Journal of International and Advanced Japanese Studies 国際日本研究

© 2020 Journal of International and Advanced Japanese Studies
Vol. 12, February 2020, pp. 105-120
Master's and Doctoral Programs in International and Advanced Japanese Studies
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
University of Tsukuba

Research Note

A New Analysis of Persian Visits to Japan in the 7th and 8th Centuries

James Harry MORRIS
University of Tsukuba, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Assistant Professor

This research note describes the biographies of Dārāy and Ri Mitsuei, two Persians whose visits to Japan in the 7th and 8th Centuries are recorded in the *Nihon Shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi*. The research note outlines and critically engages with contemporary research, and seeks to suggest that much of the current knowledge regarding the biographies of the two figures is unsubstantiated. Furthermore, the research note seeks to provide new starting points for the analysis of the two figures. Whilst it argues that little can be known about the figure of Dārāy, the research note seeks to interact and add to debates regarding his name, nationality, rank, and the roles of other people who are often mentioned alongside him in scholarly works. Turning to Ri Mitsuei, the research note adds to previous research undertaken by the author revising some of the conclusions that he drew elsewhere.

Keywords: Persian-Japanese Relations, Ri Mitsuei, *Shoku Nihongi*, *Nihon Shoki*, Dārāy

The classical Japanese histories, the *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀, completed in 720CE, and the *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀, completed in 797CE, refer on numerous occasions to the visits of foreigners from distant lands including Tocharoi, Kosalans, and Persians.[1] Whilst these figures and their visits have received attention in Japanese language scholarship, they are yet to be explored extensively in the English language. There is little scholarly consensus on the biographies of these figures, who receive only a cursory mention in Japan's historical record. Furthermore, many theories lack substantive evidence or are based on outdated scholarship. Nevertheless, researching the visits of Tocharoi, Kosalans, and Persians[2] to Japan is important not only for deepening our understanding of Japanese history, but for understanding the history of trade, immigration, and the journeys of travellers on the Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road. This research note will assess and problematize some of the hitherto popular theories regarding the visits of two Persians to 7th and 8th Century Japan and will seek to explore the veracity of these theories and their usefulness or lack thereof. The research note, moreover, offers some new interpretations and analyses of these figures, which may be used as a starting point for future research on the topic.

---

[1] Itō Gikyō, *Perushia bunka torai kō: Shirukorōdo kara Asuka e* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1980), 1-30.

[2] In this paper, the term "Persian" refers to peoples from the Sasanian Empire (224-651CE) and its pre-Islamic successor states. Contemporaneously, the Chinese referred to Sasanian Persia as *Bōsī* 波斯 and its people as *Bōsīrén* 波斯人, and these terms are usually translated into English as "Persia" and "Persian." Edwin G. Pulleyblank notes that from the early 8th Century until 755CE the term referred to a Chinese puppet state in the region of the eastern borders of Afghanistan (Bactria). See: Edwin G. Pulleyblank, "Chinese-Iranian Relations i. In Pre-Islamic Times," *Encyclopedia Iranica,* 2011.

The Figure of Dārāy

According to Itō Gikyō, the first reference to a Persian in the *Nihon Shoki* appears in the reign of Empress Saimei (J. Saimei Tennō 斉明天皇 , 594-661CE) in 660CE.[3] In classical English translations of the piece such as William Aston's famous *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697,* the term Kenzuhashi Dachia, Kenzu Fasi Datia, or Kenzuhashi Tatsua 乾豆波斯達阿 (C. *Gān dòu bōsī dá ā*) is often presented as a person's name as is illustrated in the following passage:

> Again, the man of Tukhāra, Kendzuhashi Tatsua, desired to return to his native country, and asked for an escort officer, saying:— "I intend later to pay my respects to the Court of the Great Country, and therefore, in token of this, I leave my wife behind." Accordingly, he took the way of the Western Sea with several tens of men.[4]

The passage notes that the figure is from Tokharistan (Bactria) through its use of the contemporaneous Chinese term, *Dūhuòluórén* 覩貨羅人[5] (J. *Tokara no hito,* E. Tocharoi), however, the ensuing passage often taken to be the figure's name contains an additional two place names. Firstly, the term *Kenzu* 乾豆 , a possible Sinicized version of the Persian word *Hindūg* or *Hindūgān* (India) or a reference to the place name Kunduz, and secondly the Sino-Japanese term *Hashi* 波斯 (C. *Bōsī*) which refers to Persia.[6] Itō argues that these place names should be understood as prenominal descriptions of a person called Dachia 達阿 (C. *Dá ā*) likely a Japanese version of the name Dārāy.[7] Itō, therefore, posits two possible ways to translate the text dependent on whether the term *Kenzu* 乾豆 refers to India or Kunduz; either 'Man from Toxārestān: Persian Dārāy who had remained in or come from India'[8] or 'Man from Toxārestān: Persian Dārāy of/from Kunduz.'[9] Okamoto Kenichi who accepts the same premises as Itō argues that the term *Kenzu* 乾豆 is a reference to Samarkand, and therefore that Dārāy is a Tocharoi Persian from Samarkand.[10] A similar position is also taken by Imoto Eiichi who argues that *Kenzu* likely refers to a city within Persia.[11] Itō's, Okamoto's, and Imoto's arguments are convincing as it is highly unusual to find a surname built from two primarily geographic terms. Nevertheless, as noted by Nishimoto Masahiro the use of the term *Bōsī* 波斯 as a name is not uncommon in contemporaneous Chinese

---

[3] Itō, *Perushia bunka torai kō*, 14-17.

[4] William Aston, trans., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697, Two Volumes in One* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1972), 266. In the original text:

> 又覩貨羅人。乾豆波斯達阿。欲歸本土。求請送使曰。願後朝於大國。所以留妻爲表。乃與數十人。入于西海之路。(*Nihon Shoki*, Page 1574, Paragraph 5).

[5] The term *Dūhuòluóguó* 睹貨邏國 is used to refer to the region in Xuánzàng's 玄奘 (602-644), *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* (C. *Dà táng xīyù jì* 大唐西域記) completed in 646CE (Xuánzàng, *Dà táng xīyù jì*, Volume 1, Paragraphs 54 and 85).

[6] Itō, *Perushia bunka torai kō*, 14-15.

[7] Ibid., 14-15; Itō Gikyō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," *Orient* 15 (1979), 58. Some scholars have noted the possibility that the name may be derived from the Sanskrit *Datta*, but have generally rejected this possibility, see: Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 55-63; Imoto Eiichi, *Kodai no Nihon to Iran* (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1980), 21. While the name Dārāy has, therefore, received widest acceptance, it appears to me that the Middle Persian name *Dād* from the Old Persian *Dāta* is also a potentially valid origin for the name, although it would have likely been Sinicized in a different way.

[8] Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 59.

[9] Ibid., 60.

[10] Okamoto Kenichi, "Nihon ni Kita Seiikijin," *Higashi Ajia no Kodai Bunka* 17 (1978), 62.

[11] Specifically, Imoto suggests the city of *Kando* or *Yārukato,* but I have not been able to trace either of these place names. He also notes that Samarkand and other locations are potential alternatives. Imoto, *Kodai no Nihon to Iran*, 23-24.

sources,[12] and therefore it remains a possibility that Kenzuhashi 乾豆波斯 is a name rather than a geographic description. Furthermore, Itō's first suggested translation is problematic since the passage lacks the relevant verbs to suggest that this man had sojourned in India. His second translation or the one provided by Okamoto provide mere geographic specificity (Dārāy's country, region, and city of origin), and because that specificity makes logical geographic sense (he is from Tokharistan – Kunduz in Persia),[13] the second translation or Okamoto's alternative is, in my opinion, likely accurate. Indeed, although it is not possible to specify which city or geographic locality that the term *Kenzu* refers to, there is some scholarly consensus regarding Itō's assertion that the passage demarks that the man in question as a Tocharoi man named Dārāy who came from Persia.[14]

Given the foregoing conclusions we might be able to theorize that other figures described as "Tocharoi" who came to Japan were similarly considered to have hailed from Persia, however, due to a lack of textual evidence such figures cannot be identified. There is debate in regards to the location of *Tokara no kuni* 吐火羅國 or 覩貨邏國 in the *Nihon Shoki* with scholars suggesting that the term may refer to *Xīyù* 西域 , the Tokara islands (J. *Tokara rettō* 吐噶喇列島), the Philippines, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, or Persia.[15] Nishimoto argues that *Tokara no kuni* cannot be identified with Persia (a popular position accepted by Okamoto and Takatō Gorō),[16] since contemporaneous Chinese sources refer to both regions as separate entities.[17] Drawing on the usage of the term in Chinese sources, he argues that the region is best identified as Tokharistan, situated in modern day Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.[18] Indeed, given the terms' usages in contemporaneous Chinese sources it is not possible to affirm that *Tokara no kuni* is anywhere other than Tokharistan without abandoning textual evidence in favour of potentially spurious philological arguments. Whilst I agree with Nishimoto, that the term *Tokara no kuni* (referring to Tokharistan) should be understood in contradistinction to Persia given its usage in Chinese sources; Sasanian control, patronage, and influence in the region during and before the 7th Century[19] cannot be dismissed, and it would therefore not be unusual to find Persians in Tokharistan, Tocharoi in Persia or Tocharoi Persians, like Dārāy.

