

**YIJING SCHOLARSHIP IN LATE-NGUYEN VIETNAM:
A STUDY OF LE VAN NGU'S *CHU DICH CUU NGUYEN*
(An Investigation of the Origins of the *Yijing*, 1916)**

By Wai-Ming Ng*
Chinese University of Hong Kong
E-mail: waimingng@cuhk.edu.hk

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The study and uses of the *Yijing* (Book of Changes or *Dich kinh*) in Vietnam is a largely unknown research area on which very few Vietnamese writings have survived into the modern period and modern scholarship is basically non-existent.¹ This paper is a preliminary study of Vietnamese scholarship on the *Yijing* from historical, textual and comparative perspectives. As the background, it first gives a historical overview of *Yijing* scholarship in Vietnam from the text's importation in early centuries to the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945), introducing representative scholars and their works, and identifying the characteristics of *Yijing* scholarship in Vietnam. The main part of the paper is a textual analysis of one of the extant Vietnamese commentaries on the *Yijing*, *Chu dich cuu nguyen* (An Investigation of the Origins of the *Yijing*, 1916). It aims to deepen our understanding of developments in *Yijing* scholarship and Confucian studies in times of turmoil and change during the late Nguyen period (1886-1945).

***Yijing* Studies in Vietnam before Le Van Ngu (1859-Early 1930s)**

The *Yijing* was not a particularly popular and influential Chinese classic in

* WAI-MING NG, associate professor, Department of Japanese Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. Specialties: Sino-Japanese intellectual and cultural history, Confucianism. E-mail: waimingng@cuhk.edu.hk

Vietnamese scholarship. The Song school, in particular the Zhu Xi school [Zhu Xi (1130-1200), which had a strong preference for the Four Books over the Five Classics, was dominant in Vietnamese Confucianism.² The exact date for the importation of the *Yijing* to Vietnam is unknown. During the long period of more than a thousand years between 111 B.C.E and C.E. 939 when Vietnam was under Chinese domination, not only did Chinese officials and merchants settle or sojourn in Vietnam, but Vietnamese officials and students also went to China to pay tribute, trade or study. It was likely that these Chinese or Vietnamese might have brought Han (206 B.C.E-C.E 200) and Tang (618-906) commentaries on the *Yijing* to Vietnam (especially the northern part).

In the Ly dynasty (1010-1225), Buddhism was much more influential than Confucianism. Like medieval Japan, Buddhist monks, in particular Zen monks, were dominant in scholarship and attempted to incorporate Confucian and Taoist elements into the Mahayana Buddhist system. Some Buddhist monks (such as the Zen monk Buu Gian) studied the *Yijing* to enrich Buddhism.³ The Ly government founded an Imperial College modeled after that of China. However, it is unclear that whether the *Yijing* was a reading at the College. During the Tran dynasty (1225-1400), the government introduced the civil service examinations and expanded the school system. It reprinted the Four Books and the Five Classics as textbooks for the civil service examinations and public schools. At schools, students usually began to study the Four Books and the Five Classics at the age of fourteen or fifteen in order to prepare for the civil service examinations.

The Zhu Xi school of Neo-Confucianism became very influential in state ideology and scholarship in the Le dynasty (1428-1789).⁴ The government created the positions of the Doctors of the Five Classics to promote the Five Classics, for fear that Confucian classics, such as the *Yijing*, *Liji* (Book of Rites) and *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals), would become neglected.⁵ In the government, the *Yijing* was studied as a Confucian classic at the Imperial College and as a divination manual at the Ministry of Rites. However, it was not an important text in both organizations and very few students specialized in it.⁶ The *Yijing* never occupied an important place in the civil service

examinations.⁷ The government reprinted the Five Classics and their commentaries as textbooks for public schools in the capital and the regions. Le Confucian scholars produced commentaries on Chinese classics in Chinese and translated Chinese classics into *nom* (demotic Vietnamese script). Some became famous for *Yijing* scholarship. For instance, Nguyen Binh Khiem (1491-1585), a *nom* poet and Confucian scholar, was a famous scholar of the *Yijing*.⁸ He used the *Yijing* to fuse Neo-Confucian metaphysics with Taoism and Buddhism. Le Quy Don (1726-1784), a diplomat and a prolific Zhu Xi scholar, wrote an important commentary on the *Yijing*, entitled *Dich kinh phu thuyet* (A Simple Explanation of the *Yijing*, 1752). He also wrote several books on *Yijing* divination. Under the influence of *kaozheng* scholarship (the Chinese philological tradition of evidential research), Le conducted textual criticism on the *Yijing* and other Confucian classics. As an official, he used the *Yijing* to advocate political and social reforms.⁹

The Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945) was a period of great change. Confucian politics and studies made great progress in the early Nguyen period (1802-1885). The government enhanced the civil service examinations and promoted Confucian morality. Temples of Confucius were built throughout the nation. Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi's (1033-1107) commentaries on the *Yijing* were adopted as official texts for the civil service examinations.¹⁰ The government also published the *nom* edition of the Chinese classics including the *Yijing*.¹¹ Nguyen scholars produced a large number of Confucian commentaries and not a few have survived into the modern period. Pham Quy Thich (1759-1825), a renowned Confucian scholar and teacher, wrote an important commentary on the *Yijing*, entitled *Chu dich van giai toat yeu* (A Summary of Questions and Answers about the *Yijing*, 1805). Nhu Ba Si (1759-1840), a high-ranking official, developed his Confucian views in the *Dich ti giai thuyet* (An Explanation of the *Yijing* System). These two commentaries were faithful to Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi's interpretations. Dang Thai Bang (dates unknown), in his *Chu dich quoc an ca* (*Yijing* as a *Nom* Poem, 1815), translated the main text of the 64 hexagrams in the *Yijing* into a *nom* poem for commoners to memorize. This text was printed under the auspices of a regional

administration to promote Confucianism.¹²

The late Nguyen (1886-1945) was an era of crises and reforms that stimulated many new intellectual currents. Under French domination, Vietnam adopted a cultural policy that promoted Western learning at the expense of Chinese learning. The authority of the Zhu Xi school was questioned by reform-minded Vietnamese scholars.¹³ Nguyen Kyuyen (1835-1909), an official and a poet, showed his concern for the decline of the Confucian order. In a poem, "Reading the *Yijing*," (*doc dich*), he wrote:

If the world is becoming a new world,
Public manners should nevertheless follow ancient models.
I wake up in the morning to read the *Yijing* alone.
Understanding the change of times is no easy task.¹⁴

The late Nguyen is regarded as a period of the decline of Confucianism and Chinese learning.¹⁵ Although late Nguyen commentaries are not rated highly in terms of scholarship, they demonstrate a level of originality and iconoclasm that can hardly be found in any other periods in Vietnam. This changing intellectual climate can also be seen from *Yijing* scholarship. For instance, Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940), a reformist and the champion of the "new learning" (*Tan hoc*) and "travel East" (*dong du*) movements, stressed the importance of applying Chinese classics to promote modern reforms.¹⁶ His *Dich hoc chu giai* (An Annotated Explanation of the *Yijing*) was an attempt along this line. He translated the *Yijing* into Latinized Vietnamese and added annotations. Le Van Ngu (1859-?) wrote an important commentary on the *Yijing*, *Chu dich cuu nguyen* (An Investigation of the Origins of the *Yijing*, 1916) in which he gave insightful views of *Yijing* scholarship in China and the comparison of Eastern and Western learning.

To conclude a thousand years of *Yijing* studies in Vietnam, underdevelopment was perhaps the most salient characteristic. *Yijing* scholarship remained rudimentary and the *Yijing* was never a very popular text among Vietnamese scholars. Vietnamese writings on the *Yijing* were few and

not very influential. Unlike its Chinese, Japanese or Korean counterparts, *Yijing* scholarship in Vietnam did not develop into different schools, such as textual interpretation, symbols and numbers, divination or application schools.

Vietnamese scholarship was not mature enough to develop its own interpretations. Vietnamese intellectuals followed Song interpretations of the *Yijing* faithfully and original Vietnamese commentaries on the text and images of the *Yijing* were few. Although individual scholars might have been influenced by Wang Yangming, *kaozheng*, and practical learning scholarship, basically there were no other Confucian schools founded in Vietnam to compete and interact with the Zhu Xi school.

Yijing scholarship in Vietnam was highly pragmatic. Vietnamese scholars were not interested in metaphysical discussions or textual criticism. To most Vietnamese, the *Yijing* was a book of high practical value. The *Yijing* was basically treated as a textbook for the civil service examinations. The Vietnamese government reprinted Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi's commentaries on the *Yijing* numerous times to promote Confucian education and morality. Most people studied the text as a part of the school curriculum for preparation for the civil service examinations.

