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Benjamin Wai-ming Ng “The *Yijing* and Meiji Ideology: Nemoto Michiaki’s Political Interpretation of the *Yijing*” *Sino-Japanese Studies* 26 (2019-2020), article 2.

**Abstract:** Following the rise of the *tennōsei* (emperor-centered system) ideology in late Meiji Japan, many Japanese Confucian scholars cited Chinese classics to support the state ideology. The *Yijing* (Classic of Changes), like many other forms of learning, was also absorbed into the *tennōsei* discourse. Nemoto Michiaki (1822-1906) was a renowned *Yijing* scholar who promoted the *tennōsei* ideology in his *Shūeki shōgi bensei* (Correct Meanings in the Images of the *Zhouyi*, 1901). He regarded the *Yijing* as a book to advocate unbroken imperial succession based on absolute loyalty, believing that the sages wrote the *Yijing* to warn the people against revolution. His interpretation of the *Yijing* had a strong impact in prewar Japan. This article is the first academic study of Nemoto Michiaki’s *Yijing* scholarship, and focuses on how he loosely interpreted the text and images to uphold Meiji state ideology, which would deepen our understanding of the flexibility of the *Yijing* that allowed it to survive and thrive in political environments of Meiji Japan.

# The *Yijing* and Meiji Ideology: Nemoto Michiaki's Political Interpretation of the *Yijing*

Benjamin Wai-ming Ng

## Introduction

in order to revive Confucianism and regain their influence in national politics and the intellectual world.<sup>1</sup> *Yijing* (Classic of Changes) studies, like other schools of thought and religion, was used as an intellectual tool to support the state ideology.<sup>2</sup> It was no coincidence that both Nemoto Michiaki 根本通明 (also Tsūmei, 1822-1906) and Takashima Kaemon 高島嘉右衛門 (1832-1914), two leading Meiji *Yijing* scholars, supported the Meiji government through their reading of the text or oracles. Takashima was a semi-official diviner who provided military advice to Meiji government leaders based on his consultation of the *Yijing*.<sup>3</sup> Nemoto was a renowned *Yijing* scholar who promoted the *tennōsei* ideology in his *Shūeki shōgi bensei* 周易象義弁正 (Correct Meanings in the Images of the *Zhouyi*, 1901), one of the most important *Yijing* commentaries written by modern Japanese scholars. He lectured on the *Yijing* at the Tokyo Imperial University and was invited to lecture on the hexagram *tai* 泰卦 for the Meiji emperor (1852-1912). This article is the first academic study of Nemoto Michiaki's *Yijing* scholarship, and focuses on how he loosely interpreted the text and images to uphold Meiji official ideology. By deconstructing Nemoto's writings, it will highlight the flexibility of the *Yijing* that allowed it to survive and thrive in political environments of Meiji Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> For the role of Confucianism in the making of the *tennōsei* ideology, see Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) and Warren Smith, *Confucianism in Modern Japan: A Study of Conservatism in Japanese Intellectual History* (Tokyo: Hakuseidō, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Shinto, Nichiren Buddhism, Christianity and "new religions" were channeled to support the Meiji state ideology. See Michiaki Okuyama, "Religious Nationalism in the Modernization Process: State Shinto and Nichirenism in Meiji Japan," *Comparative Civilizations Reviews*, 48:48 (Spring 2003): 21-37; Ben-Ami Shillony, "Emperors and Christianity," in Ben-Ami Shillony, ed., *The Emperors of Modern Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 163-183; Fumiko Miyazaki, "The Formation of Emperor Worship in the New Religions: The Case of Fujidō," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (1990): 281-314.

<sup>3</sup> See Wai-ming Ng, "Divination and Meiji Politics: A Reading of Takashima Kaemon's *Takashima Ekidan*," in Chun-chieh Huang and John Tucker, eds., *Dao Companion to Japanese Confucian Philosophy* (New York: Springer, 2014), pp. 315-330.

## The Making of Nemoto's *Yijing* Scholarship

Nemoto Michiaki was born and raised in the Akita domain, a place where Confucianism and *kokugaku* (nativism) prevailed in the late Tokugawa period. At the age of eleven, he studied the *Yijing* under two Confucian scholars Kurosawa Shijo 黒沢四如 (1783-1852) and Kitamura Tan'an 北村澹庵 at the Akita domain school Meitokukan 明德館.<sup>4</sup> At eighteen, he read Hu Guang's 胡廣 (1370-1418) *Zhouyi daquan* 周易大全 (The Complete Collection of the *Zhouyi*) and was disappointed that almost all Chinese commentators saw the hexagram *qian* 乾卦 as an endorsement of revolution. In his twenties, Nemoto read a Shinto interpretation of the *Yijing* by Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776-1843) and was influenced by his nationalistic views.<sup>5</sup> For instance, after reading Hirata's *Sango hongokukō* 三五本国考 (An Investigation of the Origins of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, 1835), he was convinced that Fu Xi 伏羲, the creator of the eight trigrams, was indeed the manifestation of the Shinto deity Ōkuninushi no Mikoto 大国主命.<sup>6</sup> At thirty-one, Nemoto was appointed assistant lecturer at Meitokukan and absorbed himself in the study of the *Yijing*. His colleague Hiramoto Kinsai 平元謹齋 (1810-1876), the author of the *Shūeki kō* 周易考 (An Investigation of the *Zhouyi*), also influenced his understanding of the *Yijing*.

