

Cheng Yi and His Ideas About Women as Revealed in His Commentary to the *Yijing*

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Observers looking at the fate of Confucianism in the twentieth century can easily recognize that its opponents and its defenders often did not speak of the same subject: Those who attacked Confucianism usually did so because of its social component, the *sangang wuchang* 三綱五常, the hierarchical order of human relationships. On the other hand, those who defended Confucianism usually referred to philosophical aspects and eternal values such as “harmony”, “humanity” and so forth. Even today one sometimes can get the impression that the word “Confucianism” is a concept which entails quite different notions for different audiences.

At present it seems that the philosophers have taken the lead. They are quite successful in promoting Confucianism as China’s old and new mainstream ideology. Yet, there are a number of issues that remain unsettled. The role of women in modern society is a topic that poses an especially difficult task. Cheng Yi (1033–1107), one of the founding fathers of the *daoxue* 道學 or “Neo-Confucian” movement of the Song period that crucially shaped the modern notion of Confucianism, is well known as someone who on several occasions spoke about the right place of women in the family. Indeed, there are a number of passages in the collected works of the Cheng brothers that are interesting with regard to our subject. This article will first look at three of these passages and will then proceed to analyze some crucial passages in Cheng Yi’s commentary to the *Yijing*. It will finally try to address the question of what modern Confucians will have to do in order to make this system of thought compatible with some of the demands that Chinese society in the 21st century will probably have.

The first passage that has to be dealt with comes from chapter 18 of the posthumous works of the Cheng Brothers from Henan, *Henan Chengshi yishu* 河南程氏遺書.

Question: “Is it allowed to expel one’s wife?” Answer: “If the wife is not worthy, what harm should there be in expelling her? A man such as Zisi also expelled his wife. Nowadays it is the custom of our contemporaries to treat it as an ugly behaviour to expel one’s wife. Therefore, they do not dare to do it. The ancients were not like this. If a wife was not good, then she rather had to be expelled! Only we modern people treat this as a big thing and hide [bad behaviour] and endure it without daring to make it known. In some cases evil is being hidden and [she is] allowed to secretly stick to it, which then leads to indulgence and licentiousness. If one nourishes and completes things that are not good, does this not do harm to your affairs? For a man who culti-

vates himself the most pressing issue is to keep a tight rein over his family. Then he will put the cultivation of the self on top of keeping a tight rein over his family!”¹

Interestingly, in what follows Cheng Yi says that only small men would publicize the evils of their wife:

One should leave a woman whom one has expelled the chance to remarry!²

So this passage is not entirely negative as far as women are concerned. Rather it seems that Cheng Yi here addresses the topic of the possibility of divorce.

More relevant for our subject is the famous case of the eldest daughter of Duke Cheng 成 of Lu 魯 who in his ninth year had been married to Duke Gong 共 of Song 宋 and who almost 40 years later (in year 30 of Duke Xiang 襄) died when a fire broke out in the harem of Song because her governess was not there to accompany her. The *Zuozhuan* 左傳 sarcastically remarked that this was a behaviour proper for a young girl but not for an elderly lady who should have simply gone on her own. Du Yu 杜預 (222–284) who obviously supports the evaluation of the author of the *Zuozhuan* adds that she was around 60 years old at the time.³ Cheng Yi was asked about his opinion on this case:

Question: “Why does [the *Chunqiu*] only in the case of the Ji, Wife of Duke Gong of Song, recount the details from beginning to end in great detail?” Answer: “In order to praise the behaviour of this eldest daughter Ji [of Lu] this is recorded in great detail. In former times master Hu [Yuan] once said that this eldest daughter from Lu among women equaled [the hermit] Boyi because she died when she was not willing to step down from the hall.”⁴

This comment praising a woman for rather letting herself be consumed by the flames than losing her chastity has been the source for heated attacks against Cheng Yi since it is seen as a starting point for the later Confucian practice to let women rather burn themselves than to remarry after the death of their husband. There are other comments similar to this one⁵ but not all of them need to be enumerated here

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- 1 *Er Cheng ji* 二程集 (henceforth: ECJ), 18.243: 問妻可出乎? 曰: 妻不賢, 出之何害? 如子思亦嘗出妻。今世俗乃以出妻為醜行, 遂不敢為, 古人不如此。妻有不善, 便當出也。只為今人將此作一件大事, 隱忍不敢發, 或有隱惡, 為其陰馳之, 以至縱恣, 養成不善, 豈不害事? 人修身刑家最急, 纔修身便到刑家上也。The last sentence is difficult to understand: It is not clear whether Cheng Yi wants to say that his own cultivation or his keeping a tight rein over his family comes first.
 - 2 ECJ 18.243: 出妻令其可嫁。
 - 3 *Shisanjing zhusu* 十三經注疏 (henceforth: SSJ), 2012c.
 - 4 ECJ, *Er Cheng yishu* 22.304: 獨宋共姬書首尾最詳, 何故? 曰賢伯姬, 故詳錄之。昔胡先生常說伯姬是婦人中伯夷, 為其不下堂而死也。
 - 5 ECJ *Er Cheng yishu* 18.212, waishu 6.389.

