

# **“This Deus is a Fool’s Cap Buddha”: ‘The Christian Sect’ as Seen by Early Modern Japanese Buddhists<sup>1</sup>**

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## **RESÜMEE**

Keine hundert Jahre lang durften christliche Missionare im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert sich in Japan aufhalten, ehe sie des Landes verwiesen wurden und das Christentum für über zweihundert Jahre verboten wurde. Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht, wie das Christentum in Japan insbesondere von Buddhisten, den wichtigsten Dialogpartnern bzw. Konkurrenten, wahrgenommen wurde und welchen sprachlichen Niederschlag der Kontakt zwischen den beiden Religionsgemeinschaften im Japanischen fand. Während für viele christliche Termini bald Übersetzungsbegriffe geprägt wurden, wurde das Christentum insgesamt im Rahmen der bestehenden Terminologie gefasst: Noch die stärkste Ablehnung des Christentums erkannte implizit dessen kategoriale Kommensurabilität an, indem es als (wenn auch häretische) Sekte mit demselben Klassenbegriff belegt wurde wie die einheimischen Religionen auch. Die Religionspolitik des 17. Jahrhunderts trug dazu bei, dass dieser Sprachgebrauch – durch eine Erweiterung des extensionalen Sinns – wiederum Veränderungen in der bestehenden Terminologie hervorrief, die auch nach dem Verbot des Christentums nachwirkten. Der vorliegende Beitrag argumentiert, dass die Bildung des heute in Ostasien verbreiteten Begriffs für „Religion“, die erst in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts erfolgte, maßgeblich durch diese Vorgeschichte geprägt ist.

In 1560, eleven years after first setting foot on Kyūshū, Japan’s southwestern main island, Christian missionaries received permission to proselytize in Kyōto. While the missionaries had already had various encounters with indigenous religious groups, it was

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here in the capital, where Buddhist temples of a great variety of sects abounded, that the contact with Buddhism was most intense. In June of that year, 1560, Lourenço Ryōsai, a Japanese convert later to become the first Japanese member of the Society of Jesus, wrote a letter from Kyōto to his superiors at their mission station in southwestern Japan, describing Buddhist attitudes towards the Christian teaching: “The Shingon sect says that we teach their Dainichi, the Zen sect that our Dios is their hōben, the Hokke sect that our Dios is their myō, and the Jōdo sect that our Dios is their Amida.”<sup>2</sup>

While it would be difficult to accept Lourenço’s description at face value, given that it represents the writing of a missionary about heathen attitudes, the letter conveys a clear picture of a situation characterized by competition. The Buddhist sects<sup>3</sup> are depicted as being aware of the Christians, as communicating with them, indeed as challenging them. At the same time, the letter claims that Buddhists even identified the Christian God with their own supreme deities or concepts. While, again, we cannot necessarily fully trust Lourenço, such an attitude would not be entirely surprising, given that: a) such an identification is frequent in the early contact between religious traditions,<sup>4</sup> and b) that the Christian missionaries to Japan indeed shared a similar sentiment during the first few years of their activities (see below).

While the one-time identification of Buddhist teachings with Christian ones was not of lasting impact, the notion of the commensurability of Christianity, i.e., the idea that Christianity belonged to the same category of entities as Buddhism, *did* survive the following decades. In other words: Christianity continued to be seen as worthy of engagement, be it in a meaningful dialogue or from a hostile point of view. Due to a lack of sources, this point is surprisingly difficult to prove. Indeed, the quotation from Lourenço’s letter is one of the few sources we have on the topic at hand because there are literally no texts directly giving the Buddhist view of things from before 1600. One possible way to circumvent this methodological problem is to examine how the *language* of the period refers to religious phenomena. In the absence of deeper-running theological treatments, I will therefore concentrate on the conceptual realm, in which the attitude of commensurability described above can be discerned quite clearly, especially when turning to the categories used to refer to foreign religion. Drawing on the distinction between an abstract concept of religion and an umbrella term for religions conceptualized in the introduction to this volume,<sup>5</sup> I will show how, despite the absence of an equivalent to the former, something like the latter developed more clearly from around 1600 than had been the case earlier, prefiguring linguistic innovations taking place in mid-nineteenth century Japan. Furthermore, it was the encounter with the Christian religion as a result of Christian missionary activities in Japan from the mid-sixteenth century onwards that triggered this semantic innovation around 1600, crucially aided by the religious policy

2 Quoted in: G. Schurhammer, *Das kirchliche Sprachproblem in der japanischen Jesuitenmission des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Tokyo 1928, p. 39.

3 The letter mentions four of the six sects or schools of Buddhism dominant in Japan at the time.

4 See the introduction to this volume, pp. 12-13.

5 See above, p. 11.

of the Tokugawa state in the first decades of the seventeenth century. These factors help explain why a similar development did not occur in China, where Christian missionaries were active at around the same time.

In contrast, up to the sixteenth century, the terminology used by intellectuals in the broad sense to refer to the religious field was the same in Chinese and Japanese. The Japanese language, although genealogically unrelated to Chinese, had picked up a great number of loanwords from Chinese during the first phase of intensive cultural contact since around the fifth century of the common era. Almost all lexemes in abstract wordfields were of Chinese origin, i.e., written with Chinese characters and pronounced in what was an approximation of the Middle Chinese pronunciation. Although the religious landscape in Japan was quite different from that of China, this fact had little impact on those parts of the lexicon dealing with religious terminology. Accordingly, the dominant hypernym embracing religious traditions was *jiao* (Jap. *kyō*), literally “teaching.” In most cases, both in premodern China and Japan, reference to distinguishable groups worked by resorting to *jiao*, less frequently to *dao* (Jap. *dō*, “way”). Both terms are notable for including traditions that even broad modern definitions of “religion” would not cover, such as philosophical teachings in the case of *jiao* or martial arts in the case of *dao*.

Perhaps the best example of the Chinese usage of *jiao* to label traditions in a way that distinguished them while stressing their similarity was the *sanjiao* paradigm. The three traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, dominant in China for centuries, were in the *sanjiao* discourse regarded as complementary members of the same group of entities, namely *jiao* (perhaps translatable also as “world views”). While this kind of argument had a reconciliatory side to it, as a way to reduce the tensions of competition, most often the three *jiao* were presented in a clear hierarchy, with Confucianism residing at the top.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the semantic prototype of *jiao* in China clearly was Confucianism, a fact that remains visible well into the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Not only the terminology, but even the scheme of the *sanjiao* was adopted in Japan from early on. Around 800, Kūkai (774–835), the figure today identified as the founder of the influential Shingon lineage of Buddhism, authored a fictional dialogue between a Confucian, a Buddhist, and a Daoist entitled *Sangō shiki* (“Tenets of the Three Teachings”). Daoism had at this time still some significance as an institutionalized religion in Japan, while the worship of indigenous deities (later called Shintō<sup>8</sup>) apparently played no role for Kūkai, who set Buddhism at the apex of the *sanjiao*. Indeed, different from China, the prototype of *jiao* (Jap. *kyō*) for most authors of the ancient and medieval period in Japan (i.e. roughly from the eighth to the sixteenth centuries) was Buddhism rather than

6 See J. Gentz, *Die Drei Lehren (sanjiao) Chinas in Konflikt und Harmonie: Figuren und Strategien einer Debatte*, in: E. Franke / M. Pye (eds), *Religionen Nebeneinander: Modelle religiöser Vielfalt in Ost- und Südostasien*, Münster 2006, pp. 17–40.

7 Compare the contribution by Ya-pei Kuo in this volume.

8 The early forms of *kami* worship were little systematized and conceptualized. It was only from about the fourteenth century onwards that a concept of Shintō was developed. See M. Teeuwen, *From Jindō to Shinto: A Concept Takes Shape*, in: *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, 3/4 (2002), pp. 233–63.

