The Legacy of Peter Yoshirō Saeki: Evidence of Christianity in Japan before the Arrival of Europeans

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Abstract

Peter Yoshirō Saeki was an eminent Japanese scholar who devoted much of his career to the study of Nestorian/Syriac Christianity in China. One overlooked aspect of his work is the development of the concept that Nestorians had both missionary and secular contacts with Japan throughout its premodern history. These controversial theories were taken up by his peers, transported into Western scholarship, and have trickled down to this day in historical, theological and conspiratorial works which are riddled with confusion, truth, and untruth. This paper provides a chronological and contextual history of the genesis and development of Saeki’s theories throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries within his own work and in the work of others. It is argued that such theories have been utilised in three broad schools of thought; historical, religious and pseudo-historical. Furthermore, it is suggested that to develop more rigorous theories on a Nestorian presence in Japan it is essential for contemporary scholars to abandon Saeki’s paradigm to address the topic with greater clarity and historicity, and to shift away from a reliance on an inherently erroneous set of theories.

Introduction

The first Christian-Japanese encounters and the first Christian mission to Japan are almost universally dated to the 16th Century. Beginning with interactions between the Portuguese and Japanese Wako (倭寇 also Kairagi - 海乱鬼 - Pirates) or traders in the Pacific and continental Asia during the early 16th Century,¹ it was not until the beginning of the 1540s that Europeans landed in Japan,² and 1549 when the first Christian mission was established.³ Despite this, some scholars fleetingly mention at the beginning of their histories on Japanese Christianity that theories indicating a pre-European arrival of Nestorian Christianity (景教 J. Keikyō, C. Jingjiao)⁴ exist.⁵ A lengthy

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² There are difficulties with precise dating. The traditionally accepted account of Mendes Pinto who claimed to have “discovered” Japan in 1542 or 1543 is problematic, however it does appear that he was one of the earliest Europeans to set foot on the islands, see: Boxer, The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650, 14-27.


⁴ There are issues with the terms Nestorian and Nestorianism, more appropriately referred to as the “Church of the East,” the “Apostolic Church of the East,” (an abbreviation of the “Holy Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East”) or the “East Syriac Church.” See: Wilhem Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, The Church of the East: A Concise History (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 3-5. Here the terms Jingjiao and Keikyō commonly translated as the “Luminous Religion” or “Religion of Light” will be used. This term is derived from the Nestorian Stele (Daqin Jingjiao lixing Zhongguo bei 大秦景教棱镜中国碑)
discussion feature in Nakamura Satoshi’s *Nihon kirisutokyō senkyōshi: Sabieru izen kara kyō made*, however in most other works on the history of Christianity in Japan these theories are quickly dismissed without critical discussion. Some of the theories continue to feature as accepted truth in works on the history of *Jingjiao*, whilst others are developed in popular works on the topic of Ancient Japan. This paper provides an overview of the theories that Christianity came to Japan before the arrival of Europeans, arguing that they lack a historical basis on the whole. Furthermore, it attempts to suggest that whilst these theories are best understood as imaginative thought experiments leading out of the work of the scholar Peter Yoshirō Saeki (佐伯好郎) and other early 20th century scholars, which through a lack of critical engagement have become established as fact in some fields, the concept that Christians arrived in Japan prior to the 16th Century is plausible.

Therefore, it is argued that to develop future theories of a pre-European arrival of Christianity there is a need to abandon reliance on the disproven theories of earlier scholars. In the paper, the primary focus is to provide a chronological history of the development of theories regarding a pre-16th Century Christian presence in Japan so that future scholars may interact with these theories which are often presented in a confused way more easily.

**Peter Yoshirō Saeki and the genesis of theories of the pre-European arrival of Christianity**


belongings of a family. However, he was unable to conclude that this cross had a Christian origin and therefore appears to have abandoned the idea which was likely grounded in a mixture of premature hope and the Jesuit tendency to view the Japanese as highly civilized, something perhaps contradicting their lack of Christian belief. It was not until the Meiji period (Meiji jidai, 1868-1912CE) some three hundred years later that the concept re-entered scholarship, although there was no direct connection between Meiji conceptions and Xavier’s thoughts. The end of the Edo period’s (Edo jidai, 1603-1868CE) defining Sakoku policy, which had restricted Japan’s interactions with other countries and prohibited Christianity, influenced the genesis of these theories in several ways. Firstly, as a direct result of the end of Sakoku and the Meiji Restoration (Meiji ishin, 1868CE), increasing interaction with Western scholars and scholarship, as well as the development of Western scholarship on Japan led to some changes within Japanese academia. Meiji Japan was marked with the political desire to extend influence internally, peripherally and externally, and to create a wealthy state and strong military through industrialization and political centralization. Traditionally viewed as a turning to the West, within this context scholars sought to discover a renewed vision of Japanese history around which to build the new Japanese societal and political systems. The process of rediscovering Japan’s past took the form of a criticism of her Imperial records and historical documents and the adoption of Western scholarly methods which resulted in the related use of foreign languages and the targeting of foreign audiences in the publication of scholarship. In this context, the first texts on Jīngjìào were imported, and Japanese scholarship on the topic emerged by the late 1890s. Simultaneously, Western scholars such as Norman McLeod in his 1879 monograph Japan and the Lost Tribes of Israel began to extend the commonly accepted histories of Japan’s interactions with the Abrahamic faiths developing the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory (Nichiyu Dōsoron, 日ユ同祖論). Finally, despite the newfound Meiji period religious freedom, the growth of anti-Christian sentiment in the 1890s led to the “Japanization” of Christianity through an emphasis on Japanese traditions and patriotism. Within this complex Meiji period context, Peter Yoshirō Saeki developed the first theories that Christians had come to Ancient Japan.

