

ZHENG Wangeng

Tracing the Source of the Idea of Time in *Yizhuan*

© Higher Education Press and Springer-Verlag 2010

Abstract By examining the propositions “waiting for the proper time to act”, “keeping up with the time”, “accommodating oneself to timeliness”, and “the meaning of a timely mean”, this paper examines the relationship between the idea of time conceived of in *Yizhuan* 易传 (Commentaries to the *Book of Changes*), *Zuozhuan* 左传 (Annals of Spring and Autumn with Zuo Qiuming’s Commentaries) and *Guoyu* 国语 (Comments on State Affairs) as well as the related thoughts of Confucianism, Daoism and the Yin-Yang School. It holds that on the foundation established by its predecessors, *Yizhuan* elevated time to its own category and made the first steps in establishing a theoretical system for time, making an important contribution to the enrichment and deepening of philosophical thought in the pre-Qin period.

Keywords *Yizhuan*, idea of time, source of thought

1 Introduction

Yijing 易经 (Book of Changes) places special emphasis on *shi* 时 (literally “time”), mentioning it at least 58 times. It gives this term more significance than “climate” and “time”, e.g., “opportunity”, “occasion”, “fortune” and “timeliness”. It expands it into a category, discussing it from various aspects and even taking the first steps to establish a theoretical system about “the idea of time”. Cheng Yi 程颐, a master of the School of Principles in the Song Dynasty, generalized the essentiality and fundamentals of the *Book of Changes* as “change as time goes so

Translated by HUANG Deyuan from *Zhouyi Yanjiu* 周易研究 (Studies of Zhouyi), 2008, (5): 55–60

ZHENG Wangeng (✉)

College of Philosophy and Sociology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China;
Research Center for Zhouyi and Ancient Chinese Philosophy, Shandong University, Ji’nan 250100, China
E-mail: dragon929@sina.com

as to follow the Way” (Cheng 1981, p. 689). Wu Cheng 吴澄, a prominent Confucian of the Yuan Dynasty, believed, “The issue of time has been expounded most thoroughly in the *Book of Changes*”, and Cheng Yi said, “change as time goes so as to follow the Way” (Li 1995, p. 1866). Cai Qing 蔡清, an expert of the Ming Dynasty in Confucian classical works, wrote the *Yijing Mengyin* 易经蒙引 (ABC to the Book of Changes), clearly asserting that “The Way in the *Book of Changes* is no more than ‘time’” (Ibid.). Li Guangdi 李光地 of the early Qing Dynasty went further to view it as “the quintessence of the *Book of the Changes*” (Ibid.) when he wrote the *Zhouyi Zhezong* 周易折中 (A Collection of opinions for the *Book of Changes*) under an imperial decree. Huang Qingxuan 黄庆萱, a modern day scholar, has written a treatise discussing “the idea of time” in the *Book of Changes* (Huang 2006, pp. 73–92). The systematic “idea of time”, which has been so influential, did not suddenly emerge, but had its roots in philosophy and culture. This essay traces these roots and discusses its past.

2 Waiting for the Proper Time to Act

“Waiting for the proper time to act” is one of the basic ideas about time in the *Book of Changes*, but the notion of “waiting for time” seemed to have been set forth as early as *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu*. The record in the 8th year of the reign of Duke Zhuang 庄公 in *Zuozhuan* says:

In the spring of the 8th year, military affairs were dealt with in the ancestral temple, and it conformed to the propriety of rituals. In the summer of the same year, the Zheng State allied with the Qi State to besiege the Cheng State, but the Cheng State submitted to the forces of Qi. Zhong Qingfu 仲庆父 (Duke Zhuang’s old brother) advised launching a punitive attack against the forces of the Qi State. The Duke responded, “We cannot do that. It was I who was not virtuous enough, how could we blame the forces of the Qi State? It is I who should be blamed. The *Xiashu* 夏书 (Book of Xia, a part of the *Book of History*) says, “Gaoyao 皋陶 endeavored to cultivate his virtues. After he cultivated his virtues, people began to submit to him.” Is this not to say that one must cultivate his virtues and wait for his time? (Kong 1997, p. 1765)

The “Qiyu shang” 齐语上 (“The first part of commentary on Qi”) in the *Commentary on State Affairs* has a similar line:

Suppose somebody takes office in my state. If he has both merits and virtues and exercises caution in waiting for his time, mobilizing people through

persuasion and encouragement, and quenching slanders, he will sufficiently make up for the misgovernment of officials (“Qiyu shang”).

Here to “exercise caution” means to “reflect cautiously and cultivate virtues”; accordingly, to “exercise caution to wait for the time” means to “cultivate virtues to wait for the time”.

Such a notion of “waiting for time” was widely influential at that time. “The Gongsun Chou shang” 公孙丑上 (“The first chapter of Gongsun Chou”) in the *Works of Mencius* claimed, “People from the Qi State say, ‘Taking advantage of a situation is better than having wits, and waiting for time is better than holding a weapon’ (Yang 1981, p. 57). It argues for an opportunity to unify the country. When discussing the great cause of a lord, “Bayan” 霸言 (“Speeches about supremacy”) in *Guanzi* 管子 (Works of Guanzi) says, “A plan without any major points leads to predicament, and a cause without preparation goes in vain. Therefore, a sage king necessarily prepares himself well and cautiously watches his time. He prepares for the time, and promotes his causes at a right time. When the time comes, he motivates his forces, seizing forts and defeating states.” Accordingly, such a ruler could “benefit his people and overawe the world, with his decrees carried out among the seigneurs. Accordingly, all the people nearby submit to him, and all the people in the distance obey his orders” (Guo 1982, pp. 29–33). Thus, it seems that there was a consensus about the idea of “waiting for time”. The *Yizhuan* 易传 (Commentaries to the *Book of Changes*) was an outcome of such a trend in thought, and did its utmost to advocate the notion of “waiting for the time”.