Confucianism. The inclusion of Daoism and the exclusion of Shintō was to change in later times (from about the sixteenth century onwards), after Daoism had lost its role as a clearly identifiable tradition of its own in Japan, and Shintō was adopted as the third partner next to Confucianism and Buddhism.<sup>9</sup>

Since about the tenth century, however, combinatory practices, as the dominant Buddhist way to approach kami worship, were more important for the conceptual grasp of what later came to be called Shintō. Combinatory practices here refer to the discovery of various correspondences between kami and Buddhist deities, correspondences which found expression in institutional and ritual amalgamations and combinations.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the medieval period (roughly between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries), Japanese Buddhism<sup>11</sup> thus incorporated indigenous deities into its own universe in a sometimes highly sophisticated fashion, albeit as subordinate. It has been claimed that, conceptually speaking, this combinatory paradigm was a hermeneutic that “den[ie]d difference by translating alternate positions into the ‘true’ language of a particular ideology” (i.e., Buddhism).<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the two alternatives of *sanjiao* vs. combinatory practices, religious pluralism in pre-sixteenth century Japan was either denied in a system of subsumption under existing creeds (Jason Josephson speaks of a system of “hierarchical inclusion”<sup>13</sup>) or muted within the framework of different “teachings” under the predominant hypernym of the religious field *jiao*. All of this remained unchanged until the advent of Christianity in the middle of the sixteenth century.

## 1. Buddhist Appropriations of Christianity Around 1600

Just as the first Japanese Buddhists to encounter Christians identified them as adhering to some (hitherto unknown) variant of Buddhism, the first Christians to hear about Japanese Buddhism were surprised to find a religion seemingly so very much like their own. This impression was fostered in the Japanese missionaries even before they set out for Japan through their earliest Japanese informant, Anjirō, who came into contact with Jesuit missionaries at their base in Malacca. Anjirō reported that the Japanese worshipped only

9 This triad was well established until the end of the Tokugawa period in the middle of the nineteenth century. References to the “three teachings” in this meaning can be found in a number of writings including Tominaga Nakamoto’s 1746 tract discussing the respective worth of the three teachings entitled *Okina no fumi* (The Writings of an Old Man), discussed below, or *Ninomiya ōyawa* (Nightly Talks of Old Ninomiya) attributed to Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856).

10 For an in-depth theoretical treatment of combinatory religiosity in premodern Japan see M. Teeuwen / F. Rambelli, Introduction. Combinatory religion and the honji suijaku paradigm in pre-modern Japan, in: M. Teeuwen / F. Rambelli (eds), *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: Honji Suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm*, London 2003, pp. 1–53.

11 This did not hold true for all Buddhist sects: The Pure Land sects, e.g., stressed the avoidance of the worship of *kami*.

12 J. Josephson, *Evil Cults, Monstrous Gods, and the Labyrinth of Delusion: Rhetorical Enemies and Symbolic Boundaries in the Construction of ‘Religion’ in Japan*, in: *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 33 (2009), pp. 39–59, here: p. 41.

13 J. Josephson, *Evil Cults* (as in note 12), p. 40.

one God, a personal God, who had created all things and who rewarded good and punished evil.<sup>14</sup> Francisco de Xavier, the first missionary to Japan, even employed the name of the Buddha central to the Shingon sect, Dainichi, as a term for the Christian God during his first months of proselytizing.<sup>15</sup> The Society's historian of the missionary activities in Japan, Luís Fróis (1532–1597) relates that this identification was not regarded as absurd by the Japanese Buddhists themselves. Of a meeting between Xavier and priests of the Shingon sect in Yamaguchi in 1551, Fróis writes:

*When they heard our things, it appeared to the bonzes that the divine attributes were very similar to their Dainichi, for which reason they told the Pater [i.e. Xavier] that while they may be different in their words, language, and clothing, the content of the law professed by the Pater and that of their own were one and the same.*<sup>16</sup>

Although the Jesuit historian George Elison dismisses these early identifications as "unavoidable initial misunderstandings"<sup>17</sup> and adds that "the points of resemblance [of Christianity] with Buddhism were ephemeral and delusory,"<sup>18</sup> to mid-sixteenth century Japanese, perhaps the natural, if not the only, way to deal with the newly arrived faith may have been to comprehend it within the epistemic framework of Buddhism.

At a basic level, this epistemic framework entailed the very language available to Japanese for dealing with Christianity, a language that was full of Buddhist terms. This is clearly visible in what is likely the earliest reference to the Christian missionaries in a Japanese document. In 1551, two years after his arrival in Japan, Xavier received a piece of land for building a church by Ōuchi Yoshinaga, a local lord in Western Japan.<sup>19</sup> Yoshinaga's letter of authorization read: "In the matter of Daidō Temple in [...] Suō Province, the [Buddhist] priests who came from the West to Japan with the purpose of letting flourish the Law of the Buddha shall be granted their request to build this temple [...]."

The reason we know of this document today is because a copy of the original, accompanied by a transcription and a Portuguese translation, was sent to Europe and published there in 1570.<sup>20</sup> The 1570 Portuguese rendering of the passage concerning the "priests who came from the West" runs "aos padres do Poente que vierão declarar ley de fazer Santos [to the priests of the West who declare the law that makes saints]."

14 G. Schurhammer, Sprachproblem (as in note 2), p. 24. See also J.S.A. Elisonas, An Itinerary to the Western Paradise: Early European Reports on Japan and a Contemporary Exegesis, in: Itinerario 20, 3 (1996), pp. 25–68, here: pp. 42–44.

15 On the early use of Dainichi and its replacement by *Deusu* as translation words for "God," see G. Schurhammer, Sprachproblem (as in note 2), pp. 25–38, and N. Suzuki, On the Translation of God, Part One, in: Japanese Religions 26, 2 (2001), pp. 131–46, here: pp. 133–5.

16 Quoted from the German translation: L. Fróis, Geschichte Japans, Leipzig 1926, p. 15.

17 G. Elison, Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan, Cambridge/Mass. 1973, p. 29.

18 G. Elison, Deus Destroyed (as in note 17), p. 13.

19 G. Schurhammer, Sprachproblem (as in note 2), pp. 75–90.

20 Cartas que os Padres e Irmãos da Companhia de Jesus, que andão nos reynos de Japão escreverão aos da mesma Companhia da Índia, o Europa, des do anno de 1549 até o de 66, Coimbra 1570, ff. 161r–163v. Quoted from the digitized manuscript available in the Laures Virtual Rare Book Library (<http://laures.cc.sophia.ac.jp/laures/html/index.html>), document no. JL-1570-KB4.

It seems to be a matter of course for the regional lord to refer to the missionaries as priests, employing the Japanese term for “Buddhist priest” (*sō*), and their aim as spreading the “Law of the Buddha” (*hō*).<sup>21</sup> Viewed from historical linguistics, Yoshinaga could hardly have expressed himself otherwise indeed at this early stage of the encounter as there were no linguistic alternatives available to him. In the past, not all historians have shared this view. Catholic historian Hans Haas, writing in the 1900s, suggested that the missionaries here might have consciously employed “heathen” vocabulary in order to trick their hosts into giving them the property they desired. In his 1954 biography of Ōuchi Yoshitaka (Yoshinaga’s father), historian of early modern Japan Fukuo Takeichirō has opined that the term “Law of the Buddha” was used because in patents such as the one issued here to the Christian missionaries, a fixed set of terms was used. Fukuo adds that since the missionaries took care to differentiate themselves from Buddhism wherever they could and Yoshinaga had no personal sympathies for Christianity, it is unlikely that “Law of the Buddha” was simply employed for referring to Christianity without any afterthoughts.<sup>22</sup>

A “Summary of Errors,” penned by the Japan missionary Baltasar Gago in 1557, explicitly explains *buppō*, the Japanese word for “Law of the Buddha,” by calling it the umbrella term for the eight or nine sects of Japanese Buddhism, juxtaposing it to the sects of *kami* (i.e., Shintō) and of *yamabushi* (i.e., Shugendō, a practice of mountain asceticism drawing on elements from Buddhism and indigenous *kami* cults).<sup>23</sup> That is to say, by 1557 the missionaries certainly did not regard themselves as purveyors of *buppō*.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, this is not to say that, six years earlier, Japanese Buddhists, much less a political ruler, might not have done just that.

