

Correcting the Old, Adapting the New: Baba Nobutake and the (Relative) Rejuvenation of Divination in the Seventeenth Century

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Matthias HAYEK

## Correcting the Old, Adapting the New

Baba Nobutake and the (Relative)

Rejuvenation of Divination in the Seventeenth Century

The end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century in Japan saw transformations in divination techniques similar to those in other fields of knowledge and belief. These transformations were made possible by the growth of the book market and the emergence of a new intelligentsia willing to share its knowledge with a broader public. To be more precise, we can observe a change in paradigm regarding mantic practices and a gradual shift from a “medieval” and a quite heterogeneous method based on calendrical parameters, the eight trigrams (*hakke*) technique, to more focused and homogeneous techniques such as *shinèki* and *danèki*. These techniques derive from the mantic uses of the *Book of Changes*, and are based on hexagrams. At the center of the introduction of these new methods was Baba Nobutake, a member of the literati whose extensive publications influenced this shift in divination theory and techniques.

KEYWORDS: divination—Baba Nobutake—*Book of Changes*—trigrams—hexagrams—*hakke* divination—*shinèki*

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END-OF-SEVENTEENTH-century Japan is known as a kind of golden age that saw the extraordinary development of commercial publishing, the rise of a new urban culture, and a renewal in the way knowledge and ideas were looked upon and passed on. This period set new standards of cultural behavior that served as a basis for the establishment of a modern society, which ultimately helped the archipelago to readily embrace the Western model at the end of the nineteenth century.

Quite unsurprisingly, divination in Japan had also begun to transform in parallel to these changes, following lines strikingly similar to those taken by other fields of knowledge and belief. Nevertheless, when compared to fields such as Neo-Confucianism, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and even religion, Japanese divination has hitherto received scant attention. This may explain the tendency of scholars to dismiss divination as something that supposedly kept people in a pre-scientific state of mind, pulling them back to the irrational. However, given the complexity of divinatory techniques grounded in an evolving correlative system, there is no denying how influential they were (and are) on the construction of cosmology and the world view shared in a given society.

In this article I attempt to shed light on the evolution of divination techniques at the end of the seventeenth century in Japan, and how it relates to a more general trend of the correction of the old and the adaptation of the new that can be seen through a wide range of fields, from literature to religion. What is more, we will see that this evolution involves a relative rejuvenation of divinatory techniques mirroring a sort of tropism toward Han-period “original” Confucianism, as opposed to Song-period Neo-Confucianism, shown by several Japanese Confucian thinkers.

These transformations were not taken up by professional diviners themselves, most of them not being skilled enough in Chinese, but rather by literati with premium access to Chinese sources who were willing to diffuse their knowledge in response to their Confucian ideals, and also to appeal to a new market for books. One of these literati, Baba Nobutake 馬場信武 (?–1715), seems to have played a key role in this process, and therefore my inquiry will be focused on his works.

First, I will briefly present the context in which Baba played a role and give a quick biography of this little-known author, before moving on to his works related to divination. Finally, I will discuss the motives and implications of the winds of change he intended to see in Japanese divination.

Through this study of Baba’s work, I will try to show that he contributed in popularizing at least two different techniques, *shinèki* and *danèki*. Both techniques

derive from yarrow-stalk divination based on the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* (Ch. *Yijing*; Jp. *Ekikyō* 易經), also known as the “Changes of the Zhou” (Ch. *Zhou Yi*; Jp. *Shūeki* 周易). In other words, they pertain to the category known as *ekisen* 易占 (“divination by the changes”).<sup>1</sup> However, as we will see, they are not destined to serve as a support for metaphysical considerations, but rather to be used in a more practical way by professional diviners.

### *A Change of Changes*

When trying to determine which divination techniques were used in early modern Japan, our attention is first drawn to the diviners themselves. More specifically, the way they used to be depicted gives us a good starting point from which to comprehend how their practices were perceived by their clients. Fortunately, seventeenth-century Japan saw the production of several illustrated encyclopedias. One of the oldest, the *Kinmō zui*, compiled by prominent Neo-Confucianist Nakamura Tekisai (1629–1702), and first published in 1666, has a whole section dedicated to “professionals” in its section on “people and their habits” (*jinrin* 人倫). Among those practitioners, we can find a diviner (*boku* 卜). Although the accompanying text talks about yarrow stalks and turtle shells, the picture shows a man sitting in front of a folded book with counting rods lying on the ground. This depiction, which was later reproduced in another encyclopedia, the *Wakan sansai zue* (c.1712), is totally congruent with earlier pictures from medieval scrolls and early seventeenth-century folding screens (see FIGURE 1, following page). As I have already shown in HAYEK 2010, these depictions used to point to specific kinds of specialists called *sarōki* 算置き, using a specific technique, *hakke uranai* 八卦占 占, or divination by the eight trigrams (HAYEK 2011), which derives from the *bagua younian fa* 八卦遊年法 technique already seen in Dunhuang manuscripts (KALINOWSKI 2003, 282–83).