Traditional Vietnam also applied *Yijing*-related principles to things and affairs in their daily life. Though not a popular and influential text in the Vietnamese Confucian circle, the *Yijing* and its *yinyang wuxing* (two primal forces and five basic agents) doctrine penetrated the ideas and practices of Vietnamese politics, medicine, agriculture, calendrical studies, geography, religion and folklore.¹⁷ The *yinyang wuxing* doctrine shaped the Vietnamese perception of their society, politics, human relationship and the outside world.¹⁸ The eight-trigram symbol was used widely by the Vietnamese as a talisman.¹⁹ The imperial family and the courtiers applied the principle of *wuxing* in naming.²⁰ Vietnamese scholars used the *Yijing* to advocate the "six-eight poetry."²¹ Some Vietnamese officials claimed authority from the divination of the *Yijing*.²² Geomancy or *fengshui* based on the *yinyang wuxing* doctrine was prevalent in Vietnamese thought and folklore.²³

Le Van Ngu's Scholarship on the *Yijing*

Le Van Ngu was a Confucian scholar who specialized in the *Yijing*. Although he came from a learned family, Le failed to acquire any titles from the civil service examinations. At the age of twenty-seven, he decided to “close the door” to study Confucian classics. Le was not a hermit and did not give up hopes for career development. However, he only served the government for three months as an attaché of a delegation to France in 1900. His cultural life was more active than this political life. Le maintained correspondence with Chinese literati of the Guangxuehui (Extensive Learning Society) in Shanghai and with Vietnamese officials to seek for recognition for his Confucian scholarship.²⁴ Le was a prolific writer who wrote commentaries on the *Yijing*, *Daxue* (Great Learning), *Lunyu* (Analects), and *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean) as well as a book on Chinese medicine. Basically his writings were all influenced by his *Yijing* scholarship.²⁵ He held that “Not only medicine and Confucianism, but also all things and all changes are subject to the principles in the *Yijing*.”²⁶ His writings were never printed, but he made many handwritten copies and sent them to officials and scholars in Vietnam.

Le specialized in the *Yijing* and had studied it for more than thirty years before he wrote his own commentary, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, at the age of fifty-seven. Written in classical Chinese, the *Chu dich cuu nguyen* consists of 17 short articles on different aspects of the *Yijing* and Le's own notes on the 64 hexagrams. These 17 short articles are original pieces through which we can understand Le's personal views of the *Yijing*. In contrast, his commentary on the 64 hexagrams is more safe than stimulating. Hence, this research uses the 17 short articles as main references for textual analysis. Le rated the *Chu dich cuu nguyen* highly for its scholarly and practical value and even wrote to ask the colonial government to publish it but in vain.

Locating Le Van Ngu within Vietnamese Confucian scholarship in the late Nguyen period and *Yijing* scholarship in Vietnam is no easy task. In general, Vietnamese scholars were very faithful to the Zhu Xi school in their reading of Confucian classics. The Zhu Xi school, as a semi-official ideology, had a tremendous impact on Vietnamese statecraft, ethics, education and scholarship.

The late Nguyen was an exciting era in Vietnamese intellectual history. With the declining authority and prestige of the Nguyen court and the influx of Western learning, Vietnamese scholars began to question the sacredness and universality of the Zhu Xi school. Le Van Ngu was one such scholar who dared to develop his own ideas in the reading of Chinese classics and attempted to find a respectable place for Confucianism in the changing political and cultural order of the early twentieth-century Vietnam.

In the eyes of Zhu Xi scholars, Le Van Ngu was a heretic. Le fully understood his unorthodox position, calling himself a “crackpot” (*cuong si*) in his own writings and even letters to Vietnamese officials. Although he came from a family of the Zhu Xi tradition and rated Zhu Xi highly, his explanations of the *Yijing* were not based on Zhu Xi’s commentaries. In his commentary on the 64 hexagrams, he did not cite any Chinese commentaries at all. Le was critical of Chinese scholarship on the *Yijing* of all ages, believing that he was the only one, after the four ancient Chinese sages (Fuxi, Duke of Zhou, King Wen and Confucius), who truly comprehended the text. In the preface to the *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, he wrote:

Born thousands of years [after the sages] and having witnessed the decline of *Yijing* scholarship and the rise of heretical views, I have been engrossed in the study of the *Yijing*. I have discovered ideas undiscovered by former Confucians and elaborated ideas not yet fully elaborated.²⁷

Le’s own approach to the *Yijing* was eclectic, attempting to combine the three major elements or approaches in the *Yijing*—numbers and symbols, text and philosophy, and divination—together in his own explanations. He believed that numbers and symbols made by the Chinese sages based on their understanding of natural principles constitute the most fundamental object of *Yijing* studies.²⁸ He said:

The Way of the *Yijing* is great. Originally derived from

numbers and formulated by the four sages, the *Yijing* became the fundamental classic to teach people the mind [of Nature].²⁹

Hence, Le started his commentary by discussing a number of *Yijing* charts and diagrams. He accepted the tradition that Fuxi created the eight trigrams based on two ancient charts: *Hetu* (Yellow River Diagram) and *Luoshu* (Writings from the River Luo). He stressed that all natural principles, such as *yinyang wuxing* and *wuyun liuqi* (five agents and six climatic factors), could be found in these two charts.³⁰ He used the principles found in the *Yijing* to explain politics, morality, medicine, astronomy, physics, geography, mathematics, and divination as well as other Confucian classics.

