

The Mandate of Heaven: Hidden History in the *I Ching*

S. J. MARSHALL. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

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S. J. Marshall, an editor for *The Lancet* and an amateur sinologist, offers in this new monograph on the *Yi Jing* 易經 what purports to be a new research method, turning “modernist thinking and techniques to the task of sympathetically examining traditional beliefs about King Wen and the origin of the *Book of Changes*.” Marshall’s project was apparently motivated by the skeptical spirit of recent academic *Yi Jing* researches and their claims to have discredited the traditional view that the text was authored in early Western Zhou by the sagely King Wen. Far from attempting to find common ground between modernist and traditionalist views, as he avers in the preface, Marshall adopts a polemical tone, taking issue with the work of nearly all *Yi Jing* scholars, from Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 C.E.) on. From the start it seems clear that Marshall’s objective is to prove the validity of the traditional attribution of the *Yi Jing*, if not to King Wen personally, at least to the transitional period of the Zhou Conquest of Shang in mid-eleventh century B.C.E. Virtually all the new interpretations he offers of imagery and terms in the line texts of selected hexagrams, as well as his interpretation of the enigmatic word *yi* 易 [change] itself, aim to buttress the historical connection between the *Book of Changes* and the events, political dynamics, and personalities of the Conquest period. The *Zhou Yi* 周易, or “Changes of Zhou,” in this reading thus refers specifically to the transfer of Heaven’s Mandate to the Zhou dynasty. Underpinning Marshall’s entire philological enterprise is his claim to have discovered, in the lines of hexagram *Feng* 豐, “Abundance” (#55), an overlooked record of the total solar eclipse of June 20, 1070 B.C.E. Thus, at a stroke, Marshall claims not only to have established the value of the *Yi Jing* as an historical source, he also claims to have discovered “the year for the fall of the Shang dynasty . . . a date that supersedes all previous concocted chronologies.” We shall return to these eye-opening propositions below.

The *Mandate of Heaven* begins with an introductory chapter framing the author’s argument and approach, and discussing the traditional attribution of the *Yi Jing* to King Wen. This is followed in part 1 by chapters that advance the solar interpretation of the term *yi* [change] in the title as “change to sunny weather”; assemble traditional accounts from classical sources of events leading up to the Zhou Conquest of Shang; advance the claim that hexagram *Feng* refers specifically to the eclipse of 1070 B.C.E.; reinterpret lines of hexagram *Feng* and others in the light of the purported eclipse record and the assumption that it must have been understood as portending the demise of the Shang. Part 2 presents a miscellany, drawn from the *Changes*’ inexhaustible supply of enigmatic passages, of more or less speculative reinterpretations of lines and images, some insightful, some recapitulations of earlier explications. Concluding the monograph is a series of five appendices on chronology, genealogy, a reader’s guide to the “sinological maze” of the Wilhelm-Baynes translation, and the original Chinese text of hexagram *Feng*.

Reading this monograph, one is both stimulated and frustrated: stimulated now and then by the author’s suggestion that certain hexagrams may contain overlooked references to early

Zhou persons, places, and events, but more often dismayed by the author's condescending tone, oversights, and flawed research. For example, although he devotes an entire chapter to chronological arguments about the date of the Zhou Conquest, there is no mention of the massive five-year long Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project recently concluded in China, which marshaled a wide array of chronological evidence, showing, not incidentally, that the Zhou Conquest ought not to have occurred as early as 1070 B.C.E. More devastating, however, given Marshall's harping on others' "uninformed conjecture and inappropriate interpretation," is his failure to have consulted anyone with knowledge of the history of Chinese astronomy. Had Marshall (or his editor!) done so, one or the other would promptly have been informed that the crucial phrases *feng qi bu, ri zhong jian dou* 豐其蔀，日中見斗 and *feng qi pei, ri zhong jian mei* 豐其沛，日中見沫 drawn from hexagram *Feng*, which Marshall translates "The city of Feng was so obscured at noon the Big Dipper was observed" and "The city of Feng was so darkened at noon one could see only dimly," most definitely do not refer to the effects of a midday solar eclipse. Instead, *ri zhong jian dou* and *ri zhong jian mei* are simply two of the many ways the Chinese described sunspots throughout recorded history. Examples may be found among the earliest precisely dated Chinese astronomical records; e.g., *Han shu* 漢書, "Wang Mang zhuan" 王莽傳 for 17 March 20 C.E. There is another dated 5 November 300 C.E., and still others at intervals all the way up to 16 March 1684. Indeed, a sunspot record from 19 February 904 goes hexagram *Feng* one better and states *ri zhong jian bei dou* 日中見北斗 "the Northern Dipper was seen in the sun" rather than simply *dou* 斗. Therefore, what hexagram *Feng* actually records is the fact that the sky was so overcast or full of yellow loess dust, a common summer phenomenon in north China, that sunspots could be distinctly seen on the face of the sun. So intent is Marshall on "pushing his pet theories against the grain of the evidence," however, that he even ignores the serious doubts of professional astronomers he consulted about the potential visibility of Ursa Major during such an eclipse, and instead suggests the royal Zhou astrologers may have mistaken one or the other specific alignments of stars and planets for the handle of the Dipper, a patently absurd proposition since it assumes eyewitnesses temporarily forgot the Dipper's extreme northerly location. Marshall's central thesis, and the underlying premise for most of his historical reinterpretations of hexagram texts, is thus based on simple mistranslation of the original Chinese. This monograph should never have seen print in its present form; it reflects poorly on an otherwise capable author and on Columbia University Press. One can only deplore that, given the Press's imprimatur, this book will likely mislead many unsuspecting readers.

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