From the point of view of *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu*, “waiting for the time” also contains the meaning of “not acting at a wrong time”. Therefore, they often related “time” to “activities”. For example, “Zhouyu zhong” 周语中 (“The second part of Zhou Commentary”) in the *Commentary on State Affairs* says, “Tolerance is used to guarantee the fundamental, rigor is used to help the time, promotion is used to perform edification, and kindness is used to harmonize people. The fundamental will be firm since it is guaranteed, success can be guaranteed when things are helped at the right time, all people will receive proper education now that edification is made and promoted, and the people will get better off because they are harmonized with kindness. In this way, the ruler can have his people for long, and he can be successful in everything.” Furthermore, the “Zhouyu xia” 周语下 (“the third part of Comments of Zhou”) mentions, “observe the Heaven and the Earth and act in conformance to the time”, “act at the right time”, “act wisely at the right time” and “not act at the right time”, etc. (“Zhouyu xia” *Commentary on State Affairs*). There seemed to be a certain connection between these expressions and the idea of “waiting for the time to act” in *Yizhuan*.

In comparison, the generalization of “watching time to act” in *Zuozhuan* was

almost the same as “waiting for the time to act”. According to the record in the 11th year of the reign of Duke Yin in *Zuozhuan*, “Duke Zhuang of Zheng had propriety, which was needed to govern the country, to pacify the state, to teach people the hierarchic order, and to benefit the following generations. He crusaded against the Xu State because the latter did not conduct itself properly, forgave it when it admitted its wrongdoings, weighed his virtues to hold them, estimated his strength before actions, and watched time to act. In doing so, he left no trouble to his descendants. So, Duke Zhuang can be thought of as knowing propriety” (Kong 1997, p. 1736). Noticeably, crusading against rebellions, weighing virtues to hold them and estimating strength before actions were connected with “watching the time to act”, and it indicates that the term “time” had gone beyond the range of climate or seasons and required certain conditions. Accordingly, we can say that “waiting for the time to act” in “Xici” 系辞 (“General Comments on the Principal Part”) of the *Book of Changes* was indeed a transformation of “watching the time to act”.

Perusing the *Commentary on State Affairs*, one would find a more interesting passage in the Comments of Qi. It says, “Now peasants gather to observe the four seasons, to weigh their functions, and to prepare *lei* 耒, *si* 耜, *jia* 耧 and *shan* 芟. When it gets cold, they wipe out dry grass and prepare the soil while waiting for the time to plow. When it is time to plow, they plow the soil deeply and rake it in haste, waiting for seasonal rains; they carry their stakes, sickles, shovels and hoes, toiling in the field from dawn to dusk and stripping down to the waist for a harvest” (“Qiyu”, *Commentary on State Affairs*). According to a commentary by Wei Zhao 韦昭, “waiting for time to plow” and “waiting for time to rain” were connected with the preparation of instruments and tools. From this, we can vividly feel the expressed idea of “carrying tools and waiting for time to act” in the “Xici” (Gao 1979, p. 572), only that the “time” in the state affairs was more of seasons and climate, and *Yizhuan* added to it the meanings of “opportunity”, “situation” and “fortune”, implying the objective necessity of certain things. In this way, the term “time” became a category, and it seems to have suggested the influence of *Works of Mencius*.

It was on the basis of these thoughts that *Yizhuan* went further to set forth the idea of “waiting for time to act”. The explanation of the *Jiusi yao* 九四爻 (a line in the fourth place from the bottom in a trigram) in the Guimei Diagram 归妹卦 says, “The wedding of a young woman is postponed until a proper time.” Therefore, its appended *Xiangzhuan* 象传 (Commentaries of Images) explains, “a postponed intention suggests waiting for something to act” (Ibid., p. 443). Here the “waiting for something to act” is the same as “waiting for time to act”. The *Xiangzhuan* for the *Jian Gua* 蹇卦 (Jian Diagram) says, “Water is on the top of mountains, thus the path is rough; a virtuous man is inspired to reflect and cultivate his virtues.” And again, the comment to *chuliu yao* 初六爻 (a broken

line in the first place in the Jian Diagram) says, “He will find the path rough when he goes forward; then he should return and wait” (Ibid., p. 344). These commentaries were the succession and development of Duke Zhuang’s idea that he “must cultivate his virtues and wait for his time” in the *Zuozhuan*.

Thereby, “Xici” set forth more clearly the proposition of “waiting for time to act”. The explanation of *Shangliu yao* (two separate lines in the six place) in the “Jie gua” 解卦 (“Jie diagram”) says, “The Duke shot a hawk from a high city wall, and he caught his prey. It signifies no disadvantage.” “Xici” explains the commentary on this *yao*, saying, “The hawk is a bird. The bow and arrow are tools, and the shooter is a man. A man of virtues hides his tools on him and waits for the time to act. How can there be any disadvantage in this way? He moves without releasing his arrows casually, therefore he can catch his prey once he moves out. It means that one should prepare his tools before he acts ” (Ibid., p. 572). Here, the expression to hide “his tools on him” means to “prepare well”: Once the occasion comes, one should take actions quickly and decisively. That is what is said by “waiting for time to act”, which refers to taking an opportunity. “Xici” discusses the necessary conditions of success from the aspects of a subject, an object, the link between the subject and its object, and their mutual relationships. It highlights the importance of being prepared, and thus gives a certain metaphysical meaning to the idea of “waiting for time to act”.