The French historian of Japanese thought Frédéric Girard has added that another important reason Japanese Buddhists conceived of the Christian missionaries as Buddhists was that they came from the West, i.e., the direction of India, whence Buddhism had also come to Japan a long time ago.<sup>25</sup>

- 21 “Law of the Buddha” is a literal translation of the technical term “buddha-dharma”, i.e., a common term designating the teachings of the Buddha, but also referring to the principles underlying these teachings, the truth attained by Buddha, the embodiment of this truth in Buddha, or Buddhism in general. In Chinese and Japanese, Sanskrit “dharma” is translated by terms meaning “law” in English.
- 22 T. Doi, *16/17 seiki ni okeru Nihon iezusu kai fukyō jō no kyōkai yōgo no mondai* (The Problem of Church Vocabulary in the Japanese Jesuit Mission of the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> Century), in: *Nihon kirishitan kenkyū* 15 (1974), pp. 25–71, here: pp. 60–61.
- 23 G. Schurhammer, *Sprachproblem* (as in note 2), pp. 68, 87. Another Summary, written by Cosme de Torres around 1556, spoke of a “sect called bupoo,” without defining it as clearly as Gago did one year later (R.M. Loureiro, *Jesuit Textual Strategies in Japan between 1549 and 1582*, in: *Bulletin of Portuguese/Japanese Studies* 8 (2004), pp. 39–63, here: pp. 42, 47).
- 24 Several decades later, this became even clearer when the Dominican pater Diego Collado in his *Ars Grammaticae Japonicae Linguae* (Rome 1632) translated *buppō* with “lex idolorum” (G. Schurhammer, *Sprachproblem* (as in note 2), p. 102).
- 25 F. Girard (2002), *Discours Bouddhiques face au Christianisme*, in: F. Girard / A. Horiuchi / M. Macé (eds), *Repenser l’ordre, repenser l’héritage: Paysage intellectuel du Japon (XVII<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Genève 2002, pp. 167–208, here: p. 177.

### 1.1 “The Christian Law”

Among the known sources that mention Christianity, the earliest ones are not per se of Buddhist provenance but are political decrees, such as the one from Yamaguchi just referred to. That these were usually authored by Buddhist aides to rulers might go a long way toward explaining why Buddhist terminology was dominant in such decrees. The earliest decree of nationwide prominence is the 1587 edict for expulsion of the missionaries, issued in the name of the national ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi, but in fact written by Yakuin Zensō Tokū’un, a former monk of the Tendai school of Buddhism.<sup>26</sup> This “Edict for the Expulsion of the Padres” reads in part:<sup>27</sup>

*As Japan is the Land of the Gods, diffusion here from the Christian Countries of a devious law [jahō] is most undesirable. [...] It is the judgment that since the Padres by means of their clever law [chie no hō] amass parishioners as they please, the unfortunate situation has resulted that, as mentioned before, the Law of the Buddha [buppō] is violated in these Precincts of the Sun.*

In contrast to 1551, Christianity here is clearly seen as running counter to *buppō*, the Law of the Buddha. Yet it is still regarded as “a law” (*hō*), albeit a “devious” and “clever” one. The other famous expulsion edict from 1613/14, authored in the name of Tokugawa Ieyasu and penned by the Zen monk Konchi’in Sūden, makes use of the same kind of language:

*[The missionaries] recklessly desire to spread a devious law [jahō], confound the true sects, change the governmental authority of this realm, and make it their own possession. [...] They look at the example of a criminal, and become excited, blindly running after him. They themselves pray to him and offer him sacrifice. This is what they take as their object of reverence and salvation in their sect! How is this not a devious law [jahō]?<sup>28</sup>*

The key term in both texts is *jahō*, rendered here literally as “devious law.”<sup>29</sup> While to some degree this becomes a set phrase by the late sixteenth century, used when referring to Christianity, other combinations with “law” are also used, as can be seen in the “clever law” in 1587. What this means is that either Christianity as a whole or something like its contents or substance (i.e. its teaching) was labeled as “law,” also the common term for either the Buddhist sects or the Buddhist teaching at a time when there was not yet a concept equivalent to what we today call “Buddhism.”<sup>30</sup> The usage of “law” as a general

26 Information on authorship is from M. Anesaki, *Japanese Criticisms and Refutations of Christianity in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, in: *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Series II, 8 (1930), pp. 1–15, here: p. 1.

27 The translation is adapted from G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), pp. 115–16.

28 The translation follows G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), p. 173, and K. Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan*, London 2009, p. 56.

29 In their translations of the two edicts, George Elison and Kiri Paramore use “pernicious doctrine” and “heresy” respectively.

30 The contemporary Japanese word for “Buddhism” (*bukkyō*) was not coined before the second half of the nine-

term here obviously parallels the late medieval European custom, where “leges” (and also “sectae”) was frequently used as plural for religious groups (more so than “religiones”),<sup>31</sup> an impression corroborated by the inclusion of “ley” in the Portuguese rendering of the 1551 land grant document from Yamaguchi referred to above and in Fróis’s referring to both Christianity and Buddhism as “laws” in his description of the meeting mentioned above between Francisco Xavier and Buddhist priests in Yamaguchi in 1551.

## 1.2 “The Christian Sect”

Aside from “law” (*bō*), The 1613/14 expulsion edict makes use of a further term which came into popular use in the subsequent centuries when referring to religions. Where the English translation above reads “the true sects” or “their sect” – and where Kiri Paramore’s translation of the same text in fact reads “true religion” and “their religion” – the original employs the term *shū*. Originally meaning “ancestor,” *shū* had from the time of the introduction of Buddhism into East Asia been used to refer to specific teacher-disciple lineages and by the sixteenth century been firmly established in Japan as the standard term used to refer to distinguishable Buddhists sects or schools (such as Zen or Pure Land, etc.).<sup>32</sup> Like “law,” this “sect” is apparently easily transferred to Christianity, as the wording of the 1613/14 edict shows: Christianity may not have been a true sect, but it certainly is a sect. As the first instance of the term here suggests (“confound the true sects”), it might actually have meant something more akin to “religious truth,” but in fact *shū* was used rather exclusively, at least in the following two centuries, for the institutional dimension of religion, i.e., religious group or sect or denomination (a close equivalent is the German “Konfession”).

In another early instance of ascription, historian Ikuo Higashibaba relates that the missionaries were referred to as “people from Tenjiku,” i.e., literally from “India.” The India called Tenjiku in Japanese around 1600, however, was largely a mythical place that no Japanese had set foot upon for generations; used to designate an unknown country far away, *tenjiku* had a function similar to “India” in early modern Europe.<sup>33</sup> Higashibaba explains this ascription by arguing that the Japanese “could only make sense of them as men from the most remote land possible.”<sup>34</sup> What is more important for our context, however, is that not only were the missionaries called “Indians,” but their religion was

teenth century. See Isomae J., *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō gensetsu to sono keifu: Shūkyō, kokka, shintō* (The Discourse of Religion in Modern Japan and Its Genealogy: Religion, Nation, Shintō), Tōkyō 2003, Part 1, Chapter 3.

31 H.D. Betz et al. (eds), *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Tübingen 2004, vol. 7, pp. 267–68.

32 As *shū* highlights the aspect of lineage within Buddhism, it might be argued that it was applied to Christianity in a similar fashion. Appended as it came to be to “Christian” or “Jesus,” *shū* might have literally meant something like “the lineage going back to Jesus Christ,” although this view is never explicitly articulated in a contemporary source. Furthermore, in contrast to China, ancestor rites were never of paramount importance in Japan, which might have facilitated the Buddhist usurpation of the term there.

33 In the geographic terminology of early modern Europe, even Japan was considered part of “India” (see G. Schurhammer, *Sprachproblem* (as in note 2), p. 68).

34 I. Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice*, Leiden 2001, p. 1.



referred to as the “Indian sect.”<sup>35</sup> While Higashibaba fails to give a reference, one can indeed find the combination *tenjiku-shū* in a letter from c. 1578. In this letter from a concerned vassal of a domain neighboring the territory of the Ōtomo family, who had converted to Christianity, the vassals of the Ōtomo are warned that the disturbances in their domain are the result of the fact that “old and young, men and women, have all become adherents of the Indian sect.”<sup>36</sup> Emphasizing the foreignness of Christianity in this way certainly was a means of delegitimizing it. Hence, the letter clearly indicates a context hostile to Christians, but the recognition as a “sect” is never questioned.

