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Address: 17 Wauan-gil, Bongdam-eup, Hwaseong-si, Gyeonggi-do, Korea18323 International College, The University of Suwon

Manuscript Discrepancies and Historical Ambiguities: A Textual Study of the Shinchōkōki and Yasuke 写本の相違と歴史的曖昧さ：『信長公記』と弥助に関する本文研究

Alaric Naudé[1],
[1] *(Professor of Linguistics), College of Global Talent, University of Suwon, Suwon, Rep. of Korea)*

E-mail: naude@suwon.ac.kr

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the divergent approaches to the Shinchōkōki, contrasting Japanese scholarship—which emphasizes contextual accuracy and close adherence to the original Sengoku-era texts—with English-language research that often imposes modern ideologies onto premodern sources. Through a combination of quantitative probabilistic modeling and qualitative linguistic analysis, the research demonstrates that the exogenous methodologies prevalent in Western studies have led to a cascade of extrapolation errors. These errors are especially evident in the mythologized portrayal of Yasuke, whose scant historical references have been reinterpreted to support contemporary narratives of identity and cultural symbolism.

A key finding is that the Ikeda (池田本) manuscript on which most Japanese scholarship is based, due to its closer proximity to the original events and minimal political adulteration, emerges as the most accurate source for understanding Sengoku history. In contrast, the Sonkeikaku-bon (尊経閣本) the version used by Western scholars, an Edo-period reconstruction laden with Tokugawa-era embellishments, is unsuitable for reconstructing authentic Sengoku narratives. Consequently, the reinterpretation of Yasuke's status and receiving of wakizashi (short sword), stipend and housing is an artifact of later political writing rather than a reflection of Sengoku reality which has been further reinterpreted as samurai status by modern works ideologically driven scholars.

KEYWORDS

Shinchōkōki, black samurai, Yasuke, Oda Nobunaga, Sonkeikaku-bon, Ikeda , Kenkun , Tenri 信長公記, 黒人侍, 弥助, 織田信長, 尊経閣本, 池田本, 天理本, 建勲本

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of the *Shinchōkōki* has resulted in two prevailing orthodoxies: one grounded in Japanese scholarship (e.g, 石田善人**,** 1975; 和田裕弘, 2009) and the other shaped by English-language research (Lockley, 2024). The Japanese orthodoxy is defined by its adherence to the cultural and historical context of the Sengoku period, with interpretations that align closely with the textual and linguistic nuances of the original manuscript. Scholars working within this framework emphasize the importance of contextual accuracy, treating figures such as Yasuke in proportion to the limited references available in historical sources.

In contrast, the English orthodoxy has evolved through a less rigorous engagement with the *Shinchōkōki*, leading to significant methodological flaws. This has resulted in a quasi-religious narrative that incorporates elements absent from the original text. The case of Yasuke exemplifies this disparity. Due to the scarcity of documentation, Western scholars have frequently resorted to speculative interpretations, extrapolating details unsupported by primary evidence. Furthermore, the limited proficiency in Japanese among many researchers has led to a reliance on secondary sources and incomplete translations. This, coupled with a receptive audience unable to critically evaluate these claims, has created an academic echo chamber in which speculative narratives are perpetuated and treated as authoritative.

The consequences of this divergence are far-reaching, as the English orthodoxy has moved beyond historical analysis into myth-making, particularly regarding Yasuke. This mythologized figure often reflects modern cultural preoccupations rather than the historical realities documented in the *Shinchōkōki*. Such disparities highlight the need for a more integrated and evidence-based approach to the study of this significant historical text. These errors arise from a biased approach.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study of historical figures in Sengoku-period Japan has often been shaped by later Edo-period narratives, leading to anachronistic interpretations of social status and identity. One such case is Yasuke, a foreign retainer of Oda Nobunaga, whose historical role has been debated due to inconsistencies in primary sources and later textual additions. While Japanese scholarship tends to prioritize earlier Sengoku-period manuscripts, much of the Western discourse has relied on Edo-period transcriptions since these are available in English translations (Lamers & Elisonas, 2011), leading to significant historical distortions when usingonly English sources. To clarify Yasuke's historical identity and evaluate how later sources reshaped his portrayal, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do textual differences between the Ikeda manuscript (池田本) and the Sonkeikaku-bon (尊経閣本) affect the historical reconstruction of Yasuke's identity?
2. To what extent has the Western reliance on later manuscripts such as the Sonkeikaku-bon contributed to an ahistorical view of Yasuke as a samurai?
3. How do linguistic shifts between Sengoku-period and Edo-period manuscripts shape the evolving portrayal of Yasuke's role and status?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to clarify the extent of Edo-period editorial influence on Yasuke's portrayal, identify how linguistic and historiographical changes have shaped modern interpretations, and provide a more evidence-based historical analysis of his actual status in Nobunaga's administration. The findings will contribute to a reassessment of the methodological challenges in reconstructing historical identities using later textual sources.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

When considering the available literature, the first serious flaw is that Western *Shinchōkōki* researchers use an exogenous approach to understanding Sengoku-period texts. This foundational error in methodology triggers a snowball effect of extrapolation errors, where initial misinterpretations cascade into increasingly speculative conclusions. A significant contributor to this issue is the misunderstanding of historical and cultural context, often compounded by the application of modern ideologies to the interpretation of premodern texts.

This misalignment is particularly evident in discussions surrounding Yasuke, a figure mentioned only briefly in the *Shinchōkōki* and Ietada Nikki by name and perhaps a handful of other sources without his name. Instead of contextualizing these references within the limited evidence available, Western researchers frequently insert assumptions that reflect contemporary concerns rather than historical realities. By projecting modern narratives of identity or cultural symbolism onto Yasuke, they create a distorted portrayal that diverges significantly from the text's intent and scope. This methodological flaw not only undermines the credibility of such interpretations but also perpetuates a mythology that stands in contrast to the careful textual analysis typically seen in Japanese scholarship despite the existence of a large corpus in English from skilled linguists (Seeley, 2023).

A second area of concern is the neglect of basic linguistic nuances, particularly in understanding the semantics and idiomatic expressions of the Sengoku period. For instance, the phrase 六尺二分 (*roku-shaku ni-bu*, approximately 182 cm or 6 feet) is often interpreted by Western researchers as an objective measurement of height. However, in the context of the period, this expression appears to have functioned as a generic idiom used to describe individuals perceived as large or imposing, rather than a precise physical measurement.

This misinterpretation is compounded by the failure to conduct basic cross-comparisons with other contemporary texts that are considered highly reliable in the Japanese linguistics research corpus (金子拓, 2008). Numerous sources from the Sengoku period use 六尺二分 (*roku-shaku ni-bu*) to describe a variety of individuals, suggesting its role as a conventional descriptor rather than a unique attribute. This oversight likely stems from a lack of linguistic sensitivity and the neglect of corroborative analysis across available literature. Such errors highlight the broader methodological gaps in Western scholarship, where anachronistic readings of idiomatic expressions lead to distorted conclusions about historical figures and events.