3 Keeping up with Time

“Keeping up with time”, whose revised form has become a popular slogan nowadays, is another important principle of time in the *Book of Changes*. This preposition seems to have been put forward in connection with the ideas of “rising and falling with time” and “changing with time” by the Yin-Yang Five Elements School.

The “Fan Ju Cai Ze liezhuan” 范雎蔡泽列传 (“Biographies of Fan Ju and Cai Ze”) in *Shi Ji* 史记 (Historical Records) includes a dialogue when Cai Ze 蔡泽 persuaded Fan Ju into a timely retreat. Cai said, “People say, ‘The sun will begin to fall after noon, and the moon will begin to wax when it comes to its full, and things will begin to decline as they reach their summits. That is a rule of nature. Accordingly, it is the usual way of saints to advance and retreat as situations change with time. Therefore, one can volunteer to hold an office when the state is in order, and should retreat when it is out of order. The saints say, ‘It will benefit a man of honor when the dragon flies into the sky’ and ‘Wealth and honor are nothing to me without righteousness’. Now you have been satisfied by avenging yourself, but you have no idea how to change and cope with the new situation. But it is not the right thing. In history, Qi Huangong 齐桓公 (Duke Huan of the

Qi State) assembled other dukes 9 times and unified the country once, but when he showed his arrogance at the meeting at Kuiqiu, 9 states betrayed him. Fuchai 夫差, a king of the Wu State, had the most powerful forces in the country, but he depended upon his valiance and strength to spite the other lords and bully the Qi and Jin states, consequently he was killed and his power destroyed. Xia Yu 夏育 and Taishi Jiao 太史噉 were such valiant warriors that they could scare enemy forces simply with their shouts, but at the end they were killed by mediocre men. All these perils were the results of not turning back after reaching the summit or of not remaining humble and reclusive or frugal and simple. The *Book of Changes* says, ‘A disdainful dragon will regret itself.’ It refers to one who can ascend but not descend, or can extend but not bend, can go forward but not return. I wish you to think it over” (Sima 1982, p. 2422). In reference to this passage, Cai Ze thought the idea that one should take offices when the state was properly run meant the same as “It will benefit a man of honor when the dragon flies into the sky” in the *Jiuwu yao* 九五爻 (a line in the fifth place) in the Qian Diagram 乾卦 in the *Book of Changes*, and the idea that one should retreat when the state was badly run the same as “Wealth and honor are nothing to me without righteousness” in the Chapter “Shuer” 述而 in the *Analects of Confucius*. If one holds a high rank without knowing when to advance or retreat, it would be the same as not knowing the reason in the saying, “A disdainful dragon will regret itself”; consequently, he would be able to ascend but not descend, or to extend but not bend, “not returning after reaching the summit.” Certainly such a man will encounter the disaster of being killed and ruining the country. According to Zhu Bokun 朱伯崑, a prominent expert on the *Book of Changes*, it was probably an influence by Taoist and Yin-Yang scholars that made the author of this passage interpret “A disdainful dragon will regret itself” through the idea that “things begin to decline after they reach their summits” and the idea of “changing with time” (Zhu 2005, p. 44).

The 9th chapter of the *Laozi* 老子 (Tao Te Ching) says, “It is a natural way to retreat after the great achievement” (Lou 1980, p. 21). The chapter Baixin 白心 (Explanation of Minds) in *Guanzi* 管子 (Works of Guanzi) explains, “The sun will deflect after it rises to its ultimate site, and the moon will wane after it waxes. To noon simply results in deflection, to wax simply wane, and to enlarge simply ruins. Whoever can keep himself without clinging to oneself? It is the principle of the Heaven and the Earth that should be followed” (Guo 1982, p. 456). And the chapter “Qiushui” 秋水 (“Flood in Autumn”) in *Zhuangzi* 庄子 (Works of Zhuangzi) also says, “(It is natural) to rest after a rise and vacate after a full, and an end necessarily implies a beginning” (Guo 1961, p. 585). All things in the universe begin to decline when they reach their peaks. In addition, a chapter titled “Sishi” 四时 (“Four Seasons”) in the *Guanzi* says, “Therefore, the sage kings always return when the road comes to an end and start when things come

to an end. Virtues begin with spring and grow in summer, and punitive laws begin with fall and prevail in winter. Punitive laws and virtues are always there, the four seasons seem the same” (Guo 1982, p.27). According to this passage, *yang qi* 阳气 (positive energy) reaches its summit in summer, returning in fall when it reaches its peak, and then *yin qi* 阴气 (passive energy) arrives; *yin qi* reaches its summit in winter, returning in spring when it reaches its peak, and then *yang qi* arrives. A saint should follow such a way of nature, teaching virtues in spring and summer, and enforcing laws in fall and winter. That is the idea of “changing with the time” by the Yin-Yang Five Elements School.

“Qin Ce San” 秦策三 (“Third Part of Stratagems of Qin”) in the *Zhanguo Ce* 战国策 (*Stratagems of the Warring States*) also contains a dialogue between Fan Ju and Cai Ze. It is slightly different from the narration in the *Historical Records*, but both contain the quotation: “People say, ‘The sun declines as it reaches the middle sky’ to ‘change with time’”. This is exactly the same as that in *Duanzhuo* 彖传 (Judgmental Comments) for the Feng Diagram 丰卦 in the *Book of Changes*, which says, “The sun begins to decline when it reaches the middle sky, the moon will wane after it waxes, the Heaven and the Earth become full as they are vacated, and things rise and falls with the time. So it is with man, and so it is with deities” (Gao 1979, p. 447). Even though the exact relationship between these passages cannot be ascertained, one can be sure that they were influenced by Taoists and the Yin-Yang Five Elements School. This is confirmed in the chapters *Shanmu* 山木 and *Daozhe* 盗跖, both in the *Works of Zhuangzi*, which respectively say that “sometimes a dragon and sometimes a snake, it changes with the time” and one should “rise and rest with time”.