9 Henry Venn, The Missionary Life and Labours of Francis Xavier, Taken from His Own Correspondence: With a Sketch of the General Results of Roman Catholic Missions Among the Heathen (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1862), 185.
10 Ibid.
11 Traditionally Sakoku has been viewed as an irrationally xenophobic closed country policy, but it is not necessarily true to suggest that the country was completely closed. The Japanese maintained relations with the Dutch, Ryūkū, Ezo, China, Korea and for a time the British, it was only Catholic countries with which foreign relations were prohibited. See: Michael S. Laver, The Sakoku Edicts and the Politics of Tokugawa Hegemony (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2011), 159-192.
15 Ibid. 69-70, 76-82, 117-126.
17 Saeki notes that texts were first imported in 1817CE but were banned as part of the anti-Christian prohibitions, see: P. Y. Saeki, “Preface,” in Keikyō hibun kenkyû (景教碑文研究, by Saeki Yoshirō 佐伯好郎 (東京: 三省堂, 1911), 1.
18 Ibid. 2-3.
19 Norman McLeod, Japan and the Lost Tribes of Israel (Nagasaki: The Rising Sun, 1879).
In 1908, Saeki published a paper entitled *Hata wo satosu* 太秦を論す in the journal *Rekishi Chiri* 歴史地理, wherein he developed a version of the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory, which was not directly related McLeod’s earlier work. McLeod had conceived that Japan’s imperial line and the Japanese more generally were descended from a lost tribe of Israel noting similarities in certain cultural and religious practices, and in appearance. Saeki, on the other hand, sought to affirm that the members of *Hata clan* (*Hata uji* 秦氏) who began immigrating to Japan in the 3rd to 5th Centuries common era were not of Chinese or Korean descent as indicated by the historical records but rather were of Jewish ancestry. This was grounded mostly in philological argumentation, particularly relating to sites in the Uzumasa 太秦 area of Kyoto where the *Hata* had settled. First was the concept that the name of a shrine, Ōsake Jinja (大酒神社 or 大辟神社), set up in the *Hata* temple complex of Kōryūji 広隆寺 referred to King David. Saeki argued that Ōsake was originally written using the characters Ōsake 太闢 meaning “large opening,” the same characters used in Chinese for David. Second he argued that the names of small wells existent in the Uzumasa area known as *Isarai* (伊佐良井・いさら井) relate to the Chinese word *Yī cìlèyè* 一賜樂業 meaning Israel. Although some commentators have suggested that he did, Saeki did not refer to the *Hata* as *Jǐngjiào* adherents in the paper. Nevertheless, David G. Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa note that in a later revision, Saeki argued that the word Uzumasa derive from a corruption of Aramaic or Semitic words *Išu* and *masa* (lesu-mesheia) meaning Jesus and Messiah respectively. Although not explicitly stated in the original, it would appear that Saeki was partially motivated by his conception that the *Hata* were Christian as well as of Jewish ancestry. His concept became the basis not only for further developments of the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory but also for scholars seeking to identify ancient Christian sites in Japan.

Suffice it to say; his argument can be easily dismissed. The historical records clearly describe the *Hata* as having emigrated from Korea (百濟, K. *Baekje*, J. *Kudara*) an origin accepted by contemporary scholarship, and furthermore claimed to have been descended from Qin Emperors, Qin Shi Huang Di (秦始皇帝). There is no evidence to suggest that the Jews were present

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22 P. Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎, “Hata wo satosu” 太秦を論す [Discussion on the Hata], *Rekishi Chiri* 歴史地理 Vol. 11, No. 1 (1908), 168-185.
24 Ibid. 135-136.
26 Saeki 佐伯, “Hata wo satosu” 太秦を論す [Discussion on the Hata], 168-185.
27 Ibid. 183.
28 Ibid. 182-183.
29 Ibid. 184.
32 Ibid. And: Nihon Shoki 日本書記, Bunken-name 10, Ōjin Tennō, Page 632.
in China before the 8th and 11th Centuries which makes Saeki’s theory that the descendants of Jews arrived in Japan before this contentious. Similarly, DNA evidence disproves the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry. As for Saeki’s philological arguments, whilst the characters 大闢 (and not the characters 大關 present in the name of Ōsake Jinja) can be used to render the personal name David into modern Chinese, contemporaneously the characters Duō huì 多恵 were used. Similarly, there is no evidence in contemporaneous Japanese historical records that the shrine ever used the version of the characters provided by Saeki. Saeki’s linking of the word Isaraí to the Chinese Yicileié is also problematic, as the latter was not in use until the appearance of Jewish communities in China after the 8th Century. Finally, his suggestion that the place name Uzumasa means Jesus Messiah fails on two counts. Firstly, according to the Nihon Shoki 日本書記 the earliest appearance of the word Uzumasa took the form of a title given to the Hata leader Sake no Kimi 秦酒公 in the 15th year of Emperor Yuryaku’s 雄略天皇 reign (471CE). The text states that this title was chosen because Sake no Kimi filled the court with silks as payment of taxation. The text, therefore, suggests that there is a link between the term Uzumasa (originally written 禹豆麻佐) and Utsumori masa 禹豆母利麻佐, the appearance of all being piled up to fill. Secondly, there is no evidence to suggest that Christians were present in China in the 5th Century, and therefore, it would be highly unlikely for the name of a place associated with the Hata clan to have a Christian connection.

Hata wo sotatsu was included as an appendix to his 1911 work Keikyō hibun kenkyū 景教碑文研究, which was translated into English and published in 1916 under the title The Nestorian Monument in China. Hata wo sotatsu was not included in the English translation. In this text, Saeki developed in some asides from his main topic, the Nestorian Stele (C. Dàqín jīngjiào liúxíng Zhōngguó bēi 大秦景教流行中國碑), the idea that jīngjiào had come to Japan from China during the Táng period. The presence of jīngjiào in China, and the strong tendency in Japan through its

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39 See the Engishiki (延喜式) which renders the shrine’s name using the characters Ōsake 大酒 with a note stating that formerly the characters were written Ōsake 大禿 Engishiki 延喜式, Bunkên-name 9, Book 9, Page 5, Paragraph 1. The Engishiki is available in full from the University of California at Berkeley, Japanese Historical Text Initiative, accessed 11th February, 2015, http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/jhti/Eng%20shiki.html
42 Ibid.
43 Originally pronounced: Utsumasa.
44 Nihon Shoki 日本書記, Bunkên-name 14, Yūryaku Tennō, Page 876, Paragraph 1.
45 Whilst there is some textual evidence that Christians arrived in China prior to the 7th Century, these references appear later than the period, and the arrival of Christianity cannot be accurately dated prior to the Táng 唐 dynasty (618–907CE): Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Christians in Asia before 1500 (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), 265-267.
46 P. Y. Saeki 芥佐好郎, Keikyō hibun kenkyū 景教碑文研究 (東京: 待漏書院, 1911).
48 The presence of the religion is well recorded in contemporaneous Chinese and Christian documents, however, it appears to have remained the monopoly of immigrant populations; in early Chinese documents jīngjiào is referred to as Persian (Bōsī jīngjiào 波斯教) and their temples as Bōsī sī 波斯寺, later these terms were revised to reflect the Syrian origin of the religion becoming Dàqín jīngjiào 大秦景教 and Dàqín sī 大秦寺 respectively. Furthermore, high ranking priests were drawn from Persian rather than Chinese areas. See: Robert Louis Wilken, The First Thousand Years: A Global History of
relations with China to adopt all Chinese ideas, politics, and culture could offer as a model for the formation and maintenance of the Japanese nation, certainly made the spread of Christianity to Japan a possibility.

Saeki formulated two theories regarding this spread. Firstly, he noted that according to the Shoku Nihongi (続日本紀) in 736CE (Tenpyō 8 - 天平 8年) a Persian (波斯人, Hashibito/Perushajin) named Rimitsui (李密醫) or Rimtsuei (李密醫) depending on spelling came to Japan as part of an envoy. In Keikyō hibun kenkyū he argued that the use of the word Bōsī 波斯 with the addition of various suffixes to refer to Jīngjìào 聖教 in a Japanese tradition had the opportunity to view it. In the English version of the text, his argument differs considerably, perhaps indicating a change in Saeki’s thought or perhaps acting to add additional evidence. Here he argued that the name of Rimitsu had been transcribed incorrectly because this was a Chinese rather than a Persian name. Instead he suggested the characters should be reversed in order to create the Persian name Milis (密李 or Mili). He then sought to question whether or not this character could have been the Milis mentioned on the Nestorian Stele, a priest and the father of Yazdbōzēd/ Yazdbüzêd, the Chorepiscopos, a conclusion he later accepts without further evidence.