Since Dārāy's leaving Japan was important enough to warrant inclusion in the *Nihon Shoki*, it is likely that his arrival was also recorded. Nevertheless, his name is not recorded elsewhere, and therefore the date of his arrival can only be conjectured from the *Nihon Shoki*'s references to the arrival of Tocharoi prior to Dārāy's outbound journey in 660CE. There are two possible dates for Dārāy's arrival, either the fourth month of 654CE during the reign of Emperor Kōtoku (J. Kōtoku Tennō 孝徳天皇 , 596-654CE), when two men and two women

[12] Nishimoto Masahiro, "Asuka ni Kita Seiiki no Toharajin," *Kansai Daigaku Tōzai Gakujutsu Kenkyūsho Kiyō* 43 (2010), 6.

[13] Kunduz is a part of the area of Greater Khorasan which was under the control of the Sasanian Empire until the Arab conquest of 647CE, see: Hamid Wahed Alikuzai, *A Concise History of Afghanistan in 25 Volumes,* Vol. 14 (Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2013), 110.

[14] Okamoto, "Nihon ni Kita Seiikijin," 62-63; Imoto, *Kodai no Nihon to Iran*, 21-24.

[15] Nishimoto, "Asuka ni Kita Seiiki no Toharajin," 4-7.

[16] Okamoto, "Nihon ni Kita Seiikijin," 58-63; Takatō Gorō, "Asuka to Seiiki," *Higashi Ajia no Kodai Bunka* 18 (1978), 108-117.

[17] Nishimoto, "Asuka ni Kita Seiiki no Toharajin," 6-7, 11.

[18] Ibid., 7-10.

[19] Abd Al-Husain Zarrinkūb, "The Arab Conquest of Iran and its Aftermath," *The Cambridge History of Iran,* Vol. 4, *The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs,* edited by R. N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 1-53; E. V. Zeimal, "The Political History of Transoxiana," *The Cambridge History of Iran,* Vol. 3, *The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanid Periods, Part 1,* edited by E. Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 232-262.

from Tokharistan (J. *Tokara no kuni* 吐火羅國) were driven ashore by a storm,[20] or the seventh month of 657CE (during Empress Saimei's reign), when a further two men and four women from Tokharistan (J. *Tokara no kuni* 覩貨邏國) drifted ashore.[21] Itō favours the date of 654CE[22] due to his theories regarding Dārāy's role and identity (discussed below), however, I believe that the compilers choice of the characters *Tokara* 覩貨邏 to describe Dārāy, the same characters used to describe the Tocharoi who arrived in 657CE, rather than the characters *Tokara* 吐火羅, used to describe those who arrived in 654CE, indicate that Dārāy was amongst those who arrived in 657CE. It would, therefore, appear that Dārāy spent around three years in Japan from 657CE to 660CE. On the other hand, if one accepts Itō's dating Dārāy spent six years in Japan.

It is difficult to establish a great deal about Dārāy's life, role, and position. His inclusion in the *Nihon Shoki*, his noted desire to pay respects at the court, the fact that several tens of men left with him, and the fact that he is named in the text, indicate that he was of high social status. The text furthermore notes that he had a wife or wives. Itō argues that Dārāy was of royal blood, which due to the figure's evident high rank is a possibility, however, Itō's argument is unconvincing on several levels. Itō suggests that the name Dārāy, which he believes was derived from the name of legendary king, *Dārayaw*, betrays the figure's royal blood.[23] Amongst the first group of Tocharoi to arrive in Japan was a person described as *Shě wèi nǚ* 舍衛女 (J. *Shaei no onna*).[24] Traditionally this has been translated as a 'woman from S'râvastî.'[25] Itō, however, argues that due to the absence of the suffix *guó* 国 (J. *koku*, E. country) or *chéng* 城 (J. *jō*, E. castle), which are usually used when referring to Shravasti as a place, and because it would be odd to find Indians and Tocharoi travelling to Japan together, that this term should be understood as a title rather than a place name.[26] He then seeks to illustrate that the term is a Japanese transliteration of the Middle Persian, *šāh duxtag*, meaning "king's daughter."[27] Following this he argues that Dārāy was *Shě wèi nǚ*'s father, due to his theory that Dārāy was of royal blood, and his identification of *Shě wèi nǚ* as the "king's daughter."[28] Itō argues that sometime after Dārāy became her husband, since *Shě wèi nǚ*'s marriage to a Tocharoi is noted in the *Nihon Shoki*,[29] and such marriages (between father and daughter) were not contemporaneously uncommon.[30] He then identifies a further figure, *Duò luó nǚ* 堕羅女 (J. *Dara no onna*), whose name Itō translates as *Dārāy-duxtag* or "Dārāy's daughter," as the couple's daughter.[31] Affirming Dārāy's royal lineage, Itō transforms Dārāy into an important figure who assisted Peroz III during his military campaigns.[32]

---

[20] The original text states:

夏四月。吐火羅國男二人女二人。舍衛女一人。被風流來于日向。(*Nihon Shoki*, Page 1538, Paragraph 1).

[21] The original text states:

三年秋七月丁亥朔己丑。覩貨邏國男二人女四人。漂泊于筑紫。言。臣等初漂泊于海見嶋。乃以驛召。(*Nihon Shoki*, Page 1547, Paragraph 5).

[22] Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 60.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *Nihon Shoki*, Page 1538, Paragraph 1.
[25] Aston, trans., *Nihongi*, 246.
[26] Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 56-57.
[27] Ibid., 57.
[28] Ibid., 57, 60.
[29] The original text states:

丁亥。吐火羅人。共妻舍衛婦人來。(*Nihon Shoki*, Page 1562, Paragraph 4).

[30] Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 60.
[31] Ibid., 60-61.
[32] Ibid., 59.

