

“The Philosophy of Divination in the *Yijing*”

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Originally a collection of oracles, the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes, *I Ching*) became a Confucian classic in 125 BCE. Throughout imperial China, the *Yijing* was studied by the literati not only to pass the civil service examinations but also to fathom the cosmos, order the world, and comprehend the complexity of life. Philosophy – including cosmology, ontology, ethics, and semiotics – was essential to the *Yijing* learning. Despite the differences between the “Images and Numbers School” (*xiangshupai* 象數派) and the “Meanings and Principles School” (*yilipai* 義理派), the two groups of *Yijing* scholars shared the view that the classic was philosophical, and its philosophy was expressed through the images of the sixty-four hexagrams, their hexagram and line statements, and, above all, the divination practices known as the *Dayan* 大衍 (Great Extension) method.

However, since the 1920s, due to the dominance of scientism and empiricism in academia, the *Yijing* has been studied mainly as a historical document. The preferred methods are archaeology, philology, historical anthropology, and cultural studies. In contrast, divination – the original layer that made the *Yijing* a book of wisdom for people at a crossroads – is relegated to the periphery as a relic of a distant, primitive age. As a result, the “wisdom” of *Yijing* is limited to its process cosmology (as expressed in the images of the sixty-four hexagrams), its moral metaphysics (as conveyed in its hexagram and line statements), and its ecological concerns (as seen in its naturalistic metaphors).

To broaden the scope of the *Yijing* studies, this special issue of *IJDP* focuses on the philosophy of divination in the classic. It highlights the importance of the *Yijing* by addressing the “fear and anxiety” (*youhuan* 憂患) of humankind living in an uncertain world. More importantly, it underscores the contemporary relevance of the classic when the world is increasingly divided, fragmented, and fractured. Authors who are interested in this collective enterprise, please send proposals to Tze-ki Hon (hon@geneseo.edu) by June 30, 2026.

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