His second argument concerns the possibility that Japanese visitors to China saw the Nestorian Stele or interacted with Jīngjìào adherents. Saeki argues that the Stele stood for sixty-four years from 781CE to 845CE, and therefore that all visitors from Gyōga (行賀) in 784CE to Ennin (空海 - posthumously Jikaku Daishi 慈覺大師 – 793/794CE-864CE) who returned to Japan in 841CE had the opportunity to view it. Saeki argues these interactions led to Christianity having an influence on Buddhism in China and Buddhism as transported to Japan. For example he identifies a Kashmir monk said to have taught Kūkai (空海 - posthumously Kōbō Daishi -弘法大師 – 774-835CE) in a Japanese tradition, to the Indian Buddhist, Prajñā (般若 – Bō Rē) who alongside the Christian composer of the Nestorian Stele, Jīngjìng (景淨, also known as Adam) had translated a number of Buddhist texts.

Nevertheless, this second argument is not original to Saeki’s work, and he draws

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50 In Chinese pinyin, Rimitsu is pronounced Lî Mîyî.
51 In Chinese pinyin, Rimtsuei is pronounced Lî Mîyi.
53 Saeki 佐伯, Keikyō hibun kenkyū 景教碑文研究, 16.
54 Rendered as Li-mi-i by Saeki.
56 Contemporarily rendered as Milis or Miles.
58 Ibid. 142.
59 Ibid. 82-92.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid. 118-161. And: Saeki 佐伯, Keikyō hibun kenkyū 景教碑文研究, 93-117.
here particularly on the work of Junjirō Takakusu and E. A. Gordon, whose papers are included in the appendix of Keikyō hibun kenkyū.63

Again Saeki’s arguments are problematic. The theory that Rimitsu was a Christian cannot be maintained for a number of reasons. Firstly, whilst the religion and church are referred to as Persian, there are no examples in which the term Bōsīren describes the Christian religious identity of the person in question.64 Similarly, the religion itself was referred to as Persian (Bōsī jingjiào 波斯经教), not because the high number of Persian Christians, but because this was where the religion was perceived to have originated. Once this error was realised, from as early as 745CE Chinese documents began to refer to the religion as Syrian (Dàqín jingjiào 大秦景教), a title also used self-referentially by the Church.65 It would also be odd in a text where the members of the envoy are referred to by nationality and name alone to have a single character marked out by his religious identity.66 And, therefore, as all we can affirm is that Rimitsu was from Persia, an area where Christianity was present but not the exclusive religion,67 the question of his religious identity remains open. The concept that a transcription error took place and Saeki’s associated linking of the Milis of the Stele and Rimitsu cannot be proven due to a scarcity of evidence. There is a possibility they are the same person as both were present in the Táng capital of Cháng’ān 長安 during the same period,68 but this cannot be affirmed in any conclusive sense. For Max Deeg the concept that Jingjiào influenced Buddhism is a completely decontextualized reading of the religion in the Táng
period. Much of the evidence provided by Saeki and his contemporaries illustrates little more than coincidental similarity so that direct or indirect influence has proven impossible to affirm. Moreover, the joint translation project of Prajñā and Jingjing was criticized in the edict promulgated by Emperor Dézōng 唐德宗 in 786CE illustrating their illegitimacy, the proscription of official Christian-Buddhist interactions and the waning of Imperial support for Jingjiao. This reduces the possibility that Japanese Buddhist visitors interacted with the religion, and means that only Gyōga (行賀) in 784CE would have visited at a time when Jingjiao-Buddhist interaction was acceptable. Finally, it must be noted that no references to Jingjiao are found in the work of Japanese visitors to China.

Saeki’s early theories lack detail but nevertheless spurred the genesis of discussion on the possibility that Jingjiao had entered Japan. Throughout the development of each theory, his thought is marked by the Meiji period context; he works primarily with imperial documents which he seeks to readdress as false. In Hata wo satosu this is a complete rejection where he comes to rely on philology and archaeological remains, whereas in Keikyō hibun kenkyū the documents are not rejected but reread as containing transcription errors or hidden knowledge such as the concept that the term Bōsōrin connotes Christian religious identity. These are imaginative theories, with some limited historical possibility given the presence of Jingjiao in Táng China, grounded in Saeki’s attempt as a Christian to extend the influence of the religion to every point in Japanese history. In doing so, he seeks to illustrate that Christianity is something thoroughly Japanese, having arrived contemporaneously to Buddhism.

Acceptance amongst contemporaries
Saeki’s theories received acceptance amongst his peers and especially in the Anglican community, resulting in their repetition and development by other scholars. Simultaneously, the claims almost entirely disappeared from Saeki’s work throughout the 1920s. These scholars were, for the most part, Western missionaries present in Japan who were already working on the topic of Jingjiao-Buddhist interaction. Like Saeki, they sought to show the all-encompassing influence of Christianity on Asian history, from their grounding in European scholarship which tried to illustrate explicitly or implicitly that European, Christian “culture” and knowledge was superior to other forms of knowledge or was even the only form of knowledge.

In 1910 and 1911 Arthur Lloyd in his works Shinran and his work: Studies in Shinshu Theology and The Creed of Half Japan: Historical Sketches of Japanese Buddhism accepted Saeki’s conclusion that Rimitsui was a Christian. This acceptance was matched in the same year by Elizabeth A. Gordon in her, The Lotus Gospel; or Mahayana Buddhism and its Symbolic Teachings Compared Historically and Geographically with those of Catholic Christianity. Relying on the final character of Rimitsui’s name 医, which refers to medical practitioners and the concept that Nestorians were

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70 Deeg, “Ways to Go and Not to Go in the Contextualization of the Jingjiao Documents of the Tang Period,” 143.
71 Gillman and Klimkeit, Christians in Asia before 1500, 360.
72 Deeg, “Ways to Go and Not to Go in the Contextualization of the Jingjiao Documents of the Tang Period,” 143-145.
73 Ibid. 136.
famous for their roles in medicine, Lloyd argued that Rimitsu was a doctor active in Emperor Shōmu’s 聖武天皇 (701-756CE) medical reforms. Moreover, he suggested that Christianity influenced Emperor Shōmu’s consort, Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701-760CE), due to her work nursing lepers, which he viewed as an exclusively Christian work.

Unlike Lloyd, who argued that the involvement of both Buddhists and Christians in these medical reforms marked a point of Christian-Buddhist collaboration in Japan, Gordon, who expanded upon the development of the medical system at length, did not explicitly link these developments to a Christian-Buddhist collaborative project although this is implicitly accepted. Gordon also extended the theory of possible Christian influence in the period by likening the mandala created by the niece of Empress Kōmyō, Chūjō Hime 中将姫 to Christian renditions of heaven. However, as Rimitsu’s religious identity remains unproven, and as there are no archaeological finds to suggest that Christians were present under Emperor Shōmu’s rule, the concept forwarded by Lloyd and Gordon that there was a Buddhist-Christian collaboration or that Christianity influenced Empress Kōmyō cannot be maintained.