The aim of an encyclopedia such as the *Kinmō zui* was to help poorly-tutored readers to learn Chinese characters by linking sounds, characters, and an

1. The word *eki* is usually translated as “changes” or “mutations.” The central idea developed in the *Book of Changes* is that it is possible to understand cosmic processes, such as yin-yang alternation, and their mundane effects through sixty-four figures. These figures, known as hexagrams in the West, consist of six superposed lines, either solid (yang) or broken (yin). Each of these figures is unique and has a specific name and various properties. What is more, although the precise procedure may vary according to the technique used, in the context of divination one hexagram is not cast alone, but comes with a second one. This is because these figures reflect cosmic dynamics, and therefore are subject to changes, or mutations, hence the title of the book. In other words, a given hexagram is susceptible to transform into another, and this transformation is highly relevant when fathoming one’s fate (SMITH 2008; 2012). In this article, I will often use the word “changes” in two ways. It will either refer to the *Yijing* itself, and be capitalized and italicized, or refer to the notion of transformation involved in these divination techniques.



FIGURE 1. Diviner in the *Wakan sansai zue* (c. 1712, held at the Bibliothèque des Hautes Etudes Japonaises of the Collège de France, Paris).

illustration relevant to the topic so the reader would be able to associate each of these elements together. Thus, these depictions (of folded books and rods) can be said to be what the word “diviner” evoked to a potential reader. In other words, they underline the fact that *hakke* divination should be regarded as the main method used in late seventeenth-century Japan. This situation corroborates what can be seen in the production of divination manuals at the same time.

However, when looking at a 1739 picture by NISHIKAWA (1739, vol. 2, folio 17 r°), we discover a totally different view. In his rendition, the diviner still sits in front of books, but they are no longer folded, but bound. A pile of books lies next to him while he points to the page he is holding with his fan. On said page, and on another book clients are peering into, we can distinguish trigrams and text. However, this is not a clue to *hakke uranai*. Not only are counting rods nowhere to be seen, but an advertising board stands by the diviner’s side, with an inscription stating: “Divination by ‘changes in the mind.’ Secret divination. Divination of ink color” (*shin’eki mitōshi-ken hisenkō sumiuro-kō* 心易見通し軒秘占考墨色考). An archetypal personal signature and a yin-yang diagram are also visible. This 1739 diviner is no longer supposed to be a *san’oki*, and resorts to a technique called *shin’eki* 心易 (Ch. *xingyi*), the “changes in the mind.”

Thus, at a distance of some thirty years, the way diviners were depicted and the techniques they used seem to have changed dramatically. What caused such a transformation? The answer to this question may very well lie in the books that diviners used. Early modern Japanese diviners were undoubtedly relying on

printed books to learn how to perform divination. Not only did existing printed manuals often bear annotations from their users, but there is also evidence that professional diviners of various status, were they *yamabushi* 山伏 or *onmyōji* 陰陽師,<sup>2</sup> or simply urban lay soothsayers, owned printed or manuscript copies of several divination manuals (HAYEK 2011). What is more, by looking through the books left by such professionals, we can see that they were indeed following the publication of new material. For instance, in a privately published book by a descendant of a *yamabushi* family of the Haguro branch, we find that the earliest books transmitted in his family were describing the eight trigrams method, but a manuscript presenting the sixty-four hexagrams used in the *shinēki* technique seems to have been added to their repertoire as early as 1682 (FUKAWA 1992).

Therefore, if we are to understand how divination techniques changed between the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, we should focus on the potential sources of divinatory knowledge, such as printed books. More specifically, we should first try to track down what caused the shift from *hakke-uranai* to *shinēki* techniques. One will inevitably stumble upon one name: Baba Nobutake, a physician in Kyoto whose books were first published in 1697.

Little is known about Baba, which might explain why he has not been given much attention by scholars. To my knowledge, only two studies have attempted to shed light on him (NAGATOMO 1994; HAYEK 2008), and so these will therefore be the main sources of biographical information. The only information about his life prior to his first publication comes from inscriptions on an abandoned gravestone of the Oda 尾田 family at Tsūmyōji 通妙寺 temple's graveyard (TERADA 1976, 247). They give the nineteenth day of the first month of 1715 as the date of death for a "father, Genshun" (*senkō genshun* 先考玄俊), which is supposedly Baba's posthumous name (NAGATOMO 1994, 143). Regarding his son, Nobunori 信意, the gravestone mentions:

Sansen Soseki, formerly Baba Genryū, his personal name being Nobunori, and his pen name Ryūinshi, descendant of the sixth generation of Baba Nobufusa, governor of Mino, and so on. (NAGATOMO 1994, 142)

According to this, Baba was a relative of a warrior from Kai province, whose fame, exposed in military tales, was well known to the public in his time. However, I am unable to find any trace of such a relation in the genealogy of the Baba family, and thus unable to prove there was such a relation. Nevertheless, Baba

2. *Yamabushi* ("those who sleep in the mountains") are folk religious practitioners of Shugendo, a syncretic movement seeking to obtain magical powers through ascetic exercises in sacred mountains (TYLER and SWANSON 1989; FAURE et al. 2009). The word *onmyōji* was used for official court diviners until the Heian period, but gradually came to refer to one practicing divination and propitiatory rites. In the Edo period, such practitioners were controlled by specific organizations. See Hayashi's article in this issue, 151–67.

and son were convinced of the reality of their ascendancy, using it to assert their authority or to legitimize their positions when writing military stories.

