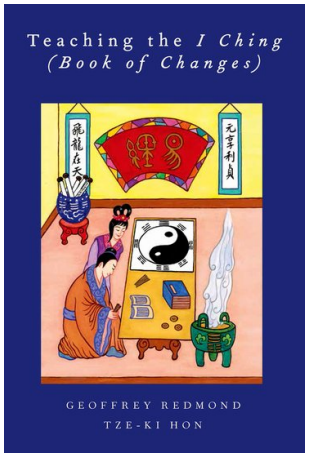


Teaching the I Ching (Book of Changes)

Redmond, Geoffrey; and Hon, Tze-Ki
Oxford University Press, 2014

Book Review

Tags: I Ching | religious studies | teaching texts

Reviewed by: Harold C. Washington, *Saint Paul School of Theology*
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The *I Ching* (or *Yijing*, *Book of Changes*) is one of the great works of world literature, but at first approach it can be perplexing at best. Geoffrey Redmond is a scholar of textual criticism and Asian spiritual traditions (he is also an MD). Tze-ki Hon, professor of history at the State University of New York at Geneseo, is a specialist in Chinese cultural history and classical Chinese thought, including the commentaries on the *I Ching*. Together these authors provide a judicious, illuminating account of this classic Chinese text. *Teaching the I Ching* is a valuable reference for scholars and students alike, and a superb sourcebook for teaching the *I Ching* at the undergraduate level.

The authors trace the complex history of the *I Ching's* development through three millennia, beginning with its Bronze Age origins in divinatory practices using yarrow sticks, precursors of the hexagrams of the traditional work. The earliest texts, preserved on bound bamboo strips, are first attested to around 300 BCE, but they hearken back to much earlier exemplars. The first authoritative collection, known as the *Zhouyi*, was composed in the Western Zhou period, 1046-771 BCE. An expanded version of this text was "canonized" by royal decree in 136 BCE, deemed as a classic under the authority of Confucian tradition. In the modern era, archaeology has turned up many early witnesses to the text, largely from ancient tombs. These have spurred new assessments of the textual tradition.

In the modern era the *I Ching* has met varied fates. It came under sharp criticism at the hands of the Chinese "Doubting Antiquity Movement" of the 1920s. Mao Zedong banned the text, at times. During the Cultural Revolution the use of the *I Ching* for divination was widely regarded as a superstitious, "feudal" practice. Yet by the 1980s and 1990s a popular movement called "Yijing Fever" widely introduced new mass populations to the *I Ching.* There is also a survey of

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the reception of the *I Ching* in the West, from Christian missionaries encountering the work in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, to C. G. Jung's engagement of the text, to the *I Ching*'s (dubious, perhaps?) status as a countercultural icon.

The book gives special attention to the role of women in the *I Ching*, especially the subordination of the feminine in the traditional Chinese yin/yang duality. There are also valuable chapters on the cosmology and ethical principles of the *I Ching.* The book closes with an extensive "Readers Guide" to the *I Ching*, describing the standard translations of the work, bilingual editions, concordances and reference works, online versions of the *I Ching,* and other digital resources. There is also a working orientation to the structure of the text, with instructions on how to consult the *I Ching*, should one wish to pose a question to this ancient, still vital text.

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