at great length. One especially famous example of Cheng Yi's misogyny should, however, be adduced since it is very well-known in China today:

Question: "It seems that normally one should not marry a widow. What do you say about this?" He answered: "Yes. In general when someone marries he does it in order to have a partner for himself. If he marries someone who has lost her virtue as a partner for himself, this is the same as to lose virtue oneself." Further question: "Is a widow who is orphaned, poor and in dire straits without having someone whom she can rely on, allowed to remarry?" Answer: "Only because in later ages one feared to die from coldness or to starve this discussion arose. But to starve to death is an extremely small matter whereas to lose one's virtue is an extremely big matter."⁶

These two examples show Cheng Yi as the extremely conservative scholar well-known from other contexts. In what follows I would like to scrutinize how this conservatism can also be recognized in what may be the most important contribution that Cheng Yi made to classical scholarship, namely his commentary to the *Yijing*. This commentary was to become the authoritative exegesis of the *Yijing* until the system of the triennial palace examinations was abolished. It is the work with which Cheng Yi late in his life⁷ established his fame as a philosopher. According to Cheng Yi's preface to the *Yijing* all possible constellations and situations in this world were contained in this book. Hence, this is also a text that combines both the social and the philosophical component of Confucianism.

It is hard to overstate the importance of the *Yijing* as a book in which the foundations of all human social relationships are represented. Rather is it often underestimated in sinological literature on Confucianism because a) is it not regarded as a real "Confucian" book (many Chinese would instinctively rather treat it as a Daoist text) and b) is it still understood as a book the main importance of which lay in its being a divination text. That the *Yijing* deals with human relationships in general is sometimes forgotten. This is certainly wrong as far as many Chinese thinkers and certainly Cheng Yi are concerned.⁸

It is both in the discussions of the trigrams and of the lines that the *Yijing*, and hence also Cheng Yi, speaks of female characteristics. The trigrams have traditionally been understood as representing a family that was divided into father, mother, three

6 ECJ, *Er Cheng yishu* 22B.301: 問孀婦於理似不可取。如何？曰。然。凡取以配身也。若取失節者以配身。是已失節也。又問：或有孤孀貧窮無託者。可再嫁否？曰。只是後世怕寒餓死故有是說。然餓死事極小。失節事極大。

7 The preface is dated to 1099. ECJ, 583.

8 There are two major books that deal with the *Yijing* commentary of Cheng Yi. The first one is Smith *et al.* 1990. In this book the commentary is analyzed mainly with regard to its contribution to the philosophical ideas of Daoxue. Hon 2006, is mainly concerned with Cheng Yi's ideas about factionalism.

sons and three daughters. Father and mother are easily defined: Three strong, unbroken lines yield the trigram *qian* 乾 (in Wilhelm's translation "the creative"), the father, Three broken lines the trigram *kun* 坤 ("the receptive"), the mother. Doubling of these trigrams yields the first two hexagrams that are also called *qian* and *kun*. Three of the other six trigrams are composed of two broken and one unbroken lines while the opposite is true for the other three. Although unbroken lines are Yang, and the Yang aspect belongs to masculinity, whereas broken lines are Yin and female, in the *Yijing* system those three trigrams containing more Yang, namely those with two unbroken lines, are called "eldest, middle and youngest daughter" whereas the trigrams containing more Yin, namely two broken lines, are the three sons, the eldest, the middle and the youngest. Thus, the first level of interpretation of the *Yijing* is a familial situation.