Setting aside these elements, the only details known about Baba's life are those he gave us in the prefaces of his works. His first divination book presents him as a disciple of someone named Senda Baiō 泉田梅翁, about whom we have no other information except that he was skilled in *shin'eki*. It is one of BABA's final works (1713) that gives us a more precise picture of his life. In this book, he states that he

was serving the Superior of Shōkōin temple, was by this time being called "Baba the book," and was very busy with lectures and conferences.... Afterwards, his lord having passed away, he cut his hair and took the clothes of a monk, changed his name to Oda Genko, and chose to make a living out of medicine.<sup>3</sup>

According to Nagatomo, this "lord" and Superior of the temple was in fact Imperial Prince Dōson 道尊親王, fourth imperial head monk (*monzeki* 門跡) of the Shōkōin, a Tendai temple, and the ninth son of Emperor Gosai 後西 (1638–1685; NAGATOMO 1994, 144). Thus Baba appears to have been a scholar giving lectures in an institution closely related to the imperial family, with prior access to books. Private lectures by scholars were commonplace among the warrior class and the aristocracy during the early seventeenth century. They often consisted of commentaries of Chinese classics or of Japanese military tales such as *Taiheiki* 太平記 (WAKAO 1999). The nickname "Baba the book," probably given to him by his lord, underlines his great erudition, and helps explain how he managed to become a physician after he resigned from his early assignment. In later works, Baba sometimes refers to himself as a *ju'i* 儒医, a Confucian physician—a member of the cultural or intellectual elite of Tokugawa society. Lastly, and this is a crucial element to understand his later activity as an author, it seems he owned the publisher Kyōraiji (Kyōraishi) Yahē 經來寺 (教來石) 彌兵衛 that published several of his works.<sup>4</sup>

#### *An Eclectic but Coherent Author*

Baba's production extends over some twenty years, from 1697 to his supposed death in 1715, even if we take some *a priori* posthumous publications into account, which were probably published by his son. During this period, he penned (or rather brushed) up to thirty-three titles. More than half (eighteen) of them are related to divination. The remaining fifteen are distributed between translations (adaptations) of Chinese military tales, illustrated commentaries of Confucian classics, and miscellaneous pieces covering a wide range of topics from Chinese, from the sciences (astronomy, the calendar), to magic tricks. Surprisingly enough, he did not leave

3. BABA (1713), vol. 1, folio 3 v°. This whole introduction was not included in the 1750 reprint.

4. The name Kyōraishi refers to Baba's supposed ancestor, Baba Nobufusa. Before inheriting the name Baba, Nobufusa had already changed his name once to Kyōraishi Kagemasa.

TITLE	YEAR	SOURCE(S)	STRUCTURE
<i>Jurui sankō baika shinēki shōchū shinan</i>	Genroku 10 (1697)	<i>Shōkōsetsu sensei shinēki kesū</i> , (probably Ming)	5 chapters
<i>Shūeki hakke zōhon-shō</i>	Genroku 11 (1698)	<i>Hakke</i> books, <i>Wakan hakke shoshō taisei?</i>	3 chapters
<i>Ekigaku keimō zusetu</i>	Genroku 13 (1700)	Zhu Xi's <i>Yixue qimeng</i> (Song); Hu Fang Ping's <i>Yixue qimeng tongshi</i> (Song)	Illustrations following the original text; Additional technique with coins
<i>Shogaku tekisen-shō</i>	Genroku 16 (1703a)	<i>Duanyi tianji</i> (Ming); Other <i>dan'eki</i> texts	4 parts
<i>Shūeki isshō-ki</i>	Genroku 16 (1703b)	Ming <i>dan'eki</i> texts; <i>Wakan hakke shoshō taisei?</i>	6 parts
<i>Kanmei isshōkin wage</i>	Hōei 2 (1705)	Yixing's (?) <i>Kanming yizhang jin</i> (Ming)	3 parts
<i>Shokatsu kōmei senpō rigen-shō</i>	Shōtoku 3 (1713)	Guiguzi teachings?	9 chapters

TABLE 1. Books by Baba examined in this article and their structure.

any book on medicine. The rather eclectic nature of his publications may explain the lack of attention from scholars. However, when combined with the resilience and durable reception of his works (some of them were frequently republished up to the beginning of the twentieth century), these features should instead make us consider him as an archetype of late seventeenth-century Japanese scholarship, for he was a pioneer in most of his works, regardless of their topics.

Since my main concern here is with his divination books, I will not examine his literary works, but we definitely should keep in mind the breadth of his interests, as they give a coherent background as to how he came to affect the divination techniques in use after 1700. I have selected seven of Baba's books that I consider to be representative of his work on divination (see TABLE 1).