Accordingly, *Yizhuan* went further to view the idea that “the Heaven and the Earth become full after they are vacated and things rise and rest with the time” as the natural law for change in all things in the universe. Duanzhuo explained *Bo Gua* 剥卦 (Bo Diagram) as such, “Bo means to strip, and it suggests that gentleness becomes strength. ‘not beneficial to going anywhere’ implies that men of dishonor grow strong. To be submissive and halt means to observe the situation. And it is a natural way for a man of honor to value the law of resting after rising and being filled after being vacated” (Gao 1979, pp. 232–233). The expression “to be submissive and to halt” explains the image of the Bo Diagram: a *Kun Gua* 坤卦 (Kun Diagram) below and a *Gen Gua* 艮卦 (Gen Diagram) above, Kun suggests submission, and Gen implies a halt. As a whole, the Duanzhuo commentary of the Bo Diagram means that one should observe changes in a situation instead of boldly taking action when strength is immersed in gentleness and the Yin prevails, that is, the time when a man of dishonor dominates, for a man of dishonor cannot last long and he will soon come to an end. That is why a man of honor pays attention to resting and rising or being filled and being vacated, and knows how things changes. A “natural way” is the

Way of Heaven, the way in which the Heaven and the Earth evolve. Things always change in the course of increasing and decreasing or being filled and being vacated, so man has to act in conformity with time, and rise and rest accordingly.

Taoists and Yin-Yang scholars attached much importance to conformity with time. In *Guanzi*, a chapter titled “Zhouhe” 宙合 (“Time and space”) says, “A saint must conform to the time no matter whether in action or non-action, in opening or closing, or in advancement or withdrawal. He will take actions if it is the time, but he will remain still if it is not”; the chapter “Baixin” says to “take peace as a principle and take time as a treasure”; Chapter “Bayan” says, “It is an art of leadership to act in conformity with time”; and “A saint can assist the time but cannot go against it; a sage who acts at the right time is better than him who has desirable wits.” To “assist time” means to help on the occasion of a certain time. And Chapter “Sishi” 四时 (“Four Seasons”) mentions four times that “Five kinds of political affairs should be dealt with at their proper time”. Here to “be dealt with at their proper time” means the same as “conformity to time”. Accordingly, Chapter “Mumin” 牧民 (“Shepherding of People”) says, “Those who know the time can be regarded as leaders” (Guo 1982, p. 50). It equates to expressions summarized by Sima Qian 司马迁 in his *Lun Liujiu Yaozhi* 论六家要旨 (On the Points of 6 Schools) (Sima 1982, p. 3293), that is, to “move with time”, to “make one’s career in conformity with time” and to “adhere to changes of time”.

These expressions, to “change with time”, to “make one’s career in conformity with time” and to “rise and rest with time”, all mean keeping up with time, taking the opportunity or following the situation. The authors of *Yizhuan* were deeply impacted by such thoughts. Moreover, they carried them out and expounded upon them, specifically setting forth the preposition of “keeping up with time”.

The preposition of “keeping up with time” occurs three times in *Yizhuan*. When it explains the commentary of the *Jiusan yao* 九三爻 (a line third from the bottom) in the Qian Diagram, “Wenyan zhuan” 文言传 (“Commentary specializing on the Qian and Kun diagrams”) in the *Book of Changes* says, a man of honor “remains diligent and vigorous all day long and keep up with the time” (Gao 1979, p. 68). And commentary on the *Jiusan yao* talks about a man of honor who remains diligent and vigorous all day long but stays quiet and rests well at night. Such a gentleman can be free from mishaps although he is surrounded by dangers, for he is able to keep up with time, opportunity and situation. And that is the same as “diligent and vigorous, he remains alert to conforming with time, so he can remain secure although in a dangerous situation.” “Renjian xun” 人间训 (“An essay about human society”) in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Works of Prince Huainan) explains this *yao* by saying, “vigorous and diligent in all the daytime, one acts on the occasion of Yang; alert

at night as much as possible, one rests because of Yin. Moving out at sunrise and cease to rest after sunset, only a man who adheres to the Dao can do that” (Liu). To “move out at sunrise and cease to rest after sunset” means to move and stop in light of a proper timetable. And again, it has the same meaning as “keeping up with time”.

Commentary in *Sun Gua* 损卦 (Sun Diagram) says, “Two baskets of sacrifice might work sometimes, and the stronger might be weakened and the weak might be strengthened sometimes. Weakening and strengthening or filling and vacating take place as the time goes on” (Ibid., pp. 355–356). This can be paraphrased as such: sacrifices even as trivial as two baskets of food would be acceptable if at a proper time; the Sun Diagram has an image of diminishing and increasing, or to say, repressing the yin and supporting the yang, but sometimes it does exactly the contrary of diminishing and then increasing or to weaken the strong and strengthen the weak. Whether to decrease or increase depends upon the time, and one needs to take different measures according to specific opportunities and situations. That is why it says “Weakening and strengthening or filling and vacating take place as the time goes on”. That is the case of the Sun Diagram, and the *Yi Gua* 益卦 (Yi Diagram) is not exceptional. Therefore, the commentary of the Yi Diagram says, “The weakening of the superior and the strengthening of the inferior mean boundless pleasure of the people. With the superior lowered, the Dao will be greatly brightened. ...the Heaven gives and the Earth procreates, with their benefits boundless. Generally, the Way of increasing goes with the time” (Ibid., pp. 361–362).