I am not convinced by these arguments. Itō does not reference necessary textual or extra-textual evidence to support his claims and there is no reason to assume that *Shě wèi nǚ* is a title. To the contrary within the context of the sentence, which lists people arriving in Japan according to their place of origin and their gender, it is more reasonable to assume that *Shě wèi* 舍衛 refers to a place, such as Shravasti, as has been theorized by other scholars.[33] Indeed, the fact that the term *Shě wèi nǚ* is followed by the counter *Yīrén* 一人 (J. *Hitori*) meaning "one person" indicates that *Shě wèi* is more likely a place of origin than a name. If *Shě wèi nǚ* were a name, the text would likely follow standardized patterns by which a figure's nationality precedes their name, as was the case with the passage concerning Dārāy explored above. Accepting Itō's argument that the term is a name would mean that information indicating *Shě wèi nǚ*'s nationality and gender are absent from the text, which is unusual. In addition, all other figures referred to in the passage in question are identified by their nationality and gender, whereas their names are not provided.[34] The concept that it is odd for a place name to lack qualifying suffixes such as the term "country" is also problematic. Not only does it nullify Itō's argument that Dārāy is from Kunduz or India and Persia (terms which lack the relevant suffixes in the passage), but other geographic areas such as the country of Baekje (J. *Kudara* or *Hyakusai* 百濟) are frequently referred to without such qualifiers throughout the *Nihon Shoki*. Neither is it a rarity to find people from multiple countries on the same voyage; a passage explored later in this research note records a Persian arriving alongside Chinese and Japanese.[35] Imoto argues that *Shě wèi* may be the name of a city in the Tokharistan region, suggesting that it may refer to Kashgar or Saveh.[36] However, accepting this notion would beg the question as to why four of the party are referred to as Tocharoi, whereas a further figure is identified as coming from a specific city within the same region. Given the context of the sentence and the usage of the term *Shě wèi* to refer to Shravasti in other texts, it doesn't appear that there are issues with affirming that the term *Shě wèi nǚ* means "a woman from Shravasti." One potential problem arises when it is noted that Xuánzàng 玄奘 in his *Dà táng xīyù jì* 大唐西域記 (646CE) records that the city had been deserted, although there were still some people.[37] Therefore, there is a potentiality, as Imoto suggests, that *Shě wèi* may refer to a separate location. Nevertheless, Itō's use of *Shě wèi nǚ* as evidence for Dārāy's royal lineage cannot be maintained. Whilst the historical record notes that this woman married one of the Tocharoi, it is unclear whether this was Dārāy since the text does not provide her husband's name. By the same logic that I used to suggest that Dārāy came to Japan in 657CE, it would appear that the woman from Shravasti was married to someone from the first group of Tocharoi visitors since her husband is described using the characters *Tokara* 吐火羅 rather than Dārāy's *Tokara* 覩貨邏 . Nevertheless, Imoto and Nishimoto both concur with Itō in suggesting that the woman from Shravasti and Dārāy were a married couple,[38] although neither provide further evidence to make this case. As for Dārāy's potential daughter, *Duò luó nǚ*, other scholars have argued that the term *Duò luó* 墮羅 is an alternative transliteration of the term *Tokara*[39] as is noted in the *Nihon Shoki*'s annotations.[40] Since the *Dà táng xīyù jì* refers to a country by the name of *Duò luó bō dǐ guó* 墮羅鉢底國 (J. *Darahatsutei no kuni*, E. Dvaravati),[41] which shares the characters *Duò luó* 墮羅 , it might be possible to argue that the term refers to this country instead. However, to accept such an argument

[33] Notably by: Imoto Eiichi, "Perushiajin no raichō to urabonkai," *Daihōron* 大法論 45, No. 9 (1978), 48. Itō argues that *Shě wèi* cannot be a place name, since the place names from whence other members of the group hailed are not mentioned, however, this is simply not factual since other members are referred to as hailing from Tokharistan. Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 57.

[34] *Nihon Shoki*, Page 1538, Paragraph 1.

[35] Kuroita Katsumi and Kokushi Daikei Henshūkai, eds., *Shoku Nihongi: Zenpen* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1979), 141.

[36] Imoto, *Kodai no Nihon to Iran*, 24.

[37] Xuánzàng, *Dà táng xīyù jì*, Volume 6, Paragraph 6.

[38] Imoto, *Kodai no Nihon to Iran*, 24; Nishimoto, "Asuka ni Kita Seiiki no Toharajin," 3.

[39] Nishimoto, "Asuka ni Kita Seiiki no Toharajin," 3.

[40] *Nihon Shoki*, Page 1548, Paragraph 1.

[41] Xuánzàng, *Dà táng xīyù jì*, Volume 10, Paragraph 30.

we would need to prove that the *Nihon Shoki*'s definition of the term is incorrect, that the *Nihon Shoki*'s compilers had poor geographical knowledge, or that the term *Tokara* refers to Dvaravati. Again, the context of the sentence, which lists people according to their place of origin and gender or title, suggests that rather than a name the term *Duò luó nǚ* refers to a "woman from Tokharistan."[42] Moreover, there is nothing in the sentence which suggests that this figure is the daughter of the woman from Shravasti or Dārāy. In summation, there are numerous issues with accepting Itō's argument regarding the personage of Dārāy. Many of his theories rely on textual and extra-textual assumptions which lack sufficient evidence to establish a burden of proof.

In lieu of the accuracy of Itō's argument, there is little we can say about Dārāy beyond that which is recorded in the text. He was a Tocharoi from Kunduz in Persia or a Tocharoi Persian from Samarkand, he was married, and was of sufficient social status to be recorded in Japan's imperial histories and to have a retinue of men who left the country with him. We may affirm, as Nishimoto does, that Dārāy was somewhat of a leader amongst the Tocharoi in Japan due to the presence of this retinue.[43] He left Japan for his home country travelling via Táng 唐 dynasty (618-907CE) China[44] in 660CE leaving his wife (or wives) there, after having likely arrived in 657CE. As for religious affiliation, which Itō argues was indisputably Zoroastrian,[45] nothing can be conclusively established. Whilst Imoto thinks that there is a potentiality that Dārāy was a Zoroastrian,[46] he also suggests that Dārāy may have been a Buddhist. He notes that if the term *Kenzu* 乾豆 refers to India it may indicate a Buddhist religious identity, which causes him to translate the term Kenzuhashi Dachia as "Dārāy, a Buddhist from Persia."[47] In itself this argument is unconvincing due to the issues associated with linking *Kenzu* to India, however, Imoto also notes that the *Nihon Shoki* records the Tocharoi participating in the festival of *Urabon* 盂蘭盆[48] shortly after the arrival of the second group (of which I have argued Dārāy was a member) in 657CE.[49] Moreover, Dārāy's petition to leave Japan in 660CE was presented the day following *Urabon* on the 16th of the 7th month.[50] Whilst this is far from conclusive as a plethora of religions flourished in contemporaneous Persia and Tokharistan, as noted by Imoto it may be the case that Dārāy's connection to *Urabon* is far from accidental.[51]

We do not hear of Dārāy again in the *Nihon Shoki*; there is no record of what happened to him after he left Japan in 660CE or if he ever returned. Itō creates an imaginative scenario linking Dārāy to the escape and subsequent campaigns of Peroz III following his father, Yazdgerd III's death in 651CE. He writes:

For the then about 15-year-old prince Pērōz, to cope with the difficulty was too hard and exacting without

---

[42] The original text states:

四年春正月丙午朔。大學寮諸學生。陰陽寮。外藥寮。及舍衛女。堕羅女。百濟王善光。新羅仕丁等。捧藥及珍異等物進。(*Nihon Shoki*, Page 1713, Paragraph 3).

[43] Nishimoto, "Asuka ni Kita Seiiki no Toharajin," 3.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 61.
[46] Imoto, *Kodai no Nihon to Iran*, 35.
[47] Ibid., 26.
[48] The original text states:

辛丑。作須彌山像。於飛鳥寺西。且設盂蘭盆會。暮饗覩貨邏人。[或本云。堕羅人。] (*Nihon Shoki*, Page 1548, Paragraph 1).

[49] Imoto, *Kodai no Nihon to Iran*, 26.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

assistance from someone else with whom I should like to identify 達阿 (Dārāy). The campaign must have set in while Yazdgerd's stay still in Khorāsān, but having heard the death of the king of kings, Dārāy escaped from the army-and-troop with his lord, Pērōz, and other followers among whom was found most probably his own daughter (舍衛女) to seek refuge in *Zhǎng-ān*.[52]

This story, used by Itō to support his theory that Dārāy was a royal, cannot be substantiated and seems unlikely given the problems of dating that would arise if it were accepted. Pērōz III did not arrive in Cháng'ān 長安 until the early 670s.[53] Although Dārāy had returned to the mainland meaning that it was possible that he travelled to Cháng'ān, *Shě wèi nǚ* remained in Japan into the 670s with a reference to her personage appearing in the first month of 676CE.[54]

Despite our limited knowledge of Dārāy, he is an important figure for understanding early Japanese, foreign relations. Although the testimony of *Nihon Shoki* indicates that a whole community of Tocharoi were present in Japan, it is only Dārāy, a probably high-ranking Tocharoi from Kunduz in Persia, who is demarked by name. Ultimately, little can be known of the potential influence that Dārāy, as an individual, had on contemporaneous Japan, although we may concur with scholars such as Itō and Imoto, that the Tocharoi may have influenced some Japanese religious and secular practices.[55] The interesting historical episode of which Dārāy was a part elucidates some of the ways in which early Japanese foreign relations were conducted and the sort of interactions which occurred between foreigners and Japanese at court. Nevertheless, following the collapse of the Sasanian Empire in the 650s, Tocharoi-Japanese relations appear to have come to an end with no Tocharoi receiving mention following the final appearance of *Duò luó nǚ* in 676CE. It is likely that the Tocharoi community eventually became amalgamated with the Japanese through intermarriage. While scholarship on the figure of Dārāy has often proven problematic, I believe that the conclusions made here may provide new starting points from which the figure and related topics can be researched.

