

possess, commences the history of their country with the reign of an emperor named *Yao*, whom it represents to us as occupied in removing the waters, *which, having risen to the skies, still bathed the foot of the higher mountains, covered the less elevated hills*, and rendered the plains impassable \*. According to some, the reign of Yao was 4163 years before the present time ; according to others, 3943. The discrepancy in the opinions regarding this epoch even amounts to 284 years.

A few pages farther on we find one *Yu*, a minister and engineer, re-establishing the courses of the waters, raising embankments, digging canals, and regulating the taxes of all the provinces in China, that is to say, in an empire extending 600 leagues in all directions. But the impossibility of such operations, after such events, shews clearly that the whole is nothing else than a moral and political romance †.

More modern Chinese historians have added a series of emperors before Yao, but with a multitude of fabulous circumstances, without venturing to assign them fixed epochs. These writers

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\* Chou-king, French translation, p. 9.

† See the Yu-kong, or first chapter of the second part of the Chou-king, pp. 43--60.