

The light that Wilhelm kindled ...

Jung's *I Ching* and the Spirit of the East



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The work I'm presenting here is part of an on-going effort I call "Change in the West." It is an attempt to revive the Way or spiritual practice called I Ching or the Classic of Change in the Jungian world and to provide clear, textured and imaginatively ample translations that facilitate this practice.

Here, I want to explore further the hidden connection between the evolution of Jung's psychology, his idea of a *kairos* or critical moment in culture and the "spirit of the east" he saw embodied in the Classic of Change. I see this connection as part of a great "rescue operation" inherent in Jung's opus, an attempt to reclaim an imaginative Way that had been split off in the development of western thought, a development that has left us all "modern men in search of a soul."

I Ching, the Classic of Change, or simply Change as it was called in the East, is an old spiritual practice that has entered western culture largely through Jung's thought and work - the "light that Wilhelm kindled." I personally am extremely grateful for this gift. So before we start talking about Jung and Wilhelm, and the *kairos* of the 1930's I would like to offer a homage and a recognition, a sort of shrine of the word that might touch the heart of what Jung saw in this old Chinese book, the character "yi" or change, as sign for the Way and what it does or means.



Change is simultaneously a quality of the world we live in, an inner, creative energy and the name of a divination book, the *Change*, and the technique associated with it. It is also applied to the school that uses this mysterious quality as a spiritual Way. A primary meaning of the word is “trouble.” It indicates sudden, disastrous storms, unexpected losses or times of political upheaval when confusion intervenes. It is a time when structures break down and something extraordinary happens.

Another primary meaning of *Change* shows the response to trouble: versatility, imaginative mobility, openness and ease. It suggests a fluid personal identity, a fertile imagination and the capacity to move with the breakdown of normal values, a quality that is as mysterious, unpredictable and fertile as the *Dao*. The spirits and the symbols of the book called *Change* connect *Change* in the universe to your own inner *Change*, your creative imagination, if you choose to use them.

The oldest meanings of this character are “to give a gift, to cure a disease.” It is the appearance of the sun after a troubled time, thanks to the help of an ancestor spirit. Philosophically, “change” means: the primordial changes that initiate the process of generation and transformation; the principles according to which transformations follow each other in the generation of phenomena. It refers to the three ancient books of change that analyzed experience in terms of “changing lines.” It means to calm, pacify, easy and simple and its antonyms are *nan*, heavy/oppressive/ghosts and demons and *yu*, twisted, exaggerated or vast.

Yi means to cultivate a field, to pull up weeds. It is both “trouble” and the response to trouble: an imaginative mobility that reconnects you to the deep flow of the Dao or Way. The Warring States sages who developed this as an “inner way” felt Yi as a companion or helper, a warm and knowing presence:

Change is a book you cannot push away.
Its way is always shifting.
Transformation and movement,
 never resting,
 flow through the six empty places.
Rising and falling,
 never fixed,
 strong and supple transform each other.
Rules cannot confine this, for it follows only *Change*.
It enters and leaves in rhythm.
It teaches caution coming in and going out.
It shows clearly the causes of anxiety and calamity.
It does not act like your master or guard.
 It is as if your beloved parents draw near.
First follow the words and feel their meanings in your heart.
Then suddenly the way to act arises.
If you are unwilling to do this, the way will not open.

Die Schule der Weisheit

In about 1923, a very important event occurred in the annals of depth psychology. A German Evangelical missionary to China, proud of the fact he had never converted a single Chinese, was preparing to publish his translation of an old book called *I Ching*. As he did so, he encountered a Swiss psychologist who was passionately interested in this old Chinese book at Keyserling's *Schule der Weisheit* in Darmstadt. It was a momentous contact.

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. . . we should impose a retreat on you somewhere on a wild rocky mountain with the pleasantest company for at least three months. Why are there no secular monasteries for people who ought to be living outside time. The world eats them up from inside if it doesn't from outside.