Le criticized Chinese commentaries on the *Yijing* of all ages written from the Eastern Zhou (771-221 B.C.E) to the Qing (1644-1911). Like many Qing Chinese or Tokugawa Japanese (1603-1868) scholars, Le pointed out that not all of the *Shiyi* (Ten Wings), the ten oldest commentaries on the *Yijing* written mostly in the Zhou period, were the works of Confucius. He held:

Scholars of the past have already suggested that the *Xugua* (Introductory Notes on the Hexagrams) was not the work of the sages. Now I want to emphasize that the *Xici* (Commentary on the Appended Judgments) and *Shuogua* (Commentary on the Trigrams) as well were not the writings of the sages. Why do I say so? This is because there are too many useless and unreasonable ideas in the *Xici* and *Shuogua*.³¹

Le reminded readers that above-mentioned three commentaries in the *Shiyi* could be abandoned or should be read and used critically. Although similar ideas had been suggested by Chinese and Japanese scholars before him and his view was not very original in this regard, Le's spirit of doubt was intellectually significant.³² Of the *Shiyi*, Le liked the *Wenyen* (Commentary on the Words of the Text), praising it as the best reference to the meanings of words used in the *Yijing*.³³ He believed that the *Tuanzhuan* (Commentary on the Decision) and

Daxiang (Commentary on the Great Images) were the works of Confucius. He cited these three ancient commentaries frequently in his own commentary.

Le completely denied the value of the Han and Tang commentaries because “after the Qin and Han, Confucian scholars discussed the *Yijing* loosely and few could understand its true meanings.”³⁴ Le criticized them for focusing solely on the text and thus separating the text and the charts. He said:

By observing the lines and images, Confucius wrote his commentary [on the *Yijing*] that enlightened later generations.... However, some people followed the old-fashioned interpretations of Zheng Xuan (127-200) and Wang Bi (226-249).... they treated the lines and images as merely lines and images, and the text as just the text.³⁵

Le did not like the old commentaries in general, but he admitted that Wang Bi’s *Zhouyizhu* (A Commentary on the *Yijing*) contained insightful views based on sound textual analysis.³⁶

Compared with Confucian scholarship of other ages, Song learning received more recognition from Le. Le himself came from a family of scholars of Song learning, and he regarded Song learning as the “orthodox learning (*chinh hoc*).”³⁷ In particular, he believed that Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi had made important contributions to *Yijing* scholarship by elaborating the philosophical, political and moral implications of the images and text. He held that Cheng Yi’s *Yizhuan* (A Commentary on the *Yijing*) was excellent in textual analysis and that Zhu Xi’s commentaries were good at discussing the images and divination. However, he criticized Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi’s commentaries as incomplete and handicapped, as they differentiated the Duke of Zhou and Confucius’ commentaries on the *Yijing* and failed to combine the text with the images.³⁸ He held:

In the Song period, two great masters, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi,

wrote the *Yizhuan* and *Zhouyi benyi* (The Original Meaning of the *Yijing*) respectively. Their ideas were comprehensive, but they only saw the origins of the *Yijing* and the numbers in the *Yijing* diagrams and charts as something natural and thus failed to explain their principles of creation. This shortcoming corrupted the text of mind [i.e., the *Yijing*] into an oral transmission of empty words. As a result, the *Yijing* was not understood and its teaching was neglected. What a shame!³⁹

Le also disliked Shao Yong's (1011-1077) ideas about divination and metaphysics of the *Yijing*, finding them too complicated and abstract.⁴⁰ He looked down upon the entire body of scholarship on the *Yijing* after the Song and never used any post-Song commentaries as references.

Le's critical overview of *Yijing* scholarship in China shows some significant characteristics in Nguyen Confucianism. First, many Nguyen scholars were confident of their contribution to Confucian scholarship. Though respecting Chinese sages, some Nguyen scholars did not rate Chinese scholarship highly. Like Tokugawa Japan, some Vietnamese scholars saw Vietnam as the "Middle Kingdom" and the center of Confucian studies. Second, though not a state ideology, Song learning was very influential in the Nguyen Confucian circle. Most Nguyen scholars accepted Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi's commentaries with some modifications.