### 1.3 Other Terms (Teaching, Way)

In contrast to “law” and “sect,” the term “teaching” (Jap. *kyō* or Chin. *jiao*), which had up to the sixteenth century been the predominant umbrella term, after 1600 was increasingly used for the substance of a teaching or its contents. This is strikingly obvious in the following quote from the 1605 *Myōtei mondō*, a fictional dialogue between Christians and Buddhists written by a Christian convert, and indeed the first native tract of substantial length on Christianity that we still know of today:<sup>37</sup>

*To enter the road to assistance [of salvation], in Christian teaching [kyō] you take what is called baptism. If you take just this sacrament, follow the ten commandments of this religion [shū], and respect and revere God, then you can relax and be sure of an afterlife in Heaven.*<sup>38</sup>

“Teaching,” “way,” and to a lesser degree a few other terms continued to be employed as umbrella terms up until the nineteenth century. Yet in many texts, a differentiation such as the one just shown between a religion’s institutional aspect and its substance or essence was reflected in the linguistic distinction between “sect” (and sometimes “law”) on the one side and terms such as “teaching” on the other.

After this brief exposition of the lexical basics, I will now turn my attention to how use of the concepts mentioned above developed against the background of a new religious policy beginning with the seventeenth century.

## 2. Grasping Christianity in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Japan

The texts thus far referred to really do not tell us much about how Christianity was perceived, especially not about how it was grasped by Buddhists, but suggest the contexts in

35 I. Higashibaba, Christianity (as in note 34), p. 44.

36 Cited in the chronicle “Ōtomo kōhaiki,” published in a modern edition in: Kakimoto T., Ōita ken kyōdo shiryō shūsei (Collected Local History Sources of Ōita Prefecture), vol. 1: Senki-hen, Ōita 1936, p. 336. See also G. Elison, Deus Destroyed (as in note 17), p. 24.

37 This is to say that while there had been earlier texts on Christianity in Japanese, these had either not been written by Japanese or were translations from European originals.

38 The translation is from K. Paramore, Ideology (as in note 28), p. 22.

which Christianity was referred to in Japanese around 1600. Buddhist examples proper are only extant from a very late stage, namely the middle of the seventeenth century, which means several decades after the proscription of Christianity and contemporary to the last executions of large groups of Christians. At this time, a whole genre of vulgar anti-Christian literature appeared with little interest in precise descriptions of its object of scorn;<sup>39</sup> roughly at the same time, however, the first examples of more scholarly attempts at refutation also made their appearance. Two early treatments of this sort will be introduced briefly in the following; they are illuminating for their use of terminology as it had become established 100 years after the first introduction of Christianity into the country. Even more so, they are influenced by the religious policy that was introduced at the time they were written.

## 2.1 Religious Policies of the Early Tokugawa Period

Two policies affecting religious groups taken by the early Tokugawa polity established by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1603 were to have a tremendous impact on the semantic range used to refer to “religion(s).” Even before assuming nationwide power, Ieyasu as a regional leader in 1597 addressed a decree to “the Pure Land Sect [*shū*] in the Kantō [provinces],” a step unusual at the time for not being directed at an individual temple but instead at a sect as a whole. While this decree still retained a regional limitation, from 1615 onwards, after the Tokugawa had consolidated their new central authority over all of Japan, they passed a number of laws and regulations directed at whole sects. While individual temples could still be targets of such legislation, four of the six major denominations were covered by such laws between 1612 and 1656, until a law for “temples of all sects” was finally promulgated in 1665.<sup>40</sup>

This was part of an effort by the shogunate to formalize allegiances between temples, which had previously been rather informal. A sect was now recognized through its head temple, and each minor temple in the country had to affiliate with one of these head temples, thus clearly becoming a member of one specific sect. “This was to provide, for the first time, [...] a legal framework for religious institutions which resulted in unified sects that transcended regional and lineage boundaries to encompass the whole of Japan.”<sup>41</sup>

Next to this new structure, known as the “system of roots and branches” (*honmatsu seido*), imposed upon Buddhism,<sup>42</sup> a second policy measure was directed mainly against

39 See H. Cieslik, “Nanbanji-Romane der Tokugawa-Zeit,” in: *Monumenta Nipponica* 6, 1/2 (1943), pp. 13–51, and G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), pp. 212–18.

40 Compare the list of such decrees in Umeda Y., *Nihon shūkyō seido shi, Kinsei hen* (History of Religious Organization in Japan, Early Modern History), Tōkyō 1972, pp. 52–57. The four sects receiving specific attention were Sōtō Zen (1612), Jōdo (1615), Shingon (1615), and Tendai (1656).

41 D.R. Williams, *Religion in Early Modern Japan*, in: P.L. Swanson/C. Chilson (eds), *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, Honolulu 2006, pp. 184–201, here: p. 189.

42 Peter Nosco has pointed out that this system was not quite as effective in practice as the shogunate had intended since the registers of branch temples to be submitted by the main temples were not complete until the end of the eighteenth century. P. Nosco, *Keeping the Faith: Bakuhan Policy Towards Religions in Seventeenth-*

Christianity but made use of, and by doing so formed, Buddhist institutions as well. The controls of religious affiliation enforced since the second half of the seventeenth century were actually a set of two complementary measures: the forced registration of all households with a Buddhist temple, and a religious census, requiring all households to periodically certify their affiliation with a Buddhist temple.

While the Japanese population certainly had many contacts to religion in the two hundred years this system was in force, it was through this certification system that they were most frequently confronted with an abstract religious terminology set down in writing. It was here that the term "sect" (*shū* or *shūmon*) became firmly established as the central umbrella term encompassing both the "legitimate" Buddhist schools and the "devious" Christian "sect." In the annual census, known at the time as "the investigation into sectarian affiliation" (*shūmon aratame*), household heads were assigned the name of one "sect" each, while for each census unit, e.g. each village, there followed a declaration that none of the persons investigated adhered to "the devious sect," i.e., Christianity.<sup>43</sup>

Due to the strong influence of this political practice on linguistic practices, "law," when applied to Christianity, soon came to lose its organizational associations, which became almost wholly absorbed by "sect." Thus, by the first half of the eighteenth century, a certificate of sectarian affiliation could end in the phrase: "The afore-mentioned is not [member] of the sect of the devious Christian law,"<sup>44</sup> in which one must interpret the "law," if one wants to make sense of the duplication of terms, as referring to the doctrinal dimension.

## 2.2 Anti-Christian Writings

The introduction of anti-Christian policies was accompanied by anti-Christian propaganda, both the vulgar and the more sophisticated variety.<sup>45</sup> The two most interesting and most clearly Buddhist early writings will be dealt with in the following, again focusing on language use. Both authors treated here were also politically active in the suppression of Christianity.

### *Suzuki Shōsan*

Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655) was a warrior who fought on the victorious side of the Tokugawa in the decisive battles of the turn of the seventeenth century.<sup>46</sup> In 1620, he be-

Century Japan, in: P.F. Kornicki/I.J. McMullen (eds), *Religion in Japan: Arrows to Heaven and Earth*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 135–55, here: p. 145.

43 For an accessible introduction into the Tokugawa-period system of investigation of sectarian affiliation in English, see A. Hayami, *The Historical Demography of Pre-modern Japan*, Tokyo 2001, pp. 21–37.

44 Quoted in: Nishida N., *Shintō shūmon* (The Shintō Denomination), in: Nishida N., *Nihon shintōshi kenkyū* (Studies in the History of Shintō in Japan), vol. 7, Tōkyō 1979, pp. 13–102, here: p. 58.

45 For an overview on anti-Christian writings of the seventeenth century, see chapter 8 of G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), in particular pp. 223–32.