The idea that Rimitsu was a medical practitioner could strengthen the claim that he was a Christian due to the link between Jingjiào 和 medicine as noted by the two scholars. Nevertheless, medicine was not the monopoly of Jingjiào as present in Táng China; rather it was influenced and practiced by some groups including Buddhists, Manicheans and native Chinese. Similarly, this concept is problematic as in some versions of the text Rimitsu is called Rimitsu, with the final character of his name ei 翳 lacking medical connotation. Although there is a absence of agreement in reprints of the Shoku Nihongi, modern copies favor this latter character, and Saeki Ariyoshi argues that this character was used in the original text. Of the two oldest versions of the text that I have been able


to locate, both the 1648 and 1657 version use the character to denote medical practice, \textit{ei}. However, the 1648 version contains a note written in 1777 noting the usage of the other character.\textsuperscript{90}

Unlike Saeki, who desired to establish that Christians came to Japan, Lloyd and Gordon are more concerned with a general historic Christian-Buddhist influence and interaction. Whilst the acceptance of Saeki’s theory regarding \textit{Rimitsui} and his inclusion by the Lloyd and Gordon in a Christian-Buddhist collaborative medical project illustrates this concern; their primary focus is a Christian influence on Japanese Buddhism. Such concerns are indicated by Lloyd’s argument that Buddhist texts influenced by Christianity were transported to Japan and had great influence there;\textsuperscript{91} an argument he juxtaposes with his discussion of \textit{Rimitsui}. Or, in the case of Gordon, her overall focus on \textit{Kōkai} as highly influenced by \textit{Jingjiao},\textsuperscript{92} based on work she had begun to formulate in pieces included in the appendix of Saeki’s \textit{Keikyō hibun kenkyū} and earlier.\textsuperscript{93} The argument that Christianity influenced Buddhism, however, like Saeki’s approach relies on the decontextualization of \textit{Jingjiao} in China, and continues to remain unproven.

Unlike Lloyd, Gordon made greater attempts to develop the theory that \textit{Jingjiao} came to Japan. Her interaction with Saeki led to her acceptance of the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory, which she developed in her work during the early 1920s,\textsuperscript{94} and to some extent in \textit{The Lotus Gospel}.\textsuperscript{95} Whilst, she accepted the basic hypothesis of Saeki, that the \textit{Hata} were Jewish, based on the existence of the \textit{Isarai}\textsuperscript{96} and \textit{Ōsake Jinja},\textsuperscript{97} she provided further evidence for the Judeo-Christian origins of the group. She argued that the characters \textit{Uzumasa} 太秦 are the same as \textit{Dàqín} 大秦 as appears on the Nestorian Stele,\textsuperscript{98} a lexicographical error perhaps stemming from Saeki. Furthermore, she contends that the \textit{Hōkan Miroku} 宝冠弥勒, the representation of the Bodhisattva Maitreya (C. 弥勒菩薩, \textit{Mílè Púsa}, J. 弥勒菩薩, \textit{Miroku Bosatsu}) presented to the \textit{Hata} leader Hata no Kawakatsu 秦河勝 in 603CE and housed in the temple \textit{Kōryūji},\textsuperscript{99} is an image of a messianic figure as understood in Mahāyāna Buddhism,\textsuperscript{100} and linked explicitly to Christ.\textsuperscript{101} She also suggested that statues kept there with a single body and three heads represent the doctrine of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{102} To confirm the Israelite origin of the \textit{Hata} beyond the exploration of Saeki, she refers the reader to a story recorded in the \textit{Nihon Shoki} which reports the killing of a man named Ōu Be no Ō 大生部多, who had been inciting people to worship an insect, by Hata no Wakakatsu, thereby ending the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Shoku Nihongi} (京都: 出雲和泉撰, 1657), Book 6 (no page numbers given).
\item \textit{Shoku Nihongi} (Waseda Scanned Documents Collection 10, Image 39), accessed February 9th, 2015, http://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/r05/ri05_02450/ri05_02450_0021/ri05_02450_0021_p0039.jpg
\item Ibid.
\item Gordon, \textit{The Lotus Gospel; or Mahayana Buddhism and its Symbolic Teachings Compared Historically and Geographically with those of Catholic Christianity}, 193-211.
\item Gordon ゴルドン, \textit{Kōbō Daishi to Keikyō to no kankei 弘法大師と景教との関係}, Appendix, 51-67.
\item Ami-Shillony, \textit{The Jews and the Japanese: The Successful Outsiders}, 137-139.
\item Gordon, \textit{The Lotus Gospel; or Mahayana Buddhism and its Symbolic Teachings Compared Historically and Geographically with those of Catholic Christianity}, 50, 65, 128.
\item Ibid. 127.
\item Ibid. 128.
\item \textit{Nihon Shoki} 日本書紀, Bunken-name 22, Suiko Tennō, Page 1272, Paragraph 1.
\item Gordon, \textit{The Lotus Gospel; or Mahayana Buddhism and its Symbolic Teachings Compared Historically and Geographically with those of Catholic Christianity}, 128.
\item Ibid. 206.
\item Ibid. 281.
\end{itemize}
religious cult. Although outside of a juxtaposed biblical quote on idolatry she fails to convey how this story confirms the Hata’s origins. Gordon’s arguments regarding a Jǐngjiào presence in Japan are indebted to Saeki’s theories on the Hata clan, and although she attempts to provide further evidence, in reality, she does little beyond noting coincidental similarities such as the presence of messianic figures in both Buddhism and Christianity.

A. H. Sayce also attempted to develop Saeki’s theories providing new evidence for the presence of Christianity in Ancient Japan, namely two beams from the temple Hōryūji containing crosses and Syriac inscriptions. Saeki notes that these “beams” are blocks of incense. The language has now been identified as Sogdian and Middle Persian, by the Tokyo National Museum (東京国立博物館) where they are held. The cross-like brand is, however, obscure, and it is a step too far to suggest that the presence of Persian writing indicates a Christian origin. Rather, the blocks affirm the existence of Silk Road trade with Japan and maybe even the presence of foreigners, as corroborated by the Nihon Shoki and Shoku Nihongi.

Lloyd, Gordon, and Sayce fail to provide the evidence needed to strengthen Saeki’s claims. Nevertheless, they developed the theories by adding further details, suggesting for instance that Christians influenced society and Imperial Court during the rule of Emperor Shōmu. Alongside Saeki’s original formulation, their work would become the cornerstone of future theories supporting a Jǐngjiào presence in Japan. However, for these scholars, it was not the presence of Christians in Ancient Japan which was important, but the influence of the religion of Asian and Japanese Buddhism more generally.