The year 1859 was a turning point in Nemoto's academic life. At the age of thirty-eight, he began to establish his own view of the *Yijing*. He believed that he was the first person after Confucius to understand the *Yijing* as a buttress of an unbroken imperial genealogy. Nemoto Tsūtoku 根本通徳 (dates of birth and death unknown), the second son of Nemoto Michiaki, recorded the words of his father as follows:

Chinese Confucian scholars regarded the *Yijing* as a book of revolution....This was caused by their careless reading. From the Ten Wings [collection of early commentaries of the *Yijing* in ten chapters], I can conclude that the way of the *Yijing* is the way of unbroken imperial succession. I have rebuked Cheng-Zhu scholars for making this mistake and suggested a new idea: unbroken imperial succession is the fundamental principle [of the way of the *Yijing*]. This is the most important part of my teaching.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Akita domain was one of the centers of *Yijing* studies in the late Tokugawa period. Kurosawa was the author of the *Ekikō* 易考 (An Investigation of the *Yijing*). Kitamura specialized in divination and often divined for the domain.

<sup>5</sup> For Hirata Atsutane's views of the *Yijing*, see Wai-ming Ng, "The Shintoization of the *Yijing* in Hirata Atsutane's *Kokugaku*," *Sino-Japanese Studies*, vol. 13 (2012): 33-47.

<sup>6</sup> Kuki Moritaka 九鬼盛隆, *Ekigaku shūchi* 易学须知 (The Essential Things in Studying the *Yijing*) (Tokyo: Shōgikai, 1915), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Nemoto Tsūtoku, ed., *Ugoku Nemoto sensei nenpu juan shang* 羽嶽根本先生年譜·卷上

Nemoto Michiaki studied the *Yijing* day and night and always carried it with him wherever he went. Before joining the anti-bakufu forces in a battle, he passed a copy of the late Ming scholar He Kai's 何楷 (1594-1645) *Gu Zhouyi dinggu* 古周易訂詁 (A Textual Study of Ancient *Zhouyi*, 1633) to his wife, and commanded her to keep it safe in case he did not return alive. He said, "In the *Yijing*, I have found my mental strength. Today, I will die for my nation. If I die, you will take care of this book."<sup>8</sup>

After the Meiji Restoration, Nemoto devoted himself to politics and education. In 1873, he joined the Ministry of Imperial Household as a special advisor. In 1878, at the age of fifty-five, he had a vigorous exchange of ideas about the *Yijing* and *Shijing* (Classic of Poetry) with two Qing diplomat-scholars He Ruzhang 何如璋 (1838-1891) and Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848-1905) in Tokyo. He argued that the Japanese way of reading classical Chinese by *kundoku* 訓読, meaning pronunciation based on the native Japanese word, was superior to *ondoku* 音読 or reading classical Chinese based on the original Chinese pronunciation, explaining that *ondoku* was no longer reliable because the pronunciation of Chinese words had shifted over time due to dynastic changes.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1880s, Nemoto built his reputation as a *Yijing* expert and became very active in promoting Confucianism as a religion.<sup>10</sup> In 1880, he lectured on the *Yijing* at the Shibun gakkai 斯文学会 (Confucian Society), a prominent Confucian organization founded in Tokyo in the same year. In 1886, on New Year's Day, he was invited to lecture on the hexagram *tai* for the Meiji emperor.<sup>11</sup> He stressed that the *Yijing* was

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(Annals of Master Nemoto Ugoku, Part 1) (Tokyo: Nemoto Tsūtoku, 1901), pp. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 26. The *Gu Zhouyi dinggu* was one of the finest Ming commentaries on the *Yijing*. It aims to restore the ancient *Yijing* by separating the main text from the Ten Wings and citing many pre-Song commentaries.

<sup>9</sup> Ōta Saijirō 太田才次郎, *Kyūbun shōroku 2* 旧聞小録下 (Small Records of Old Matters, Part 2) (Tokyo: Ōta Saijirō, 1939), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Although Neo-Confucianism was not decreed to be the official ideology of Edo *bakufu*, it became "an independent popular religious tradition" and provided the kind of religiosity that the Japanese of the Tokugawa period had been looking for. See Kiri Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chapter 2 "Confucianism as religion (1580s-1720s)," pp. 41-65. In the Meiji period, some Japanese scholars, such as Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1856-1944), Ariga Nagao 有賀長雄 (1860-1921) and Hattori Unokichi 服部宇之吉 (1867-1939), wanted to turn Confucianism into a religion in order to serve modern Japan. Nemoto was one such advocate. See Takahiro Nakajima, "The Restoration of Confucianism in China and Japan: A New Source of Morality and Religion," in Wing-keung Lam & Ching-yuen Cheung, eds., *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 4: Facing the 21st Century* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2009), pp. 37-50.