Interestingly, the *Yijing* text and its ancient commentaries, the so-called ten wings, mention the concept of the "daughters" only twice. The first of these occurrences is in the *Tuan* commentary to hexagram 38 *kui* 睽 ("the contradiction"), composed of the two trigrams *dui* 兌 ("to permeate"; also: "the sea") below and *li* 離, ("to separate"; also: "the fire") above, which are the youngest and the middle daughter. The *Tuan* commentary writes:

Contradiction: The movement of fire is upwards, the movement of the sea is downwards. Two daughters that live together: Their will does not cooperate.⁹

Cheng Yi explains that daughters when they are young live together [at their parents' place] but will develop different ideas once they are married, obviously because their husbands will be different, too.¹⁰ The *Tuan* commentary makes roughly the same comment again when it discusses hexagram 49, *ge* 革 ("the removal"), which is composed of the same two trigrams "sea" and "fire" in the second possible order:

If two daughters live together they do not get along with their will.¹¹

Not very much more can be made out of this comment. Yet, there are two more hexagrams that provoked interesting commentaries by Cheng Yi: Already in one of his prefaces Cheng Yi had explained that the two hexagrams *xian* 咸 (no. 31, Wilhelm: "stimulation") and *heng* 恆 (no. 32, Wilhelm: "the constant") deal with the way of husband and wife and that this is the reason why they form the beginning of the second section of the *Yijing* hexagrams.¹² Thus he sees them as counterparts to the first two hexagrams *qian* and *kun* which form the beginning of the first section and of the text as a whole. This again stresses the importance of the relationship of "man and woman" for Cheng Yi's understanding of the *Yijing*.

9 SSJ 50C: 火動而上，澤動而下。二女同居，其志不同行。

10 ECJ 889.

11 SSJ 60C: 二女同居，其志不相得。

12 ECJ 692, *shang xia pian yi*.

The hexagram *xian* first starts with very auspicious words and then says that it is auspicious to marry a girl. The *Tuan* commentary then adds:

Xian means *gan* (the same character with an additional heart radical; to feel). Soft above and hard below, the two [different] forces feel and react (*gan ying*), stop with each other and rejoice. The man below the girl. Therefore everything is auspicious, and it is auspicious to take a girl.¹³

“The man below the girl” here does not necessarily refer to erotic arts from the bed chamber but rather to the trigrams that form the hexagram *xian*: Below we find the trigram *gen* 艮 with one unbroken line above and two broken ones below. According to traditional *Yijing* interpretation this is the youngest son. Above we find the trigram *dui* (“to permeate”, “the sea”) which we know already as the youngest daughter. “To rejoice” (*yue* 說 = 悅) is a pun on *dui*. Cheng Yi in his commentary says that

[...] man and woman in their union become husband and wife. Therefore in both *xian* and *heng* two trigrams combine to yield the meaning of husband and wife.¹⁴

Xian 咸, he adds,

[...] means *gan* 感 (“to feel”, again a pun), and this makes “to rejoice” the leading component of this hexagram whereas *heng* means “regular” which takes “to be correct” as its root. The way of rejoicing has to proceed from what is correct while there certainly is joy in the way of the correct. [...] The hexagram *xian* has *dui* above and *gen* below, these are the youngest daughter and the youngest son. No man and no woman can rejoice as deeply as the youngest. This is the reason why the two youngest [members of the family] make up the hexagram *xian* (to rejoice). [...] The man earnestly makes contact from below, and the woman rejoices in her heart and reacts from above. Thus, the man feels first. If the man first feels with earnestness then the woman rejoices and reacts.¹⁵

Slightly later Cheng Yi adds that it is the best of all forms of harmony if the man is below the woman.¹⁶ One wonders why this situation should be so harmonious. Cheng Yi gives an explanation in his commentary to the next hexagram, namely *heng*. Here he says:

13 SSJ 46C: 咸，感也。柔上而剛下，二氣感應以相與，止而說，男下女，是以亨利貞，取女吉也。

14 ERJ 854: 男女交合而成夫婦，故咸與恆皆二體合為夫婦之義。

15 ERJ 854: 咸感也，以說為主；恆，常也，以正為本。而說之道自有正也，正之道固有說焉。[...] 咸之為卦，兌上艮下，少女少男也。男女相感之深，莫如少者，故二少為咸也。

[...] 男志篤實以下交，女心說而上應，男感之先也。男先以成感，則女說而應也。

16 ECJ 855: 以男下女，和之至也。

In *xian* the youngest son is below the youngest daughter. A man below a woman, that has the meaning of man and woman making contact and feeling each other. In *beng* the eldest son is above the eldest daughter. [Thus,] the man is dignified and the woman is humble. That is the regular way husband and wife should live in their house. Speaking about making contact and feeling the youngest are the most intimate; speaking about the order of dignified and humble the eldest should be serious and correct; therefore the trigrams *dui* (the cheerful, the sea) and *gen* (calmness, the mountain) form the hexagram *xian* whereas *zhen* (thunder) and *sun* (the gentle) form *beng*. A man above a woman [that is]: The man moves outside while the woman obeys within. That is the normal order among men, and therefore this is *beng* (the permanent).¹⁷

That is one of the not all too surprising passages which probably will make the use of Cheng Yi's *Yijing* interpretations in the 21st century a difficult task. It is, by the way, *mutatis mutandis*, already to be found in the *Tuan* commentary to the hexagram 37, *jiaren* 家人 (“family persons”):

The correct position of the woman is within, the correct position of the man is without. If man and woman are correct, then this is the great meaning of Heaven and Earth.¹⁸

In this hexagram Cheng Yi praises the Yin line on position Two as a correct woman who stays within and the Yang line on position Five which represents a correct man who acts outside.

