PART THREE: EARLY MODERN EAST ASIA
CHAPTER NINE

TOKUGAWA APPROACHES TO THE RITUALS OF ZHOU: THE LATE MITO SCHOOL AND “FEUDALISM”

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From early times government officials and scholars in Japan looked to the Rituals of Zhou (Zhouli 周禮) as a source of information about Zhou political institutions. The early-eighth-century governmental codes, modeled after those of the Tang dynasty (618–907), designated it as one of the seven Classics to be studied at the court university (daigakuryō 大學寮) and as one of the possible subjects for the examination in classical learning (myōgyōka 明經科).1 Analysis of references to Chinese works in writings from the eighth and ninth centuries—the Nara period (710–794) and the first century of the Heian period (794–1185)—has shown it to be one of the most widely cited of the Classics in this era when the Chinese-inspired codes continued largely to define the governmental framework.2

By and large, however, people both then and later seem to have regarded the Rituals of Zhou primarily as a compendium of institutional information; unlike in China, it did not invite repeated debates over its authenticity, interpretation, and relevance. As Uno Seiichi notes in his definitive study of the Chinese debates, this was true even in the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), the high point of Confucian commitment and studies in Japan.3 Compared with the intervening late Heian and medieval periods, when the Rituals of Zhou seems to have received

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1 Ritsuryō 律令 (Nihon shisō taikei 3.263–65, 300–301); Wajima 1965, 1–4.
2 Kojima Noriyuki indicates that an early Heian compilation of then-extant commentaries on the codes includes upward of seventy references to the Rituals of Zhou, in contrast to fifty or fewer for each of the other Classics. See Kojima 1968, 254–333. I am indebted to David Lurie for this reference. Given the institutional orientation of both the codes and the Rituals of Zhou, the relative weight of the latter in this context is perhaps only to be expected. In other Nara and early Heian works, such as imperial edicts or histories, references to the Rituals of Zhou are proportionally fewer. See Uchino 1991, 125–42.
3 Uno 1949, 17.