A third area of considerable concern, which contributes significantly to errors in interpretation, is the anachronistic approach employed in analyzing textual semantics. A clear example of this is the use of the 尊経閣本 (*Sonkeikaku-bon*, "Sonkeikaku edition") to assert that Yasuke, who served Nobunaga from 1581 to 1582, was conferred samurai status. The claim is based on the proposed fact that Yasuke was given a *wakizashi* (脇差, short sword although in the manuscript it is actually a さや巻

"scabbard" or decorated dagger[1]), which is argued to symbolize his elevation to the samurai class. However, this interpretation projects Edo-period conventions onto the Sengoku period, ignoring significant chronological differences in the regulation and symbolism of swords. (Also, problematic since it is found only in the Maeda Manuscript).

During the Sengoku period, only the *katana* (刀, long sword) was regulated specifically to samurai, while certain commoners in specialized vocations were permitted to carry *wakizashi*. The association of swords with exclusive samurai status emerged only after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Sword Hunt (*刀狩り, katanagari*) edict of 1588 and became absolute under Tokugawa Ieyasu's *Buke Shohatto* (武家諸法度, "Laws for the Military Houses") of 1615. Further refinements to these regulations were codified in a series of village laws (*郷村法, Gōson Hō*). By retrojecting later social norms onto the Sengoku period, researchers not only misrepresent the historical context but also distort the sociopolitical dynamics of the time. Thus, the argument for Yasuke's samurai status based on his possession of a *wakizashi* is unfounded when examined within the appropriate Sengoku-period framework.
This failure to align interpretations with the correct historical timeframe undermines the credibility of many conclusions drawn by Western researchers. Such errors perpetuate misconceptions about the roles and identities of individuals within Sengoku society, while also illustrating the broader pitfalls of anachronistic analysis in the study of historical texts, further reliance on Jesuit documents can be problematic due to the heavy bias found in such works (Takamura, 2019) and also cultural misunderstandings of words such as tono ((Fróis, L., & Mexia, 1598, p.17)).

A fourth area of errors arises from a misunderstanding of basic semantics and the evolution of vocabulary over time. Some researchers deliberately leave definitions vague to support conclusions that lack historical rigor. A prime example of this is the term "samurai," which is frequently misapplied without consideration of its period-specific meanings and sociohistorical development.

During the Heian period, the term *samurai* originated as the verb 侍う (*saburau*, yodan verb in classical Japanese grammar), meaning "to serve," "to wait upon," or "to accompany someone of higher status." This usage closely corresponds to the modern term 仕える (*tsukaeru*), meaning "to serve." (源隆国 ca. 1120–1140) By the Late Heian and Kamakura periods (12th–14th centuries), the verb evolved into a noun, referring to professional warriors in service to landholding lords (*daimyō*). The term began to signify a specific class of retainers responsible for maintaining order and protecting estates, reflecting the rise of the *bushi* warrior class.

By the Sengoku period, the word *samurai* had become more narrowly defined, referring to an elite subset of the *bushi* class. Samurai held hereditary warrior status and were distinct from *ashigaru* (common infantry). While upward mobility existed, it was far from fluid. Exceptional *ashigaru* who demonstrated significant loyalty and capability could sometimes be promoted by their *daimyō*, receiving a family name and entering the samurai class (太田牛一, ca.1569–1610). Such promotions, as in the well-documented case of Hideyoshi, were exceptional and required years of proven service.

The claim that "samurai status was not fixed" during the Sengoku period often stems from attempts to portray an era of war as entirely unstructured, allowing for near-universal upward mobility. This interpretation, however, misrepresents the structured nature of Sengoku-period society, where status distinctions, while occasionally breached, remained largely hereditary and deeply entrenched. These misunderstandings often arise from a lack of precision in defining terms or from projecting modern egalitarian ideals onto historical hierarchies.
The failure to properly define terms like *samurai* in accordance with their period-specific usage contributes to significant distortions in research. By ignoring the linguistic and semantic evolution of such key terms, some researchers produce interpretations that are at odds with historical realities, further perpetuating inaccuracies in Western scholarship on the Sengoku period.

One of the fundamental misunderstandings in Western interpretations of Sengoku-period texts is the conflation of the terms *bushi* (武士) and *samurai* (侍). While often used interchangeably, these terms are not synonymous and carry distinct meanings that reflect different layers of the warrior class and their societal roles. Failing to differentiate between these two concepts has led to significant distortions in the understanding of Sengoku-period social and military structures.

[1] さや巻 (sayamaki) was a common modification used for grip, protection, and decoration, and did not signify samurai status. Specifically, the Sayamaki is a shorter weapon than a wakizashi, sometimes this decorated weapon was used in dowries etc. While they could in some cases be used as a defense weapon, it was often decorative in nature.

The term *bushi* encompasses all members of the warrior class, a broad category that includes professional warriors of varying ranks and functions. From high-ranking *daimyō* commanding territories to lower-ranking soldiers and even specialized roles like *sōhei* (warrior monks), *bushi* served as a functional designation for those involved in martial and administrative duties. This inclusivity shows the diversity within the warrior class, where individuals operated at different levels of responsibility and privilege.

In contrast, *samurai* refers to a more narrowly defined subset of the *bushi* class. During the Sengoku period as with the earlier Kamakura Period, *samurai* were characterized by their hereditary status, their service as retainers to a *daimyō*, and their elevated position within the feudal hierarchy. Unlike the broader term *bushi*, the designation *samurai* carried specific cultural and social implications. It denoted a role that was deeply embedded in loyalty to a lord, adherence to family lineage, and a martial discipline that set them apart from other warriors (三浦浄心,1641). The distinction between Bushi and Samurai are also noted in the Portuguese dictionaries compiled during and briefly after this period meaning that contrary to popularized belief, the samurai system was hierarchical and operational during Sengoku (Rodrigues, 1603).

The distinction between these terms becomes even more evident when examining the mobility within the *bushi* class. While *bushi* as a whole allowed for some degree of upward mobility—such as *ashigaru* (common infantry) being promoted through exceptional service—*samurai* status was far less fluid. Entering the ranks of the *samurai* required not only proven merit but also formal recognition by a *daimyō*, often involving the granting of a family name and land. Such promotions were rare and marked significant achievements, as seen in the case of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who rose from humble origins to become one of Japan's most powerful leaders.