The Figure of Ri Mitsuei

A second Persian is recorded as coming to Japan in the *Shoku Nihongi.* The text notes that in the eighth month of 736CE, Nakatomi no Nashiro 中臣名代 (?-745CE), the returning vice-envoy to the Táng, led a group of three Chinese and one Persian to have an audience with Emperor Shōmu (J. Shōmu Tennō 聖武天皇 , 701-756CE).[56] In the 11th month, Nakatomi no Nashiro and others were given promotions in rank in an audience with the Emperor.[57] During the same meeting, the Chinese, Kōho Tōchō 皇甫東朝 (C. Huángfǔ Dōngcháo), and

[52] Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 59.
[53] Matteo Compareti, "Chinese-Iranian Relations xv. The Last Sasanians in China," *Encyclopedia Iranica,* 2009.
[54] The original text states:

四年春正月丙午朔。大學寮諸學生。陰陽寮。外藥寮。及舍衛女。堕羅女。百濟王善光。新羅仕丁等。捧藥及珍異等物進。(*Nihon Shoki*, Page 1713, Paragraph 3).

[55] Imoto, *Kodai no Nihon to Iran*; Itō, *Perushia bunka torai kō*.
[56] The original text states:

八月庚午。入唐副使從五位上中臣朝臣名代等率唐人三人波斯人一人拜朝。(Kuroita and Kokushi Daikei Henshūkai, eds., *Shoku Nihongi: Zenpen*, 141).

[57] Kuroita and Kokushi Daikei Henshūkai, eds., *Shoku Nihongi: Zenpen*, 141.

Persian, Rimitsuei 李密翳 (C. Lǐ Mìyì), were presented with ranks according to their social status.[58] Scholars have argued that the Persian identified as Rimitsuei and the Persian referred to as having had an audience with the Emperor several months earlier were the same person.[59] This seems evident given the presence of Nakatomi no Nashiro in both passages and the context of the passages. As such, it is also evident that Rimitsuei had accompanied Nakatomi no Nashiro (alongside the three Chinese) to Japan during the latter's return from his post as vice-envoy.[60]

Various theories have emerged regarding Rimitsuei's personage, and popular amongst these are the concept that he was either a doctor or a Syriac Christian missionary, or both. I have been critical of these positions elsewhere.[61] The theory that Rimitsuei was a Syriac Christian missionary first appeared in the work of Peter Yoshirō Saeki. In his *Keikyō hibun kenkyū* 景教碑文研究 , he argues that because the term *Bōsī* 波斯 acted as a prefix which linked terms such *sì* 寺 (temple) or *jiào* 教 (teaching) to Syriac Christianity in contemporaneous Chinese, that the term *Bōsīrén* 波斯人 (E. Persian person) should be understood to identify Rimitsuei as an adherent of Syriac Christianity.[62] Such usage of the word *Bōsīrén* is not present in other contemporaneous texts where it exclusively means "Persian person" rather than "Syriac Christian."[63] Moreover, it would be unusual given the context of the sentence, which describes visitors to the court with reference to both their nationality and their name, to find one of these figures demarked by their religious identity rather than their nationality. In his *The Nestorian Monument in China,* Saeki provides different evidence to identify Rimitsuei as a Syriac Christian. He suggests that the common Chinese name, Lǐ Mì 李密 , used to refer to Rimitsuei in the *Shoku Nihongi* derived from a scribal error.[64] Rather, Saeki believes that the name should have been rendered as Milǐ 密李 , which would correspond to the Persian name Mīlis or Mīles.[65] If Rimitsuei was in fact a Persian named Mīlis, Saeki suggests that he may have been the priest Mīlis, father of Yazdbōzīd/Yazbōzēd, the man who erected the Nestorian Stele (C. *Dàqín Jǐngjiào liúxíng Zhōngguó bēi* 大秦景教流行中國碑).[66] This is problematic since no link can be established between Mīlis and Rimitsuei other than a potential similarity of names and the fact that they had

---

[58] The original text states:

十一月戊寅。天皇臨朝。詔授入唐副使従五位上中臣朝臣名代従四位下。故判官正六位上田口朝臣養年富。紀朝臣馬主並贈従五位下。准判官従七位下大伴宿祢首名。唐人皇甫東朝。波斯人李密翳等授位有差。(Kuroita Katsumi and Kokushi Daikei Henshūkai, eds., *Shoku Nihongi: Zenpen*, 141).

[59] Yano Kenichi, "Kentōshi to rainichi 'Tōjin' Kōho Tōchō o chūshin toshite," *Senshū Daigaku Ajia Sekai Kenkyū Senta Nenbō* 6 (2012), 133; Mori Kimiaki, "Ri Mitsuei," in *Asahi Nihon rekishi jinbutsu jiten*, edited by Asahi Shinbunsha (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1994), 1802.

[60] Mori Kimiaki, "Nakatomi no Nashiro," in *Asahi Nihon rekishi jinbutsu jiten*, edited by Asahi Shinbunsha (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1994), 1199; Mori, "Ri Mitsuei," 1802.

[61] James Harry Morris, "The Case for Christianity in Japan prior to the 16th Century," *Oriens Christianus* 98 (2015), 109-137; James Harry Morris, "The Figures of Kōho and Li-mi-i, and the origins of the case for a Christian missionary presence in Tenpyō Era Japan," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27, No. 2 (2017), 313-323; James Harry Morris, "The Legacy of Peter Yoshirō Saeki: Evidence of Christianity in Japan before the arrival of Europeans," *The Journal of Academic Perspectives* 2016, No. 2 (2016), 1-22; James Harry Morris, "Rereading the evidence of the earliest Christian communities in East Asia during and prior to the *Táng* Period," *Missiology: An International Review* 45, No. 3 (2017), 252-264.

[62] Saeki Yoshirō, *Keikyō hibun kenkyū* (Tokyo: Tairō Shoin, 1911), 16.

[63] Morris, "The Legacy of Peter Yoshirō Saeki: Evidence of Christianity in Japan before the arrival of Europeans," 7-8.

[64] Peter Yoshirō Saeki, *The Nestorian Monument in China* (London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1916), 62.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

both been present in the Táng capital of Cháng'ān.[67] Moreover, as noted by Max Deeg, it would be unusual to render Mīlis (Mîlês) as 密李 in Middle Chinese.[68] If Rimitsuei was a Syriac Christian monk or priest, we would also expect to find a title such as *sō* 僧 (C. *Sēng*) demarking him as such,[69] as is the case when Syriac Christian monks and priests are referred to in contemporaneous Chinese documents.[70]

Elsewhere, I have argued that since Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Christianity were all present in contemporaneous Persia, Rimitsuei's religious identity will remain a mystery.[71] Whilst I maintain that Rimitsuei's religious identity cannot be established with certainty, Ishihara Tsutomu provides important evidence for estimating Rimitsuei's potential religious affiliation. He argues that Manichaeism had been outlawed in Táng China since 732CE meaning that it would have been nearly impossible for Nakatomi no Nashiro to receive permission from the Chinese authorities to bring a Manichaean to Japan.[72] This appears to be a misunderstanding on the part of Ishihara, since other sources note that the laws to which he refers permitted the practice of foreign religions, but banned the preaching of those religions to the Chinese.[73] Ishihara also notes that no references to Rimitsuei appear in contemporaneous Buddhist texts unlike contemporaneous foreign, Buddhist visitors.[74] Indeed, since Rimitsuei is not mentioned alongside Buddhist visitors, Dōsen 道璿 (702-760CE) and Baramon 婆羅門 (alternatively known as *Bodaisenna* 菩提僊那 704-760CE), two other members of Nakatomi no Nashiro's embassy[75] who graced the court without the other embassy members shortly after Nakatomi no Nashiro first introduced his whole party to the Emperor,[76] it seems unlikely that he was a Buddhist priest. Finally, Ishihara notes that Zoroastrians rarely made attempts to spread their religion to the Táng or beyond.[77] Although these pieces of evidence are potentially useful, they rely on the assumption that Rimitsuei visited Japan for primarily religious purposes, something which has not been proven. In the case that Rimitsuei did visit Japan for religious purposes, I believe that Ishihara's thesis may be used as an interesting starting point to explore Rimitsuei's religious affiliation, however, in the case that Rimitsuei visited for secular purposes, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, Buddhist, or Christian religious affiliation all remain equally plausible. In summation, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that Rimitsuei was a Syriac Christian missionary and insufficient evidence to identify his religious affiliation.