<sup>11</sup> Asking a prominent Confucian scholar to lecture on the *Yijing* for the Meiji emperor on New Year's Day became a kind of court tradition. After Nemoto, Motoda Nagasane 元田永孚 (1818-1891), Kawada Takeshi 川田剛 (1829-1896), Shigeno Yasutsugu 重野安繹 (1827-1910),

written primarily for the ruler to bring peace to the nation. Nemoto also lectured on the *Yijing* for other members of the imperial family, including Prince Kitashirakawa Yoshihisa 北白川宮能久親王 (1847-1895) and Prince Kan'in Kotohito 閑院宮載仁親王 (1865-1945).

From 1895 to his death in 1906, Nemoto lectured on the *Yijing* at the Tokyo Imperial University. In 1897, he published a book on divination methods, entitled *Shūeki fukko zehō* 周易復古筮法 (Restoring the Ancient Divination Method of the *Zhouyi*). He suggested revisions in divination but few were his own original ideas; for example, using forty-five yarrow stalks (instead of forty-nine) had been suggested by Chinese scholars much earlier.<sup>12</sup> In 1901, he published the *Shūeki shōgi bensei*, the most important work of his life, and presented it to members of the imperial family. Prince Kan'in Kotohito praised the book, saying that many of its ideas “have never been conceived by scholars in the past.” Sadake Yoshinari 佐竹義生 (1867-1915), Nemoto's former domain lord, remarked, “The significance of the *Yijing* is to promote unbroken imperial succession. This is what Confucians in the past never understood.”<sup>13</sup> In the book, Nemoto criticized Chinese scholars of antique and modern times for mistaking the *Yijing* as a book of revolution. He considered himself the sole successor of the Confucian *Yijing* scholarship and the first to understand the ultimate teaching of the *Yijing* after Confucius. In the preface, he wrote:

It has been two thousand and four hundred years after the death of Confucius. His teachings remain in the dark in the hands of unlearned Confucians. From lost texts, I am pleased to have rediscovered teachings that disappeared for two thousand and four hundred years. If Confucius were alive, he would not change my words. For details, please refer to my *Shūeki shōgi bensei*.<sup>14</sup>

Nemoto was so confident in his idea about unbroken imperial succession as the ultimate principle of the *Yijing* that he stamped the phrase “If Confucius were alive, he

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Mishima Chūshū 三島中洲 (1831-1919) and Hoshino Hisashi 星野恒 (1839-1917) also provided this service. They lectured on different hexagrams, and the hexagram *tai* was chosen three times for its auspicious nature. See Liu Yuebing 劉岳兵, *Riben jindai ruxue yanjiu* 日本近代儒学研究 (A Study of Confucianism in Modern Japan) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2003), pp. 307-312.

<sup>12</sup> Although Nemoto had his own views on *Yijing* divination, he did not specialize in it. He often asked Takashima Kaemon, the most famous *Yijing* diviner of his times, to divine for him.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from Nemoto Tsūshi 根本通志, “Hito sono shisō to shōgai” 人・その思想と生涯 (The Man: His Thought and Life), *Akita* あきた, no. 43 (December 1965), p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Nemoto Michiaki, “Dokueki shiki” 読易私記 (Personal Notes on My Reading of the *Yijing*), *Shūeki shōgi bensei* (Tokyo: Nemoto Michiaki, 1901), vol.1, p. 29.

would not change my words” on the preface page.

In 1902, Nemoto had a heated debate with Wu Rulun 吳汝綸 (1840-1903), a famous Qing scholar who was sent to study the Meiji education system. Nemoto told Wu the main idea of his new book. Wu was not convinced that the *Yijing* was meant to advocate unbroken imperial succession. Nemoto was very upset and wrote an article in a Japanese newspaper criticizing Wu. Wu recalled this unpleasant encounter as follows:

He [Nemoto] was very defensive about the theory of unbroken imperial succession. He replied to me that China also had unbroken imperial succession before the Tang-Wu Revolution. I told him that according to the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), Huangdi replaced Shennong by force and thus his idea was wrong. Nemoto then cited the *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourse of the States), arguing that Huangdi and Shennong were indeed brothers. I replied that the imperial lineage in the *Shiji* was based on Confucius. Nemoto was speechless. He then asked me why I did not believe in the Ten Wings. I replied that the ancient *Yijing* unearthed in Jizhong 汲冢 only had the *Yinyangji* 陰陽記 (Records of Yin and Yang), and the Ten Wings were not inside. Hence, the Ten Wings were written by later generations. Nemoto did not know what to say. He then asserted that the *Yinyangji* was the Ten Wings. Since he was being speculative, I stopped talking to him. Now, Nemoto argued in the newspaper that *Jizhong jinian* 汲冢紀年 (Annals of Jizhong) was unreliable and criticized me for using it.<sup>15</sup>

In 1906, the year of his death at the age of eighty-five, Nemoto published the *Keijijōden* 繫辭上傳 (Commentary on the Appended Phrases, Part 1) to promote absolute and unconditional loyalty to the emperor as the ultimate virtue. In 1910, Nemoto's disciple Kuki Moritaka 九鬼盛隆 (1869-1941) published Nemoto's lecture notes on the *Yijing* as the *Shūeki kōgi* 周易講義 (Lecture Notes on the *Zhouyi*). Nemoto's lectures focused on the images of the hexagrams and cited mainly pre-Song commentaries.