Aspect	**Bushi (武士)**	**Samurai (侍)**
Literal Meaning	"Warrior" or "military person"	"One who serves" or "attendant"
Scope	Broad term for warriors	Specific subgroup of bushi
Historical Context	Originated earlier; less specific	Emerged during Kamakura period; specific to retainers of lords
Cultural Role	Emphasizes military function	Emphasizes loyalty, honor, and ethics
Period of Use	From the Heian period onward	Predominantly from Kamakura to Edo periods

The most pressing issue currently facing Western research on the *Shinchōkōki* and Yasuke is the systemic corruption of the English-language corpus through circular referencing and the unchecked propagation of misinformation. A prime example of this phenomenon is the repetitive citation cycle: Source A (Lockley, 2016) is cited by Source B (Germain, 2023), Source B is cited by Source C (Wikipedia-Yasuke, 2025), but the origin of the error is Source A. This closed loop creates the illusion of credibility without any independent verification of the original claims. The result is a self-reinforcing system where speculative or inaccurate information is perpetuated as fact.

Thomas Lockley's *African Samurai: The True Story of Yasuke, a Legendary Black Warrior in Feudal Japan* (2019) exemplifies this problem. Presented as a biography, the book has been marketed as a factual account, despite introducing information not found in historical sources. Lockley's speculative narratives, which lack substantiation in primary Sengoku-period manuscripts (Purdy, 2020), have become a cornerstone for English-language discourse on Yasuke. This has led to widespread dissemination of unverified claims, with news outlets and social media platforms frequently quoting the book as an authoritative source. Other non-Japanese scholars (Arfianty & Sitanggang 2025) have based entire studies of the character of Yasuke based not on any original manuscript analysis but on the work of Lockley and subsequent works also based on Lockley's books or paper.

Further complicating the issue, platforms like Wikipedia have adopted these claims as definitive. Wikipedia editors, by their own admission, often lack the requisite knowledge of Japanese to verify primary sources, yet they insist on maintaining the narrative of Yasuke as a "samurai," derived exclusively from English-language works such as Lockley's. Dissenting perspectives rooted in Sengoku-period manuscripts or Japanese scholarship are routinely dismissed, creating an environment where historical critiques are marginalized in favor of perpetuating the prevailing myth.

Even more concerning is the influence of such narratives on traditionally authoritative sources. For example, Encyclopedia Britannica's online edition contains entries on Yasuke authored by Lockley himself, further embedding unverified data within a mainstream platform (Lockley, 2024). The inclusion of this content under the guise of academic authority lends unwarranted legitimacy to claims that deviate from historical evidence.

The implications of this corrupted corpus extend beyond academic circles. Many artificial intelligence engines rely on data harvested from sources like Wikipedia and Britannica, amplifying the spread of historically inaccurate information. As these

platforms increasingly shape public understanding, fringe ideas—such as the unsubstantiated notion of Yasuke's samurai status—have become mainstream. Meanwhile, critiques grounded in Sengoku-period culture and manuscripts are marginalized, with platforms like Wikipedia actively suppressing academic dissent that challenges the established narrative.

This cycle of misinformation underscores the urgent need for a rigorous reassessment of English-language research on the *Shinchōkōki* and Yasuke. By prioritizing primary sources and engaging with Japanese scholarship, researchers can begin to dismantle the echo chamber that perpetuates these inaccuracies. Until then, the myth will continue to overshadow the historical record, distorting not only Yasuke's story but also broader understandings of Sengoku-period Japan.

The current state of research on the *Shinchōkōki* and Yasuke is hampered by significant methodological and interpretative flaws, many of which stem from a failure to critically assess the reliability of the manuscripts used as primary sources. The overreliance on the 尊経閣本 (*Sonkeikaku-bon*), with its potential Tokugawa-era embellishments and unique but unverified details, raises serious concerns about the accuracy of conclusions drawn from its contents. This version, while valuable in understanding Edo-period historiographical practices, introduces a risk of substantial errors when applied uncritically to reconstructing Sengoku-period events.
Japanese scholars have long recognized the need for prioritizing earlier and less politically influenced transcriptions, such as the Ikeda (池田本), Kenkun (建勲本), and Tenri (天理本) versions, which are considered closer to Ōta Gyūichi's original text. These manuscripts provide a more reliable foundation for understanding Nobunaga's life and the historical context of Yasuke's service. By giving precedence to these versions and conducting a systematic textual analysis, researchers can avoid the pitfalls of relying on the *Sonkeikaku-bon* as a definitive source. In the following sections, a detailed textual analysis will be performed to illustrate how reliance on the *Sonkeikaku-bon* could lead to significant misinterpretations of key events and figures in the *Shinchōkōki*. We will also consider supporting documents. Through this analysis, we aim to underscore the necessity of revisiting the primary manuscripts and adopting a critical, evidence-based approach to Sengoku-period historiography.

4. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the *Sonkeikaku Bon* (尊経閣本) as a historical source requires a combination of quantitative and probabilistic modeling and qualitative linguistic analysis to determine its reliability within the broader corpus of *Shinchōkōki* manuscripts. These methodologies address both the statistical likelihood of textual corruption and the semantic evolution of key descriptions, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of the document's historical accuracy.

The first methodological approach applies a probabilistic model to measure the *Sonkeikaku Bon*'s reliability relative to other available manuscripts. This model incorporates variables such as the temporal gap between the original events and the document's compilation (conservative estimate of 70 years whereas some sources estimate up to 100), the number of existing manuscripts (69 although there are reportedly 2 additional manuscripts), and the presence of unique details found only in this version. The weighting system differentiates between manuscripts adhering to the Ōta tradition (weighted at 1.0) and later accounts, including the *Sonkeikaku Bon*, which receive a lower reliability weighting (0.6). The model also accounts for the natural exponential decay of accuracy over time, reflecting the increased risk of textual embellishment or political reinterpretation in later sources. By applying these calculations, it becomes possible to quantify the likelihood of textual distortion in the *Sonkeikaku Bon*, offering a statistical foundation for comparative historical analysis.

The second methodological approach focuses on linguistic and semantic analysis, examining how terminology and phrasing have shifted between earlier Sengoku-period manuscripts and later Edo-period transcriptions. A comparative study of parallel phrases across different versions of the *Shinchōkōki* highlights key lexical modifications that suggest changes in narrative framing. Particular attention is given to how Yasuke is described. Additionally, claims regarding stipends, bestowed names, and other formalized recognitions are introduced in later manuscripts, despite being absent in contemporaneous records. These linguistic adjustments reflect broader Edo-period historiographical tendencies to reinterpret past events through a structured, hierarchical lens, requiring careful analysis to distinguish original descriptions from later editorial influences.
By integrating probabilistic modeling with linguistic analysis, this methodological framework ensures a balanced evaluation of the *Sonkeikaku Bon*, distinguishing textual integrity from later embellishment. This dual approach allows for a more precise determination of the manuscript's place within the historical record, ensuring that anachronistic interpretations are identified and accounted for in the assessment of *Shinchōkōki* manuscripts. Yōmei Bunko Bon along with the Ikeda Bon are used as a base texts as they are considered a highly trustworthy texts by leading Japanese scholars such as Ishida Yoshito (石田善人**,** 1975) and Hiroshi Wada (和田裕弘, 2009).

