



Wai-ming Ng. *The I Ching in Tokugawa Thought and Culture.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000. xiii + 277 pp. \$63.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-2215-6.



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The Persistence of China in Early Modern Japan

Wai-ming Ng's recent book on the *I Ching* and Tokugawa Japan is a first of its kind in English historiography. Ng has discovered that the various scholars and cultural producers of the Tokugawa period frequently consulted and commented on this classical Chinese text, such that it had a significant influence on nearly every facet of Japanese cultural life. In making his case, he read and analyzed a formidable and wide-ranging array of primary sources. The result is a compelling argument that Tokugawa Japan cannot be fully understood without taking into account the *I Ching* and the enduring influence of Chinese culture in general.

Ng divides his book into three parts. Part 1 deals with the history of the *I Ching* from antiquity to the Tokugawa period (1603-1867). During the ancient period, scholars employed by the imperial government studied the text in earnest, and it influenced the *Nihongi*, one of the earliest imperial histories, among other ancient works. Scholarship on the *I Ching* turned more serious during the me-

dieval period when Zen monks took an active interest in it. It was also at this time, during the Muromachi period (1336-1571), that Neo-Confucian forms of medical theory and practice entered Japan. The link between the *I Ching* and medicine was especially strong in this type of medical tradition, and both were studied under Shogunal patronage in the Ashikaga School. Towards the end of the Muromachi and the beginning of the Momoyama period (1571-1603), powerful daimyo, notably Takeda Shingen and Tokugawa Ieyasu, retained advisors who studied the text for its military applications. In his discussion of the medieval period, Ng challenges the notion that Neo Confucianism, or Sung Confucian scholarship, had only a minimal impact on Japanese scholarship prior to the Tokugawa. He argues that Zen monks in medieval Japan made extensive use of Sung commentaries on the *I Ching*, including those of Chu Hsi.

Ng observes that despite the enthusiasm for the *I Ching* prior to the Tokugawa, scholarship on the classical text was not especially innovative during this period. This situation changed dramati-

ically during the seventeenth century. Through statistics culled from secondary sources as well as compiled by the author himself, Ng demonstrates a growing interest in the text after 1600. There were three important developments in Japanese *I Ching* studies during the Tokugawa period. First, the number of commentaries written on the *I Ching* during the Tokugawa period "far exceeded other Confucian classics" (p. 23). This increased interest in the *I Ching*, and the rest of the Confucian canon as well, was most likely linked to "the rise of neo-Confucianism" (p. 22). A second important development during the Tokugawa period was the advent of Kogaku, or School of Ancient Learning. Ng asserts, however, that although the scholars of this Confucian tradition collectively accounted for only about 10 percent of all the commentaries during this period, their work was "the finest and the most original" (p. 26). Finally, he observes that *I Ching* studies reached a point during the nineteenth century when scholars of a distinctly non-Confucian inclination, namely, nativists of the Kokugaku school, attempted to wrest the text away from the Confucians.

The significant parts of Ng's work are parts 2 and 3. In part 2, he looks at the various intellectual traditions of what was an important period in Japanese intellectual history. One of the reasons for the *I Ching*'s popularity was the many potential functions it could perform, including the articulation of political legitimacy. During the first half of the Tokugawa period, the text was instrumental in the effort of scholars to "lend ideological support to the bakufu" (p. 70). During the nineteenth century, however, supporters of imperial restoration also used it to justify the overthrow of the Tokugawa government. In chapter 6 of part 2, Ng discusses the relationship between the *I Ching* and Shinto. In this chapter, he resumes an earlier discussion of Hirata Atsutane and his students. He observes that the esteem for the text held by certain nineteenth-century nativists was not shared by their eighteenth-century predecessors, especially Motoori Norinaga and his students. By the

nineteenth century, nativists of the Hirata school began to openly embrace foreign knowledge, including "elements from Chinese and Dutch learning" (p. 113). Study of the *I Ching* became part of this nativist intellectual tolerance, as long as its original Japanese origins could be proven. Specifically, Atsutane believed that the sages of Chinese antiquity were actually Japanese *kami*, so he supported the notion of its authorship by the sages, such as Fu Hsi, since they were Japanese *kami* anyway. Atsutane's disciple, Ikuta Yorozu, identified the Shinto deity Okuni-nushi as the author of the *I Ching*. Finally, Okuni Takamasa, a student of Atsutane, believed that the Chinese sages and the Japanese *kami* were not actually identical. Rather, the *kami* had descended to the earth in antiquity, assumed human form, and served as advisors to the ancient Chinese sages. In this way, the Japanese *kami* helped give shape to the *I Ching*.

In part 3, Ng examines the major cultural institutions of Tokugawa Japan outside of the religious and scholarly traditions. In chapter 8, he argues that the alleged conflict between Japanese and Western forms of scientific thought is an oversimplification. Instead, he makes the interesting observation that the relationship between the two forms of knowledge was actually complementary. Thus, Japan's successful adoption of Western science would not have been possible without the *I Ching*, since "the main intellectual and cultural theme of Tokugawa Japan is not the conflict between tradition and modernity, or between East and West, but the accommodation of Western ideas to Japan's cultural system" (p. 148).

Ng devotes chapter 9 to the influence of the *I Ching* on traditional forms of Japanese medicine. During the Tokugawa period, there were three major schools of medical thought and practice: the *kohouha*, which was inspired in part by the School of Ancient Learning; the *rampou igaku*, which was influenced by Western medicine via Dutch Learning; and, the *goseiha*, which was a Neo-Confucian form of medicine. The impact of

the *I Ching* was felt most strongly in the *goseiha*, which was also "the most influential medical school of thought in the Tokugawa period" (p. 160). Its role in the other Chinese school of medicine, the *kohouha*, was minor, while its role in the *rampou igaku* was non-existent. Ng concludes that while the *I Ching* was important to Tokugawa medical theory and practice, it had virtually nothing to do with the adoption of Western medicine.