Nemoto was a controversial intellectual figure in Meiji Japan. His arrogant attitude alienated many Meiji and late Qing scholars. In *Yijing* studies, he was undoubtedly a key figure. He wrote one of the most important commentaries in the Meiji period and trained *Yijing* scholars between the Taishō (1912-1826) and early

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<sup>15</sup> Ru-lun Wu, *Wu Ru-lun chidu* 吳汝綸尺牘 (Letters of Wu Rulun) (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1990), vol. 4, p. 285.

Shōwa (1926-1945) periods. Takashima Kaemon regarded Nemoto as the best *Yijing* commentator and himself as the best diviner of his times. He remarked:

Nemoto Michiaki was a prominent Confucian from Akita Prefecture who excelled in Chinese classics, the *Yijing* in particular. He was knowledgeable and famous in our times. I was close to him. When I decided to write the *Ekiden* 易斷 (Judgments of the *Yijing*), I went to consult him, saying, “You are familiar with the ancient *Yijing* and understand the ultimate teachings of the ancient sages. I hope you will write about the meanings of the *Yijing*. I myself will share with the world the divination I discovered.”<sup>16</sup>

Nemoto was also a collector of *Yijing* commentaries and had thirty-nine books (in two hundred and eight volumes) about the *Yijing*. He rated himself above all *Yijing* commentators before him and hence regarded himself as the sole successor of Confucius.<sup>17</sup> He was confident in his understanding of the political implications of the *Yijing*.

### **Nemoto’s Reading of the *Yijing* and Meiji Ideology**

The intellectual roots of the *tennōsei* ideology can be found in Confucianism, *mitogaku* (Mito learning), Shinto, *kokugaku* (nativism), and *bushidō* (Way of the Samurai) in the Tokugawa period. As a state ideology, it was established after the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution (1889) and the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890). The emperor became the center of Japanese politics, ethics and religion and the imperial line was considered to be unbroken. For example, the Meiji Constitution calls the imperial line “the throne in lineal succession unbroken for ages eternal.”<sup>18</sup> The Imperial Rescript on Education reads, “Always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth.”<sup>19</sup> Intellectuals from different schools of thought and religion competed with

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<sup>16</sup> Takashima Kaemon, *Takashima ekidan* 高島易斷 (*Yijing* Divination by Takashima) (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1997), vol. 1, p. 179.

<sup>17</sup> His confidence in his understanding of the *Yijing* demonstrated that many Japanese Confucian scholars saw Japan replacing China as the center of Confucian studies.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Wm. Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, Arthur Tiedemann, eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition: 1600-2000* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 745.

<sup>19</sup> The English translation is quoted in Edward R. Beauchamp and James M. Vardaman, eds., *Japanese Education Since 1945: A Documentary Study* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 37.

each other to promote the *tennōsei* ideology so that they could maintain political and intellectual influences. Nemoto's interpretation of the *Yijing* can be understood within this particular historical context.

The *Shūeki shōgi bensei* consists of seventeen chapters. The first chapter includes a very important article, "Dokueki shiki," 読易私記 (Personal Notes on My Reading of the *Yijing*) which outlines the personal views of Nemoto on the nature of the *Yijing*.<sup>20</sup> Chapters one to four are in the first half of the text, whereas chapters five to eight are in the second half. Chapters nine to seventeen are in the Ten Wings. In the beginning of the "Dokueki shiki," Nemoto clearly states that the heavenly way expounded in the *Yijing* was the principle of unbroken imperial succession:

The sages wrote the *Yijing* to settle the relationships between sovereign and subject as well as father and son and to understand the virtue of the deities. The hexagram *qian* is the image of unbroken imperial succession. The hexagram *gu* 蠱卦 elaborates the meaning of passing the imperial throne from father to son. The *Tuan zhuan* 象傳 (Commentary on the Decision) of the hexagram *gu* reads, "The end is the beginning. This is the procedure of heaven." Therefore, when the father dies, his son will succeed. Unbroken imperial succession is the way of heaven.<sup>21</sup>

He believed that maintaining unbroken imperial succession was the ultimate goal of the *Yijing* set by ancient sages and he had a sense of mission to spread this message:

Fu Xi created the *Yijing*, King Wen arranged the order of the hexagrams, the Duke of Zhou added the line statements and Confucius wrote the Ten Wings to elucidate the principle of unbroken imperial succession.... We no longer understand the *Yijing* of the four sages. The principle of the unchanged positions of sovereign and subject or the principle of unbroken imperial succession has been lost. I am deeply concerned and thus must defend its principle. Mencius said, "Am I fond of debating? I have no alternative." This is why I wrote the *Shūeki shōgi bensei*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Dokueki shiki" was so important that it was also included in the *Shūeki kōgi* later.

<sup>21</sup> *Shūeki shōgi bensei*, vol.1, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.1, pp. 5-9.