Baba's first book is the *Jurui sankō baika shinēki shōchū shinan* (hereafter *Baika shinēki*). This is mainly a translation and presentation of *Shōkōsetsu sensei shinēki kesū* 邵康節先生心易卦数, Shao Kangjie's hexagram numbers, and *shinēki*. Shao Kangjie, or Shao Yong, was a famous Confucian thinker of the Song dynasty and a philosophical opponent of the school of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi



FIGURE 2. *Ekigaku keimō zusetu* (1700), from the author's personal collection.

trigrams a few years before Baba's book was published, in particular in a section in the *Wakan hakke shoshō taisei* (1695), a huge compendium containing brief presentations of most of the techniques later discussed by Baba. However, given the number of reprints of Baba's translation, I would argue that his work greatly helped to popularize the techniques. The word "translation" should not be taken too literally here for Baba's work is more than a simple Japanese rendition of a Chinese book. It is a detailed and richly illustrated adaptation, reflecting the thoughts and concerns of its author, as well as his desire to make the techniques readily usable by professional diviners. Like most technical books since the emergence of Japanese commercial printing, the text is written in plain Japanese, with Chinese characters and straight *katakana* script (as opposed to the more popular *hiragana* cursive script).

The *shin'eki* method itself relies on the conversion of the premises of a divination into numerical data, which are then processed through a set of calculations to obtain two hexagrams. The upper trigram of the first hexagram is obtained from the year, month, and day: their values are added together before subtracting eight from the total until it reaches a number less than or equal to eight. This final number is taken as the primary value. Each number from one to eight corresponds to a given trigram. Once the upper trigram is obtained, the lower is determined through a similar process, by adding the value of the time of the consultation to the previous total. The last and most important step in hexagram divination is to determine if there are "mutating lines" in the hexagram previ-

(BIRDWHISTELL 1989). Although Shao Yong is well-known as a cosmologist of the images and numbers (*xiangshu* 象数) school who put great emphasis on the relationship between numbers and the hexagrams of the *Yi jing*, the *Shōkōsetsu sensei shin'eki kesū* itself seems to be apocryphal.

Baba was the first to present an extensive Japanese version of the book and to unveil the *shin'eki* in clear and rather simple terms. As for the original text, even if Baba had a chance to see a copy of a Chinese edition, he most likely based his work on a Japanese edition of a Ming version, published as early as 1643 (NARABA 2010).

The *shin'eki* technique was mentioned in compilations on the eight

ously obtained. In other words, once a hexagram has been reached one must know if it is about to change into another one, and if so, in which one it will mutate. In *shin'eki* those mutating lines are calculated in a similar fashion, except the subtracted number is six (as is the total number of lines).

This type of numerology is not unique: *hakke* divination also made extensive use of numbers to obtain trigrams, and even hexagrams in variants probably influenced by *shin'eki*. However, the true originality of *shin'eki* resides in other ways of obtaining a hexagram. According to Baba, the diviner should be attentive to these three senses—sight, hearing, and mind. He should

Learn the auspicious and the inauspicious from the sounds he hears, know the good and bad by looking at forms, and tell what is fortunate or unfortunate by carefully reflecting the principle. (BABA 1697, vol. 2, f°4 r.)

In other words, the diviner is able to convert any kind of phenomenon, from directions to animals, objects, sounds, scripture, and so forth, into a hexagram through a complex correlative system.

Baba's *Baika shin'eki* is divided into five chapters: a general introduction to the method and its core parameters, with a lot of diagrams and illustrations; a detailed presentation with examples on how to get a hexagram from any kind of perception; an extensive list of potential divination topics and targets; insights on the properties of the trigrams and hexagrams; and advice to optimize the *shin'eki*, as well as alternate methods.

As for BABA's take on eight trigrams divination (1698; 1703c), leaving aside his attempts to correct several calculation methods and the addition of some diagrams, they differ little from already existing *hakke* manuals.

BABA's *Ekigaku keimō zusetu* (1700) pertains to a whole other genre. It is an illustrated presentation of Zhu Xi's *Yixue qimeng*, based on a commentary by Hu Fangping 胡方平 (late Song-early Yuan), the *Yixue qimeng tongshi*, already "translated" in Japan during the late medieval period. Baba's work is quite different from existing presentations, such as Kiyohara Nobukata's 清原宣賢,<sup>5</sup> in that at the end of the volume he provides a whole section devoted to yarrow stalk divination, with detailed pictures illustrating divination tools and processes. He also has a section that explains how to replace the yarrow stalk with coins, giving a more practical color to this Confucian classic (see FIGURE 2).