**Saeki’s Return**

Saeki returned to the topic of Jǐngjiào in Japan with his publication of Keikyō no Kenkyū 景教の研究 in 1935, and the more restricted English translation The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China in 1939, where he forwarded a new theory that adherents of Jǐngjiào came to Japan from Yuán dynasty China (1271CE-1368CE). Here references to the Hata and Rimitsui are absent. Samuel Hugh Moffett suggests that Saeki wisely decided not to include these items in his publications of the 1930s. However, Kenny Joseph suggests that this was the result of censorship within Imperial Japan. It is certainly apparent from photographs in his biography that Saeki, and the curriculum he taught in small cultural classes during later life, that he still believed in his original theories during

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103 Nihon Shoki, Bunken-name 24, Kogyoku Tenno, Page 1411, Paragraph 1.
104 Gordon, The Lotus Gospel; or Mahayana Buddhism and its Symbolic Teachings Compared Historically and Geographically with those of Catholic Christianity, 132-133.
old age. Moreover, the inclusion of theories of a Christian encounter through Yuán-Japan relations, and his focus on the joint translation project of Prjahā and Jingjing and the transportation of these translations to Japan illustrates that he still desired to show Christian influence on ancient Japan. Saeki’s silence on the topic did not mean that his theories had vanished from scholarship; Gordon had continued to publish works on the subject in the early 1920s, and in his 1928 Nestorian Missionary Enterprise: The Story of a Church of Fire, John Stewart included a number of references to Japan, whilst the topic also received attention in journal publications. Regarding content little was added to the scholarship, however, already defined positions were strengthened, for instance, Empress Kōmyō and Chūjō Hime became viewed more explicitly as converts. Moreover, as the topic moved out of the hands of scholars with the ability to use Japanese and Chinese, the multiple ways of rendering names led to confusion in the scholarship of the late 1920s. Such a confusion caused Stewart and J. C. Pringle to divide Rimitsu into two separate characters, the one named Li-mi (the English rendering given by Saeki), and the other Rimitsu (the rendering provided by Gordon) who they claimed was an independently verified medical practitioner who may or may not have been the same person as Li-mi.

Saeki formulated two points of encounter between Christians in Yuán China and Japan. The first was the historical find of a helmet, explored at great length in Keikyō no Kenkyū, but to which he donates only a paragraph in The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China. Despite the discrepancy in length, the argument can be summarised in both texts as there is a cruciform shape on this helmet; therefore, it belonged to a Christian. However, the poor photographic evidence provided by Saeki, and the lack of mention of the cross by other scholars, problematises the existence of the cruciform shape. Similarly, the helmet’s style is not indicative of the Yuán period. Rather it appears to have dated from the 16th Century, with a design typical of nanban kabuto 南蛮兜 featuring silver inlay patterns, a 360-degree brim, a plumage holder on the front rather than the peak, and the general shape of a Cabasset influenced design. Online photographs from the Genkō Shiryōkan 元寇史料館 where the helmet is held concurs with this conclusion. In short, it is not possible to affirm that this artefact is evidence of a pre-16th Century Christian encounter in Japan. Second was the concept that a Uyghur by the name of Guǒ 果 (also 果) present in one of the Yuán

113 For example the reprint of The Lotus Gospel; or Mahayana Buddhism and its Symbolic Teachings Compared Historically and Geographically with those of Catholic Christianity in 1920, but also the following: E. A. Gordon, “Heirlooms of Early Christianity Visible in Japan,” The Tourist Vol. 8 (July 1920), 19-41; (September 1920), 113-120. And: E. A. Gordon, Symbols of “The Way” – Far East and West (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1922).
117 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
122 This can be seen on a picture which includes a short information board included here: “Genko Historical Museum, Fukuoka, Photographs,” Trip Advisor, accessed November 29th 2015, http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g298207-d7266548-r297482213-Genko_Historical_Museum-Fukuoka_Fukuoka_Prefecture_Kyushu_Okinawa.html/photos
envoys was a Christian, based on the idea that Christian Uyghur’s monopolized scribal positions during the Mongol period. Similar to his argument regarding Rimitsui, this is effectively an attempt to suggest that nationality indicates religious identity. However, Guǒ is referred to by his nationality in only one historical document, as a person from Xūnwèiguó薰畏國, an obscure term without obvious meaning which Saeki attempts to link to Uyghur lands. He is absent from other historical mentions of the envoy, apart from its description in the Xin Yuán Shǐ新元史 (1920CE) which provides a different name for Guǒ (Dǒng Wèi董畏) reusing characters from the country name Xūnwèiguó薰畏國, which thereby suggests that rather than a country the term Xūnwèiguó found in the Kamakura Nendaiki鎌倉年代記 is a corruption of the name of the character in question. A number of religions were practiced by Uyghurs, and although both Christians and Uyghurs, and Christian Uyghurs existed in secretarial and scribal roles in the Mongol administration, it would not be historically truthful to suggest that these roles were the monopoly of Christians only. In summation, like the character of Rimitsui it is possible that Guǒ was a Christian, however, this cannot be affirmed beyond speculation, and some issues regarding Guǒ’s personage make such a conclusion questionable.

A second edition in The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China was published in 1951. However, Saeki had fallen silent on the topic, still publishing works on Nestorianism but primarily acting as mayor Hatsukaichi-shi廿日市市 in Hiroshima Prefecture. He died in 1965, yet his work alongside the additions made by Lloyd and Gordon and the mistakes of Stewart and Pringle continued to find acceptance and development in post-war scholarship.

Divergence – History, Religion and Conspiracy

Post-War scholarship on the topic diverged into several approaches. The model developed here for understanding the development of the theories after Saeki, is not perfect, as there is cross-over between the approaches. The concept that the field is marked by these different schools of thought has neither been recognized in scholarship nor by the scholars involved in developing the theories. Nevertheless, this model provides insight into the motives of scholars and the way these theories have been understood and formulated in the post-War world.

This paper proposes the existence of three general approaches, as follows:

1. The historical approach. This approach is home to the largest range of scholars, and the other two approaches lead directly out of it. The acceptance, rejection or development of Saeki, Gordon, Lloyd, Stewart and Pringle’s claims is unimportant; rather this approach is defined by the scholars’ primary involvement in writing history. The histories they develop are not necessarily accurate but are formulated in the context of acceptable historiographical practice as is common at the time of writing. In this sense whilst

124 Ibid. 982. The term is likely related to the terms Wèi wú er (畏兀兒, 畏吾兒, 畏午兒 etc.) referring to Uyghur’s from the Kingdom of Qocho (C. Gāochāng Huíhuí高昌回鶻) shares a character in the term.
125 Ké Shàomǐn柯劭忞 (ed.) Xin Yuán Shǐ新元史 (台北 : 藝文印書館, 1992), Chapter 250.
127 Michael C. Brose, “Yunnan’s Muslim Heritage,” in China’s Encounters on the South and Southwest: Reforging the Fiery Frontier Over Two Millennia, James A. Anderson and John K. Whitmore (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 143.
Saeki’s work is a history, as history was understood in the Meiji and Showa periods, it does not have a historical basis. If a scholar were to repeat Saeki’s claims in the 21st Century context, their method would not be grounded in current historiographical practice, and therefore, they would be better understood as members of the third approach of pseudo-history. All scholars dealt with thus far are part of the historical approach.