Saeki also recorded the possibility that Rimitsuei was a doctor, due to an alternative version of the final character of his name.[78] The alternative version of Rimitsuei's name, Rimitsui 李密醫 (C. Lǐ Miyī), contains the

---

[67] Morris, "The Figures of Kōho and Li-mi-i, and the origins of the case for a Christian missionary presence in Tenpyō Era Japan," 317.
[68] Max Deeg, *Die Strahlende Lehre: Die Stele von Xi'an* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2018), p. 20, no. 39.
[69] Morris, "The Figures of Kōho and Li-mi-i, and the origins of the case for a Christian missionary presence in Tenpyō Era Japan," 318.
[70] See for instance descriptions of Syriac Christian priest, Adam (Jǐngjìng 景淨) as *Dàqín sì bōsī sēng Jǐngjìng* 大秦寺波斯僧景淨 (E. The Persian monk Adam of the Syriac Temple) in contemporaneous Chinese documents: Zhēnyuán xīndìng shìjiào mùlù juǎn dì shíqī, *CBETA Hànwén dàzàng jīng CBETA*, T55, no. 2156, 756; Dàtáng zhēnyuán xù kāiyuán shìjiào lù juǎn shàng, *CBETA Hànwén dàzàng jīng CBETA*, T55, no. 2157, 892.
[71] Morris, "The Figures of Kōho and Li-mi-i, and the origins of the case for a Christian missionary presence in Tenpyō Era Japan," 318-319.
[72] Ishihara Tsutomu, "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō," *Higashi Ajia no Kodai Bunka* 18 (1978), 32.
[73] Samuel N. C. Lieu, "Manicheism vi. In China," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2002.
[74] Ishihara, "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō," 32.
[75] Mori, "Nakatomi no Nashiro," 1199.
[76] Kuroita and Kokushi Daikei Henshūkai, eds., *Shoku Nihongi: Zenpen*, 141.
[77] Ishihara, "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō," 32.
[78] Saeki, *Keikyō hibun kenkyū*, 15-16.

character, *i* 醫 , which refers to medical practitioners.[79] The other spelling for Rimitsuei's name used thus far in this research note in which the final character *ei* 翳 is present lacks any such connotation.[80] This version of the name appears to be more popular in modern reprints of the text,[81] and according to Saeki Ariyoshi and Itō was original to the text.[82] In my own exploration of older copies of the *Shoku Nihongi,* I have found that the name Rimitsui and the use of characters which suggest a role in medicine to be more prevalent.[83] P. Y. Saeki argues that given the presence of this alternative final character that Rimitsuei's name should be translated as Mīlis, the doctor.[84] On the other hand, Matsuki Akitomo, who accepts the thesis that Rimitsuei was a doctor, but rejects the concept that his name is incorrectly rendered, argues that the man should be thought of as Rimitsu, the doctor.[85] Indeed, the fact that Emperor Shōmu was engaged in reforming Japanese medical practices[86] perhaps lends to the case that Rimitsuei was a medical practitioner. Scholars such as Arthur Lloyd, Junjirō Takakusu, and Joseph Needham have all argued that he was a physician active within these reforms.[87] Identifying Rimitsuei as a doctor is, however, problematic. Itō notes that if the character *i* 醫 indicates that Rimitsuei was a doctor, grammatically it should precede his name so as to read *i Rimitsu* (C. Yī Lǐ Mì).[88] Additionally, Rinoie Masafumi illustrates that there are no references to a doctor named Rimitsu in contemporaneous documents from Cháng'ān.[89] Due to the paucity of textual evidence from Cháng'ān and on a grammatical basis, it is therefore problematic to assert that Rimitsuei was a doctor. The suggestion that Rimitsuei was a doctor is often used to strengthen the argument that he was a missionary due to a perceived link between medicine and Syriac Christianity,[90] however, although Syriac Christians did practice medicine it would be misleading to suggest that they monopolized the trade.[91]

Elsewhere I wrote that:

> ...we should also conclude that Li-mi-i [Rimitsuei] visited in a secular rather than religious capacity as a physician. Such a conclusion...[suggests] that Li-mi-i had a purpose in one of Emperor Shōmu's projects, most likely his medical reforms.[92]

---

[79] Ibid.

[80] Morris, "The Legacy of Peter Yoshirō Saeki: Evidence of Christianity in Japan before the arrival of Europeans," 8-10.

[81] Ibid., 9.

[82] Saeki Ariyoshi, *Zōho Rikkokushi* (Tokyo: Meichō Fukyūkai, 1988), 259; Itō "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 63 n. 25.

[83] Morris, "The Legacy of Peter Yoshirō Saeki: Evidence of Christianity in Japan before the arrival of Europeans," 9-10.

[84] Saeki, *The Nestorian Monument in China*, 62.

[85] Matsuki Akimoto, "Kinmeichō ni Rainichi shita Kudara no ishi Ōyuryōda ni tsuite," *Nihon Ishi Gaku Zasshi* 29, No. 4 (1983), 448.

[86] William Wayne Farris, *Population, Disease, and Land in Early Japan, 645-900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 50-73.

[87] Arthur Lloyd, *Shinran and his work: studies in Shinshu theology* (Tokyo: Kyo Bun Kwan, 1910, 171-172; Arthur Lloyd, *The Creed of Half Japan: Historical Sketches of Japanese Buddhism* (London: John Murray, 1911), 222-223; Junjirō Takakusu, "Le Voyage de Kanshin en Orient (742-754)," *Bulletin de l'École français d'Extrême-Orient* 28 (1928), 7-8; Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China,* Volume 1, *Introductory Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 188.

[88] Itō, *Perushia bunka torai kō*, 28.

[89] Rinoie Masafumi, *Tenpyō no kyaku, Perushiajin no naji: Ri Mitsei to Keikyōhi* (Tōkyō: Tōhō Shoten, 1986), 65-74.

[90] Saeki, *Keikyō hibun kenkyū*, 15-16; Ishihara, "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō," 31-32.

[91] Morris, "The Legacy of Peter Yoshirō Saeki: Evidence of Christianity in Japan before the arrival of Europeans," 9.

[92] Morris, "The Figures of Kōho and Li-mi-i, and the origins of the case for a Christian missionary presence in Tenpyō Era Japan," 319.