46 Data on Shōsan are taken from G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), pp. 223–30, and R. Tyler, *The Tokugawa Peace and Popular Religion: Suzuki Shōsan, Kakugyō Tōbutsu, and Jikigyō Miroku*, in: P. Nosco (ed.), *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*, Princeton 1984, pp. 92–119, here: pp. 93–101.

came a Buddhist monk of the Sōtō Zen persuasion. In 1642 he followed a call for help by his brother, the feudal lord assigned by the shogunate to the Amakusa Islands in southern Japan. The Amakusa Islands had been one of the centers of Christian conversion in Japan towards the end of the sixteenth century; indeed, the *collegio* the Jesuits had set up in 1580 moved to the Amakusa Islands in 1591 where it remained until Christianity was forbidden in this feudal domain after 1600. A large part of the population, however, remained Christians for a long period afterwards, and the Rebellion of Shimabara and Amakusa of 1637/1638, the last major threat to the shogunate for over 200 years, was identified by the shogunate with Christianity.<sup>47</sup> After this rebellion was forcefully suppressed, the local authorities and the shogunate were intent on taking anti-Christian action.<sup>48</sup> This partly explains why Suzuki Shōsan was called here in 1642, where his task was to lead the populace from their heretical convictions into the fold of Buddhism. In his three years on the islands, Shōsan founded no less than 17 Buddhist temples and brought with him special funds from the shogunate for the maintenance of these temples and the two Shintō shrines already in existence.<sup>49</sup>

It was in this context that Shōsan wrote his tract “Countering Christianity” (*Ha kirishitan*), which was first published posthumously in 1662. The short text, which names basic Christian tenets in order to show their absurdity, was thus probably written for a wider audience.<sup>50</sup> Shōsan’s technique is to compare Christian items of belief with principles of Buddhism and Confucianism, often of an ethical character, or by appeal to a supposed common sense. His main line of argument is to draw a clear contrast between Buddhist universality and Christian dualism (with only one divine entity).<sup>51</sup>

Rhetorically, Shōsan’s tract is remarkable for its use of Buddhist language to describe Christianity, even identifying the Christian God as a buddha: “According to the Christian teachings, the Great Buddha named Deus is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and is the One Buddha.”<sup>52</sup> Partially, this is a subversive rhetoric strategy because in his further argument, Shōsan then claims that the Christian God is not really a buddha: “In truth, this Deus is a foolscap Buddha!”<sup>53</sup> And in the end, Shōsan makes clear that the Christians really do not know anything about the true Buddha: “This Christian sect will not recognize the existence of the One Buddha of Original Illumination and Thusness.”<sup>54</sup>

47 The precise degree to which Christianity actually played a role in the uprising is somewhat controversial. See K. Paramore, *Ideology* (as in note 28), pp. 55 and 178 (footnote 11).

48 Be it because they were wary of lingering Christian influence or because they had an incentive to emphasize the Christian aspects of the rebellion in order to deflect from more overtly political issues (such as their implication in having heavily overtaxed the region prior to the rebellion).

49 Wakaki T., *Suzuki Shōsan no shisō to kyōka: Shimabara, Amakusa no ran sono go* (Suzuki Shōsan’s Thought and Educational Activities: After the Amakusa Rebellion), in: *Gobun kenkyū* 31/32 (1971), pp. 135–48, here: p. 145.

50 M. Anesaki, *Japanese Criticisms* (as in note 26), p. 6.

51 M. Anesaki, *Japanese Criticisms* (as in note 26), p. 7.

52 Ebisawa A. et al. (eds), *Nihon shisō taikēi* (Series on Japanese Thought), vol. 25: *Kirishitan sho, haiyasho* (Christian Books, Anti-Christian Books) (below referred to as “NST 25”), p. 450; the translation follows G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), p. 377.

53 NST 25 (as in note 52), p. 450; the translation follows G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), p. 377.

54 NST 25 (as in note 52), p. 450; the translation follows G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), p. 378.

There is thus to some extent a conscious strategy in first calling the Christian God a buddha but then denying that he really is one. On the other hand, even when denouncing the Christian God as a fool, there was really no other way to do this in Shōsan’s time than within the category of “a Buddha.” Furthermore, as in *Myōtei Mondō*, quoted above in 1.3, Shōsan differentiates between “Christian teachings” and “Christian sect,” employing *shū* when referring to the overall entity, not just its doctrines.

*Sessō Sōsai*

While Christianity remained a peripheral and superficially treated subject for Suzuki Shōsan (who left behind a great number of writings), it was much more central to a contemporary of his, Sessō Sōsai (1573–1649), also a Zen monk, albeit of the Rinzaï Zen persuasion. Sōsai was a resident priest of a Kyūshū temple, who apparently spent some time with Shōsan while the latter was in southern Japan. He is also known to have preached in Nagasaki, i.e., a former Christian stronghold, in 1647, which may explain his interest in the refutation of the Christian teachings.<sup>55</sup> In 1648, Sōsai penned the best-informed work on Christianity of the period after the wholesale eradication of the creed,<sup>56</sup> the *Taiji jashūron* (“Refuting the Teachings of the Evil Sect”), first published in 1668.

The work was probably intended for the use of the Buddhist clergy, “who were then made official instruments to repudiate Kirishitan propaganda.”<sup>57</sup> In it, Sōsai takes up Christian arguments against Buddhism in some depth and tries to counter them. Remarkably, Sōsai follows the idea, more typical of earlier forms of religious contact,<sup>58</sup> that Christianity is genealogically linked to Buddhism:

*Although he professed his adherence to Śākyamuni, Jesus merely learned the name and form of things and did not arrive at their deeper and hidden meaning. By deception, he stole Śākyamuni’s [principle of the] characteristics of things [i.e. all things are of monad nature but differ in form] and created a heterodox way and a deviant view: Either he grasped the reality [of things] after changing their names or he differed in their substance although the things are identical.<sup>59</sup>*

In this way, Sōsai argued that many aspects of Christianity were not necessarily wrong but were rather evil because they were illicitly stolen from Buddhism and renamed or misunderstood. Of this, he gives many examples, including angels, paradise, purgatory, hell, baptism, confession, the Ten Commandments, or excommunication.<sup>60</sup> Sōsai claims that the Christians in Japan made conscious use of these similarities: “Deceiving them,

55 This information comes from G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed* (as in note 17), p. 231. As Elison notes: “Little is known of this monk,” a situation which is still true today.

56 Its quality in this respect was only surpassed by the 1621 *Hadaïusu* (*Destroy Deus*) written by the author of the *Myōtei mondō* after he had committed apostasy.

57 M. Anesaki, *Japanese Criticisms* (as in note 26), p. 6.

58 See the Introduction to this volume.

59 NST 25 (as in note 52), p. 494.

60 NST 25 (as in note 52), p. 462.

[the Christians] expound the laws of the name and form of things of Buddhism, of the first learning of Confucianism, and of the rites of Shintō.”<sup>61</sup>

The general Christian strategy towards those interested in the faith and towards fresh converts is described by Sōsai as follows: “At first, they do not expose their own law and do not slander the teachings of other sects.”<sup>62</sup> Rather, they engaged in charitable works. Only after some time, argued Sōsai, did they turn to open attempts at conversion by claiming the superiority and source of their teaching:

*Yet afterwards, Xavier strove to make the ruler convert to his denomination, build temples, and publicly speak on his devious law. [...] If our law does not suit your heart, you should stand by the purport of your original sect; if, however, you fully grasp the source of our sect, you should convert to our denomination.*<sup>63</sup>

Sōsai’s wording makes it rather difficult to differentiate between “law” and “sect” precisely. Perhaps “law” is thought by him as identical to “source of our sect.” Either way, the terminology generalizing the entity Christianity and its teachings throughout the text is identical to that used for Buddhism, including the standard terms for “sect” discussed above.

#### *Tominaga Nakamoto and Arai Hakuseki*

It is important to note that the establishment of the new umbrella terms “law” and “sect” did not mean that the old terms, above all, “teaching,” were immediately replaced or relegated to new and more narrow meanings. More than anything else, the choice of vocabulary was a question of the persuasion of the writer. Among the non-Buddhists it was especially Confucians who came to dominate Tokugawa-period theorizing on religious and non-religious teachings.<sup>64</sup> While they sometimes did make use of the vocabulary of “sect” and “law,” more often than not they would resort to the more traditional categories of “teaching,” “way,” etc.

This was also the case where teachings are explicitly compared, as in the following two prominent examples. Tominaga Nakamoto (1715–1746), “a Tokugawa iconoclast,”<sup>65</sup> authored what was perhaps the most provocative essay on comparative teachings during the Tokugawa Period, effectively arguing that none of the three traditional teachings could be considered satisfactory. In his 1738 “Writings of an Old Man” (*Okina no fumi*),

61 NST 25 (as in note 52), p. 492. This a very rare case where “law” is applied to all the traditional teachings.

62 NST 25 (as in note 52), p. 492.

63 NST 25 (as in note 52), pp. 492–93.

64 Due to a sharp increase in literacy since the second half of the seventeenth century (concerning the military class in particular), writing became much more important for the expression of religion in general. On the one hand, this might have brought with it a new emphasis on matters of doctrine, and therefore possibly a preference for writing about “teaching.” On the other hand, it meant that those linguistic practices which had taken shape by the middle of the seventeenth century were to some extent set and simply there to be used by the newly literate classes.