Le Van Ngu's Response to Western Learning

Western learning and modernization were very powerful political and cultural forces in the early twentieth century Vietnam. Le was not immune to Western influence. His three-month sojourn to France in 1900 was an eye-opener through which he had first-hand experience of the Western world. Through his Shanghai academic connection, he became acquainted with Chinese reformist writings and Chinese translations of Western works. In Vietnam, he also read some Vietnamese translations of Western classics. Western learning had an impact on his Confucian scholarship.

Besides his criticism of Chinese scholarship on the *Yijing*, Le's comments on Western ideas, such as liberty and freedom, constitutional monarchy, Western astronomy and physics, and Christianity, in his commentary on the *Yijing* are interesting and significant. Unfortunately, all remarks made by Le about Western things are piecemeal, loosely organized and at times self-contradictory. Obviously, he did not establish a systematic and coherent perception of Western learning. This poses a great challenge for textual study. In general, Le was critical of Western ideas, although he did not completely deny their value. He blamed the influx of Western learning for the decline of *Yijing* studies:

The Westerners came to the Eastern world by sea and brought us strange skills and playful things. Confused by and absorbed in Western learning, our people pursued fame and profit. The *Yijing* became a bunch of wastepaper.⁴¹

According to Le, Western civilization could only stimulate more human desire and consequently it would bring more problems and sufferings to human beings than answers and benefits. He said:

If people do not follow the great moral principle of benevolence and not to control their desire to conquer, then more sophisticated mining will produce more natural resources. More natural resources cause more human desires. Human beings will become more difficult to live and then they go to invade others.⁴²

Le applied the ideas of *taiji* (the supreme ultimate) and *yinyang wuxing* in *Yijing* charts to explain the origins of the universe and criticized the Western or Christian theory of creation.⁴³ He said that if people read the *Yijing*, "they should know that the wonder of the *Yijing* was ten thousand times more amazing than Western principles of cannon, ship, car or electricity."⁴⁴ He also held that the Chinese theory of the five agents (*wuxing*) was better than the

Western theory of the four elements in explaining the principles of electricity, physics and geography. He said:

Some asked, "I have heard that physical principles of electricity and chemistry are not as good as our metaphysics. Can you elaborate?" I replied, "Western experts in electricity and chemistry use materials on earth to create physical knowledge and skills. Our application of the theory of the interaction of *chi* (ether or vital force) in water, fire, wood and earth is more wonderful. The idea about the interaction between metal and fire is most profound."⁴⁵

The Western theory of the four elements refers to the Aristotelian theory of physics which views earth, water, fire and air as the four basic terrestrial elements. Le's comparison was similar to that of the Tokugawa scholar Sawano Chūan (1580-1652) and the late Chosŏn scholar Chŏng Tasan (1762-1836).⁴⁶ Le found the interaction of the agents of metal and fire in the *wuxing* the fundamental principle in the universe. He explained:

Electricity, chemistry and engineering are subject to the principle of the interaction of metal and fire.... If you want to understand the principle of the interaction of metal and fire, you should use *yinyang* and *Yijing* charts as references. The application of the principle of the interaction of metal and fire are best illustrated in electricity and chemistry. Thus, ancient people praised the *Yijing* as the book to reveal the secret of creation.⁴⁷

Le did not accept Christian ideas about heaven and hell as well as creation, stressing that the *yinyang wuxing* principle found in the *Yijing* was a better way to explain the origins of things.⁴⁸ Le sometimes attempted to apply the *yinyang wuxing* theory to explain Western knowledge in astronomy, geography

and physics, making far-fetched speculations. For example, based on his understanding of the *wuxing* principle, Le wrongly speculated that there are five layers of heaven in the universe and that Jupiter, Mars and Saturn have no satellites.⁴⁹

Le also discussed Western political concepts, such as liberty, equality, constitution and parliament in his commentary on the *Yijing*. He associated liberty with people-oriented politics (*minben*) found in Chinese classics including the *Yijing*, accepting the parliamentary system as a form of political liberalization.⁵⁰ In his explanation of the hexagram *bo* (splitting apart), Le supported constitutional monarchy as follows:

The *Shuogua* commentary reads: “The mountain rests on the earth. This is the image of the hexagram *bo*.”.... Snow falls on the mountain to nourish and rejuvenate everything.... Having observed this image, the ruler should adopt constitutional politics to rule and pay attention to the needs of the people in order to strengthen the nation. Doing this would be like snowing on the mountain.⁵¹