The year 1703 was a productive one for Baba, with the publication of three manuals. The first one, *Shogaku tekisen-shō*, or *Dan'eki shinan-shō*, comes back

5. Kiyohara Nobutaka (1475–1550) was a court noble of the late Muromachi period. Although he was born into the Yoshida family, who were in charge of Shinto, he was later adopted by the Kiyohara family, a family of scholars. He gave lectures at the court on classics from Japan and China, and produced commentaries of Neo-Confucian books such as the works of Zhu Xi.

to the coin method, only now is it applied to the *dan'eki* 断易 (Ch. *duanyi*). This technique, which has been criticized in China as departing too much from the yarrow-stalk method based on the *Book of Changes*, derives from the thoughts of the images and numbers school of the Han dynasty, namely from Jing Fang 京房 (79 BCE–37 BCE), a disciple of Jiao Yanshu 焦延寿 (dates unknown). Jing Fang, following his master, extended the correlative properties of trigrams and hexagrams to other cosmological elements, most notably music. He established two new modes for the hexagrams: flying (*fei* 飛) or hidden (*fu* 伏), either actualized or latent (SMITH 1991, 28; SUZUKI 1963, 29–37, 52–56). Formalized during the Ming dynasty, the *duanyi* embraces these elements while again adding links between the hexagrams, the branches, and stems, as well as procedures to reach divination results according to the five phases cycles, and hence its alternative name of *wuxingyi* 五行易 (NARABA 2010, 16–24). These aspects were already to be seen in Baba's first book, where he claimed to take major Ming *duanyi* works, such as *Duanyi tianji* or *Bushi quanshu*, as references.<sup>6</sup>

Baba's *Shogaku tekisen-shō* has no clear divisions, but we can distinguish several parts: a presentation of the method and its steps and applications; the properties of good and “murderous” (*satsu* 殺) spirits, and how to remember them; and a list of results, already existing in the *Duanyi tianji*, and similar to what can be found in BABA 1698 and 1703c. The *Shūeki isshō-ki* (1703b) resembles *Shogaku tekisen-shō*, for it is also a presentation of a method using coins. The technique is again a form of *dan'eki*, but the book itself is rather different from the *Dan'eki shinan-shō*. First, it includes a whole section on chiromantic, physiognomic, and sigillognomic techniques. Second, it gives a picture accompanied by a stanza in Chinese with the Japanese translation for each hexagram. These probably illustrate the correlative properties of the hexagrams. Finally, Baba's book offers for each hexagram a list of results ordered by topic, to perform “on the spot divination” (*sokuji no uranai* 即時の占). This feature was already present in the *Dan'eki shinan-shō*, but only as a complimentary section. Here, it is basically the only device offered to the reader to obtain a result from divination. For the hexagram *Ken* ䷖, for example, we have:

*Climate*: Sunny. Rain in autumn.

*Wedding*: The bride and the groom are handsome. There are two matchmakers. The union won't work at first but will eventually be successful.

*Going out*: Going out alone is bad. Going out with a lot of people is good.

*Awaited person*: Will be back on the ninth, or on a day of the ram.

*Thief*: Is hidden in the bushes of a temple. Or, one should look into a crowded place. He will be caught quickly.

6. BABA (1697), vol. 1 (“hanrei”), folio 1 v°. It should be noted that a Japanese edition of a Ming version of *Duanyi tianji* had already been published in 1645. On the reception of these books in Japan, see NARABA 2010, 137–75.

*Lost things:* Gold, and so on. A woman hid it. It is in the garden, near the planting pots. Or one should look where there are stones.

*Birth:* The first child will be a girl. The next one a boy. In both cases, they will be twins. The birth will occur in a dog or boar month.

*Trades:* If buying in advance, one should buy quickly. Prices will rise in a dog or boar month.

*Illness:* Fever and headaches. Symptoms of heart or liver disease. The cause is in the direction dragon-snake (southeast). It is the living spirit of a man. Rites will bring recovery. A ceremony made by a child to honor the metal star (Venus) will cure the disease.

*Physician:* Ask a doctor the direction of the ram-monkey (southwest). His potions are efficient.

*Public affairs:* [The case] is legit. It has to be settled out of court. It will not do good to discuss with a woman.

*Lost children/fugitives:* Some crowded place in the east. Or look to the west. Should come back on the ninth.

*Visits:* None. No need to expect any.

*Dreams:* Encounter with an old man when walking an unknown path. Auspicious.  
(BABA 1703b, vol. 2, folio 2 r<sup>o</sup>)

Among Baba's books, this is unique as it is written in cursive script, with reading guides for the Chinese characters. The publisher's preface underlines the Chinese origin of the techniques and stresses their utility in daily life. Baba himself does not emphasize any of his sources, but casually states he is doing divination in his "spare time," although with good results. Compared to his other works, this one was clearly not directed to the same kind of audience: rather than professional diviners, it was more likely targeted to those with an interest in divination.

Baba also published a translation of a Ming book attributed to Yixing 一行, a famous Tang monk (BABA 1705). Yixing, among other things, is famous in Japan for his influence on the calendar and astrology, and is frequently referred to as an authority on divination. In particular, Yixing is one of the eminent figures of the Tendai tradition. As for the book's contents, the astrology relies on the year, month, day, time of birth, and so on, to determine one's fate.