There are numerous similar passages which, however, usually are not related to the system of sons and daughters. In order to understand what Cheng Yi is saying there we should again first recall some basic information about the imagery of the lines of a hexagram: broken lines in the *Yijing* get the Yin number Six, unbroken ones the Yang number Nine. Yin lines should occupy Yin positions, that is lines with just numbers Two, Four and Six, whereas Yang lines should occupy Yang positions on lines One, Three and Four. Thus, a hexagram which is completely “correct” (*zheng* 正) would consist of alternating lines. As is well known, the six lines of a hexagram are usually seen as being related to social positions. Thus, the first line represents a person without office, normally a young man who is not yet in a position, but occasionally also an old man who never made it.¹⁹ The second line

17 ECJ 860: 咸，少男在少女之下，以男下女，是男女交感之義。恆，長男在長女之上，男尊女卑，夫婦居室之常道也。論交感之情，則少為親切；論尊卑之序，則長當謹正；故兌艮為咸，而震巽為恆也。男在女上，男動于外，女順于內，人理之常，故為恆也。

18 ECJ 884: 女正位乎內，男正位乎外，男女正，天地之大義也。

19 I always had the suspicion that when Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 called himself “Liu yi xian-sheng 六一先生” he did not just mean “me, one out of six things” (the other five being according to his “Liuyi jushi zhuan” 六一居士傳 (*Ouyang Xiu quanji*, vol. 2, 44.634f) books,

is ideally a man who just got his first position, the third an influential officer and the fourth a person who is very close to the ruler. The fifth line is the ruler himself while the sixth can be the temple of ancestors or a retired official who may or not have lost his former influence. Special importance is attached to lines Two and Five which are positioned in the middle of the two trigrams that form a hexagram. They ideally correspond to each other which, however, only works well if one of the two lines is Yin and the other Yang. The same applies to the other trigram lines: number One should correspond with number Four, and number Three with number Six because they are in the same position within a trigram.

Once again one should ask the question: Where in this system are the women? Of course, women can take the position of men, and there are a few cases in which the *Yijing* itself speaks of women. Interestingly, it does so in a very ordered way: The character *nü* 女, for example, which stands for a “daughter” or a young unmarried woman occurs in four hexagrams (3, 4, 20 and 28) usually on the second position, a Yin position (in case 3, 20 and 28). The exception is hexagram 4 where “*nü*” occurs in the text on a third line, a broken Yin line. There, the second position is occupied by a Yang line, and the Yin line is thus in the wrong position. The text says that one should not marry a woman, and Cheng Yi supplies the information that this Yin line is neither in the middle nor correct (because a Yin line is on a Yang position, number Three, an odd number which is yang). He explains that this is a woman who “moves carelessly”. In the last example, hexagram 28, the second line is interpreted by the *Yijing* as an old man who gets a young woman as his wife (*nü qi* 女妻). This is then seen as auspicious.

Thus, the marriageable *nü*-wife apparently has the position number Two in the hexagrams of the *Yijing* while the “wife” (*fu* 婦) is to be found on second and third lines only twice, but three times on fifth lines and once on a sixth line.²⁰ Moreover, when the married *fu*-wife takes an active role as a line herself, she is on higher positions. The “married wife” (*qi* 妻) is to be found two times on third lines.²¹ Therefore, we can roughly establish the following sequence: *nü* (girl) = second line, *qi* (married wife) = third line, *fu* (main wife, head of the household) = fifth or sixth line.

We do find a macho-tone sometimes in Cheng Yi's commentary. For example, he likes to compare small men and “girls” (*xiaoren nüzi* 小人女子).²² At the occasion

texts of inscriptions on bronze and on stone, a Qin, a chess board and a bottle of wine) but rather “me, the insignificant Yin person on the first line of a *Yijing* hexagram” – that is a totally worthless man.

20 In hexagram 4 on line Two, in hexagram 9 on line Six, in hexagram 28 on line Five, in hexagram 32 on line Five, in hexagram 37 and 53 on line Three, in hexagram 53 also on line Five, in hexagram 63 on line Two.