65 S. Katō, Tominaga Nakamoto, 1715–46: A Tokugawa Iconoclast, in: Monumenta Nipponica 22, 1/2 (1967), pp. 177–93.

Nakamoto throughout uses "teaching" to refer to the hypernym of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintō. The alternative traditional category of "way" is employed by him for a higher level of truth that he considers to be the alternative to the three teachings. Accordingly, Tominaga starts his essay, fictitiously attributed to an anonymous old man, as follows: "These writings, said to be the work of a certain Old Man, have been made available to me by a friend. [...] He emphatically expounds the theory that there is the Way of Truth besides the Ways of the Three Teachings."<sup>66</sup> Tominaga never uses "sect," and wherever he uses "law," he is referring to Buddhism exclusively, such as when he states that those who compiled a certain sutra "claimed that it represented Buddha's teachings during twenty-seven days after his enlightenment, illuminating the world as the sun over the mountains, and thus excelled all other laws."<sup>67</sup> The single exception is at a point where Tominaga criticizes the unconditional reliance of those expounding a certain teaching on earlier authorities of their respective tradition: "But here is the argument of the Old Man: it is a general rule that, from ancient times, those who preached the Way and established the law had always their ancestors to whom they attributed the authenticity of their Way and law."<sup>68</sup> Although it is not entirely clear what law does denote here, it certainly does not refer only to Buddhism, nor does it mean law in the sense of legal stipulation. Katō, who translates "doctrines" here, appears to be close to what Tominaga is driving at, although his wording seems to imply that "way" and "law" are regarded to be on the same level, i.e., "law" is not something subordinate to "way" (as "doctrines" would imply), but rather an alternative categorical term for the same thing that Tominaga expresses with "way."

The second insightful text is from the only Japanese intellectual who had an encounter with an actual Christian during the eighteenth century. The eminent Confucian thinker and statesman Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725) had the unique opportunity in 1709 to interrogate the Italian priest Giovanni Battista Sidotti, who was captured in Nagasaki the year before when attempting to enter the country in disguise. In 1715, Hakuseki penned his "Record of Things Heard from the West" (*Seiyō kibun*), which remained unpublished for over 150 years, but circulated widely in intellectual circles in Japan even in the eighteenth century.

Hakuseki's impression of what he learned from Sidotti and from his study of older Japanese and Chinese books on Christianity resembles that of Sessō Sōsai: "From the explanation of the beginning of the world and mankind to that of paradise and hell, they all originate from the explanations of the Buddhists."<sup>69</sup> To Hakuseki's mind, these similari-

66 Ienaga S. et al. (eds), *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (Series of Classical Japanese Literature), vol. 97: *Kinsei shisōka bunshū* (Writings by Early Modern Thinkers) (below referred to as NKBT 97), p. 547. The translation is that by S. Katō, Okina no fumi (The Writings of an Old Man), in: *Monumenta Nipponica* 22, 1/2 (1967), pp. 194–210, here: p. 194.

67 NKBT 97 (as in note 66), p. 555. See Katō, Okina (as in note 66), p. 203. Katō here translates *hō* as "sutras."

68 NKBT 97 (as in note 66), p. 554. See Katō, Okina (as in note 66), p. 201. Katō here translates *hō* as "the doctrines."

69 Matsumura A. et al. (eds), *Nihon shisō taikei* (Series on Japanese Thought), vol. 35: Arai Hakuseki (below referred to as "NST 35"), Tōkyō 1975, p. 79.

ties were no coincidence: From what he could tell from a Dutch world map, Judaea, the birthland of the founder of Christianity, was not very far from Western India, so that it seemed plausible for him to assume that Buddhism had earlier penetrated Judaea and that Christianity was but a degenerated form of Buddhism.<sup>70</sup>

This conclusion is preceded by Hakuseki's paraphrase of Sidotti's explanations of Christianity and of his motives for coming to Japan. Although Sidotti had learned some Japanese in the Japanese colony in Manila before setting out for Japan, the interrogation was conducted with the help of official Dutch translators,<sup>71</sup> and the resulting paraphrase in *Seiyō kibun* almost certainly reflects Hakuseki's own language and choice of words. On his appraisal of the situation of Christianity in Japan, Hakuseki quotes Sidotti as having said:

*As concerns the fact that our law is not practiced in these environs, there is no need to speak at length about times long past. [...] That our law is presently prohibited is because the Dutch spread the following information about our teaching: "It confuses the world and plunders countries."<sup>72</sup>*

Hakuseki's usage of both "law" and "teaching" here seems to reflect less a deliberate distinction between the two terms but rather the tacit assumption of their rough equivalence. "Law" is clearly used where one would today expect "religion," while "teaching" might refer to the doctrine of this religion, although it seems more plausible to see in it just another synonym for religion. Yet when Sidotti explains to Hakuseki that there are three world religions (namely Christianity, heathendom, and Islam), Hakuseki's paraphrase of Sidotti's explanation of heathendom or paganism suggests that while "law" and "sect" are treated almost synonymously, "teaching" is relatively clearly reserved for doctrine: "When I asked him about this law, he said that in this sect they erect many Buddhas and serve them, but when it came to its teaching, [his answer] was not clear."<sup>73</sup>

### 3. Comparison to China

The Japanese language used (and still uses) the same writing system for complex and abstract lexemes as Chinese; in fact, up to the nineteenth century, a large part of that vocabulary was adopted from Chinese or rather shared across an East Asian *koinē* of intellectual production, which also included Korea. Looking at China and Chinese is thus in principle a valid point of comparison, especially as both China and Japan (as well as Korea) adopted the same word (or at least the same characters, pronounced differently

70 NST 35 (as in note 69), pp. 81–82.

71 Dutch traders were the only Western foreigners allowed on Japanese soil between 1641 and 1854, so the shogunate maintained a small number of official translators in Nagasaki. On the languages used at the interrogation, see G. Schurhammer, *Sprachproblem* (as in note 2), p. 115.

72 NST 35 (as in note 69), p. 65.

73 NST 35 (as in note 69), p. 77.



in each country) to render the modern term "religion" by the end of the nineteenth century.

In China, as stated above, the conceptual pull of "teaching" (pronounced as *jiao* in modern Chinese) was predominant until the nineteenth century. Groups regarded as heterodox by the state were thus almost always labeled "deviant teachings" (*xiejiao*) or, taking the proper name of a fourteenth-century precedent that came to be seen as the heterodox group par excellence, as "White Lotus Teaching" (*bailianjiao*).<sup>74</sup> It was this "White Lotus Teaching" that Christianity was likened to by Yuan Guangxin in his classic collection of anti-Christian texts published in 1665 under the title *Budeyi* (I Cannot Do Otherwise). In this work, the standard way of referring to Christianity is either by "Teaching of the Lord of Heaven" (*tianzhu jiao*) or "deviant teaching." The Chinese equivalent to "sect" (*zong*) does not appear even once; "law," however, is used a few times to refer to Christianity (such as in "the new law from the West" or "the upright law of Jesus").<sup>75</sup>

There was a precedent in labeling a non-Buddhist entity as "law" or "dharma," and that was medieval Daoism.<sup>76</sup> The French sinologist Michel Strickmann has even argued that "law" was the closest equivalent to "religion" in late ancient and early medieval China:

*Taoism offered a hierarchy of carefully trained, literate priests, the Tao's own representatives on earth. [...] Taoists worked through meditations: a strictly prescribed and modulated system of communication with the invisible world, framed by established ritual procedures. All this is comprised within the Taoists' term for their religion and its rituals – fa, or 'the Law.' Fa is also used by Chinese Buddhists to render the Sanskrit word dharma. It is perhaps the Chinese word most closely approximating our own term 'religion' [...] Fa, then, suggests exemplary behavior or a ritual model.<sup>77</sup>*

It seems, however, that, as Strickmann himself mentions, it was rather the ritual practice than the entity which was referred to by that term. Equally, considering that "law" was rarely employed by Chinese Buddhists in referring to Daoism and that it was rarely applied to other teachings, especially Christianity, in the subsequent course of history, it would seem to be a weak candidate for an umbrella term. This is probably because the *jiao* paradigm was too dominant (which included, to repeat, decidedly non-religious teachings by any reasonable modern definition of "religion").

74 D.A. Palmer, Heretical Doctrines, Reactionary Secret Societies, Evil Cults: Labeling Heterodoxy in Twentieth-Century China, in: M.M. Yang (ed.), Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation, Berkeley 2008, pp. 113–34, here: pp. 115–17.