Finally, he again published a *daneki* book, this time in nine volumes (BABA 1713). The first chapter introduces the method while the remaining eight (one for each trigram) present the sixty-four hexagrams and their results. According to Baba, this is a translation of a Chinese book he attributes to the fifth century thinker Guiguzi 鬼谷子 (colloquially written 鬼國子 in Japanese). The book in question somehow made its way to Japan and was later used by Yamamoto Kansuke 山本勘助, a renowned strategist who served under the warlord Takeda Harunobu 武田晴信 (1521–1573). It was later passed on to a monk named Sotan 祖単, who attempted to translate it, a task his disciple took over without success. Baba claimed that because

he was a descendant of Harunobu's vassal, he felt it was his duty to complete the work. Regardless of the verisimilitude of this story, it makes us believe that the technique it describes was used in a military context during the Sengoku period.

From this brief overview, we can already see that there is coherency in Baba's works. First, he focused on techniques deriving from the images and numbers school, which he accessed mainly through Ming editions of Song books. Second, while he sought to legitimate his scholarly position, he also aimed to make the knowledge he gained through Chinese books readily available to and usable by less-educated professional diviners.

### *Changes and Continuity: From Trigrams to Hexagrams*

As we can see through Baba's production of not only divinatory books but also his literary pieces and commentaries, he seems to have held Chinese culture in great respect, and to have been heavily influenced by it, to the point that he was willing to share his vast knowledge of it (except medicine). Every one of his works has more or less a direct relation to Chinese books, and he even published a guide to Chinese painting, *Gaten ryōzai* 画典良材.<sup>7</sup> This is the key to understanding how and why he participated in a sort of rejuvenation of divination techniques. As a physician, he belonged to a class of literati quite unique to Japan: a Confucian scholar with no administrative function or political engagement, studying at leisure between consultations. What is more, the very basis of his professional activity resides in a mixture of empirical practice and correlative cosmology, the latter being designed on the same grounds as divination itself. Baba makes no mystery of his approach to divination as something linked to medicine. In his personal notes (BABA 1714), he quotes the *Lei jing* of Zhang Jiebin (1563–1640), a Ming physician famous for his commentaries:

As everything in medicine consists in *Changes* 易, it is difficult to discuss them separately. It is a vast topic, and I shall not go much further. Zhang Jiebin's *Lei jing* says: The *Changes* goes with the principle of medicine, and medicine allows the use of the *Changes*. This means one cannot study one without studying the other, and so on. (BABA 1714, vol. 2, folio 14 v°)

Thus, medicine and divination form a whole that cannot be split apart. As a Confucian scholar, Baba embraces this position and extends it to a broader sphere, including every aspect of Chinese culture. The frequent references he makes to this sphere and to the system it encompasses, including divination, serve as an argument to install his authority and fight against what he sees as illegitimate or corrupted knowledge or practices.

7. There is no trace of this book besides its mention in later catalogues. However, Baba's son published a *Garin ryōzai* 画林良材 in 1715.

Therefore, the Chinese medicine he practices does not exclude divination, for they share the same background system. Baba's interest in divination—and also astronomy—should then be understood through the prism of his global vision, of a Chinese culture inherited from the Ming. This culture, as a necessary premise to any kind of intellectual, scientific, or artistic pursuit, should be transmitted to guarantee the rigorousness and efficiency of the techniques in use in these contexts.

Baba's position and motives rely on the accessibility of primary sources. Although he did have prior access to Chinese books during his time as a lecturer in a Tendai temple, this alone cannot explain how he came up with his translations in the long run. Rather, other factors must also be taken into account, especially the preexistence of Japanese prints of Ming books, supported by a renewal of interest in Ming culture at the end of the sixteenth century. This has to do with the rise of commercial publishing in Japan, but existed even prior to this, with the development of such a market in China. The incremental production and diffusion of divination books in Ming China parallels a refinement of the theories and systems that divination is grounded on (SMITH 1991, 43–45), giving Japanese scholars a whole new perspective in their approach to this field. What is more, the arrival of refugee monks of the Ōbaku 黄檗 sect, fleeing from the newly-installed Qing dynasty, heavily influenced the reception of Ming works, and enabled literati circles to gain better access to up-to-date Chinese lore.

The emergence of a scholar such as Baba thus depended on such global conditions, but this alone does not explain the choices he made to focus on *shin'eki*, *dan'eki*, and the like, nor his determination to make these techniques available to a larger public. As he states in the Introduction (BABA 1713), he not only attempted to appeal to beginners by dropping the “real characters” (Chinese) in favor of Japanese script, but also to adapt a technique formerly used in a military context to more daily pursuits (BABA 1713, vol. 1, folio 4, r°). This concern can also be applied to his other works, for *hakke* divination and *shin'eki* were also used at some point by military diviners. To Baba, the type of divination that was in use before the “Pax Tokugawa” was now useless, and for such knowledge to survive, it should be replaced by something that could be used in everyday life. What is at stake here is to adapt the divinatory techniques to the new context and demands of a new era. Such a change goes far beyond a mere transposition from one use to another, and it touches at the very nature of the divinatory act. In a military context, divination—whatever the technique—aims to determine the chances of success of a group. When a warlord asks for a divination, he does not intend to know if he is lucky or not, but to guarantee to his troops that destiny is on their side. Even though the target of the divination, the general, is only one individual, it would be unreasonable for his soldiers to follow him for luck. Although the general represents the whole group, he remains a single man, master of his destiny. Thus, it is as if the troop delegates their individual fates to their