21 Hexagram 9 and 47.

22 ECJ 860, 868, in Hexagramm 31 and 33; compare *Lunyu* 17.25.

of hexagram 17, *sui* 隨 (“to follow”), he observes that “a woman has to follow a man. That is expressed through the idea of *sui* in which the youngest daughter follows the eldest son”,²³ and in hexagram 18, *gu* 蠱, he says that the son although young dwells above whereas the daughter, although the eldest, dwells below, and that thus dignified and humble get their right positions, above and below obey order which is the way to govern *gu*.²⁴ In *yi* 頤 (No. 27) he says that women are unable to live alone. They need to follow a man, just as any Yin needs to follow a Yang.²⁵

Hexagram 44, *gou* 姤 (“mating”), which consists of one first Yin line that is followed by five Yang lines starts with the words: “The girl is strong. One should not take this girl.”²⁶ Cheng Yi warns that such a girl eventually will become a strong enemy to the man and says that the *Yijing* warns against marrying such a girl. He states that in “marrying a girl one wants her to be soft, harmonious, obeying and following,”²⁷ and he ends:

In general with girls, small men and Yi and Di-barbarians, if their position gradually becomes flourishing how could one be together with them for long?²⁸

There are two hexagrams which deal with the marriage of a girl, namely *jian* 漸 (no. 53) and *guimei* 歸妹 (no. 54, “the marrying girl”), and it is stated in the beginning of Cheng Yi’s commentary to *guimei* that there are altogether four hexagrams dealing with the meaning of pairing of men and women: *xian* and *beng* (nos. 31 and 32), that have been dealt with before, and *jian* and *guimei*. The relevant text repeats what the commentary said before, namely that the fact that in *xian* the male trigram is below the female and that thus in this hexagram the normal order between man and woman is reversed is related to feelings and sentiments which apparently are Yin and allow for the dominance of women. The rule, however, should be that the husband leads (*chang* 倡) while the wife follows (*sui* 隨).²⁹ Interestingly, in “the marrying girl” the man-trigram (in this case “thunder”, *zhen* 震) which is associated with “movement” (*dong* 動) is above and the female trigram *dui* 兌 (“the sea” 澤 or “joy” 說) is below, just as it should be. Nevertheless, Cheng Yi is not really satisfied with this hexagram. The reason for this is that the canonical text says that to “undertake something is inauspicious and will not in any form bring success,”³⁰ and the

23 ECJ 783: 女隨人者也，以少女從長男，隨之義。

24 ECJ 789.

25 ECJ 835.

26 ECJ 789: 女壯，勿用取女。

27 ECJ 924: 取女者，欲其柔和順從。

28 ECJ 924: 凡女子，小人，夷狄，勢苟漸盛，何可與久也。

29 ECJ 978.

30 ECJ 978: 征凶，無攸利。

Tuan commentary adds that the positions are not appropriate.³¹ Cheng Yi thinks that this has to be understood with regard to the composition of the hexagram: “joy” 說 and “movement” 動:

To move out of joy, movement without appropriateness, therefore misfortune. Lacking appropriateness means that the positions are not appropriate.³²

A girl who is driven to joy just by the movement of the man – this simply cannot be good at all. *Honi soit qui mal y pense!*

Very interesting in this context are several line statements and their interpretation by Cheng Yi. Overall, the hexagram *jian*, one of our four hexagrams dealing with the way of man and woman, is positive because the canonical text on the image says that “the marriage of a girl is auspicious”.³³ Here, the trigrams are in the wrong order, the male trigram *gen* (the mountain) is below while the female one (*sun*, the gentle) is above. Nevertheless, Cheng Yi explains that there is no problem since the second line is Yin while the fifth line is Yang. That means: There is a weak but virtuous woman below and a strong man with whom she corresponds is above – “both get the right position”.³⁴

The other important lines in this hexagram are correct, too: a Yang line is in position Three, a Yang number, and a Yin line is in position Four, a Yin number. Everything fine? Almost, but not completely. Positions Three and Four, Yang on Three and Yin on Four, are a problem because the canonical text to line Three is not positive:

A wild goose slowly approaches the land. The husband leaves and does not return. The wife is pregnant but does not raise [the child]. Disaster! It would be advantageous to ward off robbers.³⁵

Now Cheng Yi explains us that line Three is the husband which this text is speaking of and that it is a man who is pushy and wants to achieve his goal as soon as possible. That kind of behaviour is, of course, bad, even more so since the hexagram in question bears the name *jian*, the “gradual”. Line Four, the Yin line, is the wife! The Three cannot wait but immediately wants to mate with the adjacent Yin line Four, a woman who is weak and who, therefore, gives in to number Three’s illicit desires. She gets pregnant – and cannot raise the child because the whole action was not correct. Interestingly, Cheng Yi interprets the canonical statement that one