75 I have used the edition of the *Budeyi* contained in the online Database of Classic Ancient Chinese Books (Zhongguo jiben guji ku). See also W.T. De Bary / R. Lufrano (eds), Sources of Chinese Tradition, vol. 2: From 1600 through the Twentieth Century. New York 2000, pp. 150–52.

76 Robert Ford Campamy calls "law" in medieval Chinese a "common nominalizing idiom" and claims that it was "used more often to refer to what we would term 'Buddhism' than to 'Daoism' (but also used for the latter as well)," although none of the numerous examples he gives substantiate his claim that "law" was used when referring to Daoism (R.F. Campamy, On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China), in: History of Religions 42/4 (2003), pp. 287–319, here: pp. 305–06.

77 M. Strickmann / B. Faure (eds), Chinese Magical Medicine, Stanford 2002, p. 4.

The role of the term “sect” (Chin. *zong* or *zongmen*) was equally limited. In Buddhist parlance, it seems to have remained restricted to Buddhist lineages, just as in pre-sixteenth century Japanese Buddhism. In Daoism, the term *zongmen* “refers to the series of spiritual or historical ancestors as well as differences in substance [...] Teaching [*jiao*], in contrast, is the connecting fundament” for the differing lineages.<sup>78</sup>

In contrast to Japan, where Buddhism was a powerful force both as a popular religious faith and politically (in terms of its integration with the imperial court and from the medieval period onward as an important counterweight against the military class), in China Confucianism was dominant and Buddhism (and Daoism) were relatively weak in the last centuries before the onset of modernity. Their respective roles in the field of intellectual text production (that is, in their influence on linguistic change), which were a reflection of Confucianism’s strength and Buddhism’s weakness, help explain why simply retaining the old umbrella term “teaching” seemed sufficient to most Chinese intellectuals in the contact with the West up to 1900.

The tenacity of the paradigm “teaching,” which encompassed both religious and philosophical teachings and worldviews, was much less pronounced in Japan, where semantic changes in the words “law” and “sect,” occurring after the first encounter with Christianity in the sixteenth century, had undermined the epistemological unity of “teachings” and introduced new distinctions as early as the seventeenth century. Moreover, the historical record indicates that the contemporaneity with Japan’s Christian experience was no coincidence. Although the budding central state had started adopting religious policies in the second half of the sixteenth century independent of Christianity’s advent – between 1570 and 1580, Oda Nobunaga, the first of three unifiers of the realm, crushed several politically powerful Buddhist groups and established offices to regulate religious groups – this had little effect on discursive practices. Rather, new linguistic practices were stimulated by intellectual debates comparing the merits of different “religions,” as well as by religious policies of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

#### 4. Some Distinctions and an Outlook

What do the semantic innovations triggered by the encounter with Christianity tell us about changes in general attitudes towards the religious field? It is important to remember that the usage of “law” and “sect” for non-Buddhist groups was novel in the sixteenth century, and it was also by and large unique in East Asia. In terms of sheer quantity, “sect” as new umbrella term turned out to be even more important than “law,” as it came to be employed in official documents at all levels down to villages and town districts, where, as an anti-Christian measure, from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards “investigations of sectarian denomination” were conducted.

78 F. Reiter, *Grundelemente und Tendenzen des religiösen Taoismus: Das Spannungsverhältnis von Integration und Individualität in seiner Geschichte zur Chin-, Yüan- und frühen Ming-Zeit*. Wiesbaden 1988, p. 36. Reiter is here referring to Zhang Yuchu’s 1406 *Daomen shigui*.

Drawing on the distinction between "religion" in the generic meaning (usable as a plural term) and as a borderline concept (for a societal subsystem) outlined in the introduction to this volume, "sect" (and, to a lesser degree, "law") clearly demarcated religions in the first of these two senses. A possible counterargument against this view is that rather than forming a new generic term, "sect" and "law" simply continued to be used as purely Buddhist terms and that Christianity was thus subsumed within the framework of Buddhism, a framework which did not change of itself. As anthropologist Gerd Baumann has shown in his analysis of "Grammars of Identity/Alterity," however, such an act of hierarchical subsumption (which he calls "encompassment") necessarily entails a "higher level [which] subsumes that which is different under that which is universal."<sup>79</sup> Subordinating the "Christian sect" under the Buddhist sects seems to at least imply the existence of something universal at a higher level, namely a category of "the religious." That "sect" and "law" were no longer merely Buddhist technical terms by the end of the early modern period is also attested to by the fact that they were not exclusively employed by Buddhists alone, but to some degree were diffused in the general language (of the elites at least).

Also, while there were other terms which functioned as umbrella terms, "sect" and "law" did so more sharply, i.e., with a more narrow range of entities. Thus, while a concept like "teaching" encompassed Buddhism, Shintō, Christianity, Confucianism,<sup>80</sup> or even education in general,<sup>81</sup> "sect" was applied exclusively to Buddhism and Christianity and almost never to Confucianism and Shintō. In fact, those cases in which people spoke of "the Shintō sect" (*shintō shū* or *shintō shūmon*) are revealing in themselves: A small number of Shintō priests employed this terminology in their lobbying efforts to allow exceptions from the mandatory registration at Buddhist temples and from non-Buddhist funerals. We find the term "sect" applied to Shintō in such contexts for the first time in the second half of the eighteenth century, and we find it particularly within priest families who had close connections to the nativist school of "national learning" (*kokugaku*), whose thought was fueled by a rabid hatred of all things Chinese.<sup>82</sup> This means that

79 G. Baumann, *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, in: G. Baumann/A. Gingrich (eds), *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*, Oxford 2004, pp. 18–50, here: p. 25.

80 In contrast to premodern China, Confucianism in Japan never developed forms of organized worship with institutional manifestations such as temples or a priesthood, but until the end of the early modern period was little more than an (albeit influential) school of thought.

81 Such as in the compounds *bunkyō* (Chin. *wenjiao*; "refined teaching"), documented since the ancient period in China, or *jokyō* ("teachings for women").

82 Nishida N., *Shintō shūmon* (as in note 44), especially pp. 26–31, 95–96. Interestingly, Engelbert Kaempfer, the German physician who stayed in Nagasaki as "geneesheer" of the Dutch trading post there between 1690 and 1692, in his "History of Japan" refers to Shintō as "Sinto, which is also called Sinsju," adding that "Sin and Kami, denote the Idols, which are the object of this worship. [...] Siu [or 'Sju' in the German original] signifies Faith, or Religion" (E. Kaempfer, *The History of Japan: Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690–92*, trans. J.G. Scheuchzer, vol. 2, Glasgow 1906, pp. 2–3; E. Kaempfer, *Werke*, vol. 1/1: *Heutiges Japan*, edited by W. Michel and B.J. Terwiel, München 2001, p. 173). Kaempfer's impression that Shintō is "held to be the most distinguished in rank among the three main religions now flourishing" (E. Kaempfer, *Werke*, p. 173; Scheuchzer's English translation here is misleading) and his repeated characterization of Buddhism as "foreign" seem to indicate that his informant(s) hailed from the Yoshida branch of Shintō, which was instrumental in furthering the

“Shintō sect” was used precisely by radical anti-Buddhist Shintoists who were keen on establishing Shintō as an independent religion of equal standing to Buddhism. In other words, by resorting to “sect,” they stressed something that was usually regarded as lacking in Shintō but present in Buddhism and Christianity. I want to draw attention to two further distinctions before briefly seeking out the continuities between early modern and modern conceptual conventions.