In the trigrams, *Yijing* charts and other Chinese classics, Le found that many Western principles were in agreement with Confucianism. He said:

Nowadays, we are talking about ideas like membership, public opinion, equality and freedom. Whether they are right or wrong can be deduced [from the *Yijing*]. If scholars can elaborate [the *Yijing*], then the ideas of heavenly order, heaven’s hearing and heaven’s seeing can all be seen from the forty-five dots [in the *Luoshu*] and the *Jiuchou* (nine categories) [in the *Shangshu* (Book of Documents)].... “Discuss with ministers” refers to the upper house, whereas “discuss with commoners” means the lower house and the prime minister.⁵²

However, Le condemned the idea of equality for turning society and morality upside-down.⁵³ For example, he criticized the idea of equality as unnatural and immoral. He said:

Things in nature can be beautiful or ugly, small or big. Human beings can be wise or stupid, good or bad. From things to human beings, we can conclude that equality is out of the question.... If we do not rectify [this view], how can we avoid bad consequences? How can we stop the war? For those people who are competing in this world, if their hearts follow the way of the *Yijing* and if they act according to the principles of the *Yijing*, they will compete for what they should compete and will acquire for what they should acquire.⁵⁴

As for Christianity, Le held that some Christian ideas and ethics were at odds with Confucian ethics and the *yinyang wuxing* principle. For instance, he criticized the ideas of heaven and hell as follows:

[Christianity suggest that] when the end of the world comes, human beings will disappear, but heaven and earth will stay forever with heaven and hell. Objectively speaking, the idea that heaven and earth can last forever without living things on it is not in agreement with the principle of metal and fire.⁵⁵

From the above-cited paragraphs, we have the impression that Le was fundamental a Confucian scholar and his understanding and acceptance of things Western was limited and incomplete. He tried to respond to changing conditions in Vietnam with his mastery of Chinese classics and limited Western knowledge. He represented a large group of frustrating Vietnamese intellectuals who were trained in traditional Confucian education but lived in a modern world.

Concluding Remarks

Fairly speaking, Le Van Ngu was not a prominent late Nguyen scholar and his *Chu dich cuu nguyen* did not break new ground in *Yijing* scholarship in Asia. The significance of the *Chu dich cuu nguyen* rests mainly with its spirit of doubt, openness and pragmatism rather than scholarship. Le questioned the Song learning, discussed Western ideas, and suggested ways to improve Vietnamese politics and scholarship.

Le, like many late Nguyen scholars, dared to criticize Zhu Xi and other Chinese Confucian masters of all ages. However, the bottom line was that he was careful not to attack the Chinese sages and their teachings, blaming only scholars of later ages for corrupting the original Confucian teachings.⁵⁶

Gained through the reading of Chinese translations and writings as well as own observations during his three-month sojourn in Paris (May-July 1900), Le's understanding of things Western was superficial and incomplete. His attitude toward modernization was ambiguous. Unlike many late Nguyen Westerners who modified and reorganized Chinese and Vietnamese traditions into a Western framework, Le took the reverse action by selectively incorporating some Western elements into the Chinese Confucian framework. He flatly rejected the idea of equality that he thought went against the fundamental principle of the Confucian social order, but endorsed Western political institutions such as constitutions and parliaments. Sometimes, he distorted or misunderstood Western ideas. His discussions of liberty, Christianity, and the solar system are such examples. He also attempted to compare and combine some Chinese and Western ideas such as the *wuxing* theory and the four-element theory as well as the concept of people-oriented politics and liberty.

To conclude, Le was neither a reformer nor a Westernizer in the strict sense. He was not a faithful Zhu Xi scholar either. He lived in a time, as Neil Jamieson puts it, "the nation became obsessed with the problem of determining the appropriate response to the challenge of an aggressive Western civilization."⁵⁷ In this respect, Le was not a unique or exceptional figure, but represented a member of a lost generation. He was just a Confucian scholar

who was caught in a dilemma as to whether to hold firmly to tradition or adopt modernity. In order to accommodate Confucian learning in the modern world, Le sometimes redefined, discarded or even distorted Confucian ideas in the *Yijing* and other Chinese classics. This was indeed a common cultural response of Asian Confucians to Western learning in times of crises. *Yijing* scholars in China, Japan and Korean, in the early twentieth century, all showed a similar direction in *Yijing* studies.⁵⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ Only 13 writings on the *Yijing* are listed in the catalogue of ancient books published by the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies (Vien Nghien Cuu Han Nom). Most were the reprints of Chinese texts or Chinese texts brought to Vietnam. See Tran Nghia and Francois Gros, eds., *Di san Han Nom Viet Nam: Thu muc de yeu* (Catalogue of Books in Chinese and Nom) (Hanoi: Nha xuất bản khoa học xã hội, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 289-291, 591, 707, 769; vol. 3, p. 738, 749-750, 761, 946-947. The Hanoi National Library also has some other titles on the *Yijing*. Most of these writings are about divination.