31 SSJ 64A: 位不當。

32 ECJ 978: 以說而動，動而不當，故凶。不當，位不當也。以說而動，動而不當，故凶。不當，位不當也。

33 ECJ 972: 女歸吉。

34 ECJ 978: 男下女而各得正位。

35 SSJ 63c: 鴻漸于陸，夫征不復，婦孕不育，凶；利禦寇。

should “ward off robbers” in a moral and at the same time abstract way: The man should “return,” meaning that he should quit his illicit behaviour and return to the correct way and he should protect himself against the robbers within himself who lead him to an incorrect behaviour. Similarly, the Yin line on the fourth position is explained as the weak woman who only if she is very prudent will have a chance to end up in safety.³⁶

There is a situation right in the beginning of the *Yijing* which closely resembles the one just recounted. Hexagram 3, *zhun* 屯, the difficulty, which is interpreted by Cheng Yi as a situation of danger since the two trigrams are “thunder” (*zhen*, which is the same as “movement”) and “the abyss” (*kan* 坎) meaning danger: Thus there is movement in danger, and also interaction of Yin in the form of clouds, also one of the meanings of *kan*, and Yang in form of thunder. That reminds us of “clouds and rain,” a well-known symbol for sex. That is also the situation which then is correlated with some of the lines of the hexagram. Cheng Yi is most interested in line number Two, a broken Yin line which following the canonical text he interprets as a young woman. Next in importance comes line number One, a male Yang line, and line number Five, also a male Yang line. Line number One is a talented young man who is in danger because of his talent. He has to stay in his position and should not be deluded by his own strength to push forward. Line number Five, too, is a strong man, a senior person whom Cheng Yi warns not to display his power too much.

Line Two is a young woman who has to choose between these two men. It may be necessary to present a translation of the extremely cryptic canonical text as well as the commentary which Cheng Yi wrote to it:

Canonical text:

Six on line Two: The second Six, divided, shows (its subject) distressed and obliged to return; she mounts the horse but then again descends. (But) not by a spoiler (is she assailed), but by one who seeks her to be his wife. The young lady maintains her firm correctness, and does not get pregnant. After ten years she will be united, and have children.³⁷

Commentary by Cheng Yi:

The two as a weak Yin line is situated in a world of danger. Although she has a correct response above [with the strong Yang line on the fifth position] she is harassed by the hard [line] on the initial position. Therefore she is in danger and distress. [...] She mounts her horse – that is: she wants to go. She wants to follow the [senior per-

36 ECJ 975f.

37 屯如遭如，乘馬班如。匪寇婚媾，女子貞不字，十年乃字。 Translation by James Legge (1899, 62), slightly adjusted in order to make the text fit Cheng Yi's commentary.

son] who correctly responds [to her on the fifth position] but then she again descends and is not able to proceed. The word *ban* means “to spread out”. To get down from a horse [also] means *ban*, to separate from the horse. The [woman on line] Two lives in a world of danger. Although she is not able to rescue herself she is situated in a middle position [of the trigram; but also in human relations] and she finds the right [way: because she is a Yin person on a Yin number (2)]. She has a response above [line number 5] which means that she is one who does not give up what is right. Yet, she is hard pressed by the initial [male line] which is very close. Yin is something which is desired by Yang, and the soft are harassed by the hard. A soft [person] in a time of danger really has a hard time to rescue herself. In addition she is pressed by a hard Yang [person on line number one]. Therefore she is in difficulty. If she is not pressed by the problem presented by robbers, she is surely be sought by marriage-seekers. The marriage-seeker, that is the correct response [of the senior person on position Five]. The robber is one who arrives out of order. The [person] on line Two is in the middle and correct and does not carelessly unite with the [man] in the initial position. Therefore she does not get pregnant. If she carries on firmly and does not change her attitude for up to ten years then the situation of danger will come to its extreme and will be penetrated. Then will she get the correct response [from the senior man above] and get pregnant and raise children.

If a woman with her Yinnish weakness is able to guard her principles in this way that after a long time she will be able to get through, how much more so should a superior man be able to hold on to his way without looking back?³⁸

As in the example quoted above from hexagram 53 (“the gradual”), here, too, we have a young woman who is hard pressed by a young and strong man (on a line below her). Cheng Yi praises her for not giving in to his advances but instead waiting for the time when she can correctly and harmoniously unite with the senior person on the fifth line whom she rightly belongs to. What is interesting in this text is the strong belief in correct hierarchies that characterize human relations, first among them the relation between men and women. A young girl rightly belongs to a senior man, not to a young man who desires her.

