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Wai-ming Ng/The I Ching in Tokugawa Thought and Culture

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Introduction

This study uses the *I Ching* (*Ekikyō* in Japanese, or *Book of Changes* in English) to investigate the influence of Confucianism and Chinese learning in the Tokugawa period. The text, one of the most influential and popular Chinese classics, is both a book of magic and a book of wisdom. In antiquity, it started as a book of magic that contained sixty-four divinational images, or hexagrams, and their oracles. It was later Confucianized and became one of the Five Confucian Classics. However, the richness of the *I Ching* was not limited to Confucianism but shared its wisdom with different schools of thought and religion. In China, Confucianism, Taoism, the *yin-yang* school, and some schools of Buddhism and folk religion all claimed the text as their own. It is no exaggeration to say that the philosophy and divination of the text became an integral part of Chinese civilization.

In particular, the *I Ching* incorporated two extremely powerful ideas into its system: *yin-yang* and *wu-hsing*. *Yin* and *yang* denote the two primal forces of the universe. They oppose and supplement each other, and their relationship can be represented as the interplay between negative and positive forces, female and male, darkness and brightness. *Yin* and *yang* control the *wu-hsing* (the five basic agents, or stages): wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Among the five agents, there are two types of relationship: some agents work with each other, whereas some oppose each other. This is called “the theory of promotion and control of the five agents.” Corresponding to the five agents, everything in the world can be classified into five, such as five colors, five grains, five organs, and so forth. This is called “the theory of correspondence of the five agents.” The doctrine of *yin-*

yang wu-hsing served as the major theoretical framework in philosophy, culture, and science in the Chinese cultural system.

Historically speaking, the concepts of *yin-yang* and *wu-hsing* did not exist in the earliest editions of the *I Ching*, and these terms cannot be found in its main text. Incorporated into the *I Ching* system by the late Chou period (771–221 B.C.E.), they were developed into a sophisticated theoretical framework in the Ch'in (221–206 B.C.E.) and Han (206 B.C.E.–C.E. 200). This research treats the *yin-yang wu-hsing* doctrine as an integral part of the *I Ching* system. In my discussion, therefore, the *I Ching* is not only a Confucian classic but also a powerful metaphysical and symbolic system representing different aspects of Chinese culture.

Traditional Japan was within the orbit of the Chinese cultural sphere, and thus was indebted to the *I Ching* for the development of aspects of its history. Indeed, the *I Ching* penetrated many different areas of Japanese life, including politics, the economy, the military, arts, religion, science, and folklore. This book is the first serious attempt to examine the role of the *I Ching* in Japanese thought and culture. Because secondary references are extremely limited, it relies heavily on primary materials. Using textual analysis of Tokugawa writings as my major research method, I conducted this study within a larger historical context and theoretical framework. Based on a proper and critical reading of the texts, my objective was to formulate narratives and views of historical significance that provide a deeper understanding both of Japanese intellectual and cultural history and of Sino-Japanese cultural relations in early modern and modern Japan.

Each chapter, I believe, represents a bold attempt to address new topics by drawing on many rarely used materials. Part I is a historical narrative of *I Ching* scholarship in Japan. Chapter 1 traces the early adaptation of the text, from its importation to Japan in the sixth century to the end of the medieval period in the sixteenth century. It examines how the *I Ching* became a subject of particular attention among major literate groups in the medieval period, such as Zen Buddhist monks, courtiers, and high-ranking warriors. It focuses on the role of the *I Ching* in medieval Japanese culture and on the continuity of its scholarship from medieval to early modern times. Chapter 2 demonstrates the popularity of the text in the Tokugawa period by analyzing both the numbers of authors and writings on it and the importation, reproduction, and punctuation of Chinese commentaries.

Chapter 3 is an overview of the study and uses of the text in the

Tokugawa period, when *I Ching* scholarship reached its apex and the work itself became one of the most popular and influential Chinese texts among Tokugawa intellectuals. This chapter highlights the *I Ching's* popularity; the major schools, scholars, and writings that grew up around it; and the characteristics of *I Ching* scholarship. In the Tokugawa period, Confucian scholars replaced Zen Buddhist monks as the main force behind *I Ching* scholarship. Because I discuss Confucian issues in almost every chapter, I have not included a separate chapter on Confucianism.

Parts II and III are the foci of my research. They explore the role of the *I Ching* in the thought and culture of Tokugawa Japan. Part II is an analytical discussion of the text in Tokugawa thought. Chapters 4 and 5 look at the impact of Confucianism on Tokugawa politics and economics through the role of the *I Ching*. Chapter 4 documents its part in the formation of Tokugawa political thought. The abstraction and ambiguity of the *I Ching* meant that its ideas were interpreted in various ways in different political contexts. This chapter shows that whereas early Tokugawa scholars used the text to legitimize the Tokugawa regime, late Tokugawa reformers and loyalists used it to air anti-bakufu ideas. It also surveys how the Japanese altered Chinese political ideals to fit the Tokugawa political system.

Chapter 5 demonstrates the importance of the text in Tokugawa economic thought and analyzes its role in Japan's economic development. The doctrine of *yin-yang wu-hsing* was used as a basic interpretative framework in many agricultural writings. The text was also used by economists and early entrepreneurs to develop their "free-market" economic theories, and provided early entrepreneurs with the wisdom and confidence to engage in modern industry and business.

Chapters 6 and 7 investigate the relationship of Confucianism to religion. Chapter 6 demonstrates how Tokugawa Shinto interacted closely with the *I Ching*. In the early Tokugawa period, a large number of Confucians and Shintoists used the text to uphold the doctrine of the unity of Confucianism and Shinto. Many Shinto doctrines were borrowed from the text, and Shinto was Confucianized in this process. In the late Tokugawa period, however, the Hirata school of national learning (*kokugaku*) attempted to change the *I Ching* from a Confucian classic into a Shinto text.

Chapter 7 looks at the subtle relationship between the *I Ching* and Tokugawa Buddhism. The *I Ching* was an ideological battleground for Buddhists and Confucians. Buddhist monks supported the doctrine of

the unity of Buddhism and Confucianism, quoting the text to illustrate that both teachings share the concepts of karmic retribution, transmigration, gods and ghosts, and universal flux. The Confucians, in contrast, interpreted the *I Ching* as denying any affinity with Buddhism.

Part III is an analytical discussion of the role of the *I Ching* in Tokugawa culture. Chapter 8 focuses on the role of the text in the cultural interchange between traditional and Western science. In particular, it highlights the text's role in the adaptation of Western astronomy, calendrical studies, and physics. Japanese scholars of Western learning used the *I Ching* extensively to advocate Western ideas. Some cited it to claim that Western ideas had existed in ancient China, and even maintained that Western ideas had originated in China, while others tried to use the text to transplant Western science and technology into a Confucian metaphysical framework.

Chapter 9 discusses the *I Ching*'s role in traditional medicine and in the adoption of Western medicine. Chinese medicine, which was used extensively by Tokugawa physicians, was based on a number of neo-Confucian doctrines related to the *I Ching*. The text played a less significant role in Western medicine, although some physicians did attempt to use it to fuse Western and Chinese medical ideas.

Chapter 10 explores the importance of the text in traditional military studies and in the importation of Western weaponry. Many military and martial arts schools in the Tokugawa period adopted *yin-yang wu-hsing* as their central philosophy. The *I Ching* was also used by different schools of artillery to explicate and justify the use of Western weaponry.

Finally, Chapter 11 surveys the influence of the *I Ching* on the theory and practice of different forms of Tokugawa art and culture, including the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, popular theater, and music.