Following further consideration, I do not believe that it is possible to affirm that Rimitsuei was a physician since this is grammatically and terminologically problematic, and lacks support in Chinese sources, although it remains a possibility. Nevertheless, I abide by my conclusion that he came to Japan for primarily secular purposes. Kōho Tōchō, the man with whom Rimitsuei received rank from the Emperor, is featured extensively in the *Shoku Nihongi*.[93] Kōho was involved in the office of court music and later became a Vice-Governor.[94] Yano Kenichi argues that he was brought to Japan to perform at the opening ceremony of the Nara *Daibutsu* 奈良大仏 and in order that his expertise might be used in the country.[95] Since Kōho's name is listed prior to Rimitsuei's, Rinoie argues that it is possible to conjecture that Rimitsuei was the younger of the pair (below the age of 18 or 19) or of lower rank.[96] In any case, while the following is potentially the product of crude reasoning, I would suggest that the *Shoku Nihongi* illustrates that the foreigners who returned to Japan with Nakatomi no Nashiro's were categorized by their roles as either secular or religious. As noted, after the whole of Nakatomi no Nashiro's group had an audience with the Emperor, Dōsen and Baramon, who had explicitly religious roles, met with the Emperor alone.[97] Following this Kōho, whose role was primarily secular in nature, and Rimitsuei, met with the Emperor without Dōsen and Baramon.[98] This suggests that the foreigners were categorized by their roles, with those involved in religious professions meeting the Emperor at one point, and those involved in secular positions at another. This conclusion is further strengthened by the fact that there are very few instances of religious figures receiving rank from the Emperor in the *Shoku Nihongi*, and under Emperor Shōmu no monks or priests received imperially awarded rank.[99] Since Rimitsuei met the Emperor separately from Dōsen and Baramon, and since he received a rank from the Emperor, it would appear that he came to Japan in a secular capacity. Some scholars have suggested that Rimitsuei may have been involved in the field of music due to his featuring alongside Kōho in the text,[100] however, as with his potential role as a doctor this remains unclear in the source material. Indeed, Rinoie argues that Rimitsuei could not have been a musician since he does not appear alongside Kōho and his family at later points in the text.[101] Despite all this, since Dōsen, Baramon, and Kōho all had a role (religious, scholarly, musical or political) to play in Tenpyō 天平 era (729-749CE) and post-Tenpyō era Japan,[102] it is highly likely that Rimitsuei was also brought to Japan due to some service that he was able to render to Shōmu's government.

Whilst Yano notes that the year of Rimitsuei's birth, and details regarding his life once in Japan are completely untraceable,[103] I believe that it may be possible to make some estimations regarding Rimitsuei's personage. From the text, we know that he is a Persian who received rank from the Emperor according to his social status,[104] and (as discussed above) it seems likely that he came to Japan in a secular role. Furthermore, his receiving of a low rank[105] and his mention in the *Shoku Nihongi* suggest that he held a fairly high social status. Like other scholars, I believe that Rimitsuei's name may point to details about his personage. Itō suggests

[93] Yano, "Kentōshi to rainichi 'Tōjin' Kōho Tōchō o chūshin toshite," 129-141.
[94] Ibid. 129-141; Morris, "The Figures of Kōho and Li-mi-i, and the origins of the case for a Christian missionary presence in Tenpyō Era Japan," 314-315.
[95] Yano, "Kentōshi to rainichi 'Tōjin' Kōho Tōchō o chūshin toshite," 129-141.
[96] Rinoie, *Tenpyō no kyaku, Perushiajin no naji: Ri Mitsei to Keikyōhi*, 105.
[97] Kuroita and Kokushi Daikei Henshūkai, eds., *Shoku Nihongi: Zenpen*, 141.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 97-202.
[100] Ishihara, "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō," 34-25; Mori, "Ri Mitsuei," 1802.
[101] Rinoie, *Tenpyō no kyaku, Perushiajin no naji: Ri Mitsei to Keikyōhi*, 103.
[102] Ishihara, "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō," 34-35.
[103] Yano, "Kentōshi to rainichi 'Tōjin' Kōho Tōchō o chūshin toshite," 131.
[104] Kuroita and Kokushi Daikei Henshūkai, eds., *Shoku Nihongi: Zenpen*, 141.
[105] See discussion in: Rinoie, *Tenpyō no kyaku, Perushiajin no naji: Ri Mitsei to Keikyōhi*, 104-106.

that the name Rimitsuei may be derived from the Persian name Rāmyār.[106] This seems unlikely since Lǐ 李 (J. *Ri*) was a Chinese surname popular amongst Persians contemporaneously.[107] Although Ishihara agrees that Lǐ is Rimitsuei's surname, he notes the difficulties associated with translating the character's first name into contemporaneous Chinese, and therefore argues that the name Mitsuei 密翳 was likely constructed in order to encapsulate some sort of meaning rather than according to phonetics.[108] As such, he favors the rendering Mitsui 密醫 , allowing him to suggest that Ri Mitsuei was a doctor.[109] Nevertheless, as discussed above there are issues with accepting not only the spelling "Mitsui," but also the concept that it betrays some sort of meaning related to medicine. On the other hand, Imoto notes that the name is likely derived from Persian.[110] He argues that since the character *Mitsu* 密 was used to transliterate foreign phonics such as *mir*, *mur*, or *mihr* into Chinese, the name Mitsuei was likely originally a Persian name such as *Mihr-ay*, *Mihr-ey* or *Mihr-ag*.[111] Building on the work of Philippe Gignoux, Deeg has also suggested the Middle Persian name *Rēv-Mihr* as a potential point of origin.[112] Rinoie, who explores Mitsuei's name at length proposes *mi-wei* or *miwai*.[113] Following Imoto and Deeg, I would also suggest that *Mihr-dād*, *Mihr-ād*, or perhaps even a derivative of the Sogdian *Miši* are potential origins for the name Mitsuei. Nevertheless, on the whole I believe that Imoto's suggestions of *Mihr-ay* and *Mihr-ey* resemble the Japanese, Mitsuei, more closely than *Mihr-ag*, *Mihr-dād* or *Mihr-ād.* The concept that Rimitsuei had a Sogdian name is unlikely, although artefacts containing both Sogdian and Middle Persian inscriptions have been discovered in the Tenpyō era capital, Nara.[114] These names are all theophoric in nature, consisting of the theonym *Mihr* (E. Mithra)[115] and some additional phonic(s). Israel Campos argues that theophoric names have a religious meaning which represent either:

> an act of religious devotion by the individual's progenitors or...a personal option of the person, who chooses this name in a certain moment of his adult life.[116]

Since names containing the theonym, *Mihr*, were popular amongst Zoroastrians and Manichaeans,[117] it is reasonable to assume that Ri Mitsuei's parents were Zoroastrian or Manichaean. Unless, Ri Mitsuei converted to another religion he too was likely Zoroastrian or Manichaean. Itō, who believes that other Tocharai and Persian visitors to Japan were Zoroastrian, suggests that because Ri Mitsuei is not mentioned further in the *Shoku Nihongi*, he must have been a Manichaean who fell victim to the slander of his Zoroastrian countrymen.[118] Although this is a possibility, there appears no way at present to determine which of the two religions he

---

[106] Itō, *Perushia bunka torai kō*, 28.
[107] Matsuki, "Kinmeichō ni Rainichi shita Kudara no ishi Ōyuryōda ni tsuite," 449; Ishihara, "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō," 31.
[108] Ishihara, "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō," 31.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Imoto Eiichi, *Kyōkai Saishi kūkan* (Tokyo: Hirakawa Shuppansha, 1985), 170.
[111] Imoto Eiichi, "Mihrak (弥勒) and other Iranian words," *Orient* 18 (1982), 131.
[112] Deeg, *Die Strahlende Lehre: Die Stele von Xi'an,* p. 20, n. 39. See also: Philippe Gignoux, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch (hrsgv. M. Mayrhofer u. R. Schmitt), Band II: Mitteliranische Personennamen, Faszikel 2: Noms propres Sassanides en moyen-Perse épigraphique* (Vienna: Verlag der Östereichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), p. 154, Nr. 812.
[113] Rinoie, *Tenpyō no kyaku, Perushiajin no naji: Ri Mitsei to Keikyōhi*, 75-97.
[114] Morris, "The Case for Christianity in Japan prior to the 16th Century," 125-126.
[115] Rüdiger Schmitt, "Personal Names, Iranian V. Sasanian Period," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 2005.
[116] Campos Israel, "Theophoric names as a matter of faith," 2009.
[117] Philippa Adrych, Robert Bracey, Dominic Dalglish, Stefanie Lenk and Rachel Wood, *Images of Mithra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 94-95; Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 194; Michael Allen Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 68.
[118] Itō, "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," 63 n. 25.

belonged to.