There are more passages in which Cheng Yi says that quite clearly: Right in the next hexagram, *meng* 蒙 (no. 4, “youthful ignorance”), the canonical text to the Six (Yin line) on third position says:

38 ECJ 716: 二以陰柔居屯之世，雖正應在上，而逼於初剛，故屯難。[...] 乘馬，欲行也。欲從正應，而復班如，不能進也。班，份布之義。下馬為班，與馬異處。二當屯世，雖不能自濟，而居中得正，有應在上，不失義者也，然逼近於初。陰乃陽所求，柔者剛所陵。柔當屯時，固難自濟，又為剛陽所逼，故為難也。設匪逼於寇難，則往求於婚媾矣。婚媾，正應也。寇，非理而至者。二守中正，不苟合於初，所以不字。苟貞固不易，至於十年，屯極必通，乃獲正應而字育矣。以女子陰柔，苟能守其志節，久必獲通，況君子守道不回乎？

The third Six, divided, (seems to say) that one should not marry a woman who, when she sees a man of wealth, will not keep her person from him. In no way will advantage come from her.³⁹

Cheng Yi comments:

The [woman] on position Three lives as a soft Yin person in youthful benightedness. She is not in the middle and not correct [that is: she is not in a middle position in the trigram and a wrong line on the wrong position, since Three is a Yang position that would require an unbroken line]. That is a woman who moves carelessly! The right response is above [because the sixth line is a Yang line, and this is the line she belongs to] but she is not able to follow the one who is far away. She sees that the Nine on line Two [below her; that is a strong young man] is a person whom all the ignorants turn to and that he gets the power of the moment. Therefore she throws away her correct response and follows this person. This is: “A woman sees a man of wealth.” When a woman follows a man she should use correct rules of propriety. But she sees that a man has a lot of money, rejoices and follows him. She is not able to protect her body. No movement of her will be advantageous!⁴⁰

Cheng Yi approves of an old man marrying a young woman – in the language of the *Yijing* the mating of a Six on the first line with a Nine on the second line which occurs in hexagram 28, *da guo* 大過 (“the great exaggeration”),⁴¹ and he also approves of a young woman on line Two who looks up to the superior man on line Five in hexagram 20, *guan* 觀 (“to look up”).

There the canonical text says:

[*Guan*.:] The second Six, divided, shows one peeping out from a door. Advantageous is the firm correctness of a female.⁴²

Cheng Yi says:

The [woman on line] Two responds to the [man on line] Five and looks up to number Five. The Five is hard and Yang and has the Way of the middle and the correct. That is something which the Two in her Yin manner, in her softness and weakness cannot recognize. Therefore she just peeps out from the door. A peep out from the door just allows to see a little bit and not to understand fully. Because the Two is not able to clearly recognize the hard and Yang way of the middle and the correct, it is

39 ECJ 721: 六三：勿用娶女；見金夫，不有躬，無攸利。Translation: Legge 1899, 65, ad-justed.

40 ECJ 721: 三以陰柔處蒙闇，不中不正，女之妄動者也。正應在上，不能遠從，近見九二為群蒙所歸，得時之盛，故捨其正應而從之，是女之見金夫也。女之從人，當由正禮，乃見人之多金，說而從之，不能保有其身者也。無所往而利矣。

41 ECJ 840.

42 ECJ 799: 六二：窺觀，利女貞。

advantageous that she behaves firmly like a woman: Although she can not fully understand she is nevertheless able to obey and follow. That is the way of a woman and that is what one considers to be firmness of a woman. As the Two is not able to clearly understand the way of the Nine on the fifth position she will not lose the middle and the correct if she is able to obey and follow as a woman. That would be advantageous.⁴³

Even more misogynous is the comment on the paragraph that follows in the Xiang commentary 象傳:

The firm correctness of a woman, in peeping out from a door' is also a thing to be ashamed of (in a superior man).⁴⁴

Cheng Yi:

If a superior man is not able to recognize the great way of the hard and the Yang and the Middle and the Correct but only peeps out from the door and catches the resemblance of it then this is like the firmness of a woman. That is really something one should be ashamed of!⁴⁵

My last examples come from hexagram 54, “the marrying girl”, that I already mentioned before. Cheng Yi interprets all six lines as women in different situations of a marriage. The first line in the canonical text reads:

The first Nine shows the young girl married off as a second wife. A person lame on one leg who yet manages to tramp along. Going forward will be auspicious.⁴⁶

Cheng Yi first explains that hard Yang – the unbroken line called “Nine” – in a woman means that she is worthy and firm but then says that a second wife, although worthy, will not be able to do very much because she is in a base position. She cannot do more than improve herself in order to be able to help her lord, nothing more, and she will not be able to get very far.