In his early adulthood, Nemoto was puzzled by Gan Bao 干寶 (286-336) who used the hexagram *qian* to justify dynastic changes.<sup>23</sup> To him, it went against the principle of loyalty to the emperor. Having examined the Ten Wings seriously, he came to the conclusion that Gan Bao and most Chinese scholars were wrong about the hexagram *qian* and the nature of the *Yijing*. Nemoto maintained:

Gan Bao of the Jin dynasty regarded *qian* as the hexagram of revolution. I had serious doubts and considered all commentaries of both past and present unreliable. I turned to focus on the Ten Wings and studied it repeatedly to understand its meanings and images. During the sixth year of Ansei [1859], I came to realize that the way of the *Yijing* was to promote unbroken imperial succession. I began to know what Confucius had sought to pass on to later generations in the *Xi ci* 繫辭 (Commentary on the Appended Phrases), *Wen yan* 文言 (Commentary on the Words of the Text), *Shuo gua* 說卦 (Commentary on Trigrams), *Xu gua* 序卦 (Commentary on the Sequence of the Hexagrams), and *Za gua* 雜卦 (Commentary on the Paired Hexagrams) was down-to-earth and easy to understand.<sup>24</sup>

Nemoto criticized Gan Bao for using this hexagram to justify the revolution of King Wu of Zhou who overthrew the Shang. Gan's explanation was very influential and many prominent scholars, such as Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) and Hui Dong 惠棟 (1697-1758), were under his influence. Nemoto added:

Nine in the fifth place reads, "Flying dragon in the sky. Beneficial to see the great man." Bao said, "This line statement refers to King Wu who defeated King Zhou to become the emperor." Gan Bao did not understand the images and thus mistook the hexagram of unbroken imperial succession for the hexagram of revolution by rebels. This was the beginning of the misunderstanding of the *Yijing* and the relationship between sovereign and subject. Confucians of all ages followed him in such reading of the *Yijing*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gan's explanation of the hexagram *qian* can be found in a number of his writings, including the *Zhouyi zhu* 周易注 (Commentary on the *Zhouyi*), *Zhouyi yaoyi* 周易爻義 (Meanings of Line Statements of the *Zhouyi*) and *Jin Wudi geminlun* 晉武帝革命論 (On the Revolution of Emperor Wu of Jin).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., vol.1, pp. 10-11.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p. 28.

Nemoto believed that the Ten Wings were written by Confucius and no one could understand the *Yijing* without referring to the images expounded in the Ten Wings. However, scholars from the Han to the Qing only paid attention to the text of the Ten Wings and did not understand its images and thus the real meaning of the *Yijing* was lost. He criticized Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) for challenging Confucius' authorship of the Ten Wings, and Zhu Xi for treating *qian* as the hexagram of revolution. He gave Lai Zhide 來知德 (1525-1604) credit for focusing on the images and stressing the importance of the hexagram *qian* in the *Zhouyi jizhu* 周易集注 (Collected Commentary on the *Zhouyi*). However, he pointed out that Lai, like most Chinese scholars, failed to understand the significance of the hexagram *qian* as a hexagram of unchanging eternity rather than change. He explained:

This [hexagram *qian*] is the hexagram of the emperor. It can be called "the hexagram of constancy." Unbroken imperial succession is the principle that cannot be changed for thousands of years. The six lines concerning the dragon are the images of the emperor. The throne should always be passed on to a crown prince. Unbroken imperial succession is the way of heaven.<sup>26</sup>

Nemoto claimed to have found support for his argument in the Ten Wings, the *Shuo gua* in particular. He wrote:

When the Duke of Zhou wrote the line statements, he used the dragon as the image to demonstrate that the eldest son should succeed the throne. That the right of succession belongs to the eldest son is the way of heaven. The Duke of Zhou used this image to make us understand [this principle]. Confucius was concerned that the image might not be understood and thus wrote in the *Shuo gua* that "*zhen* 震 is the dragon that refers to the eldest son." He remained concerned that this was not enough and then added in the *Xu gua* that "in presiding over vessels [at the ancestral shrine], no one is equal to the eldest son."..... Scholars of Han, Wei, Tang and Song did not understand this principle. They regarded the dragon as the symbol of *yang qi* 陽氣 (masculine vital energy) in the sky and dragon is an unpredictable *yang* creature. Forgetting the *Shuo gua* in explaining [the hexagram *qian*], they mistook the hexagram of unbroken imperial succession for one of revolution led by rebels. This misinterpretation has been passed on to hundreds of generations and no one has ever realized this mistake. Unlearned scholars considered revolution as the way of Fu Xi, King Wen, Duke of Zhou and Confucius.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., vol.1, pp. 18-19.

Nemoto believed that the principle of unbroken imperial succession could also be found in other Confucian classics, such as the *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents), *Shijing*, *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Commentary of Zuo), *Guanzi* 管子 (Writings of Master Guan) and *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects of Confucius) because “the *Yijing* is the root of the *Shijing*, *Shangshu*, and other classics...The ideas of *daode* 道德 (ethics) and *xingming* 性命 (nature and destiny) in the *Shijing* and *Shangshu* all came from the *Yijing*, but they are not as comprehensive as the *Yijing*.”<sup>28</sup>

Nemoto believed that he was the only one who discovered the principle of unbroken imperial succession as the ideal of the Chinese ancient sages and that Japan was the only nation that had implemented the way of the sages. He maintained that “the so-called *junziguo* 君子國 (nation of gentlemen), if not Japan, which nation deserves this title? In ten thousand nations, only my nation enjoys unbroken imperial succession. Therefore, we are called the nation of gentlemen.”<sup>29</sup>