I was somehow worried about you. Please don't be offended. You are too important to our western world. I must keep on telling you this. You mustn't merely waste away or otherwise disappear, or get ill, but wicked desires should pin you to the earth so your work can go on. ...this will make history! Think of what it means if medical practitioners, who get at the ordinary person so brashly and in the most vulnerable spot, were to be inoculated with Chinese philosophy and the spirit of the east This

really goes to the heart of the matter. Medicine is switching over to psychology with a vengeance and that's where the east comes in.

It is lovely to hear the word friend from you. Fate seems to have apportioned to us the role of two piers that support the bridge between east and west...

In Memoriam

In May 1930, just a year after these letters, Jung gave the Eulogy for Wilhelm, who had died in March, at a memorial service in München. He was profoundly moved by Wilhelm's premature death, and he exposed his feelings in a totally uncharacteristic way. (CW15, §74-96, 1930).

Jung said that Wilhelm kindled a light that was one of the most significant events of his life. He gave the West the precious heritage of a culture thousands of years old, perhaps destined to die forever. With no trace of Christian resentment or European arrogance, Wilhelm was like a receptive and fruitful womb, giving us the living spirit of Chinese civilization and making us one with those who know the way (*tao*). He "inoculated us with the living germ of the Chinese spirit and we found ourselves partaking of the spirit of the East as we experience the living power of the *I Ching*. It is capable of working a profound transformation of our thought." Wilhelm gave us a new light, and "we must translate this meaning, as Wilhelm translated *tao*, into life. Realizing *tao* is our task."

Just as European science, technology and greed were overwhelming Chinese culture, our unconscious is swarming with eastern symbolism. "The spirit of the East is really at our gates" and "this search for meaning (*tao*) has become a collective phenomenon. It was Wilhelm who brought the spiritual root of ancient China and planted it in the soil of Europe." He was like the "solitary wanderers" who, two thousand years ago, "brought the Hellenic spirit into contact with the cultural heritage of the East and thereby caused a new world

to rise out of the ruins." This *gnosis*, this experience of the "living spirit of the East," is embodied in the *I Ching*.

Jung said that Wilhelm's work with the *I Ching* was of such immense importance to him personally because it confirmed what he had been seeking in his efforts to alleviate the psychic suffering of Europeans. "I heard from him in clear language the things I had dimly divined in the confusion of the European subconscious. I received more from him than from any other man."

I want to suggest that this "spirit of the east" that Jung found in Wilhelm and the *I Ching* is the hidden subtext, as it were, for the major psychological statements he made during the crisis and kairos of the 1930's. It is his hidden secret that underlies and informs his struggles to articulate a way of the spirit in terms of western culture that could stave off the storm that was gathering around the "modern man in search of a soul." To do this I am going to re-read or re-vision parts of these key texts from the 1930's in terms of the "light that Wilhelm kindled."

Homo Religiosus

In 1937 Jung was invited to give the Terry Lectures at Yale University, fifteenth in a series of "Lectures on Religion in the Light of Science and Philosophy." They are seen in CW 11, I as Psychology and Religion. In these talks, written originally in English, Jung set out to address a problem of practical psychology and religion, to demonstrate the existence of an authentic religious function in the unconscious. He spoke, he said, on the level of psychological truth, true to the individual. And to define religion on this level, he invoked Rudolf Otto and what was at the time an extremely influential book: *Das Heilige*, translated as *The Idea of the Holy*. Religion, he said, was "a careful and scrupulous observation of what Otto aptly termed the *numinosum*, the dynamic agency or effect not caused by an arbitrary act of will. It is an experience of the subject independent of his will, the influence of an invisible

presence that causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness. The term “religion” designates the attitude peculiar to a consciousness that has been changed by the experience of the *numinosum*. He then went on to describe a particular case of the homo religious in crisis.