The third component of the methodology involves a graphological analysis of the 尊経閣本 (Sonkeikaku-bon) in comparison to versions that are considered highly accurate and are respected by Japanese scholars, namely the 池田本 (Ikeda-bon), 建勲本 (Kenkun-bon), and 天理本 (Tenri-bon). This analysis will examine orthographic and stylistic shifts that occurred as texts transitioned from the Kanbun (漢文) conventions of the Sengoku period to the more expanded writing style of the Edo period, particularly focusing on the integration of longer-form kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Graphological analysis is a well established method of understanding language evolution between manuscripts (Jia, 2010) and hence was chosen as one method.

The first step in this analysis will be a direct comparison of Kanbun syntax and character selection in the earlier manuscripts versus the Sonkeikaku-bon(尊経閣本). Particular attention will be given to word order, the presence or absence of okurigana (送り仮名),[2] and any systematic differences in kanji selection. The degree to which Sonkeikaku-bon(尊経閣本) moves away from the terse, abbreviation-heavy style typical of Sengoku-period Kanbun will be documented, with special consideration for any influences from vernacular Japanese.

Next, the Edo-period script characteristics of the Sonkeikaku-bon (尊経閣本) will be examined, including; Expanded kanji forms, where Edo-period scribes may have favored different character choices. Increased phonetic annotation, particularly the use of hiragana or katakana to clarify readings. Structural modifications, including changes in phrasing that accommodate shifts toward a more Japanized syntax. The final aspect of this analysis will focus on vocabulary shifts, identifying whether the Sonkeikaku-bon (尊経閣本) exhibits lexical changes that differentiate it from its predecessors. If significant vocabulary substitutions are found, these will be assessed to determine whether they reflect evolving linguistic norms, changes in scribal convention, or intentional modernization of the text to suit Edo-period readers where the conventions in script were rapidly changing to match the emerging market of printed books (Kornicki, 2006). By systematically comparing these features, this analysis will provide insight into how historical Japanese manuscripts were altered and adapted over time, reflecting broader linguistic and orthographic trends from the Sengoku to Edo periods.

5. FINDINGS & RESULTS

Quantitative Analysis: Textual Validity of Sonkeikaku-bon

To evaluate the reliability of the 尊経閣本 (*Sonkeikaku-bon*) as a source, we apply a probabilistic model to estimate its accuracy compared to other existing versions of the *Shinchōkōki*. This approach considers key variables such as the temporal distance between the events and the compilation of the *Sonkeikaku-bon*, the number of eyewitness documents, and the unique details included in this version that are absent from other manuscripts thereby following Bayesian models of probability.

The formula used for this analysis is as follows:

$$P(A) = \left(\frac{U}{N}\right) \cdot \left(W_L \cdot e^{-kT} + W_E \cdot \frac{E}{N}\right) \cdot M$$

[2] Okurigana (送り仮名) are kana characters (hiragana) that are attached to kanji to indicate grammatical function and pronunciation in Japanese writing. They help clarify how a kanji should be read and conjugated, especially in verbs, adjectives, and some nouns. In Sengoku-period Kanbun (漢文), okurigana were often minimal or absent because the text adhered closely to Classical Chinese structure. Readers familiar with kunten (訓点) systems could infer grammatical forms. However, as Japanese writing developed in the Edo period, scribes increasingly used okurigana to make texts more accessible and closer to spoken Japanese. This shift is one of the key orthographic differences between Sengoku and Edo-period manuscripts, including those under study in the 尊経閣本 (Sonkeikaku-bon).

Substituting Known Values Given:

- N= 70 (Total documents)
- U=1 (Documents dealing the specific subject)
- T=70 (Years after the event)
- E=69 (Eyewitness documents)
- WE=1.0 (Weight for older versions closer to Ota Tradition)
- WL=0.6 (Weight for later accounts)
- k=0.02 (Exponential decay constant)
- M=0.8 (Significance factor for unique mention)

This first step in understanding the *Sonkeikaku-bon* is to place it within the corpus of currently available texts and ascertain its viability as a historical reference text. The probability calculation for the *Sonkeikaku-bon* reveals critical issues regarding its reliability as a historical source.

Step 1: Calculate $\frac{U}{N}$

$$\frac{U}{N} = \frac{1}{70} = 0.01429$$

Step 2: Calculate $W_L \cdot e^{-kT}$

$$e^{-kT} = e^{-0.02 \cdot 70} = e^{-1.4} \approx 0.2466$$

$$W_L \cdot e^{-kT} = 0.6 \cdot 0.2466 \approx 0.14796$$

Step 3: Calculate $W_E \cdot \frac{E}{N}$

$$\frac{E}{N} = \frac{69}{70} = 0.9857$$

$$W_E \cdot \frac{E}{N} = 1.0 \cdot 0.9857 = 0.9857$$

Step 4: Combine Temporal and Ota Tradition Components

$$W_L \cdot e^{-kT} + W_E \cdot \frac{E}{N} = 0.14796 + 0.9857 = 1.13366$$

Step 5: Multiply by U/N and M

$$P(A) = \left(\frac{1}{70}\right) \cdot 1.13366 \cdot 0.8$$

$$P(A) = 0.01429 \cdot 1.13366 \cdot 0.8 \approx 0.01296$$

Final Probabilities
Probability of remaining uncorrupted

$$P(A) \approx 0.01296 \text{ or } 1.3\%$$

Probability of Corruption

$$P(C) = 1 - P(A) = 1 - 0.01296 = 0.987 \text{ or } 98.7\%$$

The analysis also reveals that the *Sonkeikaku-bon* is unique among the 70 known manuscripts addressing these events, as it presents details that are not corroborated by any of the 69 manuscripts adhering to the *Ōta tradition*. While this uniqueness might appear intriguing, it becomes problematic in the absence of independent verification. The significance factor applied in the calculation accounts for this, emphasizing the potential but limited value of such unique details. However, these details remain highly suspect due to their isolation within the manuscript tradition.

Additionally, the weighting system within the model starkly contrasts the reliability of manuscripts adhering to the *Ōta tradition* with later accounts such as the *Sonkeikaku-bon*. Manuscripts closer to the *Ōta tradition*, weighted at 1.0, are heavily favored in terms of accuracy compared to the *Sonkeikaku-bon*, which is weighted at 0.6. This disparity reflects the well-established principle that earlier manuscripts closely following the *Ōta tradition* are inherently more reliable than later transcriptions influenced by political literary embellishments or cultural factors. A weight of 0.6 (WL=0.6W) for later accounts in the probabilistic model serves to mathematically discount the reliability of sources that are temporally distant from the original events. This reflects well-established historiographical principles regarding textual accuracy and reliability over time (Gelman et al, 1995)[3] .