2. The religious approach. The religious approach often has close links with the historical approach, however, the motive or goal of the work or scholar is oriented primarily to creating a theological rather than a historical narrative. Whilst the work of Saeki and his contemporaries certainly had a theological element and implication, they primarily sought to write history, hence their inclusion in the first category. Nevertheless, in the post-War period, some scholars developed the theories for religious rather than academic purposes.

3. The pseudo-Historical or conspiracy approach. This approach is defined as the attempt to write history whilst lacking concordance with accepted historical method. Indicative of this approach is a reliance on pseudo-historical or outdated evidence and conspiracy for explanation. The growth of popular works on the topics in the 1990s and 2000s has caused this school to grow, competing in terms of size with the historical approach, and risking bringing the whole concept into disrepute in mainstream academia.

The first major post-War development came with the work of Ikeda Sakae. Following the Takigawa Incident (Takigawa jiken 滝川事件) in 1933, Ikeda was one of the few staff members to remain in Kyoto University’s law department, and therefore in 1936 he received a promotion, continuing to teach there until 1946. He left his position that year, during the post-War reshaping of Kyoto University, joining Kansai University in 1952 and retiring in 1963. It was during his period of unemployment when he began developing his theories on Jingiō. Between 1949 and 1951, his letters appeared in the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East’s publication Light from the East. Therein he claimed to have discovered sites where chapels belonging to the Church of the East had been located. These appear to have included Ōsake Jinja and a shrine called Konoshima Jinja 木嶋神社 originally referred to by Gordon. Moving away from the work of his predecessors, however, he attempted to establish that Christianity had arrived independently of the Hata clan during the reign of Empress Suiko 推古天皇 (554-628CE), he provided no evidence...
for this other than the widespread nature of the religion in China.\(^{137}\) Such a stance was bold, ridding the topic at once from its association with the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory. Rather than being transported by the Hata, Christianity he argued, was transported by a Chinese immigrant.\(^{138}\) Despite this, his position was equally fallacious as the presence of Christianity in China contemporaneously cannot be affirmed. Similarly, his acceptance of Ōsake Jinja and Konoshima Jinja as Christian sites must rely on Saeki’s association of the location with King David and his exploration of the Hata. A final discovery was the likeness of an Assyrian missionary known as Mar Toma, who died in Japan in 601CE.\(^{139}\) Having had a significant influence on Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574-662CE), Ikeda argues that the Prince built the statue with his hand but that the statue has been revered as the Buddhist figure Bodhidharma (菩提達磨 - Bodaidaruma)\(^ {140}\) since 1738. This appears to be linked to the work of Gordon, who equates Bodhidharma or at least representations of him with the Apostle Thomas.\(^{141}\) Ikeda’s story which does not appear in the work of other scholars cannot be verified, due to a lack of evidence, as far as I can find there is no Mar Toma in the historical record, and therefore this claim must be rejected unless further evidence comes to light.

Ikeda’s publications in Light from the East point to interesting developments, however, his claims that these are independent discoveries of his own appear to be untrue, as he draws directly on the arguments of Gordon at several points. Similarly, although he seems to have abandoned the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory later correspondence recorded in other works suggest that he eventually came to rely on the theory.\(^{142}\) Whilst the publication of his book on the topic entitled Nestorianism and Japanese Culture is recorded in the journal,\(^ {143}\) modern scholars have been unable to locate a copy. The interests of Ikeda’s publisher Light from the East and the author differ radically. There is a stark contrast between the work of the editor and the inclusion of excerpts from Ikeda’s letters and newspaper articles. The former is focused more on Ikeda’s mission to Japan, the establishment of an organization (Association for the Reinstatement of the Church of the East – ARICE) to facilitate this and the acquirement of converts, the latter focuses on the discoveries.\(^ {144}\) In this way, whilst it appears through Ikeda’s extracts that he belonged to the historical approach, his work is used for religious purposes; it is inextricably linked to his temporal religious mission so that he sits astride the two approaches. Similar to the Meiji period context of Saeki, Ikeda’s work was positioned in a post-War context. Christianity had failed to establish a role for itself in post-War politics; the Church sought to recover from wartime declines in membership, but factors of social

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\(^{140}\) Ibid.

\(^{141}\) Gordon, The Lotus Gospel; or Mahayana Buddhism and its Symbolic Teachings Compared Historically and Geographically with those of Catholic Christianity, 234.

\(^{142}\) See for instance correspondence with Ikeda recorded in the work of Ken Joseph Sr. And Ken Joseph Jr.: Ken Joseph Sr. ジョセフ・ケン・シニア and Ken Joseph Jr. ジョセフ・ケン・ジュニア, Kakusareta jūjika no kuni - nihon・gyakusetsu no kodaishi 誠された十字架の国・日本・隠された古代史 [Japan: Country of Hidden Crosses – Paradoxical Ancient History], (東京: 徳間書店, 2000), 16, 69, 75-76.

\(^{143}\) Ikeda Sakae, “History of Church in Japan Published by Resident Commissioner Sakae Ikeda,” Light from the East, Vol. 3, No. 4 (June-July 1950), 5.

upheaval, the establishment of religious freedom, and the need to rebuild Japan were also at play. In such a context, it could be suggested that Ikeda was seeking not only to “re-establish” the Church of the East in Japan but also Christianity more generally, by suggesting like his predecessors that Christianity was a Japanese religion or had in the least an established indigenous Japanese history. Ikeda continued a personal mission following the end of these publications, but the Church did not have the resources to supply the mission with the personnel or funds it needed, and he did not continue to publish on the topic. There is no record that the 800 people awaiting baptism in the Church ever received it or that congregations were organized, yet his influence on the scholars who followed him perhaps matches that of his predecessors.

In 1963, Church historian and Jesuit, Mario Marega presented a paper on the topic in which he strengthened previously made claims. Grounded squarely in the tradition of Saeki, and referencing him in his paper, he argued that Kōryūji was originally a Church but after its destruction in a fire in 818CE became a Buddhist temple with the Syrian Hata people being absorbed into Tendai Buddhism. Marega views Tendai Buddhism as a combination of Buddhism, Manicheism, and Christianity. The elements of his predecessor’s theories are all present in his argument, however, as in the case of Ikeda they are repurposed. The Hata here are not viewed as Jewish, but as Syrians, who brought Christianity to Japan. Regardless of this, no new evidence is provided to make his claim, rather the work of Saeki and others, which this paper has already problematized, were accepted with the word “Jewish” substituted for “Syrian.”