“Keeping up with time” is also known as “going with time”. The commentary to the *Dun Gua* 遁卦 (Dun Diagram) says, “The expression ‘*dun heng*’ 遁亨 means to retreat and thus prosper. Strength takes the right place and responds, and it means that things are keeping up with the time.” This means that the retreat of a man of honor is a way of prosperity. Why is that? It is because a man of honor has to play to score by retreating temporarily when a man of dishonor has his moment. Again, the commentary to the *Xiaoguo Gua* 小过卦 (Xiaoguo Diagram) says, “The expression ‘*Xiaoguo heng*’ 小过亨 (the character ‘*heng*’ is added in reference to the research conducted by Wang Niansun 王念孙) means the small is past and thus comes prosperity. (As the small) goes away and things prosper, things go with the time” (Ibid., p.484). The Xiaoguo Diagram contains four *yin yao* 阴爻 (broken lines) and two *yang yao* 阳爻 (unbroken lines). The yin is small and the yang is large; in this diagram, the small override the large, thus its name “Xiaoguo”. How can it still be smooth when the force of yin is stronger than that of yang? The reason rests in observing propriety, that is, acting in light of the present situation, and that is why it says “(As the small) goes away and thus things prosper, things go with the time”. The same meaning can be found in the *Xiangzhuan* commentary for the *Jiji Gua* 既济卦 (Jiji Diagram),

which says, “The eastern household offers an ox as their sacrifice, but they gain fewer blessings than their neighbor in the west who offer their cheap sacrifices timely.” This is also consistent with “choosing the proper time to act” and “timing to manage things” in *Zuozhuan*, and “observing one’s time carefully” and “taking advantage of the time for businesses” in the chapter Bayan in *Guanzi*. Accordingly, the commentary to the *Gen Gua* 艮卦 (Gen Diagram) concludes, “gen, halt. Halt when the time halts, and move when the time moves.” To move and withdraw at proper time means a delightful future (Ibid., p. 427).

More than that, *Yizhuan* also highlights the metaphysical value of the idea of “keeping up with time” by discussing it from the point of view of the combination of the Heaven and man. “Wenyan zhuan” says, “A man of honor shapes his virtues to the Heaven and Earth, his light to the sun and the moon, his sequence to the four seasons, and his fortune to deities and ghosts. He does not violate the nature when he acts beforehand, and he acts in accordance to the natural sequences when he moves afterwards. Now he can keep the pace with the Heaven, not to mention men and deities and ghosts” (Ibid., pp.72–73). In other words, the saints have grasped the rules in the *Book of Changes*, and can thus keep their virtues and activities consistent with changes in the Heaven and Earth, the sun and earth, and the four seasons. Therefore, in its explanation of the Kun Diagram, *Yizhuan* says, “The way of Kun is submissive, and it acts timely in accordance to the Heaven.” This idea comes from the line in the Commentaries that “So great is *Kun Yuan* 坤元 (Kun the Origin), which acts as the source of all things and thus responds to the Heaven”. To paraphrase, Kun Yuan is the virtue of the earth, which can submit and respond to the changes of the way of Heaven and procreate and support all things. In contrast, *Qian Yuan* 乾元 (Qian the Origin) is the virtue of Heaven from which everything began. The virtue of Heaven is strong and vigorous, starting the existence of all things (So great is Qian Yuan, thanks to which all things begin their courses); the virtue of Earth is gentle and submissive, which submits and responds to the way of Heaven and acts in conformity with time to grow things. All things depend on Heaven and Earth to exist and grow, therefore the virtues of the Heaven and the Earth are known as “origin”. The way of the Earth is gentle and submissive, following the Heaven and acting timely; man is expected to “shape his virtues in accordance with the Heaven and the Earth”, and to “resemble Heaven and Earth without violating them”, therefore he is more obliged to observe the way of the Heaven and act timely. That is what is said in the commentary of the *Dayou Gua* 大有卦 (Dayou Diagram): “Its qualities are bravery, vigor and civilization, and it responds to the Heaven and acts at the right time, therefore it is described as ‘*yuan heng*’ 元亨 (original and prosperous)” (Ibid., p. 172). If a man has the virtues of bravery, vigor and enlightenment and “responds to the Heaven in a timely way”, his business will prosper. Such theory has not only further

promoted the philosophy of “keeping up with time”, but put forward a world view and philosophy about harmony between nature and man. It has profoundly influenced both Chinese history’s *Yixue* 易学 (a study of the *Book of Changes* and the derivatives of this work) and Chinese philosophy.

4 Accommodating Oneself to Time

“Accommodating oneself to time” is a more creative preposition in *Yizhuan*. Since the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, Confucianism, Taoism and the Yin-Yang Five Elements School have all attached much importance to “time”, but seldom related *biantong* 变通 (versatility) to “time” except in a chapter titled *Tianyun* 天运 (Moves of the Heaven) in the *Works of Zhuangzi*, which says, “Rituals, righteousness, laws and regulations are things that should change with the time” (Guo 1961, p. 515). But the authors of *Yizhuan*, on the basis of the above-mentioned discussion of “time”, considered versatility and situations together, going further to set forth the preposition of “accommodating oneself to time”.