The results provide quantitative evidence of the challenges posed by the *Sonkeikaku-bon*. Its late compilation, combined with its reliance on unverifiable and unique details, significantly undermines its credibility. Furthermore, the dominance of earlier *Ōta tradition* manuscripts among the available sources reinforces the necessity of prioritizing versions like the Ikeda (池田本), Kenkun (建勲本), and Tenri (天理本) for historical inquiry. By relying on these earlier texts, researchers can better avoid the distortions introduced by the *Sonkeikaku-bon* and achieve a more accurate understanding of the events described in the *Shinchōkōki*.

Qualitative Analyses:
Terminology Shifts and Multiple Text Comparison
The shift in terminology between the Sengoku and Edo periods reveals significant differences in how figures like Yasuke were described, reflecting broader linguistic and cultural shifts. Terms such as 黒坊主 (*kurobōzu*, "black monk") and 黒坊 (*kurobō*, "black man") illustrate these changes in both form and function. In the manuscripts closest to Ōta Gyūichi's tradition, such as the Ikeda (池田本), Kenkun (建勲本), and Tenri (天理本) versions, the term 黒坊主 was used to describe Yasuke. This term ties physical appearance—his dark skin color, signified by 黒 (*kuro*, "black")—with the word 坊主 (*bōzu*, "monk"), which was commonly used to refer to men with shaven heads, particularly those serving in monastic or similar roles. In Yasuke's context, this term reflects the immediate, descriptive language of the Sengoku period, focused on observable characteristics and contextualized roles which in his case was associated with the Jesuits.

By the Edo period, however, this terminology had shifted, as seen in the Maeda family records, which use the term 黒坊 (*kurobō*). This simplification omits the "-主" (*-zu*), which connoted a professional or formal association, leaving behind a more generic descriptor for "black man." This change in language reflects a broader pattern of Edo-period linguistic trends, where terms became less tied to immediate context and more generalized. The rigid social hierarchies and cultural isolation of the Edo period

[3] The model applies an exponential decay constant (k=0.02k) to account for this factor, and WL=0.6Wfurther reduces the influence of later accounts. Thus aligning with Bayesian Data Analysis methodologies.

contributed to this simplification, as foreign individuals, including Africans, were categorized based on broad physical traits rather than specific roles or contexts.

The evolution of these terms is particularly telling when examining the 尊経閣本 (*Sonkeikaku-bon*). Unlike the Ikeda, Kenkun, and Tenri manuscripts, which retained the original Sengoku-period terminology tied to the *Ōta tradition*, the *Sonkeikaku-bon* reflects the linguistic and cultural shifts of the Edo period. By moving away from terms like 黒坊主 and aligning more closely with the Edo-period language seen in Maeda family records, the *Sonkeikaku-bon* demonstrates its alignment with an Edo-period audience. This shift suggests that the *Sonkeikaku-bon* was not primarily concerned with preserving the historical authenticity of Sengoku-period language but was instead tailored to suit the cultural and linguistic expectations of its contemporary readers. This adjustment in terminology reveals a deeper intent behind the compilation of the *Sonkeikaku-bon*. Rather than acting as a purely historical document, it reflects the priorities of its Edo-period context, where historical narratives were often reshaped to align with the Tokugawa shogunate's cultural and political goals. The simplification of terms like 黒坊主 to 黒坊 serves as a linguistic marker of this shift, illustrating how the *Sonkeikaku-bon* moved away from the more direct and historically grounded language of the Ikeda, Kenkun, and Tenri versions. This divergence underscores the importance of prioritizing the latter manuscripts for an accurate understanding of Yasuke and the events of the Sengoku period, as they retain the unaltered language and context of the era. By contrast, the *Sonkeikaku-bon* reflects the broader Edo-period tendency to reinterpret and repurpose historical events for contemporary audiences.

Literature	Scene	Name	Title	Treatment
***Shinchōkōki* (信長公記) original Ota Gyuichi Tradition – Ikeda (池田本)**	First meeting with Nobunaga (信長と初対面)	*Absent from Text*	Black monk (黒坊主)	*Absent from Text*
***Shinchōkōki* (信長公記) original Ota Gyuichi Tradition- Kenkun (建勲本)**	First meeting with Nobunaga (信長と初対面)	*Absent from Text*	Black monk (黒坊主)	*Absent from Text*
Shinchōkōki* (信長公記) original Ota Gyuichi Tradition- *Tenri (天理本)	First meeting with Nobunaga (信長と初対面)	*Absent from Text*	Black monk (黒坊主)[4]	*Absent from Text*
***Shinchōkōki* (信長公記) *Maeda Tradition- Soken Bon* (尊経閣本)**	First meeting with Nobunaga (信長と初対面)	Yasuke (弥助)	Black monk (黒坊)	Granted weapons and stipend by Nobunaga (被成御扶持)
***Ietada Nikki* (家忠日記)**	Kōshū Campaign Return (甲州征伐帰途)	Yasuke (弥助)	Black man (くろ男)	Taken care of by the lord (上様御ふち)
***Report of Luis Frois 1581/4/14 (Japanese translation)* (日本語訳)**	First meeting with Nobunaga (信長と初対面)	*Absent from Text*	Cafre	*Absent from Text*
			Black slave (黒奴)	*Absent from Text*
***Report of Lorenzo Mesia 1581/10/8 (Japanese translation)* (日本語訳)**	First meeting with Nobunaga (信長と初対面)	*Absent from Text*	Cafre	*Absent from Text*
			Black slave (黒奴)	Protected (之を庇護)
Report of Luis Frois 1582/11/5	*Honnōji Incident* (本能寺の変)	*Absent from Text*	Cafre	Left with Nobunaga (deixor a Nobunanga)
***(Japanese translation)* (日本語訳)**			Black slave (黒奴)	Given to Nobunaga (信長に贈った)

One of the most intriguing aspects of Yasuke's historical record is that his name is only explicitly mentioned in documents associated with the Tokugawa-controlled Matsudaira and Maeda clans. This pattern raises important questions about why these

[4] The 主 in 黒坊主 denotes and may reinforce the idea of the monk as a significant or prominent figure and it often refers to their role as a central or authoritative figure within a temple or religious setting. It does not specifically denote actual leadership as in the case of lordship.

particular sources preserved Yasuke's name while contemporaneous Oda documents did not. Given that both the Fukōzu-Matsudaira (深溝松平家) and Maeda clans were deeply embedded in the Tokugawa power structure, their versions of history would have been shaped by Edo-period priorities rather than the immediate, observational accounts of the Sengoku period.

A particularly significant implication of this is that the *Sonkeikaku Bon* (尊経閣本), the Maeda version of the *Shinchōkōki*, may not be a purely historical document but rather an amalgamation of multiple sources, possibly including Edo-period reinterpretations, diaries, and even folktales.