Following Marega little new was added to the theories as described by those of the historical approach for upwards of thirty years. They were repeated first by Mar Aprem, a Church historian, and leader in the Church of the East in his 1970 publication Nestorian Missions. Here he repeated aspects of Saeki, Gordon, Ikeda and Marega’s work, as well as repeating the mistakes of Stewart and Pringle, limiting himself to pre-Táng and Táng transmission. He added one new theory, namely that in the Constitution created by Prince Shōtoku, Nestorians were given full liberty and personal rights. However, like the majority of claims made by the theorists explored here, there is no mention of this in the Imperial Record. In 1980, Hiyane Antei devoted several pages to the topic in his Kirisutokyō no Nihonteki tenkai, drawing exclusively on the work of Saeki and accepting the conclusion that Nestorianism arrived at three historical points. Hiyane’s work draws solely on Saeki’s Japanese publications, and therefore avoids the confusion and development by English scholars of later periods.

A substantial addition was made in 1971 by Teshima Ikurō, who published the first monograph on the topic. However, the text dealt mostly with the Japanese-Jewish Common

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149 Ibid.
150 Aprem, Nestorian Missions, 76-82.
151 Ibid. 78.
Ancestry Theory rather than the concept that Christianity came to Japan. Nevertheless its use by his successor John M. L. Young who shaped the topic in the 1990s makes this text an essential part of the discussion. Teshima’s work is indebted to and inspired by Saeki, as he notes in the preface, and accepts all the claims made thus far, including the concept that the Hata were Christian, the presence of Rimitstui and the evidence of a helmet. He added some new concepts such as noting similarities between Hebrew and Japanese folk songs, claiming that the Hata God (八幡人 Hachiman jin/Yahata no kami) was derived from the term Judah (Yehudah) and that therefore, this religion was Jewish in origin. He also argued that the three-pillared torii at Konoshima Jinja is a Trinitarian symbol, saying that Uzumasa is, in fact, the name of the Christian Godhead worshipped by the Hata, and he noted some legendary accounts. Still, his work does not depart greatly from that of his predecessors. He argues like Marega and Aprem that Kōryūji was a Church and that the religion vanished through syncretism with Buddhism by the 12th Century, made possible due to the Jewish origins of the religion. Furthermore, he notes in passing the existence of a Jingjiao text, The Lord of the Universe’s Discourse on Almsgiving: Part III (冊封布施論第三 J. Sesong fuse ron, dai san, C. Shizun bushi lün dī sān) housed in the Temple Nishi-Honganji 西本願寺 and supposedly transported to Japan by Shinran 親鸞. The importance of Teshima’s work is not, however, his minor additions to the theories or the fact that he wrote the first complete text dealing with the topic. Rather, this book marked the beginning of the pseudo-historical approach. Ikeda, Marega, Aprem and Hiyane had more or less abandoned the pseudo-philology of Saeki. However, this feature returned as the primary method of Teshima’s work. Similarly, his work lacked the academic referencing expected of mainstream scholarly work, with only a handful of sources provided, which combined with unusual translations and transliterations make his theories extremely difficult to trace. Whilst he began the pseudo-historical approach to the topic, Teshima is squarely located in the religious approach, and whilst his work acts as theological narrative, it is masqueraded as history and at no point is it made clear to the reader that this is a theological text. Teshima was the founder of the Mukyōka (幕屋) Christian denomination, which split from the non-Church movement in 1949, after the inclusion of Pentecostal elements in his Bible study group. The movement sought to recover an authentic apostolic Christianity, and after Teshima’s visit to

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154 Ibid. 3-6, 60, 79.
155 Ibid. 20-23.
156 Ibid. 37-39.
157 Known as Mihashira Torii/Mitsubashira Torii (三柱鳥居) or Sankaku Torii (三角鳥居).
158 Ibid. 53.
160 Ibid. 53.
164 Mullins, Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements, 120.
Israel in 1961, the movement began to develop Zionist and pro-Israel tendencies. Mark Mullins notes that of primary importance for Teshima were the religious traditions of Ancient Japan, which led to a focus on Japan’s early imperial documents to aid in the understanding the ancient Japanese spirit. Mullins argues that much like Saeki, Teshima sought to Christianize Japan’s pre-Christian past. In this context, Teshima’s text attempts to foster positive Japanese-Israeli relations and provides Teshima’s religion with a historical precedent in Japan.

Following Teshima, in 1984 John M. L. Young, a Presbyterian missionary, produced a more accessible text focusing on Nestorianism in Asia with some references to Japan. His references to Japan therein continue in the tradition of Saeki, and repeat the confusions created by John Stewart, but for the most part, he draws on the work of Teshima as his base, repeating the majority of claims in the form that Teshima developed them. Following his predecessors, Young attempts to establish that the Hōkan Miroku was linked to Juedo-Christian messianic figures and that the statue has Semitic features and contains Nestorian artistic themes. The concept that there is an indirect Christian influence on the statue is, however, inconclusive and the majority of scholars concur that the statue is indicative of contemporaneous Korean art. Young also appears to be the first scholar to note the existence of the Tomb of Christ (キリストの墓) in Shingo 新郷村, Aomori 青森県 which he claims is the tomb of a Nestorian missionary. Nevertheless, the linking of this tomb to Christianity cannot be traced before 1936, and as such most scholars believe the site to be a fake.

At the same time, these developments were carried back into the historical approach by John C. England in a 1991 paper, and a section in his 1996 work The Hidden History of Christianity in Asia: The Churches of the East before the year 1500. Therein, England draws exclusively on the work of Saeki, Stewart, Aprem, and Young, but abandons philological arguments to focus only on possible archaeological finds and textual evidence, noting the difficulty of ratifying some of these claims. The appearance of these concepts in modern peer-reviewed texts thereby established them as historical. Nevertheless, it is apparent that England was unable to turn to the primary documents to explore the truth of these claims more thoroughly, and therefore, he fails to notice the lack of historical basis for these claims. He repeats Stewart’s mistakes and mistakenly attributes

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165 Ibid. 120-122.
166 Ibid. 123.
167 Ibid. 124.
169 Ibid. 18.
171 Young, By foot to China: Mission of the Church of the East, to 1400, 18.
176 Ibid. 107 n. 12.
to Saeki a quote taken from Young arguing that a man who travelled alongside Rimtusi, Köho Tőchō 平湖東朝 177 was a Christian.178 His argument follows Young closely, and therefore, despite its lack of mention, due to Young’s reliance on Teshima, many of the theories England takes from Young’s work are intimately linked to the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory, for instance, the concept that sites in the Uzumasa area are related to Christianity.

Following England’s work, the theories increasingly became the topic of short excerpts in longer histories of Japanese Christianity. Notably, Mark Mullins accepted that there was some evidence for a Yüan period interaction, and Atsuyoshi Fujiwara provided short rebuttals of the claims but did not deal with the sources critically.179 Samuel Hugh Moffett similarly explored the claims without much critical discussion. He incorrectly argued that Saeki had never postulated a Nestorian mission to Japan and that he had only indicated the existence of Nestorians in Japan through Yüan period interactions, interactions Moffet accepts as truthful.180 Furthermore, he dismisses the apocryphal stories included in modern scholar as pure speculation; however mistakenly believes these stories to be modern inventions not linked to the work of Saeki.181 Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit provide a more positive summation of the claims, accepting the concept of Christian presence in the Mongol interactions, and the idea that Rimtusi was a missionary.182 They reject the existence of a sustained mission, or that there was a Christian influence on Japanese Buddhism.183 Notto R. Thelle concluded that these theories currently lacked the evidence needed to ratify them, but that they were strong estimated guesses to be proven true in the future.184 The first lengthy exploration appears to be that of Nakamura Satoshi in 2009, who concluded that there was a probability that Christians came to Japan before Xavier, but that there was only limited evidence with scholarship difficult to trace.185 He decried the fact that the topic was often grounded in the Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory, and noted the need for the use of more historical methodology, whilst also arguing that the theories should not be ignored in mainstream scholarship.186 Yet all these scholars added nothing new to the topic, other than much-needed commentary on the theories.

