

Wai-ming NG, *The I Ching in Tokugawa Thought and Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press and Association for Asian Studies, 2000. xiii + 277 pp. \$63.00 cloth, ISBN 0-8248-2215-3. \$31.95 paper, ISBN 0-8248-2242-0.

THIS BOOK SURVEYS the diffusion and cultural and intellectual influence of the Confucian canonical text the *I Ching* (Book of Changes) in Tokugawa Japan. The original Chinese work is multilayered and of great complexity, composed in its present form by many hands over a millennium or so. It contains a practical manual of divination, overlaid by moral, numerological, and cosmological interpretation. Allegedly studied by Confucius and an accepted object of study by Confucian scholars, it was to some extent displaced during the Neo-Confucian revival of the Song and later dynasties by the greater emphasis accorded to the "Four Books": *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, and *Doctrine of the Mean*. None the less, particularly through its Appendices, it exerted a formative influence on Neo-Confucian cosmology and metaphysics. At the same time, at a more popular cultural level, it retained importance as a text of divination.

Ng's project proves to be a vast one. This multi-faceted text attracted scarcely less attention in Japan than in China. The sheer number of *I Ching*-related texts written by Japanese from the Tokugawa period—over 1,000 works by 416 authors in Ng's count—fairly boggles the mind. "The quality of their works," he writes, "their enthusiasm and devotion to *I Ching* studies was unparalleled in East Asian history" (27). The book surveys this output under the headings of "political thought," "economic thought," "Shinto," "Buddhism," "natural science," "medicine," "the military," and "popular culture." Much that is new, including the work of little-known writers of various persuasions,

is introduced to Western readers. In this, the book succeeds in its declared objective.

Yet the very breadth of the project brings problems. Not surprisingly, Ng's study can only skim the surface. One learns little of the profundities with which the *I Ching* is sometimes credited. The book, too, might have benefitted from an earlier and more thorough introduction of the *I Ching* itself. It is surprising to learn as late as page 169 that "*I Ching* divination involved yarrow sticks." At times, the influence of the *I Ching* is identified in elements of thought that were really the shared inheritance from the Chinese tradition as it was transmitted to Japan. The ideal of "simplicity" or ease of practice, for instance, was an element in the Confucianism of the *Analects* (see e.g., *Analects*, VI, i); it was also a feature of Taoism. The need to cover the ground sometimes leads inevitably to superficiality. The *I Ching* could be subversive in more ways than Ng suggests. Thus, a Confucian such as Kumazawa Banzan (1619–1691) certainly, as Ng claims, "rationalized the Tokugawa social hierarchy" on the basis of the *I Ching* (68). But Banzan also used this text to challenge the urbanization of the samurai, one of the central aspects of the Tokugawa settlement. Occasionally, too, Ng's language becomes too bland even for a survey such as this, as when he writes of Ogyū Sorai that he "also advocated the way of the sages" (101). His history is sometimes rather old-fashioned. It is surely open to question how much "Tokugawa Ieyasu recognized the philosophical and divinational value of the *I Ching*" (65). His intellectual history also sometimes requires refinement, as when he claims of Yamaga Sokō that Neo-Confucianism "served as the framework" of his military thought. Yet such simplification is difficult to avoid in a survey of this scope. Disarmingly, Ng introduces his work as "only preliminary." He is "fully aware of how much more remains to be done" (210).

This book is a member of a series called "Asian interactions and comparisons" edited by Joshua A. Fogel, in which it is the second title. Undoubtedly, Ng has successfully demonstrated how inalienably an important aspect of Japanese culture was indebted to the continent. This debt extends from the great tradition of high Confucian thought down to the little tradition of practical divination to solve the conundrums of daily life. This book has amply earned itself a place in this new series.

**James McMullen**  
*Oxford University*