² For a historical overview of Confucianism in Vietnam, see Ngugen Ngoc Huy, "The Confucian Incursion into Vietnam," in Walter Slote and George De Vos, eds., *Confucianism and the Family* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 91-104.

³ Chen Yulung, et. al., *Han wenhua lunwang* (An Introduction to the Chinese Cultural Sphere) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993), p. 387.

⁴ For a study of the spread of neo-Confucianism in Le Vietnam, see John K Whitmore, *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly and the Ming (1371-1421)* (New Yale: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1985).

⁵ He Shengda, *Dongnanya wenhua fazhanshi* (Cultural History of Southeast Asia) (Kuming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 155.

⁶ Ngo Si Lien, *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* (A Complete History of Great Vietnam, comp. 15th century) (Tokyo: Tōyōbunka kenkyūjō, 1984), p. 1002.

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- ⁷ Fujiwara Riichirō, *Tōnan Ajia shi no kenkyū* (A Study of Southeast Asian History) (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1983), pp. 436-435, 460.
- ⁸ Maurice M. Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan, *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature*, translated from French by D. M. Hawke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 71.
- ⁹ See Yu Xiangdong, ed., *Dongfang zhuming zhexuejia ping zhuan: Yuenam juan, Youtai juan* (Biographies of Famous Eastern Thinkers: Vietnamese and Jewish) (Jinan: Shandong remin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 193-194.
- ¹⁰ Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 208.
- ¹¹ He Shengda, *Dongnanya wenhua fazhanshi*, p. 184.
- ¹² Wang Xiaoping, *Yazhou Hanwenxue* (Chinese Literature in Asia) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2001), pp. 540-541.
- ¹³ Regarding the changing intellectual climate in the late Nguyen period, see Tran My Van, *A Vietnamese Scholar in Anguish: Nguyen Khuyen and the Decline of the Confucian Order, 1884-1909* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 1991); Tran Dinh Huou, "Vitonamu ni okeru Jukyō to Jugaku," (Confucianism in Vietnam), in Mizoguchi Yūzō, et. al., *Kanji bunkaken no rekishi to mirai* (History and Prospects of the Sphere of Chinese Characters) (Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten, 1992), p. 79; Oscar Chapuis, *The Last Emperors of Vietnam* (London: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 94-101.
- ¹⁴ Tran My Van, *A Vietnamese Scholar in Anguish*, "appendix."
- ¹⁵ For a brief history of late Nguyen Confucianism, see He Chengxuan, *Ruxue nanzhuanshi* (History of the Transmission of Confucianism to the South) (Beijing: Beijingdaxue chubanshe, 2000), pp. 358-371.
- ¹⁶ For the life and thought of Phan, see Phan Boi Chau, *Overtured Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan Boi Chau*, translated by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999). See also David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 98-155.

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- ¹⁷ For example, a late Nguyen scholar, Le Huu Trac (1720-1791), was famous for applying *Yijing* ideas in medicine. See *Dongfang zhuming zhexuejia ping zhuan: Yuenam juan, Youtai juan*, pp. 164-175.
- ¹⁸ Neil Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 11-15.
- ¹⁹ Pham Kim Vinh, *The Vietnamese Culture: An Introduction* (CA.: Solana Beach: The Pham Kim Vinh Research Institute, 1990), p. 120.
- ²⁰ Chen Yulong, et. al., *Han wenhua lunwang*, p. 374.
- ²¹ Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, p. 56.
- ²² Ngo Si Lien, *Dai Viet su ky toan thu*, pp. 617-618, 1074-1075. See also Fujiwara Riichirō, *Tōnan Ajia shi no kenkyū*, p. 617, 1074.
- ²³ Nguyen Khac Kham, *An Introduction to Vietnamese Culture* (Tokyo: Center for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1967), p. 41. For an interesting example, see Hu Xuanming, *Zhongguo wenxue yu Yuenan Lichao wenxue zhi yanjiu* (A Study of Chinese Literature and Li Vietnamese Literature) (Taipei: Jingyang chubanshe, 1979), p. 271, 291-292.
- ²⁴ Le Van Ngu, *Dai hoc tich nghia* (An Interpretation of the Meanings of the *Daxue*), pp. 1-2. I read the photocopy of the original handwritten manuscript kept at the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies.
- ²⁵ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 17, 33, 53. I read the photocopy of the original handwritten manuscript kept at the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies. See also *Dai hoc tich nghia*, pp. 1-3.
- ²⁶ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 53.
- ²⁷ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 6.
- ²⁸ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 10, 52.
- ²⁹ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 6.
- ³⁰ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 5, 10.
- ³¹ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 41.
- ³² For instance, Le's idea was very similar to that of Itō Jinsai (1627-1705) and Itō Tōgai (1670-1736). See Wai-ming Ng, *The I Ching in Tokugawa Thought and Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), pp. 39-40.