But in the space allotted to her she acts well. Therefore, if she acts according to this, this will be auspicious.⁴⁷

43 ECJ 799f: 二應於五，觀於五也。五，剛陽中正之道，非二陰暗柔弱所能觀見也。故但如闕規之觀耳。闕規之觀，雖少見而不能甚明也。二既不能明見剛陽中正之道，則利如女子之貞。雖見之不能甚明，而能順從者，女子之道也，在女子為貞也。二既不能明見九五之道，則不失中正，乃為利也。

44 ECJ 800: 窺觀女貞，亦可醜也。Translation: Legge 1899, 293.

45 ECJ 800: 君子不能觀見剛陽中正之大道，而僅闕規其彷彿，雖能順從，乃通女子之貞，亦可羞醜也。

46 ECJ 980: 初九：歸妹以娣，跛能履，征吉。Legge 1899, 181f. adjusted.

47 ECJ 980: 然在其分為善，故以是而行則吉也。

And a little bit later:

To be able to help her lord, this is the auspiciousness of a secondary wife.⁴⁸

I skip line Two in which Cheng Yi recognizes a worthy woman who unfortunately is married to a weak character (a Six on number Five) and whose worthiness will therefore only help herself but will not make any greater positive effect – a woman is not capable of doing more. Number Three is interesting again because this is a Yin line, a girl who is waiting for a partner and in the end is married off as a secondary wife just as the first line in this hexagram. According to Cheng Yi this girl who is, after all, not in a low position does not get a reaction from a man. The reason for this interpretation is that there is another Yin line in the sixth position, and in order to make a good relationship with the corresponding number Three this should be a Yang line.

This girl, Cheng Yi says,

[...] originally was not lowly. She lost her virtue and therefore did not get a correct response [from a man above]. Therefore although she wants to go to someone she does not find anyone whom she can turn to [...]. She is the lord of the trigram “joy” [*yue* 說 = *dui* 兌] and out of lust 說 she wants to marry. That means that her movement does not accord with the rules of propriety. Above she does not have a response which means that nobody accepts her. Because there is no partner she has to wait. If a girl is in such a position who would ever take her? She simply cannot be a partner for somebody else. She needs to turn back to marry and to seek to become a secondary wife or a concubine. That is still possible. Because she was not right she lost her place.⁴⁹

And to the corresponding canonical image commentary:

“The young girl who was to be married off has to wait.” – nothing is fitting yet.⁵⁰

Cheng Yi says bluntly:

Nothing is fitting means: Her place, her virtue and her way to look for a marriage, all these things are not fitting. Therefore there is nobody who wants to take her and she accordingly has to wait.⁵¹

48 ECJ 980: 能助其君，婦之吉也。

49 ECJ 980: 本非賤者，以失德而無正應，故為欲有歸而未德其歸。[...] 為說之主，以說求歸，動非禮也。上無應，無受之者也。無所適故須也。女子之處如是，人誰取之？不可以為人配矣。當反歸而求為婦媵則可也，以不正而失其所也。

50 ECJ 980: 歸妹以須，未當也。

51 ECJ 981: 未當者，其處，其德，其求歸之道皆不當，故無取之者，所以須也。

It is quite cruel how ancient societies worked. Mistakes were not forgiven. Lines Four and Five are more positive, but line Six in this hexagram again is a weak woman who has nothing to offer for the sacrifices in the ancestral temple of her husband. In such a case Cheng Yi simply recommends a divorce.⁵²

We could go on with more passages which involve the correct positions of wives in a family. I think that this is not necessary. The picture does not change. Cheng Yi does not condemn women straight away. But it is clear that his views on how they should behave and which place they should take is not going to be accepted by many women in the 21st century. Cheng Yi's views on the *Yijing* would certainly deserve a translation into any Western language because it could open the eyes of a Western readership to a Chinese cosmos that is enshrined in this commentary.⁵³ Yet no matter how well intended this moral thinking may have been when it was developed in the eleventh century, I hardly think that this view of the world is going to be one that should influence any way of behaviour, be it Chinese or Western, in the decades to come. This is a problem that has to be sorted out by the advocates of modern Confucianism.

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52 *Li jue* 離絕; ECJ 983.

53 The Chinese Hanban has recently started a project to retranslate all Chinese canonical scriptures. I think that translations should be made that are based on commentaries which establish a fixed meaning.