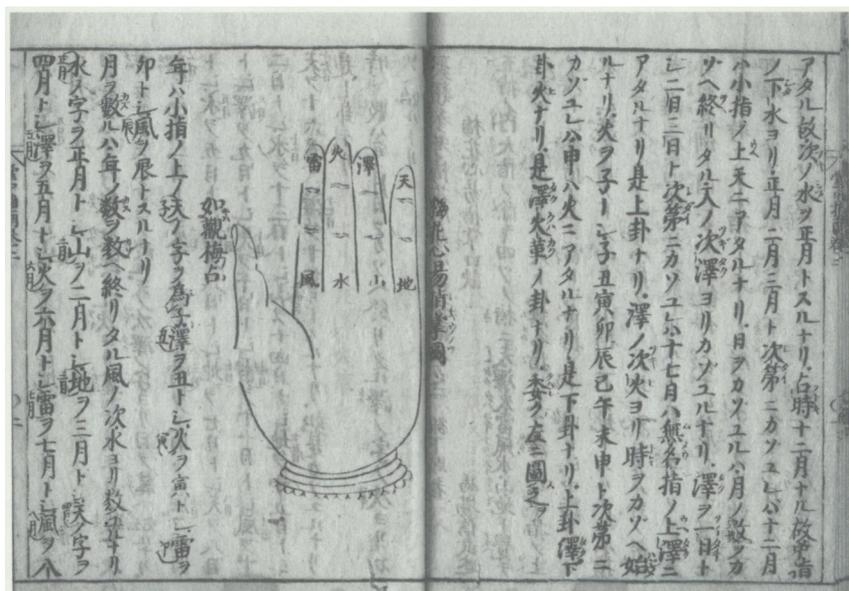


FIGURE 3. *Jurui sankō baika shinēki shōchu shinan* (1697), distribution of the eight elements (trigrams) on the fingers, from the author's personal collection.

chief, so that when he becomes the target of a divination, their own fortunes are judged through his. Therefore, military divination can be pictured as an attempt to determine the collective destiny of a group through one individual.

Hence, abandoning military divination in favor of daily usage also indicated a distance from a collective target and a focus on individual destinies. The divinatory parameters can very well remain the same, but the way they are used must be linked to a unique individual in order to match the hypothesis.

Can we consider that Baba himself brought the individual to the center of divination practice? Not really, for *hakke* divination, as a hemerological technique based on the birth year of the person under consultation, was already focused on individual fate. Is it then in Baba's list of results that we should seek his contribution to the translation from military to day-to-day use? Again, *hakke* divination manuals were already using such targets, although not in the same way. What is more, if we look more closely at the various techniques Baba discloses in his works, we are struck by some common features. In *shinēki* and *danēki*, and in the astrological technique of the *Kanmei isshōkin wage*, the date, hour, and other numerical parameters determine, or at least have a decisive influence on, the result of the divination. In other words, these techniques are mostly methods that pertain to a category I would call "divination with fixed variables and drawing," that is, the fixed variables (date, and so on) that are closely connected to the

idiosyncratic character of the person under consultation are “drawn” at the time of the consultation, ensuring an organic connection between the client and the results. This feature was, again, already typical of *hakke* divination.

Should we then conclude that Baba did not in fact provide anything new to Japanese divination? This would be quite unfair and inaccurate. A great number of elements present in Baba’s manuals were already featured in divination books before him, but this only shows one thing: that he built on existing knowledge in order to bring practitioners on a new path. This appears most clearly in another common characteristic of most of his works, namely the extensive use he makes of illustrations that explain how to make divinatory calculations on one single hand. At least four of his books, starting with *Baika shin’eki*, explicitly state in their titles that the technique presented uses the hand, the palm, or the fingers. This is not about some kind of chiromancy, but rather a way to turn one’s hand into a divination tool by attributing values such as trigrams, branches, stems, and so on to the phalanges, so that various processes can be achieved by counting on the fingers. This kind of feature was already used in China in various contexts, including of course divination (HANSEN 2008). In *shin’eki*’s case, for instance, all the operations required to obtain the hexagrams and mutating lines I described above are to be performed using the left hand (see FIGURE 3).

These “hand mnemonics” were crucial in *hakke* divination as well, although no printed manual before the *Wakan hakke shoshō taisei* offered any actual diagrams. This is precisely the reason for Baba’s keenness on providing such illustrations to his reader—professional diviners were already accustomed to this feature. In the end, Baba’s main concern and motivation comes from this observation:

Witch doctors, priests, and priestesses all resort to the eight trigrams, the nine luminous stars, and the twelve conducts to determine what is auspicious and what is not, without any knowledge of the principles of the *Changes*.