Since Ri Mitsuei's surname, Lǐ 李 , was popular amongst Persians in Táng China it is difficult to ascertain a great deal from his surname. There were some 4,000 foreign families residing in Cháng'ān by 787CE.[119] Ye Yiliang notes that most Persians in Táng China were merchants although some were employed as administrators or in the military.[120] Statistically the likeliness that Ri Mitsuei was a merchant is therefore high, and this may explain why there are no further references to him in Japanese sources. Nevertheless, the *Shoku Nihongi* rarely mentions merchants (J. *Shōnin* 商人), and rarely refers to them by name. Due to his status, which I believe is illustrated by the fact that he is named in the document, he may have been related to other high ranking, Persian, Lǐ mentioned in contemporaneous Chinese texts. Nevertheless, there is no possible way to link Ri Mitsuei to these other figures. Prominent Lǐ include descendants of the Sasanian line, such as Lǐ Sù 李素 who was a Christian cleric and a court astronomer,[121] as well as poets and medical experts such as Lǐ Xún 李珣 .[122] The recent discovery of a *mokkan* 木簡 (E. a document recorded on a piece of wood) from 765CE,[123] may also shine some light on Ri Mitsuei. The *mokkan* notes the employment of a Persian called Hashi no Kiyomichi 破斯清通 at the Imperial university known as the *Daigaku ryō* 大学寮 .[124] Whilst few have conducted research into the figure, Watanabe Akihiro of the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (J. *Nara Bunkazai Kenkyūsho* 奈良文化財研究所) has suggested that Hashi no Kiyomichi may have been Ri Mitsuei, a member of his family, or someone else with links to the figure.[125] If true, this suggests that Ri Mitsuei or his family integrated into Japan, and that they were involved in the field of education.

Like his predecessor Dārāy, Ri Mitsuei is a mysterious figure about which little is known, but much is conjectured. Classical scholarship which has viewed Ri Mitsuei as a Syriac Christian missionary or doctor cannot be maintained. Since he visited the Emperor and received rank it is unlikely that he came to Japan in a religious role, rather it seems most likely that he was engaged in a secular field perhaps linked to education, or as Rinoie suggests that he possibly died shortly after having come to Japan.[126] Moreover, because his name is recorded in the *Shoku Nihongi* and because he received rank, he likely held high social status. Such is the lack of knowledge that surrounds the figure that even his original name is debated. This research note argued that his surname was likely the common Sino-Persian, Lǐ, whereas his first name was likely derived from a Mithraic

---

[119] Ye Yiliang, "Introductory Essay: Outline of the Political Relations between Iran and China," *Aspects of the Maritime Silk Road: From the Persian Gulf to the East China Sea*, edited by Ralph Kauz (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 4.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Chengyong Ge and Matteo Nicolini-Zani, "The Christian Faith of a Sogdian Family in Chang'an during the Tang Dynasty," *Annali. Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli* f64 (2004), 181; Domenico Agostini and Sören Stark, "Zāwulistān, Kāwulistan and the Land Bosi 波斯 – on the question of a Sasanian Court-in-Exile in the Southern Hindukush," *Studia Iranica* 45 (2016), 25.

[122] Zheng Jinsheng, Nalini Kirk, Paul D. Buell and Paul U. Unschuld, eds., *Ben Cao Gang Mu Dictionary,* Volume 3, *Persons and Literary Sources* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 274.

[123] Miyata Osamu, *Isuramu yuītsu no kibō no kuni Nihon* (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūsho, 2017).

[124] The following is a rendering of the text. Backslashes mark the separation of sentences, whilst the character □ demarks illegible characters. It states:

大学寮解 申宿直官人事／員外大属破斯清通／天平神護元年□□□□ . (Sankei West, "Heijōkyū ni Perushajin no yakunin ga hataraitera!! 765 nen mokkan ga shōmei "kokusaiteki chishiki de tōyō ka" to senmonka," 2016).

[125] Sankei West, "Heijōkyū ni Perushajin no yakunin ga hataraitera!! 765 nen mokkan ga shōmei "kokusaiteki chishiki de tōyō ka" to senmonka," 2016.

[126] Rinoie, *Tenpyō no kyaku, Perushiajin no naji: Ri Mitsei to Keikyōhi*, 107.

theonym, *Mihr*, with the addition of a further phonic. If this is the case, it is highly likely that Ri Mitsuei was a Zoroastrian or Manichaean. Ri Mitsuei's visit to Japan, like Dārāy's before him, helps to further demythologize the commonly held conception that Japan's early foreign relations were limited to relations with Táng China and the Three Kingdoms of Korea (Baekje, Silla, and Goguryeo). Although, the episode illustrates that relations with non-East Asian nations were often facilitated by Sino-Japanese interaction, it also suggests that the nationals of other foreign nations influenced and interacted with early Japan.

Conclusions

In this research note, I have sought to offer some thoughts on early Persian visitors to Japan, and some of the potential issues with hereto accepted scholarly opinion on the topic. Previous scholarly attempts to deal with the biographies of the figures explored in this research note have often been based on outdated scholarship or have lacked sufficient evidence to ratify. This research note has attempted to provide a new starting point from which to study these figures based on new analyses and past interpretations that seem to hold some credence. While we can ascertain that Persians visited Ancient Japan and can garner limited information on these people from contemporaneous sources, there is very little that we can concretely say about these figures beyond that which is recorded in the source texts. It appears that early Persian visitors to Japan mentioned in the *Nihon Shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi* were of a high social status. Dārāy sought permission to leave Japan with a retinue of men, leaving behind his wife and promising to return in the future. Ri Mitsuei arrived as part of a returning Japanese embassy to Táng China and received rank from the Emperor. However, neither figure receives mention in Japan's classical histories after their initial appearance. Our limited knowledge of these figures does not mean that their visits were insignificant. On the contrary, the episodes elucidate the ways in which foreigners met with Japan's Emperors and the ways in which Japan's foreign relations with non-East Asian nations occurred. Moreover, the episodes illustrate that Japan's early foreign relations were not limited to relations with the Táng and the Three Kingdoms of Korea as is commonly assumed. As a closing thought it must also be noted that the figures explored in this research note were not necessarily the earliest Persians to arrive in Japan. Some scholars such as Matsuki Akimoto have contended that Persians arrived even earlier,[127] although this doesn't seem to have gained widespread acceptance.

References

Adrych, Philippa, Robert Bracey, Dominic Dalglish, Stefanie Lenk & Rachel Wood. 2017. *Images of Mithra.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Agostini, Domenico & Sören Stark. 2016. "Zāwulistān, Kāwulistan and the Land Bosi 波斯 – on the question of a Sasanian Court-in-Exile in the Southern Hindukush," *Studia Iranica,* Vol. 45: 17-38.

Alikuzai, Hamid Wahed. 2013. *A Concise History of Afghanistan in 25 Volumes,* Vol. 14. Bloomington: Trafford Publishing.

Aston, William (trans.) 1972. *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697, Two Volumes in One.* Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing.

Compareti, Matteo. 2009. "Chinese-Iranian Relations xv. The Last Sasanians in China," *Encyclopedia Iranica.* http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/china-xv-the-last-sasanians-in-china (Accessed July 26, 2018).

Dàtáng zhēnyuán xù kāiyuán shìjiào lù juǎn shàng 大唐貞元續開元釋教錄卷上 . *CBETA Hànwén dàzàng jīng CBETA* 漢文大藏經 , T55, no 2157. http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T55n2156_001 (Accessed May 8, 2018).

Deeg, Max. 2018. *Die Strahlende Lehre: Die Stele von Xi'an.* Vienna: LIT Verlag.

[127] Matsuki, "Kinmeichō ni Rainichi shita Kudara no ishi Ōyuryōda ni tsuite," 447-453.

Farris, William Wayne. 1995. *Population, Disease, and Land in Early Japan, 645-900.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ge, Chengyong & Matteo Nicolini-Zani. 2004. "The Christian Faith of a Sogdian Family in Chang'an during the Tang Dynasty," *Annali. Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli,* Vol. 64: 181-196.

Gignoux, Philippe. 1986. *Iranisches Personennamenbuch (hrsg.v. M. Mayrhofer u. R. Schmitt), Band II: Mitteliranische Personennamen, Faszikel 2: Noms propres Sassanides en moyen-Perse épigraphique.* Vienna: Verlag der Östereichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Ishihara, Tsutomu 石原力 . 1979. "Nara jidai ni rainichi shita Perushajin Rimitsuei (Ri Mitsu) kō" 奈良時代に来日したペルシャ人李密翳（李密）考 , *Higashi Ajia no Kodai Bunka* 東アジアの古代文化 , Vol. 18: 28-41.