In what follows I am going to quote and paraphrase major works Jung wrote when directly under the influence of the ‘spirit of the east.’ It is, so to speak, the “Terry lecture he never gave.”

As I am a doctor and specialist in nervous and mental diseases, my point of departure is the psychology of the *homo religiosus*, that is, of the person who takes into account and carefully observes certain factors which influence him. Currently our *homo religiosus* - Jung used an example that turned out to be Wolfgang Pauli - is what we psychologists call neurotic. Now, a neurosis is connected with a person’s most intimate life. We can see it as a real though somewhat ethereal cancer.

So what shall I, a doctor, say to our “religious” patient with the imaginary cancer? I would tell him: “Yes, my friend, you are really suffering from a cancer-like thing, you really do harbor in yourself a deadly evil. It will not kill your body, though it will eventually kill your soul. It has already spoilt and even poisoned your human relations and your personal happiness and it will go on growing until it has swallowed your whole psychic existence. So that in the end you will not be a human being any more, but an evil destructive tumor.”

Now it is obvious to our patient that he is not the author of his morbid imagination - that prejudice is of relatively recent date. Not very long ago even highly civilized people knew that psychic agencies could and did influence our minds and feelings. Ghosts, wizards and witches, demons and angels and even gods could produce psychological changes in human beings. Indeed, our cancer case shows clearly how impotent man’s reason and intellect are against

even the most palpable nonsense. So I advise my patient, both personal and cultural, to take such “obvious but invincible nonsense” as the manifestation of a power and meaning he has not yet understood, some sort of “diagnostic” statement about a psyche that really exists independent of his consciousness. “But,” he will certainly ask, “What could that growth be?” And I shall answer: “I do not know,” as indeed I do not. Then, at the risk of shocking him severely, I shall say: “Let us ask the Oracle of Change.” This is something I learned from Wilhelm.

The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man

You see, for the modern European, unearthing the psyche is like undertaking a full scale drainage operation. Only a great idealist like Freud could devote a lifetime to such unclean work. But it was not he who caused the bad smell, it was all of us – we who think ourselves so clean and decent from sheer ignorance and self-deception. Thus our psychology, our acquaintance with our own souls, begins in every respect from the most repulsive end, with those things we do not wish to see or understand.

But Freud was only a beginner’s attempt compared with what is an immemorial art in the east. The East with its superior psychic proficiency is throwing our spiritual world into confusion, fastening its hold on us from within. It is at the bottom of the spiritual change we are passing through today. Only this East is not Madame Blavatsky’s Tibetan monastery full of mahatmas, but lies essentially within us. It is our psyche, constantly at work creating new spiritual forms and spiritual forces to help us subdue the boundless lust for prey of Aryan man. To me the crux of the spiritual problem today is to be found in the fascination the psyche holds for modern man. We can see in it the promise of a far-reaching spiritual change in the western world that touches those irrational and –as history shows- incalculable psychic forces which transform the life of peoples and civilizations in ways that are unforeseen and unforeseeable.

A New Time

Now it is exactly here that we encounter the idea and the experience of what I have called “synchronicity.” This is something else I learned from Richard Wilhelm. The idea of synchronicity forms the basis of both classical Chinese thinking and our own “occult” views and philosophies, the naive views of our own Middle Ages. It seems to us, as modern enlightened beings, an archaic assumption that ought at all costs to be avoided. But it is not so much a question of superstition as of a truth that has remained hidden for so long because it has to do with the psychic aspects of events. It is modern psychology that has proved that causality does not explain a certain class of events and that in these cases we must consider the formal factor of synchronicity as the principle of explanation.

You see, it is like recovering a lost language.

Here are some dream motifs from my own studies on synchronicity that occurred when this idea was being discussed.

There is a large sandpit in the garden in which layers of rubbish have been deposited. In one, I discover thin slaty squares of green serpentine with black squares in it, ingrained in the stone.