(BABA 1714, vol. 2, folio 13)

This condemnation of *hakke* divination would sound strange, given the fact that Baba himself produced two manuals on this very technique, but these manuals are precisely in the line of this criticism, for they try to correct faulty calculations, and to reinsert “serious” references to an old method. In other words, what Baba really dislikes about *hakke* divination is not the method itself, but that he cannot find any “solid” Chinese background to its highly heterogeneous and “syncretic” medieval nature. However, when he realized it would be difficult to get rid of such a popular technique, he attempted to “patch” it up so it could fit it into his vision of divination. As for his other works, he intended to lead his public, that is to say professional diviners, to shake off their old habits and to embrace a more “documented” method, grounded in serious Chinese references and a coherent system. In *Baika shin’eki*, Baba admits he reluctantly added a reference

to personal hexagrams, reminiscent of the personal trigrams of *hakke* divination, to fulfill the publisher's wishes, but not without claiming its inconsistency with the main technique described by the book:

Although the determination of one's hexagram for his entire life is of no use in the changes in the mind, I wrote it here because I was asked by publisher X.

(BABA 1697, vol. 1, "hanrei," folio 1 r°)

Thus, Baba's real goal is not so much to enact a transition that already took place before him, but to give the specialists a solid basis on which to build their performances. His tropism toward numerical techniques can therefore be explained by his will to draw his readers on familiar grounds, only to have them take a leap into a purer, more organized system, one that is actually based on the *Changes*, contrarily to the "misleading" *hakke* divination. This position taken by Baba also reveals his philosophical concerns about what "correct" knowledge is, and why it should be transmitted.

Due to their peculiar situation, early modern Japanese Confucian scholars—Baba being but one of them—enjoyed a distinct position toward "orthodoxy" compared to their Chinese and Korean counterparts. Although the renewal of Confucianism in Japan first came through Zhu Xi studies, by the end of the seventeenth century several first-rank scholars, such as Itō Jinsai and Ogyū Sorai (although they had opposing views), began to take a new approach to Confucian classics, mainly by rejecting Song commentaries, and to advocate a direct interpretation of "old" texts. Through their philological inquiries, they tried to retrieve the meaning of Han Confucianism in its original purity. It is with such a background that Baba tried to correct the old and adapt the new, following a global trend. His choice to focus on *shinēki* and *danēki* thus makes perfect sense: although they were developed during the Song dynasty, these techniques greatly emphasize the correlative organization of the universe—a characteristic of Han Confucianism. By introducing *shinēki* and *danēki* to a Japanese audience, Baba not only sought to bring coherency to the mantic market, but also applied his own philological and critical views to this matter.

### *Conclusion*

As we have seen, changes in the main divination techniques that were observed in Japan at the beginning of the eighteenth century are rooted in a broader social and philosophical context. At the center of these changes was Baba Nobutake, struggling to conciliate his urge to see practitioners adopt methods properly rooted in Chinese sources, and directly connected to the *Changes*, with his need to match the expectations of an already well-established market. This is probably why he succeeded: his works, while erudite and contemptuous, are designed as practical

manuals for professionals, full of concrete examples, detailed explanations on how to proceed, and even tips to memorize parameters, calculations, and results. While expressing his own Confucian views on what “correct knowledge” is, he intended to reform the existing techniques with the aid of new Chinese material, but also to diffuse a type of divination answering to the new needs of a new society. Of course, he was neither the first nor the last to try to infuse some coherency in mantic practices by exposing the flaws and inconsistencies of existing techniques and advocating the diffusion of Chinese knowledge. He was, however, the first to do so in such a lengthy, broad, and durable fashion. Far from being anecdotal entries, his books were reprinted from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, passing from one publisher to another, sometimes with added features. A hundred years after his last work, there is solid proof that he was still read by authors of divination books, and some of them even quoted him in their works, like Tamiya Yū’s *Hōsoku shiyō* (1816), which gives Baba credit for having been the first to clearly explain the inducted sounds (Ch. *nayin*; Jp. *natchin* 納音) system.

In that regard, Baba’s attempt to make Japanese diviners convert from “medieval” trigrams divination to *shinēki* and *danēki* opened a new road that was soon followed by others. Although Baba had to stick to the numerical system, and seemed to have felt coin-tossing divination was more suited to nonspecialists, he made a major contribution to the radical change that happened by the end of the eighteenth century, when new authors succeeded in imposing *danēki*-based yarrow-stalk divination as a mainstream method.

Thus, behind the transformation of Japanese divination in cities and in the countryside, we find scholars—middle-class literati who wrote books in Japanese—playing a key role as the interface between elite and popular culture, and aiming to “rationalize” divinatory practices through philological and critical thinking.

This tells us not only how influential books were on popular knowledge, a point that anthropologists used to overlook, but also how divination was an essential part of early modern Japanese daily life. As such, it was able to influence people’s world view. The diviners not only passed on a part of the correlative cosmology to their clients; they must also have echoed in some respect the philosophical views conveyed by their own manuals.

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