

woensdag, 30 augustus 2006

HEXAGRAM 2 IN A YIJING FRAGMENT OF THE XIPING STONE CLASSICS



Volume 3 of the *Gushi Bian* 古史辨 (ISBN 5550110350), which contains the famous articles by [Gu Jiegang](#) 顧頡剛 (1893-1980), also has a small article by [Ma Heng](#) 馬衡 (1881-1955), titled 漢熹平石經周易殘字跋,



'Annotations of the remnant characters in the Zhouyi Stone Classic from the Han dynasty Xiping period' (p. 70-73). The article deals with the variant characters that are found on a stone fragment of the Yijing text that was engraved in stone in 175 AD (not 180 BC as is said [here](#); image from *Gushi Bian* 古史辨, vol. 3, p. 70/71, click to enlarge).

In his book *Warp & Weft - In search of the I-Ching*, William de Fancourt tells about the making of these Stone Classics (ISBN 1861630069, p. 100):

(...) Chinese scholars searched for definitive versions of the texts elevated to the status of *jing* in 136BCE, and attempted literally to cast them in tablets of stone.

The first attempt was begun in the year 175CE, during the latter part of the Han dynasty. This great project took some eight years to complete. When finished, the stone classics were erected at the Imperial Academy in Luoyang. Thousands flocked to see them and make rubbings, much like those of brass monuments in old churches today. In fact, the stone classics became such an enormous attraction that a guard had to be posted around them to control the crowds.

Shortly after their completion, these stone stelae were badly damaged in the year 190CE, during the political upheaval that marked the end of the Han dynasty. Unfortunately, only fragments and rubbings of them survive today.


The surviving shattered fragments of these stone tablets, and antique rubbings of lost pieces, include only 1,171 characters of the total 24,437 characters of the modern Yijing. (...) Though incomplete, they are sufficient to piece together a text which bears a closer resemblance to today's Yijing than does the Mawang Dui manuscript.

Stuart V. Aque quotes Zhou Yutong's commentary to Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850-1908) his *Jingxue lishi* 經學歷史 in [his dissertation](#) *Pi Xirui and Jingxue lishi* (p. 589, n. 108; see also p. 697-703):

The "Biography of Cai Yong" 蔡邕傳 chapter of the Hou Han shu states, "In 175 A.D., the fourth year of the Xiping 熹平 period (172- 177)...a memorial was submitted to the emperor which sought to correct and determine in a fixed form the characters of the Six Classics. Emperor Ling 靈帝 (reg. 168-189) consented to it. Cai Yong then wrote the characters in red on a stone slab, and had artisans then chisel and carve the characters. The stones were then placed in an upright position outside of the gate of the Imperial Academy." (...) These are none other than what is referred to as the Xiping Stone Classics, and are also called the Han Stone Classics. Xiping is a reign period (172-77) of Emperor Ling and the fourth year of the Xiping period is 175 A.D.--[the year they were finished].





One side of the fragment that Ma discusses contains parts of the texts of hexagram 37 to hexagram 54; the other side contains fragments of the Wenyan and Shuogua chapters of the Ten Wings. Even though it's a small fragment Ma recognizes quite some differences with the received text of the Yijing. I will not discuss all these differences (unless by popular demand), there is one variant character I would like to bring forward. In chapter four of the Shuogua there is the line '坤以藏之'. This line is also found












on the stone fragment, but the character 坤 is replaced by . It is the same character that is found in the Mawangdui version of the Yijing: *chuan* 川.






When I read this my first reaction was "this is interesting!". But during my research of the origin, history and language of the Stone Classics, and the usage of this specific character, it turned out not to be so spectacular. Often the character 川 is translated as 'flow' (Shaughnessy), '[waterway](#)' or something similar, but you might seriously doubt if this is a correct translation in the given context. Yes, 川 means 'stream' or 'flow', but on many stone tablets from the Han dynasty 川 is used as a substitute for 坤 (Wu Xinchu 吳新楚, "*Zhouyi yiwen jiaozheng* 《周易》异文校证, ISBN 7218037194; p. 38). The *Li Bian* 隸辨, a dictionary of characters from Han stone tablets which was compiled by Gu Aiji 顧藹吉 in 1718, lists five of these cases (ISBN 7101041442; p. 38-39. See image on the left; click to enlarge. Picture from [Dictionary of Chinese Character Variants](#)). In the Dictionary of Chinese Character Variants [川 is listed under 坤](#). Tang dynasty scholar Lu Deming 陸德明 (556-627) says in his *Zhouyi Shiwén* 周易釋文 about 坤 (古史辨, vol. 3, p. 73):

本又作 , , 今字也。
Also written as ,  is Lishu style.

(For the phrase 今字 meaning 'Lishu style of writing from the Han dynasty' see 漢語大詞典 1.1079-B).

But there is more. The variant characters of 川, namely ,  and , are also long known substitutes for 坤 (漢語大字典 2.1097). If you rotate these variant characters 90° CW they turn into the trigram Earth (see also Deng Qiubo 鄧球柏, *Boshu Zhouyi jiaoshi* 帛书周易校释, ISBN 7543812975; p. 260). Well, maybe not the first one, but the other two do. The characters  and  could be two ways of writing the trigram. Because  and  are very similar it is easy to mix them up, and therefore I believe that hexagram 2 was never meant to be named  with the meaning of 'stream', or 'flow', but instead  was originally intended, as an alternative form of the trigrams that form the hexagram.



Summarizing: the character 川 and its variants ,  and  were during the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) well-known substitutes for 坤. To me this indicates that hexagram 2 was not meant to be named 'stream', 'flow', or 'waterway' or similar names. For the meaning of the name of hexagram 2 we can only rely on the Shuogua, which says that Kun stands for 'earth' (chapter 11). Because the earliest appearance of the character 坤 is found in the Yijing, and all other instances of it in later books are references to the Yi, it is hard to find the original meaning without the aid of commentaries like the Ten Wings.