I am in a wild mountain region and find layers of Triassic rock. I loosen the slabs and find to my boundless astonishment that they have human heads on them.

I am traveling in the Siberian tundra and find an animal I have been looking for. It had just sprung by chance from a microscopic unicellular organism that has the power to turn into all sorts of animals.

I am walking in a wooded mountain region. At the top of a steep slope I come to a ledge honeycombed with holes. I find a little brown man the same color as the rock hollowing out a cave at the back of which a cluster of columns could be seen. On the top of each is a human head with large eyes carved from the stone. The little man frees this formation. It continues back into the living rock must have come into existence without the help of man, at least a half million years old.

At the Kairos

In these dreams we are looking at a type of revelation that was once given the name of gnosis, an unveiling of the depths of the human soul, an essentially psychological event. They seem to be presenting a formal factor in nature, a language created by meaningful coincidence, the re-emergence of a language that Wilhelm taught me to call Change or the Way or synchronicity or I Ching. Much of our own Occult Tradition is a fumbling attempt to “set up a hierarchy of these archetypes.” This “hierarchy” is what I have learned from Wilhelm to call the Book of Changes or the Book of Fates.

You see, the problems of our neurotic *homo religiosus* are intimately related to these problems of culture. And they can only be solved by a change in individuals, a transformation of their personal likes and dislikes, of their outlook on life and of their values. Only the accumulation of these individual changes will produce a collective solution. This is the most vital and ticklish ethical problem of a civilization that has forgotten why human life should be sacrificial, that is, offered up to an idea greater than itself.

In a time of kairos and breakdown, of what the old Chinese called Yi or Change, God can no longer be projected into traditional icons. The unconscious, in response, produces the idea of the divine human who is imprisoned or concealed and must be realized. This could be explained as a regression to archaic ways of thinking, but through contact with this idea the whole personality of our patient undergoes a change for the better. So I am inclined to understand this apparently retrograde connection as the continuation of a process of spiritual development which began in early Christian or pagan times. It is a spontaneous expression of a suppressed psychological condition that is reasserting itself when the main ideas of the suppressive condition begin to lose their influence. For this heresy has long flourished under the disguise of alchemy, the anima mundi, the waters of the beginning, the miraculous water of tao, and the sons of wisdom. Richard

Wilhelm showed me how the Chinese produced the same idea. Its greatest expression is the *I Ching*.

The Myth of History

Here you can see the culmination of my work with Wilhelm – an attempt to open a space for the return of what we had repressed in our own lives and culture.

My aim is to bring about a psychic state in which my patient begins to experiment with his own nature – a state of fluidity, change and growth where nothing is eternally fixed and hopelessly petrified ... this shift in gravity of the entire personality is brought about by an emergence of the historical part of the psyche. (CW 16, 99-111)

We know that the historical layer of the psyche is a continuing imaginative act, and what we find in this fantasy past has a real influence on our current psychological reality. Wilhelm taught me that it is the purpose of a divinatory tradition like the Way of Change to help us make sense of these eruptions through creative re-enactment. For the spirits and the ghosts, the shen and the gui as the Chinese call them, do not have our human language. The mantic method of Change gives a voice to these strangers, like our old shamans and magicians and Gnostics.

For the East did not suppress this mantic methodology, but developed and refined it into one of the world's most sophisticated systems of imaginal navigation, the *Yijing* or Classic of Change. We can see it as a kind of Bardo navigator, a way through the kairos or critical moment of change. We know from the Buddhists that the Bardo worlds open between death and re-birth, whether a literal death, a crisis or a psychological experience of death and re-birth. In the Bardo our lives come apart. Our experiences and emotions, our complexes, present themselves as ghosts, gods, power figures and landscapes of passage. It is critical that we understand what we are confronting in this state and how to negotiate a passage. This can release us from the compulsion of things, so we can live our lives as expressions of the spirit and not victims

of fate. That is what things like the *I Ching* help us to do. They are tools on the great and mysterious voyage of life and transformation.