In the final two chapters, 10 and 11, Ng examines the impact of the *I Ching* on military thought and popular culture respectively. In the realm of military thought, the influence of the *I Ching* was felt in *gunbai shisou*, or military oracles. The use of such oracles prevailed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. During the Tokugawa period, the use of such oracles declined as the nature of the Japanese military changed during an era of peace. Schools of the martial arts appeared which were more heavily influenced by Neo-Confucian metaphysics, or *yin-yang wu-hsing*, and eventually "replaced *gunbai shisou* as the central tenet of military thinking" (p. 187). He argues that traces of the influence of the *I Ching*, in the form of *yin-yang wu hsing*, can be found in various forms of popular culture as well. This connection appears to have been especially strong in the various schools of flower arrangement, or *kadou*, but Ng sees a connection in the tea ceremony and popular theater (*kabuki* and *joururi*) as well.

As expected, there are a handful of mistakes and inaccuracies that accompany books with such a large scope. Among the more minor mistakes are misspellings or typos, usually of Japanese terms like the title of *Jinnou shoutouki* (p. 14), *Kokugaku* (p. 96), and *joururi* (p. 199). There is the phrase "Confucius classic" (p. 10), which should be "Confucian classic," and is missing from the phrase "a kind [of] *ch'i kung*" (p. 158). There are also a few inaccuracies. For example, Shoutoku Taishi's year of death is given as 612 (p. 3) when it should be 622; Hirata Atsumasa, Atsutane's "son"

(p. 87), should be Kanetane, his adopted son; Hirata Atsutane's dates (p. 128) provided by Ng are actually Motoori Norinaga's; and Ng refers to the Korean sovereign Sejong as an "emperor" (p. 203), when "king" is more appropriate. Perhaps the most puzzling of these small mistakes is the way Ng handles Japanese names. He uses the apostrophe to divide certain syllables, as is standard practice, but he is inconsistent in its use and applies it to names for which scholars normally omit it. For example, he renders Izumi Makuni as Maku-ni (p. 158), while earlier in the book he renders it as Makuni (p. 59). The earlier spelling, of course, is the correct one, since the *kuni* of Izumi's name is one ideograph "country," "province". Other names in which he inserts an unneeded apostrophe include: Ko-nishi (p. 48), Sui-nin (p. 103), Naga-numa (p. 173), Tame-naga (p. 197), and so forth. In one case, Ng leaves out the required apostrophe when rendering the title of one of Atsutane's texts as *Saneki yuraiki* (p. 109), which he correctly spells earlier as *San-eki yuraiki* (p. 45). One final weakness of the book is its index. For a book as broadly focused yet detailed as Ng's, it needs to have a more useful index than the four-page one that he provides.

There are two larger analytic criticisms that I have of Ng's book. The first concerns the *I Ching* itself. It would have been helpful if he could have spent some more time on the history of the text, as well as provide some kind of discussion of his own interpretation. Ng seems to have realized the importance of these issues because he addresses them in the epilogue, but he does so only briefly. Some background to the *I Ching* and its history would have been useful in the context of the relationship between the *Chou I* and the *I Ching*, especially since it seems to have been a topic of research for scholars of both Tokugawa Japan and Ch'ing China. Ng uses the two titles interchangeably, which can be confusing without some explanatory note. Moreover, he indicates that there are competing views of the *I Ching* in the academy today, which he dismisses as "ahistorical and

unscholarly" (p. 208). He should have given his readers something more than a terse "I'm right, they're wrong" kind of discussion.

A second critical point, related to the first, concerns Ng's interpretation of *yin yang wu-hsing*. He identifies it as both "the neo-Confucian metaphysical principle" (p. 145) and as the "doctrine" of the *I Ching* (p. 204). These characterizations seem to reduce Neo-Confucian metaphysics only to the *I Ching*. If that is the case, then Ng could have advanced this interpretation in a general discussion of the *I Ching* and its history. In his chapter on popular culture, he argues that references to *yin-yang wu-hsing* in Tokugawa sources are also references to the *I Ching*. Thus, according to the aforementioned identification (p. 145), these must also be references to Neo-Confucianism as well. The issue is how the Tokugawa Japanese themselves interpreted the *I Ching*, *yin-yang wu-hsing*, and Neo-Confucianism "Sung Learning," (et al.). Judging by the contentiousness of intellectual debates during the Tokugawa, there probably was no universal agreement on the meanings of these terms. Ng, however, seems to believe that nearly all Tokugawa interpretations, except, perhaps, the nativist ones, were correct. By his own admission, however, contemporary scholars of the *I Ching* do not necessarily agree with him. If the Tokugawa Japanese interpreted Chinese cultural institutions in the correct way, then Ng could have addressed this issue in the context of a general discussion of *I Ching* studies.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, Ng's study of the *I Ching* is truly the first of its kind for the study of Tokugawa Japan. He clearly demonstrates how pervasive the text was in Japan during that era; his assertion that the influence of the *I Ching* was more keenly felt than any other Chinese text is also difficult to refute. He brings together in one study primary sources that would otherwise be studied in different scholarly contexts. He also uses sources that have been examined only rarely, if at all, by scholars who write in

English. The book's chapter organization is clear, and Ng provides useful background information for each of the sub-fields that he analyzes. Above all, his prose is quite lucid and readable, making the book accessible even to non-specialists. His book will become required reading for graduate courses on Tokugawa Japan, and could even be used for some upper-level undergraduate courses. It is a major contribution to the field of Tokugawa history and to Sino-Japanese studies.

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