Explaining the qualities of the two diagrams Qian and Kun, the first part of “Xici” in *Yizhuan* says, “Qian contracts when it is still, and extends when it moves, therefore it magnifies creatures; and Kun closes when it is still and opens when it moves, therefore it increases creatures. The magnification and increase match up to the Heaven and the Earth, versatility to the four seasons, the meaning of Yin and Yang to the sun and the moon, and the good of simplicity to the perfect virtues” (Gao 1979, p. 517). The attribution of the quality “magnifying creatures” to Qian and the quality “increasing creatures” to Kun is based on the Commentaries in *Yizhuan*, which says “So great is Qian the Origin, upon which all things depend to commence,” and “So great is Kun the Origin, upon which all things depend to procreate”. Qian magnifies creatures because it contracts when it is still and extends when it moves; and Kun increases creatures because it closes when it is still and opens when it moves. According to “Xici”, such qualities of Qian and Kun are consistent with the Heaven and the Earth, which create all things as they progress through the four seasons. The last two lines summarize Qian and Kun as Yin-Yang and simplicity, the supreme principle in the *Book of Changes*. The two diagrams of Qian and Kun, i.e., the two *yao* of Yin and Yang, alternate and process to generate 64 diagrams, just as the four seasons change to procreate things in the world, therefore it says that “versatility matches up to the four seasons.” The first part of “Xici” praises the Book of Changes, saying, “No image is more important than the Heaven and the Earth, no versatility is more important than the four seasons, no light is more important than the sun and the moon, and no value is more important than wealth and rank”

(Ibid., p. 539). In the eyes of the authors of *Yizhuan*, versatility is related to the four seasons. Accordingly, it is easy to deduce that versatility is related to time, situation and opportunity.

In this way, *Yizhuan* logically sets forth the preposition of “accommodating oneself to time”, as the second part of “Xici” says, “Versatility means accommodating oneself to time”. It also explains, “To evolve and judge is known as *bian*, and to push and perform is known as *tong*” (Ibid., p. 543). In his *Zhouyi Benyi* 周易本义 (The Correct Meaning of the Book of the Changes), Zhu Xi 朱熹 commented, “The versatility of diagrams and *yao* depends on man, and man depends on his virtues to find the wonder in it” (Zhu 2004, p. 288). Zhu thought “versatility” to be the versatility of diagrams and *yao*, and he was correct; and the expression “to evolve and judge” means to judge in reference to changes in diagrams and *yao*, that is, to change a yang *yao* into a yin *yao* and a yin *yao* into a yang *yao*. “Xici” thinks that this is the meaning of “*bian*”. “Tong” refers to the smooth process of images of *yao*, which move up and down through six positions, and the “*tong*” in the line “to push and perform is known as *tong*”. Literally it is about the changes of diagrams and *yao*, but can be explained as discussing the Heaven, the Earth and all things between them, because it involves the idea, “The moves of six *yao* are the way of the Three Ultimates”. The second part of “Xici” also says, “According to the *Book of Changes*, things change when they come to an end, become smooth when they change, and last for long when they are smooth.” Here the word “change” means changing the current situation, and it has the meaning of reform and innovation. Before this line are the words “After Shennong Shi 神农氏 passed away, the Yellow Emperor, Yao 尧 and Shun 舜 arose, who were expert at changes and thus kept people unwearied” (Gao 1979, p. 561). Here the word “arose” means to create or innovate. According to these ideas, “accommodating oneself to time” means making efforts to closely follow trends, change old situations, and prepare new conditions so that things develop smoothly and benefit mankind. It stresses man’s initiative, the more outstanding self-consciousness of a subject; in Zhu Xi’s words, “It depends upon man to have versatility.” In comparison, the ideas of Taoists, the Yin-Yang School and the *Zuozhuan* about time emphasized submission to time and situation. The implications are completely different. Therefore, “Wenyan zhuan” twice mentions, “It will be secure despite dangers if one remains diligent, vigorous and alert at the right time”, and does its utmost to promote that “A man of honor improves his virtues and makes his career keep up with time” (Ibid., p. 65). In other words, it is to “never stop improving oneself” and “accommodate oneself to time”.

On the contrary, one would meet mishaps, and even disaster, if he did not make use of initiative and accommodate himself to time. In commenting on the explanation of the Shangjiu *yao* of the Qian Diagram, “Wenyan zhuan” says, “A disdainful dragon regrets itself, and reaches the ultimate with time.” To “reach

the ultimate with time” means not to keep up with time, resulting in regret. The *Xiangzhuan* commentary for the *Jie Gua* 节卦 (Jie Diagram) says, “It is dangerous not to go outside; for it is the worst among all cases of not keeping up with time” (Ibid., p. 474). It is dangerous to stay behind the times and miss opportunities. Overall, one cannot meet with great success if he fails to accommodate himself to time.

5 A Timely Mean

Yizhuan suggests that one must follow the principle of “*shi zhong*” 时中 (a timely mean) whether it is “waiting for the time to act”, “keeping up with time” or “accommodating oneself to time”. It also attaches special importance to the idea of “a timely mean”. Hui Dong 惠栋, a scholar of the Qing Dynasty, included an essay titled “The Book of Changes Values the Idea of a Timely Mean” in his book *Yi Han Xue* 易汉学 (On Yixue in the Tradition of the Han Dynasty), which says, “*The Book of Changes* is very profound, but it can be generalized in a few words: a timely mean”; and “Knowing the meaning of a timely mean means knowing the *Book of Changes* in general” (Hui 2007, p. 624, p. 626).