Development came in the field of Jingjiao scholarship, although this was limited due to the general rejection of the theories. Perhaps the most significant contribution is that of Alexander Toepel, who illustrated without reference to previous arguments and theories that Christians had come to Japan during the Yüan invasions. He based this argument on evidence during the second invasion in 1281CE, the northern forces under the control of Korean Hong Dagu 洪茶丘, a direct subordinate of the Mongol Christian Prince Nayan, were drawn from the areas under the control of Nayan and his high number of Christian vassals.187 Furthermore, he illustrated that there was a

177 Sometimes rendered Kōfu, Kofu or Kohfu.
180 Moffett, A History of Christianity in Asia Volume 1: Beginnings to 1500, 459-460.
181 Ibid. 460.
182 Gillman and Klimkeit, Christians in Asia before 1500, 360-361.
183 Ibid.
185 Nakamura 中村敏, Nihon kirisutokyō senkyō: Sabieru izen kara kyō made 日本キリスト教宣教史：サビエル以前から今日まで, 32.
186 Ibid.
possibility that one of the commanders of the invasions, Xīndū, was a Christian, based on the fact that this name was only borne by Christians and Muslims and that Muslims did not hold military office at the time. Although he references Saeki’s discovery of a helmet as further evidence, his argument which appears to be historically accurate does not hinge on this concept. In this way, Toepel’s work marks an important move away from the problems of this area of study, establishing the truth of one of the claims concerning new evidence.

The pseudo-historical school was rife with activity during the late 1990s and early 2000s, matching the increasing number of explorations in academic publications. Kenny Joseph and Ken Joseph, a father and son team of evangelical missionaries of Assyrian descent, wrote prolifically on the subject although their major works are more or less identical in content and often form. Their expansion of the theories effectively pools all previous work on the topic but does so using an outdated approach with a focus on philology, a lack of reliable sources and reliance on legend recorded conversation and conspiracy. Reasons for rejecting the theories include, that it is unacceptable to argue the Japanese bloodline is not pure; that they have not been fully published due to pre-War censorship; that a Buddhist conspiracy to take credit for the medical work of Emperor Shōmu and Empress Kōmyō means that their Christian motivation has been forgotten; and that Buddhists have made a concerted effort to erase the presence of crosses on archaeological artefacts. It is not only conspiratorial claims which mark the work of the Josephs; the theories undergo a great deal of development. However, this development lacks verifiable sources and often involves blatant lying. To name a single example, they argue that the term keijin came into common usage following the arrival of Rimutsu in the Imperial documents. However, such a term does not feature in Japanese Imperial documents nor contemporary Chinese texts of Jingjiào or non-Jingjiào origin. In fact, it appears to be an entirely new term, the creation of the authors. Samuel Lee has since repeated their claims thereby aiding to popularize them in the Western research also. Whilst the Josephs have fallen silent in recent years, the pseudo-historical approach continues to be popular with Sugiyama Haruo having published work in 2015, attempting to link Japanese with Hebrew, Syrian and Western languages. Most of the time, however, his claims are simply nonsense, for example, he forwards the idea that Inarizushi, commonly believed to

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188 Ibid., 281, n11.
190 Joseph, “Japan’s Jizo and Jesus,” 5.
191 Ibid. 7.
192 Ibid. 8-9.
193 Ibid. 11.
194 Ibid. 12.
be named after the Shintō God Inari 稲荷, is related to the Latin acronym INRI and developed as the Japanese version of unleavened bread to be used in the Eucharist.\footnote{Ibid. 40.}

In the post-War years, therefore, the theory that Christianity came to Japan before the Jesuits, has undergone a great deal of development under three separate approaches. After the early work of Ikeda and Marega who sought to remove the theories from their Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory baggage, historical approaches towards these theories lacked progression. Nevertheless, Teshima’s development of the theories for use as a theological narrative in his religious denomination Makuya spawned a pseudo-historical approach which continued to rely on outdated historiographical methodology and pseudo-linguistic comparisons combined with limited reference to academic sources as the basis of claims. This pseudo-historical work was carried back into mainstream peer-reviewed scholarship, where the philological method was dropped, and only textual and archaeological evidence explored. On the most part, these claims were rejected in mainstream scholarship; however, scholars such as Alexander Toepel were able to provide new verifiable evidence for some of the theories, establishing for instance Christian presence in the Yuàn invasion forces. Such advancements were matched by the growing pseudo-historical approach, which relied on conspiracy and legend as evidence, risking the repute of the topic more generally.

**Conclusions**

The history of Jǐngjiào in Japan is, as framed in 20th Century scholarship, more or less fictional. The theories belong to a different time, context and historiographical methodology, but cannot be affirmed to be true. In the early 20th Century they were grounded in the disproven Japanese-Jewish Common Ancestry Theory but became the subject of development and confusion once they entered the realm of Western scholarship, where scholars were unable to work with the Japanese and Chinese languages. The beginning of the post-War period saw an attempt to rid the field of its reliance on theories of common ancestry, but all this involved was the substitution of the term “Jewish” with “Syrian.” The theories themselves underwent little substantial change, other than the addition of further sites possibly related to Jǐngjiào, mostly based in the Uzumasa area. Under Teshima, the theories were repurposed for theological use, and as a by-product of this, the pseudo-historical approach was created marked by a reliance on outdated methodology. Nevertheless, the work of Teshima found its way into the mainstream, creating an unusual situation in the 1990s in which academics attempted to wrestle with these ahistorical theories which had entered peer-reviewed publications.

Today, it is only the concept of an encounter with Yuàn Christians, which is widely accepted, although some scholars have also refused to rule out the idea that Rimitsu was a Christian. Whilst some scholars repeat claims that there was interaction during the Táng dynasty, this is the result of an inability on the part of those scholars to return to the historical documents. Moreover, despite attempts to the contrary, these theories still rely on the work of Saeki to establish their “truth.”

Notwithstanding the fact that 20th Century and 21st Century formulations fail to establish these theories as truth, there is a real possibility that interactions took place. In a way the attempts of Ikeda, Marega and England are inspiring as they try to rid the field of its ahistorical baggage. Nevertheless, it is only Toepel who has been able to do this effectively as the former three scholars still very much rely on the work of their predecessors. Much work is needed on the topic to affirm the truth of the theory that Christians came to Japan before the Jesuits, and this paper, rather than
forwarding new conceptions has only sought to clarify the genesis of certain theories and to dismiss them.