In the eyes of Nemoto, not only the hexagram *qian*, other hexagrams also elucidated the principles of unbroken imperial succession and absolute loyalty. For example, he explained the sixth line statement of the hexagram *kun* 坤卦 as follows:

The sixth line of the hexagram *kun* reads, “Dragons are battling in the wild. Their blood is dark and yellow.” It means that when the rebels offend the emperor, the whole world can kill them. The blood of the rebels is dark and yellow, showing that it is mixed with imperial blood. This is an image of the minister playing the role of the emperor.<sup>30</sup>

Nemoto saw *qian* and *kun* as the two most important hexagrams because they represent sovereign and subject respectively and underline the importance of absolute loyalty. He called them “the hexagrams of constancy.”

Heaven is respectable and earth is humble. The relationship between *qian* and *kun* is fixed. Hence, *qian* and *kun* are the hexagrams of constancy. Sovereign and subject, as well as father and son, are in the right positions. The image of constancy.<sup>31</sup>

Nemoto explained that revolution went against the principle of heaven and the way of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., vol.1, pp. 39-40.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p. 14. Likewise, Nemoto stressed that Japan was the only nation that had implemented the rites of the Zhou. See Nemoto Michiaki, *Mōshi kōgi* 孟子講義 (Lectures on *The Mencius*) (Tokyo: Bunbu kōshūkan, 1884), vol. 1, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Shūeki shōgi bensei*, vol.1, pp. 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p. 21.

the sages and thus the sages wrote the *Yijing* to warn the people against revolution. He held:

The *Wen yan chuan* reads, “The murder of a ruler by his minister, or of a father by his son, is not the result of the events of one morning or one evening. The causes of it have gradually accumulated, through the absence of early discrimination.” This is such a reasonable statement. It warns the ruler or the father to prevent such incidents. The sages were worried that these might happen to future generations. The *Xi ci chuan* reads, “Those who composed the *Yijing* had great care and sorrow.” Revolution is the biggest change in the world. Revolution was the biggest concern of the sages. The *Yijing* has the hexagram *ge* 革卦 to remind later generations to prevent [revolution].<sup>32</sup>

The hexagram *ge* was another hexagram frequently used by Chinese scholars to justify revolution and thus Nemoto also paid attention to this hexagram. According to Nemoto’s explanation, the hexagram *ge*, like *qian*, was meant to promote absolute loyalty and deny revolution. He compared hexagrams *qian* and *ge* as follows:

The hexagram *qian* has the dragon, the image of a crown prince. The hexagram *ge* has the tiger, the image of a minister. Although the tiger is strong, it cannot leave the ground. Although the minister is virtuous, he cannot leave his post. The dragon belongs to the sky, whereas the tiger belongs to the ground. The difference is salient and the two should not be confused.<sup>33</sup>

He also commented on other hexagrams from the same political perspective. For instance, on the hexagrams *gu* 蠱 and *xun* 巽, he made the following remark:

*Gu* refers to the emperor who rectifies the wrong policies of the former emperor. The son corrects the mistakes of his father. This is the filial piety of the emperor. *Xun* refers to the crown prince who rectifies the mistakes that the emperor made in his later years. He corrects the mistakes of his father. This is the filial piety of the crown prince. Fu Xi created these two hexagrams to make sure that the principle of unbroken imperial succession would last forever. Hence, the way of *qian-kun* is fully expressed in the hexagrams *gu* and *xun*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., vol.1, pp. 40-41.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., vol.1, p. 45.

Besides revolution, Nemoto also attacked the claim that “the world belongs to all” (*tenka ikō* 天下為公), another key concept commonly accepted by Chinese scholars. The term is quoted from the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites) and it was particularly embraced by scholars of the Wang Yangming school. The practice of *shanrang* 禪讓 or yielding the throne to the most virtuous and wisest minister was based on the ideal that “the world belongs to all.” Like *kokugaku* scholars of the Tokugawa period, Nemoto attacked *shanrang* as an excuse for the rebels to overthrow the emperor. To him, the world only belonged to the emperor. Hence, he criticized Hui Dong 惠棟 (1679-1758) for promoting “the world belongs to all” in the *Zhouyi shu* 周易述 (Discourse on the *Zhouyi*). Hu believed that in the ideal world, the ruler should be decided by virtue and ability rather than by blood.<sup>35</sup> Nemoto was disappointed that Hu did not pay attention to the images and thus misunderstood its political philosophy. He wrote:

The hexagram *gu* is about the eldest son succeeding to his father’s position. The *Tuan chuan* reads, “The end is the beginning. This is the procedure of Heaven.” It means that the end of the father is the beginning of the son. This is the way of Heaven. Therefore, it is called righteousness. If the minister replaces the emperor, it is called usurpation. Mr. Hui, in his *Yijing* scholarship, was accurate in textual criticism, but was lost in acquiring the meanings of the *Yijing* from images.<sup>36</sup>

Nemoto saw *chūkun aikoku* 忠君愛國 (loyalty to the emperor, love for the nation) as the way of the *Yijing* and thus he advocated absolute and unconditional loyalty to the emperor and the nation. His thinking was in line with the *tennōsei* and *bushidō* ideologies. For instance, he stressed that people should be prepared to die for the emperor by saying:

The *Yijing* is a book that demonstrates that heaven and earth are the images of emperor and minister. There is no earth without heaven. Then, is there any reason for which the minister can leave the emperor?...Once the emperor gives the order, no matter how difficult it is, the ministers should implement and be prepared to die for it. They ought to feel ashamed if they do not die. If they do not die, their parents will not see them as sons, their wives will not see them as husbands, and their friends will look down upon them.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hui Dong, *Zhouyi shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), pp. 376-377.