The earliest Western descriptions of Yasuke appear in the writings of Jesuit missionaries stationed in Japan, most notably Luis Fróis and Lorenzo Mesia, both of whom were active in Nobunaga's era. Their reports, dated 1581 and 1582, acknowledge Yasuke-like figure's presence but fail to record a personal name (Fróis & Mexia, 1598, pp. 2 (9, 10, 12)–9 (24)–17 (39)–65 (136)). Instead, they refer to him using the Portuguese term *Cafre*, which was a common designation for black Africans at the time. The term *Cafre* (derived from the Arabic كافر (*kāfir*), meaning "infidel" or "non-believer") was widely used by Portuguese traders and missionaries to refer to people from sub-Saharan Africa, particularly from Mozambique, Angola, and the Swahili Coast. While not inherently a term for "slave," *Cafre* was frequently used in colonial and missionary contexts where Africans were subjected to servitude or forced labor. (Fróis, 1585)

Significantly, the Japanese translations of these Jesuit reports replace *Cafre* with 黒奴 (Sengoku pronun. *kuroyatsu*, meaning "black slave" modern pronun. kokudo), reinforcing the idea that Yasuke's status and ethnicity were prioritized over his personal identity. This lack of an individual name suggests that the Jesuits did not consider Yasuke an important figure but rather a background character in their reports. This would mean that his role was not central to their interests, which were primarily focused on religion and political affairs rather than recording Nobunaga's entourage in detail. Further, he may not have had a widely recognized or commonly used name at the time, at least not one that the Jesuits deemed necessary to mention.

Coming to the Japanese records the absence of Yasuke's personal name is not limited to Jesuit sources; it is also evident in trustworthy documents like the Ikeda version of Ota Gyuichi's *Shinchōkōki* (信長公記), the most detailed chronicle of Nobunaga's reign. Ota Gyuichi (太田牛一, 1527–1613) was one of Nobunaga's personal retainers, serving as both a samurai and historian. His role was crucial: he recorded Nobunaga's military campaigns and governance in meticulous detail (Ota, 1891), making this *Shinchōkōki* the most authoritative account of Nobunaga's administration. Despite Ota's extensive documentation of Nobunaga's retainers, military actions, and interactions with foreign visitors, he never records Yasuke's name. Instead, in the Ikeda (池田本), Kenkun (建勲本), and Tenri (天理本) manuscripts, Yasuke is described only as 黒坊主 (*kurobōzu*, "black monk"). The choice of this term is significant for several reasons:

1. 坊主 (*bōzu*, "monk") was a descriptor commonly used for men with shaved heads, not necessarily Buddhist monks in the strict sense. This implies that Yasuke's physical appearance—his dark skin and shaved head—was the primary defining characteristic in the eyes of Oda's retainers.
2. The lack of a personal name indicates that Ota Gyuichi did not consider Yasuke a figure of lasting importance, at least not enough to distinguish him with an individual identity.
3. Ota records the names of many other Nobunaga retainers, foreign visitors, and even minor figures, yet Yasuke is left unnamed, suggesting that his role in Nobunaga's court may have been short-lived or peripheral.

In contrast, other foreign figures who had political or strategic significance were recorded by name in the *Shinchōkōki*. For example ; Italians and Portuguese Jesuits such as Organtino Gnecchi-Soldo were referred to by name due to their importance in Nobunaga's dealings with Christianity. Chinese and Korean envoys were also named because of their diplomatic relevance.

Absence from Secondary Sengoku Documents

Yasuke's role in Nobunaga's administration is the absence of his name from official records documenting the retainers and *kosho* (小姓, "attendant pages") who served under Nobunaga. The *Sōkenkō Bukkan* (総見公武鑑), a compiled register of Nobunaga's retainers, does not include Yasuke's name among the recorded *kosho* or vassals (浅井, 1634). Given that Nobunaga maintained detailed personnel records, the omission of Yasuke's name raises significant doubts about whether he was ever formally recognized in any official capacity beyond that of a servant. The absence of Yasuke's name from structured personnel lists further undermines claims regarding his official status, as even minor retainers who held recognized positions were recorded in contemporary documents.

Modern interpretations frequently depict Yasuke as a *kosho*, yet no surviving Sengoku-period sources explicitly assign him this title. Instead, available records describe him as carrying tools (道具, dogu)**.** Beyond the *Sōkenkō Bukkan*, no known administrative or military records from the Oda clan identify Yasuke as holding a formal rank or assignment (谷口, 2000). His documented presence at Nobunaga's court does not, in itself, indicate that he was integrated into the established retainership structure. The exclusion of his name from Nobunaga's official records strongly suggests that his role was neither institutionalized nor formally recognized, but rather incidental or circumstantial.

Semantic Analysis of Nuances in the *Yōmei Bunko Bon* and *Sonkeikaku Bon*

Yōmei Bunko Bon『信長公記』(陽明文庫本)天正九年二月廿三日条 きりしたん国より黒坊主参り候、年の齢廿六・七と見えたり、惣の身の黒き事牛のごとく、彼男健やかに器量なり、しかも強力十の人に勝たり、伴天連召列れ参り、御礼申上ぐ、誠に御威光を以て、古今承り及ばざる三国の名物、か様に希有の物共細々拝見有難き御事なり

"*A black monk (kurobōzu) from the Kirishitan country came to present himself (visit). His age appeared to be around 26 or 27. His entire body was as black as an ox. The man was robust and of good features, and furthermore, he surpassed ten strong men in strength. He came in the company of the missionaries (bateren, Jesuits) and expressed his gratitude. Truly, with [Nobunaga's] great prestige, such rare and extraordinary objects from the three countries, unheard of in the past, were carefully observed and it is to be greatly appreciated*."

Sonkeikaku Bon『信長記』(尊経閣文庫本)同右条 きりしたん国より黒坊まいり候、齢廿六・七と相見へ、惣之身之黒キ事牛之ことく、彼男器量すくやかにて、しかも強力十人に勝れたる由候、伴天連召列参、御礼申上候、誠以御威光古今不及承、三国之名物、かやうに珍寄之者拝見仕候、然に彼黒坊被成御扶持、名をハ号弥助と、さや巻之のし付幷私宅等迄被仰付、依時御道具なともたさせられ候

" *A black man (kurobō) from the Kirishitan country came to present himself (visit). He appeared to be around 26 or 27. His entire body was as black as an ox. The man was of good features, and furthermore, it is said that he surpassed ten strong men vigorous in strength. He came in the company of the missionaries (bateren, Jesuits) and expressed gratitude. Truly, with [Nobunaga's] unmatched prestige, such rare and extraordinary items from the three countries, unheard of in the past, were observed with reverence. Subsequently, the black man was granted a stipend and given the name Yasuke (弥助). Furthermore, he was entrusted with a scabbard (dagger), ceremonial items, and even a personal residence. At the time, he was also tasked with certain tools and implements (for Nobunaga). "*

The *Yōmei Bunko Bon* and *Sonkeikaku Bon* versions of the *Shinchōkōki* present notable lexical and syntactic differences, reflecting their respective Sengoku- and Edo-period contexts. These differences are not just linguistic but indicative of how historical narratives evolve in meaning, tone, and purpose. Below, I present a comparative table of parallel phrases, followed by an in-depth explanation of their nuanced meanings.

