics manifest in cultural trends and societies’ aesthetic consciousness, in relation to the classic itself an important question deserves particular attention: “We ask what this identity is that presents itself so differently in the changing course of ages and circumstances. It does not disintegrate into the changing aspects of itself so that it would lose all identity, but it is there in them all. They all belong to it. They are all contemporaneous (gleichzeitig) with it. Thus we have the task of interpreting the work of art in terms of time (Zeit)” (Gadamer 119).

As we have seen, Western encounters with the I Ching have taken various forms: conservative, dialogical, radical, or a mix of these. Clearly, compared to Gadamerian dialogical hermeneutics, the radical postmodern rewritings and interpretations can be more susceptible to commercialism, instrumentalist manipulation and annexation of alien cultures, as they allow for unconstrained and more or less wishful interpretations. Such interpretations and representations of the Chinese culture would not accommodate the Gadamerian ideal of fusion of horizons. In fact they can in the long run lead to a distrust of the West and even a communication breakdown.

But even if we move back from radical approaches to more conservative ones, still the question of authenticity and fidelity to the original text and its culture does not lose its significance. Wilhelm’s dialogical approach raises an important question: to what degree was his work contributing to a fusion of horizons as opposed to facilitating the appropriation of the “other.” Such questions cannot be readily answered as they need much research and analysis and at the end the answer would reflect a partially subjective judgment. For sure postmodernism’s particular attention to the subtle ways in which Western perspectives can be imposed on the East invites a different judgment on this matter than the position which Gadamerian bridge-building evokes. Nevertheless, the impressive impact of Wilhelm’s work proves that he has successfully offered a partially novel interpretation of an ancient classic.

Generally speaking, the Western cultural encounter with the I Ching has moved from conservative approaches towards dialogical, and furthermore to radical interpretations. The question of fidelity to the original text and the source culture becomes more important in the face of radical and playful approaches. Yet, regardless of the
degree of the closeness of the interpretation and translation of the Chinese classics to their original texts and to the Chinese culture as understood and experienced by the Chinese people, the far reaching influences of the classic reviewed in this paper negates the existence of fundamentally isolated and insulated civilizations. Whether due to a sincere interest in the culture of the “other” or the product of mixed motives, intercultural exchanges have become increasingly inevitable. Attention to this fact is of particular importance at this time in human history when constructive and harmonious interactions and exchanges among civilizations is a necessity for the prosperity and even survival of humankind. In this vein, I will end this research with an edifying passage:

...[John] Dewey upholds the prospect of a global ecumenism that does not erase local or national loyalties but uses them as a springboard for intercultural cooperation [...] As it seems to me, this prospect is not far removed from, and even coincides with, Gadamer’s vision of a global “unity in diversity” – a unity not imposed by “one single nation” – and his plea that “the future survival of humankind” may depend on our willingness to engage dialogically with personal level and the level of larger human communities and cultures (Dallmayr 118).

Notes

1. This paper is based on presentation made at the Beijing Forum 2019, an improved version presented at the Sixth Annual Conference and International Symposium on Cognitive Communication cosponsored by the Global Rhetoric Society. The work was developed while on assignment with the Peking University Institute of Ancient Civilizations project of Hermeneutics Research on Eastern Philosophy. My thanks to Ms. Zhou Xiayi for her review and comments.
2. For “Variation Theory” refer to Professor Cao Shunqing’s volume, The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature.
3. A hexagram is a symbol composed of a combination of six Yin and/or Yang (broken and/or unbroken) lines. A trigram is composed of three lines i.e. a hexagram is composed of two trigrams.
4. A careful examination of this hexagram arrangement as shown in Blofeld (223) makes it clear that it is derived from Fu Xi’s trigram arrangement.

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