<sup>36</sup> *Shūeki shōgi bensei*, vol.1, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.1, p. 37.

When Nemoto lectured for the Meiji emperor on the hexagram *tai*, he interpreted it differently from most Chinese and Japanese Confucians. The hexagram *tai* consists of the upper trigram *kun* and the lower trigram *qian*. Most Confucians used it to suggest that the emperor should not make decisions alone, and should communicate with his ministers. According to Nemoto, this hexagram is the symbol of loyalty, showing that the emperor cares about his subjects and his subjects are loyal to the emperor. He commented:

In the hexagram *tai*, *qian* is at the bottom. The air in the sky descends to the ground. An image of the sincerity of the emperor that fills the nation. *Kun* at the top. Hot stream covers the ground. An image of the loyalty of the people to the emperor.<sup>38</sup>

*Bushidō*, a component of the *tennōsei* discourse, was firmly established in late Meiji Japan.<sup>39</sup> *Bushidō* ethics can also be seen from his commentary on the hexagram *tai*. He reminded the ministers and the common people that they should be prepared to die for the emperor in times of crisis.

Loyal retainers and faithful samurai will not spare their lives in the face of national crisis. They use their bodies to face danger and cross the waters that rush over their heads. They are not afraid of death. They will not leave their emperor. They do their best to save the nation. This is the way of the minister and the heart of loyal retainers and faithful samurai.<sup>40</sup>

Nemoto was by no means the first voice in Japan and East Asia to promote the authority of the sovereign, but perhaps few were as forceful and extreme as he was. He used the *Yijing* as a tool to advocate the *tennōsei* ideology. Although the *Yijing* was given a new life in the modern period, it was greatly distorted to promote a modern state ideology for Japan. Rather than a contribution to the scholarship of the *Yijing*, Nemoto's interpretation became a part of the *tennōsei* discourse, and was more used to support Japan as a nation-state.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., vol.2, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> See Oleg Benesch, *Bushido: The Creation of a Martial Ethic in Late Meiji Japan* (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, February 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., vol.2, pp. 79-80.

## Concluding Analysis

Kurozumi Makoto 黒住真, a scholar of Edo thought, has pointed out that Confucianism was used to enhance the *tennōsei* ideology in modern Japan. He wrote, “In modern Japan, Confucianism demonstrated the features of the legalist school. No matter what forms of Confucianism they were in, they all served as tools to spread the modern *tennōsei* ideology.”<sup>41</sup> The *Yijing* scholarship of Nemoto reflected this characterization of Confucianism in modern Japan. Nemoto interpreted the texts and images of the *Yijing* loosely to promote his own political views. In the *Shūeki shōgi bensei*, he criticized Wang Zhaosu 王昭素 (894-982) for pleasing the first Song emperor Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 (927-976) by justifying revolution in his lecture on the hexagram *qian*. Ironically, when he lectured for the Meiji emperor on the hexagram *tai*, he pleased the emperor by promoting absolute loyalty. It shows that the *Yijing* has been used from past to present and from China to East Asia by some scholars to support the government. The *Yijing* appears to be flexible enough to be interpreted differently in various political settings.

The *Shūeki shōgi bensei* is not only the most prominent work of Nemoto, but also one of the most influential *Yijing* commentaries ever written in modern Japan. In the strictest sense, it was not a pure academic work on the texts and images of the *Yijing*, but an ideological tool to uphold the conservative ideology of the Meiji government. Nemoto cherished the *kokutai* 国体 (national polity) of Japan by interpreting the *Yijing* as advocating unbroken imperial succession based on absolute loyalty. In a nationalistic Shinto vein, he was proud of Japan for being the only nation in the world in which imperial succession remained unbroken. He believed that the spirit of absolute loyalty could be found in samurai. Nemoto often wore samurai dress and collected samurai swords. His emphasis on unconditional loyalty to the emperor and readiness to die for the emperor was in line with the interpretations of *bushidō* ethics among late Meiji intellectuals.<sup>42</sup> No wonder some modern Japanese scholars call him the “samurai scholar.”<sup>43</sup> Nemoto’s reading of the *Yijing* was political, nationalistic, unorthodox and controversial. Since his interpretation served the *tennōsei* ideology, the *Shūeki shōgi bensei* was influential among right-wing intellectuals in the Taishō and early Shōwa periods.

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<sup>41</sup> Kurozumi Makoto, Yan lijing 嚴麗京 (trans), “Jindaihua jingyan yu dongya ruxue: yi Riben weili” 近代化經驗與東亞儒學—以日本為例 (Modernization Experiences and East Asian Confucianism: A Case Study of Japan), *Twenty-First Century* 二十一世紀, vol. 86 (December 2004): 26.