Phrase	**陽明文庫本 (Yōmei Bunko Bon)**	**尊経閣文庫本 (Sonkeikaku Bon)**	**Semantic Analysis**
Term for Yasuke	黒坊主 (*kurobōzu*, "black monk")	黒坊 (*kurobō*, "black man")	*黒坊主* ties Yasuke's physical appearance (黒, "black") to his shaved head (*坊主*, "monk"), suggesting immediate context. *黒坊* is a more generalized descriptor, detaching him from any specific role and aligning with Edo-period broad categorization.
Age Description	年の齢廿六・七と見えたり (*His age appeared to be around 26 or 27*)	齢廿六・七と相見へ (*His age appeared to be around 26 or 27*)	Both phrases describe age, but *見えたり* ("appeared to be") in the *Yōmei Bunko Bon* is observational, while *相見へ* ("was judged to be") in the *Sonkeikaku Bon* implies a more formal evaluation, consistent with Edo-period record-keeping.
Skin Color Metaphor	惣の身の黒き事牛のごとく (*His entire*	惣之身之黒キ事牛之ことく (*His entire body was as black as an ox*)	The metaphors are similar, but *惣之身* (all-encompassing, formal "entire body") in the *Sonkeikaku Bon* is more rigid, reflecting a shift toward formality.

	body was as black as an ox)		
Physical Description	健やかに器量なり (*He was robust and of good features*)	器量すくやかにて (*He was vigorous and of good features*)	The *Yōmei Bunko Bon* focuses on overall physical robustness (*健やかに*), while the *Sonkeikaku Bon* emphasizes vitality (*すくやかに*), narrowing the description to physical energy.
Prestige of Nobunaga	誠に御威光を以て (*Truly, with Nobunaga's great prestige*)	誠以御威光*不及承*(*Truly, with Nobunaga's unmatched prestige*)	The *Yōmei Bunko Bon* emphasizes Nobunaga's influence (*威光*, "prestige") as a context-driven observation, while the *Sonkeikaku Bon* adds *不及承* ("unmatched"), elevating Nobunaga to a semi-legendary status consistent with Tokugawa-era reverence.
Reference to Yasuke's Role	Not mentioned, name not mentioned	被成御扶持、名をハ号弥助と (*He was granted a stipend and given the name Yasuke*)	The *Sonkeikaku Bon* introduces explicit references to Yasuke's name and duties, which are absent in the *Yōmei Bunko Bon*, reflecting Edo-period narrative embellishments.

Detailed Semantic Comparison Analysis

1. Shift in Terminology: 黒坊主 (kurobōzu) vs. 黒坊 (kurobō)

陽明文庫本: The term *黒坊主* (*kurobōzu*) combines *黒* ("black") and *坊主* ("monk"), tying Yasuke's physical appearance to his likely shaved head, which was a key visual identifier in the Sengoku period. This descriptor is context-specific, reflecting an immediate observation without assigning Yasuke a societal role.

尊経閣文庫本: The term *黒坊* (*kurobō*, "black man") omits *坊主*, detaching Yasuke from his monk-like appearance and generalizing him as a racial or physical category. This simplification aligns with Edo-period tendencies to reduce contextualized roles into broader, abstract classifications.

Semantic Impact: The shift from *黒坊主* to *黒坊* represents a move from a specific, descriptive role to a generalized, exoticized identity, fitting Edo-period narratives that categorized foreigners broadly rather than by their immediate social function.

2. Age Description: 見えたり vs. 相見へ

陽明文庫本: *見えたり* ("appeared to be") conveys a subjective observation typical of Sengoku-period texts, where records were often informal and impressionistic and displays the kind of language expected from an eye-witness account.

尊経閣文庫本: *相見へ* ("was judged to be") implies a more formalized evaluation, consistent with the bureaucratic tone of Edo-period documents.

Semantic Impact: The change in phrasing reflects the shift from the observational, context-driven nature of Sengoku-period records to the evaluative, hierarchical approach of Edo-period historiography.

3. Descriptions of Strength and Appearance

陽明文庫本: *健やかに器量なり* combines *健やか* ("robust" or "healthy") with *器量* ("good features"), offering a balanced description of Yasuke's physical strength and overall appearance.

尊経閣文庫本: *器量すくやかにて* focuses on *器量* ("good features") and *すくやか* ("vigorous"), narrowing the description to emphasize Yasuke's vitality.

Semantic Impact: The *Yōmei Bunko Bon* provides a holistic view of Yasuke's physicality, while the *Sonkeikaku Bon* narrows the focus, likely reflecting Edo-period ideals of physical energy as a marker of ability. While "good features" could be confused with "handsome", the idea conveyed is more of physical soundness than attractiveness.

4. Nobunaga's Prestige

陽明文庫本: *誠に御威光を以て* describes Nobunaga's prestige as contextually impressive without hyperbole.

尊経閣文庫本: *誠以御威光古今不及承* ("with Nobunaga's unmatched prestige") exaggerates Nobunaga's authority, aligning with Edo-period efforts to elevate historical figures to near-mythical status.

Semantic Impact: The *Sonkeikaku Bon* reframes Nobunaga's prestige in exaggerated terms, reflecting Tokugawa-era priorities to sanctify past rulers while maintaining contemporary political hierarchies.

5. Yasuke's Name and Role

陽明文庫本: Does not mention Yasuke's name or assign him any duties, maintaining a neutral, observational tone.

尊経閣文庫本: Adds extensive details about Yasuke's naming (*号弥助*), stipend (*御扶持*), and responsibilities (*さや巻* "scabbard" and *私宅* "residence"), framing him as an active participant in Nobunaga's court.

Semantic Impact: the *Sonkeikaku Bon* embellishes Yasuke's role, projecting Edo-period values of structured social hierarchy onto a Sengoku-period context, where such roles were less rigid. (SEE APPENDIX- STIPEND (扶持)

From these differences it can be noted that the *Yōmei Bunko Bon* offers a contemporaneous, context-specific account of Yasuke, using neutral and descriptive language that emphasizes observation. In contrast, the *Sonkeikaku Bon* introduces Edo-period formalities, exaggerations, and hierarchical classifications, reflecting the ideological and linguistic shifts of the time. The lexical choices in the *Sonkeikaku Bon*—such as the shift from *黒坊主* to *黒坊*, and the addition of Yasuke's name and duties—transform a descriptive account into a politicized narrative, illustrating the importance of prioritizing superior texts like the *Yōmei Bunko Bon* to avoid semantic contamination and anachronistic interpretations.