The idea of “a timely mean” in *Yizhuan* came along when Confucianism developed the classic part of *the Book of Changes*. This expression contains two aspects: the time and the mean. Among the 384 *yao* of 64 diagrams in the Book of Changes, the 2nd and 5th *yao* are in the middle of the upper and lower diagrams respectively, and have more auspices. A rough statistics shows that among 64 diagrams, 33 diagrams have their second *yao* with auspicious words, about 14 diagrams have their second *yao* with “*wu jiu*” 无咎 (no mishaps); about 42 diagrams have their fifth *yao* with auspicious words, and similarly 14 diagrams have their fifth *yao* with “*wu jiu*”. These account for more than 82% of the total. Therefore, “Xici” says, “The second mostly suggests *yu* 誉 (an honor), and the fourth mostly involves fears”, and “the third mostly ‘*xiong*’ 凶 (ominous) and the fifth mostly merits” (Gao 1979, p. 591). Because of such influence, Confucius also valued the Middle Way, thinking the Mean was the ultimate virtue. That was why “*Jinxin xia*” 尽心下 (“Second part of *Jinxin*”) in the *Works of Mencius* says, “Did Confucius not desire the Middle Way? He just could not make it, therefore he turned to pursue the next one to it” (Yang 1981, p. 341). But Confucius did not take “time” as a guideline for man’s behavior, and it was Mencius who respected “time” and related it to the idea of “mean”.

Mencius praised Confucius as “a saint who acted to time” because he did not “volunteer to be an official when the government is in order and retreat when it is in disorder” as Boyi 伯夷 had, nor did he “volunteer to be an official no matter

whether the government is in order or disorder” as Yi Yin 伊尹 (Ibid., p. 63). Confucius “volunteered to be an official when the situation allowed him to become an official, stopped when the situation allowed him to stop, lingered for long when the situation allowed him to linger for long, and hastened when the situation allowed him to hasten” (“Gongsun Chou shang”). The chapter “Wanzhang xia” 万章下 (“Second part of chapter wanzhang”) in the same book says that Confucius was a man who “hastened when the situation allowed him to hasten, lingered for long when the situation allowed him to linger for long, stopped when the situation allowed him to stop, and volunteered to be an official when the situation allowed him to become an official” (Ibid., pp. 232–233). It means that both Boyi and Yi Yin stubbornly adhered to an inflexible criterion, but Confucius changed his behavior according to the temporal situation (“time”). In fact, Confucius himself said so, too, and that was what was meant by the expression “no course for which I am predetermined, and no course against which I am predetermined” (“Weizi” 微子 in the *Analects of Confucius*). The “course for which I am predetermined” and the “course against which I am predetermined” change and alternate all the time.

The first chapter of “Jinxin” says, “Yang Zhu 杨朱 was a radical egoist who would not sacrifice a hair even if it could benefit the whole world. In contrast, Mozi promoted humanity and generosity, working his fingers to the bone for it. Zimo adhered to the mean, which was similar to that. Adhering to the mean means no expediency, and it is the same as adhering to one single thing” (Ibid., p. 313). According to Mencius, Zimo thought both Yang Zhu’s egoism and Mozi’s fraternity were too radical, so he wanted to choose a “mean” between these two “poles”, which was “adhering to the ‘mean’”. Mencius held that “adhering to the ‘mean’” was somewhat better, but it had to be tempered with expediency, or otherwise it would be equivalent to adhering to an inflexible criterion. “Jinxin shang” 尽心上 (“First part of chapter jinxin”) continues, “The reason to dislike the adherence to one single thing is that it would do harm to the Way, and that the acceptance of one single thing would mean the rejection of a hundred other ones” (Ibid.). In other words, the “mean” is not necessarily the midway point of two poles, nor is it always one single point. The “mean” changes as conditions (time) do. That is called “a timely mean”.

The Chapter “Lilou Shang” in *the Works of Mencius* says, “It is out of propriety for man and woman not to touch each other, but it is of expediency to hold out one’s hand to his sister-in-law when the latter is drowning” (Ibid., p. 177). “Expediency” means the flexible use of “propriety”, and its role is to safeguard the Way. Lack of flexibility will hinder the Way. That is what is suggested in the line, “The reason to dislike the adherence to one single thing is that it would do harm to the Way”. It means a breach of the Way to stubbornly maintain a criterion without accepting timely changes. In this sense,

“expediency” simply means the so-called “timely mean”.

Yizhuan must have accepted the idea of valuing “a timely mean” and take it as an important principle in explaining divination methods. The Commentaries involves 24 diagrams mentioning “time”, and 35 diagrams talking about a “mean”; similarly, *Xiangzhuan* involves as many as 38 diagrams mentioning a “mean”. For example, it explains the Dayou Diagrams by saying “Responding to the nature and acting timely, thus original and prosperous.” It explains the Xiaguo Diagram by saying, “(As the small) goes away and thus things prosper, things go with the time”; it explains the Sun Diagram by saying, “the stronger might be weakened and the weak might be strengthened sometimes. Weakening and strengthening or filling and vacating take place as the time goes on”; and it explains the Yi Diagram by saying, “The way of Yi means to keep up with the time”. More than that, it even says “The world keeps up with time, and it is significant to keep up with time”, “it is a great occasion to meet with *Ge* 革”, and “it is of a great use of *Jian* 蹇”, and so forth. In particular, the commentaries to diagrams and *yao* with the “mean” and “the mean and fairness” are seen everywhere. For example, it explains the *Xu Gua* 需卦 (Xu Diagram) by saying, “staying at a Heavenly site and holding the mean thanks to its fairness”; it explains the *Song Gua* 讼卦 (Song Diagram) by saying, “Beneficial to see a man of high rank because it respects the mean and fairness”; it explains the *Xiaxu Gua* 小畜卦 (Xiaxu Diagram) by saying, “vigor and submission mean firmness inside and a satisfied will, and thus prosperity”; it explains the *Jiji Gua* 既济卦 (Jiji Diagram) by saying, “The first unbroken line symbolizes auspice because gentleness happens to respond to the mean”; and it explains the *Weiji Gua* 未济卦 (Weiji Diagram) by saying, “Weiji means prosperity because gentleness happens to respond to the mean” (Gao 1979, p. 496). The *Book of Changes* holds that the “mean” and “time” are related. More than that, it specifically sets forth the concept of “timely mean”, and thus takes “timely mean”, i.e., the Middle Way at the right time, as a man’s code of conduct. For instance, the Commentaries explains the *Meng Gua* 蒙卦 (Meng Diagram) by saying, “Meng symbolizes prosperity because prosperity happens with the timely mean” (Ibid., p. 99). The Meng Diagram was designed as the Gen Diagram on top and the *Kan Gua* 坎卦 (Kan Diagram) below. The Gen Diagram suggests mountains, and has a significant stop or halt; while the Kan Diagram implies dangers, therefore the Meng Diagram expresses the idea of halting when one meets danger. When he has the quality of “prosperity”, one will act and halt at the right time, and perform the Middle Way thanks to the timely mean. Therefore the explanatory words for the diagrams say “prosperity and smoothness”. Also, it explains the Gen Diagram by saying, “going as time goes, and halting as time halts, and always keeping up with the time whether to act or remain still”. That was largely the same as Mencius’ words, “volunteered to be an official when the situation