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- ³³ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 37.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 40.
- ³⁶ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, pp. 39-40.
- ³⁷ Le Van Ngu, *Dai hoc tich ngnia*, p. 46.
- ³⁸ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 37.
- ³⁹ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 6.
- ⁴⁰ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 44. He preferred a simplified way of divination suggested by Tang scholars.
- ⁴¹ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 35.
- ⁴² Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 45.
- ⁴³ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, pp. 7-10.
- ⁴⁴ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 15.
- ⁴⁵ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 17.
- ⁴⁶ See Wai-ming Ng, *The I Ching in Tokugawa Thought and Culture*, pp. 136-137; Ng, "The I Ching in Late-Chosŏn Thought," *Korean Studies*, vol. 24 (2000): 62.
- ⁴⁷ Le Van Ngu, *Phu tra tien thuyet* (Brief Records of My Sailing Abroad, 1900), p. 23. I read the photocopy of the original handwritten manuscript kept in the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies.
- ⁴⁸ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, pp. 43-44.
- ⁴⁹ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 27, 31.
- ⁵⁰ The two famous late Nguyen reformist thinkers, Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926) and Phan Poi Chau, also attempted to combine the Confucian notion of *minben* with Western democracy. See *Dongfang zhuming zhhexuejia ping zhuan: Yuenam juan, Youtai juan*, p. 64.
- ⁵¹ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, Vol. 2., p. 17. Likewise, Kumazawa Banzan (1619-1691) used this hexagram to explicate the idea of people-oriented politics. See Wai-ming Ng, *The I Ching in Tokugawa Thought and Culture*, p. 61.
- ⁵² Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, pp. 21-22.
- ⁵³ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, pp. 21-22, 34, 46-47.
- ⁵⁴ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 34.

⁵⁵ Le Van Ngu, *Chu dich cuu nguyen*, p. 44.

⁵⁶ For an examination of this common attitude among late Nguyen scholars, see Neil Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

⁵⁸ See Wai-ming Ng, *The I Ching in Tokugawa Thought and Culture*, pp. 47-49; Ng, "The I Ching in Late-Chosŏn Thought," *Korean Studies*, vol. 24, pp. 24-25; Ng, "I Ching Scholarship in Ch'ing China: A Historical and Comparative Study," *Chinese Culture*, 37: 1 (March 1996): 64-65.

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GLOSSARY

- bo* 剝
 Buu Gian 寶鑒
chinh hoc 正學
 Chǒng Tasan 丁茶山
Chu dich cuu nguyen 周易究原
Chu dich quoc an ca 周易國音歌
Chu dich van giai toat yeu 周易問解攝要
cuong si 狂士
 Dang Thai Bang 鄧泰滂
Daxiang 大象
Dich hoc chu giai 易學注解
Dich kinh 易經
Dich kinh phu thuyet 易經膚說
Dich ti giai thuyet 易系解說
doc dich 讀易
dong du 東游
fengshui 風水

Guangxuehui 廣學會
 Hetu 河圖
 kaozheng 考證
 Jiuchou 九疇
 Le dynasty 黎朝
 Le Quy Don 黎貴惇
 Le Van Ngu 黎文敵
 Luoshu 洛書
 Ly dynasty 李朝
 minben 民本
 Nhu Ba Si 汝伯仕
 Nguyen Binh Khiem 阮秉謙
 Nguyen dynasty 阮朝
 Nguyen Kyuyen 阮勸
 nom 喃
 Pham Quy Thich 範貴適
 Phan Boi Chau 潘佩珠
 Phan Chu Trinh 潘周楨
 Phu tra tien thuyet 附槎小說
 Sawano Chūan 沢野忠庵
 Shiyi 十翼
 Shuogua 說卦
 taiji 太極
 Tan hoc 新學
 Tran dynasty 陳朝
 Tuanzhuan 象傳
 Wenyen 文言
 wuyun liuqi 五運六氣
 Xici 繫辭
 Xugua 序卦
 Yizhuan 易傳

Zhouyi benyi 周易本義

Zhouyizhu 周易注