It is this hidden culture of *mantike* that that I found through Wilhelm, a culture that was lost to us in the “black mud of the occult.” The *I Ching* carries our cultural shadow, you know. It points out our lacunae quite precisely, and this is one of the reasons I value it so highly. It is why we are so afraid and uneasy about it. At bottom, this is the fear of Hell and the first step on the night-sea journey.

The Secret of the Golden Flower

Now, in all this I am trying to understand the “east” without recourse to the western way of hiding one’s heart under the cloak of so-called scientific understanding, that miserable *vanité des savants* that fears and rejects living sympathy because it might transform contact with an alien culture into an experience that has to be taken seriously.

Observations made in my practical work have opened a quite new and unexpected approach to this Eastern wisdom. I found that I had been unconsciously following that secret way which for centuries had been the preoccupation of the best minds of the east. It was Richard Wilhelm, that great interpreter of the soul of China, who confirmed this. He gave me the courage to write about the mysterious shadow land of the Eastern mind that forms a living parallel to what takes place in the psychic development of my patients. This is why we take up the Way of Change.

We think we have emancipated ourselves from all this, but in doing so we have merely reached a condition of intellectual atrophy. We soar above the earth and above humankind, but the danger of sudden collapse is there. The wise Chinese would say in the words of the *I Ching*, when the yang has reached its greatest strength, the dark power of yin is born in its depths, for night begins at midday when yang breaks up and begins to change to yin. We see an

unconscious in full revolt against conscious values, which cannot possibly be assimilated to consciousness, an apparently irreconcilable conflict before which reason stands helpless. At this point the path traveled by the east since the beginning of things begins, seeking a way of life that would be what the Indians call *nirvanda*, free of opposites, “no-wind”. I am concerned with just this way, what I call “individuation.” It is the germinal vesicle from which all the sages start. It is a kind of thought of the heart that we see expressed in the Book of Changes Wilhelm gave me. It is THE book that teaches you your own way and the all-importance of living it.

The Language of Change and the Thought of the Heart

Now, using this language of Change or thought of the heart over a period of time often has an astonishing effect. It brings about a solution of psychic complications and frees the inner personality from emotional and intellectual entanglements, creating a unity of being universally felt as liberation. This cannot be attained by the conscious will, for the un-conscious powers do not understand the language of the conscious mind. We must have the magic of the symbol that contains the so-called primitive analogies that speak to the unconscious. For the unconscious, what the Chinese call the *guishen*, the ghosts and spirits, can only be reached by symbols.

You see, the reason why our time has become so godless and profane is that we lack all knowledge of these *guishen*, these ghosts and spirits. Our true religion is a monotheism of consciousness, a mind greed that entails grave psychic danger, for then the *guishen*, the ghosts and spirits, become an inexplicable source of disturbance which leads to collective delusions, incidents, revolutions, war, in other words, destructive mass psychosis.

We congratulate ourselves on having reached a pinnacle of clarity, imagining we have left all these phantasmal and superstitious gods behind. But what we have left behind are only verbal spectres, not the psychic facts that give birth to the gods. Today, the gods have become diseases and produce curious

specimens for the doctor's consulting rooms or disorder the brains of politicians and journalists who unwittingly let loose psychic epidemics on the world. We should learn to acknowledge these psychic forces anew and not wait until nervous states and delusions make it painfully clear that we are not masters in our own house.

So our growing familiarity with the spirit of the East, and the great Oracle of Change, should first of all be taken as a sign that we are beginning to relate to the alien elements in ourselves. It is here that "god must be born again and again." This evolution of the religious spirit, the tao that grows out of the individual, is in fact the main problem of our day, a mandate given us by heaven. This is Wilhelm's real gift, the tremendous experiment of living up to one's destiny. It helps us build the Ship of Dreams, to wear the Body of Visions that I have called the Self.