#### 4.1 Heterodoxy vs. Heresy

What does it mean that Christianity is routinely referred to as “the devious law”? It is perhaps helpful here to make a distinction not generally considered in the study of European historical material, i.e., that between heterodoxy and heresy. Here, I am following the suggestion made recently by buddhologist John LoBreglio who has attempted to “draw a distinction between ‘heterodoxy’ as something merely judged to be an ‘other’ (heteros) ‘opinion’ (doxa), the abandoning of which is possible through dialogue and persuasion, and ‘heresy’ as something that is actively excluded as being ‘beyond the pale’ when dialogue has broken down.”<sup>83</sup>

In the East Asian case, the common terms for “heresy,” i.e., the entirely incommensurable, included “licentious worship” (Chin. *yinci* or *yinsi*, Jap. *inshi*, used, e.g., by anti-Buddhist Confucianists in medieval China) or “slanted” (Chin. *yiduan*, Jap. *itan*, used by Chinese Catholics in the early seventeenth century when speaking about Buddhism or Daoism).<sup>84</sup> In contrast, the terms “devious law” (*jahō*), “devious sect” (*jashū*), or “aberrating way” (*gedō*), used for Christianity in early modern Japan, all imply aberration, but within a framework of commensurability: it is certainly the wrong sect, law, or way, but it is nevertheless a sect, law, or way, while the terms for incommensurable practices or entities were usually reserved for magical rituals and so on outside of established religious traditions.<sup>85</sup>

To be sure, the borders between the two ascriptive sets of heterodoxy and heresy were not clear-cut, yet overall, and irrespective of author, it was rather the milder label of heterodoxy that was applied to Christianity in sixteenth- through nineteenth-century Japan. Also, while Jason Josephson has pointed out that “Tokugawa intellectuals [...] used terms such as *inshi*, *jakyō*, or *jasetsu* to describe not only Christianity but a wide range of

cause of Shintō as a “sect” in the sense described above. This would allow us to date the movement for a “Shintō sect” several decades earlier than Nishida has done. It is not entirely clear how Kaempfer would have come under the influence of Yoshida Shintō. The assumption that this was indeed the case is voiced by Klaus Antonii (Engelbert Kaempfers Werk als Quelle der Geschichte des edo-zeitlichen Shintō, in: Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens 161/162 (1997), pp. 87–109, here: pp. 103–04).

83 J. LoBreglio, Orthodox, Heterodox, Heretical: Defining Doctrinal Boundaries in Meiji-period Sōtō Zen, in: Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung 33 (2009), pp. 77–102, here: p. 78.

84 For more on the use of these two categories in China and Japan, see J. Josephson, Evil Cults (as in note 12), pp. 42–43.

85 It needs to be pointed out that this simplified picture becomes much more complicated when considering intra-Confucian disputes of the early modern period.

popular practices from local mediums to Buddhism as a whole,”<sup>86</sup> the term *jashū*, again, was significantly only applied to Christianity and not to such popular practices as those referred to by Josephson.

#### 4.2 Extension vs. Intension

To determine whether the meaning of a certain word has changed, we first have to clarify what we mean by meaning. A basic distinction in philosophical logic distinguishes between the “extensional” (discrete things that a term can be applied to) and the “intensional” (sic!) (properties or qualities connoted by a word). I have so far spoken almost exclusively of the extensions of the terms discussed above, i.e., the question which entities are encompassed by a certain term. All the concepts referred to, however, have rather clear intensions. Both “teaching” and “law,” e.g., have at the core of their meaning the contents of a teaching, yet they differ in that ethics are much more important for “teaching,” while religious truth is much more important for “law.”<sup>87</sup>

What, however, do we gain by distinguishing between the extensional and intensional dimensions of meaning? The answer is that it helps us better approach our central question: how does religious contact change the language used to speak of the religious? The fundamental change introduced when Christianity entered Japan in the sixteenth century is that Christianity was added to the extension of a number of existing terms. Does this change, however, affect the intension of these terms in any way? While this is difficult to judge without a very detailed analysis of a great number of texts, it seems that concerning “teaching,” “way,” or “law,” change in intensional meaning was rather limited. In the case of “sect,” in contrast, the term seems to have shifted its intension from “a set of beliefs, practices following the precedent set through a lineage” towards “the organization of religious people recognizable as clear unit.” Religious studies scholar Isomae Jun’ichi defines the extension of “sect” in the early modern period even more sharply. He claims that

*Shūshi and shūmon, which correspond to [the dimension of] practice, are basically words expressing the relationship of belonging to a specific Buddhist sect such as the Sōtō Zen Sect or the Pure Land Sect. This was closely connected to the early modern system of control of individuals by the shogunate through the temples known as the temple registration system, and, before the background of a system of community-level organization of religious groups, the term ‘sect’ was recognized as applying only to the Buddhist sects, which had been permitted to perform funerary rites. For this reason, Shintō and Confucianism, which had basically no connection to funerary rites, were not included in this*

86 J. Josephson, *Evil Cults* (as in note 12), p. 47.

87 In contrast, “way” (*dō*) and “art” (*jutsu*) share many of the characteristics of “teaching,” but have a much stronger emphasis on practice as opposed to doctrine. You Jae Lee presents a brief discussion of the intensional dimension of meaning of several terms used for religion in premodern Korea. See Y.J. Lee, *The Concept of Religion and the Reception of Christianity in Korea Around 1900*, in: *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 33 (2009), pp. 61–76, here: p. 64.

*category, and only Christianity, which was then a forbidden religion, was, as an aberrant form of 'sect,' seen as 'the devious sect' that rejected Buddhist style funerals.*<sup>88</sup>

It is true that the immediate aim of those Shintō priests mentioned above who wanted to have Shintō recognized as a “sect” was to obtain exemptions from having to partake in Buddhist funerary rites. Yet the ideological context of these efforts shows that this recognition entailed much more, namely a sense of equality with Buddhism. Also, the issue of funerary rites was never even mentioned in discussions of “the Christian sect.” Instead, as we have seen above, the similarities to Buddhism that were pointed out rather stressed issues of doctrine or belief. Another indication that “sect” in the early modern mind was about much more than funerary rites can be seen in the transition to the modern period, to which I will now turn my attention.

### 4.3 Towards a General Concept of Religion in Japan

When Japanese were first confronted with the modern term “religion” by speakers of European languages in the mid-nineteenth century, there was no self-evident way to translate this new concept. A number of neologisms were quickly coined (or rarely used existing words resorted to) throughout the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>89</sup> In the dozen or so candidates for translation bandied about before a term was finally fixed in the late 1870s, all of them compound words consisting of two Chinese characters, it is conspicuous that those most frequently used contain either “sect” or “law,” in particular in combination with “teaching.” Thus, we find *hōkyō* (“teaching of the law”), *kyōhō* (“teaching and law”), *shūhō* (“sectarian law”), *shūshi* (“gist of a sect”), *shūmon* (“lineage of a sect”), and finally *shūkyō* (“sectarian teaching”), the term that was to remain the standard translation for “religion” until today.

The background for the choice of a compound character including “sect” is that the new translation for “religion” was coined in the legal context; the necessity to translate religion first arose in the context of international treaties in the 1850s, and the necessity to hone the understanding of this new concept became evident in the course of the discussions about how to deal with the problem of religions in the context of the new constitution in the 1880s. This might explain why “sect,” the term the extension of which most closely focused on the organizational dimension, might have been the best fit among the many options that were tentatively tried out in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, “sect” was used within the new word for religion to signify the religious essence, so that *shūkyō* refers to those kinds of teachings with a “sectarian” (i.e., religious) character.

This latter nuance is visible in the way Japanese Buddhist writers who were engaged in redefining Buddhism in the face of the new Christian missionary effort conceptualized

88 Isomae J., *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō gensetsu* (as in note 30), p. 35.

89 See Hikaku Shisōshi Kenkyūkai (ed.), *Meiji shisōka no shūkyōkan* (Meiji Thinkers' Views on Religion), Tōkyō 1975, pp. 16–28.

90 See Isomae J., *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō gensetsu* (as in note 30), Part 1, Chapter 1.

"sectarian teaching" in the early 1870s.<sup>91</sup> In fact, we might find an indication in these writings, in which "sect" shifted its primary intensional meaning from "institution" or "organization" toward a more emphatically "religious" or "transcendent" character, of the importance of the encounter with Christianity in the sixteenth century, and of its long-term effect on historical semantics. The answer partly seems to depend on whether we want to accept a relationship between the two meanings of religion sketched above: Is the grasping of different entities as similar, i.e., as "religions," a step towards recognizing an abstract entity of social and cultural life we call "religion"? It is precisely the transition period of the mid-nineteenth century which one would have to subject to a detailed analysis that might potentially offer an answer to this fundamental methodological problem, an analysis, however, that transcends the scope of the present paper.

91 Secondary scholarship has not yet addressed this issue. Examples of Buddhists making use of "sect" in this way around 1870 are the True Pure Land priests Shimaji Mokurai, Higuchi Ryōon, and Sada Kaiseki.