<sup>42</sup> *Bushido: The Creation of a Martial Ethic in Late Meiji Japan*, pp. 195-271.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, both Niino Naoyoshi 新野直吉 and Sasaki Hitomi 佐々木人美 called Nemoto “bushi gakusha” 武士学者 (samurai scholar).

Having taught the *Yijing* for so many years, Nemoto had a number of students who succeeded him in his *Yijing* scholarship. In particular, Kōda Rentarō 公田連太郎 (1874-1963) and Kuki Moritaka were important. Kōda studied under Nemoto for more than ten years and became a famous scholar of Chinese studies. His *Ekikyō kōwa* 易經講話 (Lectures on the *Yijing*, 1959), one of the best commentaries on the *Yijing* in postwar Japan, borrowed many ideas from Nemoto. Kuki specialized in *Yijing* divination and wrote the *Ekigaku shūchi* 易学須知 (Essential Knowledge in Studying the *Yijing*, 1915), *Ekidan seion* 易断精蘊 (Essence of *Yijing* Divination, 1932), *Ekidan shingi* 易断真義 (The True Meaning of *Yijing* Divination) and *Komekabu ekisen* 米株易占 (*Yijing* Divination on Rice Stock, 1913). He became the most influential *Yijing* diviner after the death of Takashima Kaemon. Key intellectuals in Meiji Japan, including Shigeno Yasutsugu 重野安繹 (1827-1910), Nakamura Masanao 中村敬宇 (1832-1891) and Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), attended Nemoto's *Yijing* seminars.<sup>44</sup>

Kuki Moritaka elaborated the principle of unbroken imperial succession in his *Ekigaku shūchi* and *Ekidan shingi*. Like his teacher, Kuki also believed that Japan was the only nation in which the imperial lineage remained unbroken. He said, “Among thousands of nations in the world, only my Empire of Great Japan has the national polity that matches the principle of the *Yijing*.”<sup>45</sup> Kuki went a step further to suggest that the teaching of the *Yijing* should be made the national religion of Japan.

The *Shūeki shōgi bensei* became more popular during the Pacific War after the publication of an extended edition by Nemoto Michiaki's grandson Nemoto Tsūshi 根本通志 in 1937. The first edition published in 1901 consisted of only four chapters, but the 1937 edition contained seventeen chapters and more than a thousand pages. Tsūshi added many unpublished manuscripts in the new edition. In 1942, the right-wing historian Hiraizumi Kiyoshi 平泉澄 (1895-1984) cited Nemoto's “Dokueki shiki” in the *Asahi shimbun* to support Japan's participation in the Second World War:

Nemoto Michiaki once said, “Thanks to unbroken imperial succession, our army is invincible in the world.” The success of our imperial army is based on the dignity of our national polity. By understanding the meaning of our national polity, relying on the emperor wholeheartedly and focusing on serving the nation, we can win the Holy War. This is the beauty of accomplishment and is obviously extremely important.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Stalling, *Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in American Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p.70.

<sup>45</sup> Kuki Moritaka, *Ekigaku shūchi* (Tokyo: Shōgikai, 1915), p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Hiraizumi Kiyoshi, “Taishō o haishite: okotae moshiaeru michi” 大詔を拝して：御答え申し上げる道 (Worshipping the Imperial Edict: The Way to Answer), Ōsaka Asahi shinbunsha 大

Hiraizumi continued to cite Nemoto to advocate his emperor-centered historical view in the postwar era. After reading Nemoto's "Dokueki shiki," he made this remark:

Our nation is fortunate to have an emperor descended from an unbroken lineage and to have no revolution in the past. The difference between the emperor and his ministers is clear and the ethics of an emperor-minister relationship are the purest....After the emperor issued the Imperial Declaration of War, thousands of people were eager to die. They all wanted to sacrifice their lives to pay off debts to the emperor. This was the spirit of the Japanese. Hence, the imperial army was invincible and could conquer every obstacle. Our heavenly army had no rival. Why was the imperial army invincible? Mr. Nemoto has fully explained this principle.<sup>47</sup>

The *Shūeki shōgi bensei* was a controversial text. Nemoto interpreted the texts and images of the *Yijing* in his own unique way to support the *tennōsei* ideology. He was influential in prewar Japan as his work spoke to the right-wing government of the times. However, as a commentary of the *Yijing*, Nemoto's work was too politicized for mainstream scholars to rate it highly and was totally unacceptable to Chinese scholars who saw it as a distortion and manipulation of the Chinese text. Nemoto's scholarship on the *Yijing* demonstrates that the *Yijing*, like many other forms of learning, was absorbed into the *tennōsei* discourse.

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阪朝日新聞社, ed., *Sensen taishō kinkai* 宣戰大詔謹解 (A Careful Explanation of the Imperial Declaration of War) (Osaka: Ōsaka Asahi shinbunsha, 1942), p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> Hiraizumi Kiyoshi, *Nemoto Tsūmei sensei dokueki shiki shō* 根本通明先生讀易私記抄 (The "Dokueki shiki" by Mr. Nemoto Tsūmei). (Ise: Ise seiseijuku, 1984), p. 1.