Imoto, Eiichi 井本英一 . 1980. *Kodai no Nihon to Iran* 古代の日本とイラン . Tokyo: Gakuseisha.

Imoto, Eiichi 井本英一 . 1985. *Kyōkai Saishi kūkan* 境界・祭祀空間 . Tokyo: Hirakawa Shuppansha.

Imoto, Eiichi. 1982. "Mihrak (弥勒) and other Iranian words," *Orient,* Vol. 18: 129-132.

Imoto, Eiichi 井本英一 . 1978. "Perushiajin no raichō to urabonkai" ペルシア人の来朝と盂蘭盆会 , *Daihōron* 大法論 , Vol. 45, no. 9.

Israel, Campos. 2009. "Theophoric names as a matter of faith." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259442447_Theophoric_names_as_a_matter_of_faith (Accessed May 8, 2018).

Itō, Gikyō 伊藤義教 . 1980. *Perushia bunka torai kō: Shirukorōdo kara Asuka e* ペルシア文化渡来考 : シルクロードから飛鳥へ . Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Itō, Gikyō. 1979. "Zoroastrians' Arrival in Japan (Pahlavica I)," *Orient,* Vol. 15: 55-63.

Japanese Historical Text Initiative, University of California at Berkeley (ed.) *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀 . https://jhti.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/jhti/select.cgi?honname=1 (Accessed May 8, 2018).

Kuroita, Katsumi 黒板勝美 & Kokushi Daikei Henshūkai 國史大系編修会 (eds.) 1979. *Shoku Nihongi: Zenpen* 続日本紀 : 前編 . Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.

Lieu, Samuel N. C. 1998. *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*. Leiden: Brill.

Lieu, Samuel N. C. 2002. "Manicheism vi. In China," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/manicheism-v-in-china-1 (Accessed May 8, 2018).

Lloyd, Arthur. 1910. *Shinran and his work: studies in Shinshu theology.* Tokyo: Kyo Bun Kwan.

Lloyd, Arthur. 1911. *The Creed of Half Japan: Historical Sketches of Japanese Buddhism.* London: John Murray.

Matsuki Akimoto 松木明知 . 1983. "Kinmeichō ni Rainichi shita Kudara no ishi Ōyuryōda ni tsuite" 欽明朝に来日した百済の医師王有陵陀について , *Nihon Ishi Gaku Zasshi* 日本醫史學雜誌 , Vol. 29, No. 4: 447-454.

Miyata, Osamu 宮田律 . 2017. *Isuramu yuītsu no kibō no kuni Nihon* イスラム唯一の希望の国 日本 . Tokyo: PHP Kenkyūsho.

Mori, Kimiaki 森公章 . 1994. "Nakatomi no Nashiro" 中臣名代 , in *Asahi Nihon rekishi jinbutsu jiten* 朝日日本歴史人物辞典 , edited by Asahi Shinbunsha 朝日新聞社 : 1199. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha.

Mori, Kimiaki 森公章 . 1994. "Ri Mitsuei" 李密翳 , in *Asahi Nihon rekishi jinbutsu jiten* 朝日日本歴史人物辞典 , edited by Asahi Shinbunsha 朝日新聞社 : 1802. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha.

Morris, James Harry. 2015. "The Case for Christianity in Japan prior to the 16th Century," *Oriens Christianus,* Vol. 98: 109-137.

Morris, James Harry. 2017. "The Figures of Kōho and Li-mi-i, and the origins of the case for a Christian missionary presence in Tenpyō Era Japan," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* Vol. 27, No. 2: 313-323.

Morris, James Harry. 2016. "The Legacy of Peter Yoshirō Saeki: Evidence of Christianity in Japan before the arrival of Europeans," *The Journal of Academic Perspectives,* Vol. 2016, No. 2: 1-22.

Morris, James Harry. 2017. "Rereading the evidence of the earliest Christian communities in East Asia during and prior to the *Táng* Period," *Missiology: An International Review,* Vol. 45, No. 3: 252-264.

Needham, Joseph. 1954. *Science and Civilization in China, Volume 1: Introductory Orientations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nishimoto, Masahiro 西本昌弘 . 2010. "Asuka ni kita seiiki no Toharajin" 飛鳥に来た西域の吐火羅人 , *Kansai Daigaku Tōzai Gakujutsu Kenkyūsho Kiyō* 関西大学東西学術研究所紀要 , Vol. 43: 1-23.

Okamoto, Kenichi 岡本健一 . 1978. "Nihon ni kita seiikijin" 日本に来た西域人 , *Higashi Ajia no Kodai Bunka* 東アジアの古代文化 , Vol. 17: 58-63.

Pulleyblank, Edwin G. 2011. "Chinese-Iranian Relations i. In Pre-Islamic Times," *Encyclopedia Iranica.* http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/chinese-iranian-i (Accessed October 3, 2019).

Rinoie Masafumi, 李家正文 . 1986. *Tenpyō no kyaku, Perushiajin no naji: Ri Mitsei to Keikyōhi* 天平の客、ペルシア人の謎：李密翳と景教碑 . Tōkyō: Tōhō Shoten.

Saeki, Ariyoshi 佐伯有義 . 1988. *Zōho Rikkokushi* 増補六国史 . Tokyo: Meichō Fukyūkai.

Saeki, Yoshirō 佐伯好郎 . 1911. *Keikyō hibun kenkyū* 景教碑文研究 . Tokyo: Tairō Shoin.

Saeki, Peter Yoshirō. 1916. *The Nestorian Monument in China.* London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Sankei West 産経 West. 2016. "Heijōkyū ni Perushajin no yakunin ga hataraitera!! 765 nen mokkan ga shōmei 'kokusaiteki chishiki de tōyō ka' to senmonka" 平城宮にペルシャ人の役人が働いていた !! 765年木簡が証明「国際的知識で登用か」と専門家 . https://www.sankei.com/west/news/161005/wst1610050057-n1.html (Accessed May 8, 2018).

Schmitt, Rüdiger. 2005. "Personal Names, Iranian V. Sasanian Period," *Encyclopedia Iranica.* http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/personal-names-iranian-v-sasanian (Accessed May 8, 2018).

Takakusu, Junjirō. 1928. "Le Voyage de Kanshin en Orient (742-754)," *Bulletin de l'École français d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. 28: 1-41.

Takatō Gorō 高遠五郎 . 1978. "Asuka to Seiiki" 飛鳥と西域 , *Higashi Ajia no Kodai Bunka* 東アジアの古代文化 , Vol. 18: 108-117.

Williams, Michael Allen. 1985. *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity.* Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Xuánzàng 玄奘 , *Dà táng xīyù jì* 大唐西域記 . https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=944265 (Accessed May 6, 2018).

Yano Kenichi 矢野建一 . 2012. "Kentōshi to rainichi 'Tōjin' Kōho Tōchō o chūshin toshite" 遣唐使と来日「唐人」皇甫東朝を中心として , *Senshū Daigaku Ajia Sekai Kenkyū Senta Nenbō* 専修大学東アジア世界史研究センター年報 , Vol. 6: 129-141.

Ye Yiliang. 2010. "Introductory Essay: Outline of the Political Relations between Iran and China," in *Aspects of the Maritime Silk Road: From the Persian Gulf to the East China Sea*, edited by Ralph Kauz: 3-6. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Zarrinkūb, Abd Al-Husain. 1975. "The Arab Conquest of Iran and its Aftermath," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs,* edited by R. N. Frye: 1-53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zeimal, E. V. 1983. "The Political History of Transoxiana," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 3: The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanid Periods, Part 1,* edited by E. Yarshater: 232-262. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zheng, Jinsheng, Nalini Kirk, Paul D. Buell & Paul U. Unschuld (eds.) 2018. *Ben Cao Gang Mu Dictionary, Volume 3: Persons and Literary Sources*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Zhēnyuán xīndìng shìjiào mùlù juǎn dì shíqī 貞元新定釋教目錄卷第十七 . *CBETA Hànwén dàzàng jīng CBETA* 漢文大藏經 , T55, no. 2156. http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T55n2157_017 (Accessed May 8, 2018).