allowed him to become an official, stopped when the situation allowed him to stop, lingered for long when the situation allowed him to linger for long, and hastened when the situation allowed him to haste” (Yang 1981, pp. 232–233). And that is also the meaning of a “timely mean”. *Zhongyong* 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean) observes, “The Mean of a gentleman means that a gentleman holds the timely mean.” The fact that *Yizhuan* valued the “timely mean” reflected the thoughts of the contemporary society. In reference to the above, it would be easy to see where Hui Dong’s words, “Knowing the meaning of a timely mean means knowing the *Book of Changes* in general”, comes from.

In addition to the above-mentioned “waiting for the time to act”, “keeping up with the time”, “accommodating oneself with time” and “the meaning of a timely mean”, *Yizhuan* also lays special emphasis on the significance of “time”. For example, it mentions “such a great time” four times, “so great is the significance of time” five times, and “so useful of the time” five times, for a total of at least twelve times. Accordingly, on the foundation set by its predecessors, *Yizhuan* made the first steps in establishing a theoretical system on “the view of time”, which made an important contribution to the further enrichment and development of Chinese philosophy in Pre-Qin society, and profoundly influenced the development of philosophy in the tradition of the *Book of Changes*.

References

- Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi (1981). *Er Cheng Ji* 二程集 (Works of the Two Chengs). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju
- Gao Heng (1979). *Zhouyi Dazhuan Jinzhu* 周易大传今注 (Today’s Explanations of the Commentaries in the Book of Changes). Ji’nan: Qilu Shushe
- Guo Moruo (1982). “Guanzi jijiao” 管子集校 (“Collated Collection of the Works of Guanzi”). In: *Guo Moruo Quanjì* 郭沫若全集 (Collection of Guo Moruo), History Class, Vol. 5, Vol. 6, Vol. 7. Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe
- Guo Qingfan (1961). *Zhuangzi Jishi* 庄子集释 (Collected Commentaries on the Works of Zhuangzi). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju
- “Guoyu” 国语 (“Commentary on State Affairs”). In: *Si Ku Quan Shu* 四库全书 (Complete Library of the Four Treasures of Knowledge), Building of Imperial Library edition
- Huang Qingxuan (2006). “Zhouyi shiguan chutan” 周易时观初探 (“Preliminary Ideas on Time in the Book of Changes”). In: *Zhouyi Zongheng Tan* 周易纵横谈 (Free Talks on the Book of Changes). Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe
- Hui Dong (2007). *Zhouyi Shu* 周易述 (Comments on the Book of Changes). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju
- Kong Yingda (1997). “Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi” 春秋左传正义 (“Correct meanings of the annals of Spring and Autumn with Zuo Qiuming’s commentaries”). In: *Shisanjing Zhushu* 十三经注疏 (Commentaries of 13 Classic Confucian Works). Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe
- Li Guangdi (1995). “Zhouyi Zhezong” 周易折中 (“Compromise on the *Book of Changes*”).

- In: Zheng Wangeng, *Yixue Jinghua* 易学精华 (Essence of Study on the *Book of Changes*). Beijing: Beijing Chubanshe
- Liu Wendian. "Huainan Honglie Jie" 淮南鸿烈解 ("Commentaries on the works of Prince Huainan"). In: *Si Ku Quan Shu* 四库全书 (Complete Library of the Four Treasures of Knowledge), Building of Imperial Library edition
- Lou Yulie (1980). "Laozi zhu" 老子注 ("Commentaries on Tao Te Ching"). In: *Wang Bi Ji Jiaoshi* 王弼集校释 (Collated and Commented Collection of Wang Bi). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju
- Sima Qian (1982). *Shiji* 史记 (Historical Records). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju
- Yang Bojun (1981). *Mengzi Yizhu* 孟子译注 (Translation and Commentaries of the Works of Mencius). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju
- Zhu Bokun (2005). *Yixue Zhexue Shi* 易学哲学史 (The History of Philosophy in the Tradition of the *Book of Changes*). Beijing: Kunlun Chubanshe
- Zhu Xi (2004). *Zhouyi Benyi* 周易本义 (The Correct Meanings of the Book of Changes). Beijing: Jiuzhou Chubanshe