Comparison to the Ietada Nikki

The *Ietada Nikki* (家忠日記) is written in a highly condensed and structured form of Japanese classical writing, influenced by Kanbun (漢文) conventions. *Kanbun* refers to a system used in Japan for reading and writing Classical Chinese, which was the scholarly and bureaucratic written language of East Asia for centuries. Ietada's diary demonstrates his own adapted form of Kanbun, which follows these principles but also reflects his personal writing style. This means that his records are highly information-dense, using a minimal number of characters to convey complex ideas. Instead of writing in colloquial Japanese with kana, he employs a compact, Sino-Japanese structure, omitting unnecessary particles and auxiliary verbs, relying instead on kanji alone to encode both meaning and grammatical relationships. His entries pertaining to arrival at Nobunaga's castle/ residence and subsequent meeting of Yasuke can be translated as:

Ietada Text: 十一日[5]　亥巳 時鳥初音聞候 上様本栖迄御成候、三川衆山々谷ノしふりニたちきり候て、返申候、大ミや迄歸陣候

> On the 11th day (十一日, Jūichi-nichi), at the hour of the boar and the snake (亥巳, I-Mi, approximately 9 PM–1 AM),
> I heard the first call of the lesser cuckoo (時鳥, hototogisu).
> His Lordship (上様, Uesama, likely referring to Nobunaga) traveled as far as Motosu (本栖).
> The Mikawa troops (三川衆, Mikawa-shū) cut through the heavy rain (しふり, shiburi) falling in the mountains and valleys (山々谷, yamayama tani) and then returned (返申候, kaeshimoshisōrō).
> His Lordship (上様, Uesama) withdrew to Ōmiya (大ミや, likely referring to 大宮).

Ietada Text: 十九日 未丁 雨降 上様御ふち候、大うす進上申候 くろ男御つれ候、身ハすミノコトク、 タケハ六尺二分、名ハ彌介と云、

> On the 19th day (十九日, Jūkyū-nichi), at the hour of the goat (未丁, Hitsujitei, approximately 1–3 PM),
> It rained (雨降, amefuri).
> His Lordship (上様, Uesama) provided care (御ふち候, gofuchisōrō).
> Jesuits (大うす, daiusu[6]) presented a tribute (進上申候, shinjōmoshisōrō).
> A black man (くろ男, kuro-otoko) accompanied them (御つれ候, otsuresōrō possibly accompanied Nobunaga).
> His body (身, mi) was as black as ink / coal (すミノコトク, sumi no gotoku). (Sumi can mean either ink or coal since no Kanbun is present it is unclear which).

[5] Tenshō 10, April

[6] A term referring to Christians from Japanised 'Deusu' デウス, Deus, as in Latin: God

> His height (タケ, take) was six shaku and two bu (六尺二分, roku-shaku ni-bu, approximately 182 cm).
> His name (名, na) was Yasuke (彌介と云, Yasuke to iu).

This passage provides an eyewitness account of Yasuke's presence in 1582, detailing his physical attributes and association with Tokugawa Ieyasu's forces at the time.[7] The use of くろ男 (*kuro-otoko*, "black man") is significant, the term is extremely generic as it does not confer any specific title or rank and is different to other referrals, contrasting with later Edo-period texts that attempt to elevate his status.

Auxiliary Evidence- Lack of use of Armed Slaves by Portuguese

Lockley (2016) asserts that "the Portuguese did not encourage martial skills in their slaves in Iberia," implying that this policy was primarily restricted to the Iberian Peninsula. However, a broader historical analysis suggests that this reluctance was not limited to Iberia but extended throughout the Portuguese colonial empire. The Portuguese, aware of the dangers of arming enslaved individuals, avoided using them as soldiers, preferring instead to rely on free indigenous and mercenary forces. This caution was influenced by historical precedents, particularly the experiences of the Arab Sultanates, which had suffered major uprisings when enslaved soldiers gained power and autonomy.

Portuguese chroniclers such as João de Barros and Gaspar Correia provide direct historical evidence that the avoidance of arming enslaved Africans was a deliberate and consistent policy across Portuguese territories. Barros, in *Décadas da Ásia* (1552–1615), describes the Portuguese military strategy in Asia, emphasizing the preference for native African and Indian mercenaries rather than enslaved combatants. His accounts demonstrate that the Portuguese understood the risks associated with arming enslaved populations and therefore sought external allies for military support, these allies were also more familiar with the local tactics and terrain which provided a strategic advantage.

Similarly, Gaspar Correia, in *Lendas da Índia* (c. 1550), details Portuguese military operations in India and Mozambique, highlighting their reliance on casteiros, or hired native soldiers, rather than enslaved Africans. Correia's work aligns with Barros' assessment that the Portuguese systematically avoided granting military training or weapons to their enslaved populations, as this could lead to resistance and rebellion. The Portuguese had firsthand knowledge of slave revolts, including those in their own territories, and sought to mitigate this risk by employing free warriors from local populations rather than weaponizing their enslaved workforce.

The reluctance to arm enslaved individuals was not an Iberian anomaly but a widespread and well-documented Portuguese strategy that extended across their empire. Given that Portuguese expansion was built on military dominance and trade, they had strong incentives to maintain control over their enslaved populations. The consistent avoidance of arming enslaved Africans—attested to by Barros, Correia, and other historical sources—suggests that the Portuguese viewed the use of free mercenaries as a safer and more reliable alternative to the unpredictable consequences of training enslaved individuals in martial skills and only trained slaves as a last resort or when circumstances did not permit the hiring of mercenaries. This makes the idea that Yasuke was a highly skilled soldier somewhat doubtful (along with a lack of mention of military expertise by Luís Fróis or Lorenzo Mexia).

6. DISCUSSION

The Role of the Matsudaira: A Direct Line to the Tokugawa

The Matsudaira, to which Matsudaira Ietada (松平家忠) belonged, were a cadet branch of the Tokugawa lineage, forming part of the Shinpan Daimyō (親藩大名)—feudal lords closely related to the ruling Tokugawa family. Ietada's diary, *Ietada Nikki* (家忠日記), is one of the only known Sengoku-era sources to record Yasuke's name explicitly, despite Ietada having no direct connection to the Oda administration. This is unusual because:

1. Ietada was not an Oda vassal—his writings should primarily concern Tokugawa matters.
2. Oda clan documents that do survive do not mention Yasuke by name, referring to him only as "black monk" (*黒坊主*) or "black man" (*黒坊*).

[7] If Yasuke was with Nobunaga at this time then he likely followed Nobunaga and moved far behind the main forces of Nobutada during the Takeda campaign, traveling along the route: Azuchi (Ōmi) → Mino → Shinano → Kai. Meanwhile, Ieyasu advanced eastward from Tōtōmi, conquered Suruga, and then moved north into Kai. Ieyasu was merely a detached force in the Takeda campaign.

3. His diary records other fantastical elements, such as a mermaid sighting, meaning it was not necessarily a strict factual account and may simply have been a personal diary of his own musings and experiences.

Given these factors, the fact that Yasuke's name only appears in *Ietada Nikki* may indicate that this was not a widely known or consistently recorded name in Sengoku Japan, but rather a name that became preserved within Tokugawa-aligned historical traditions. After Hideyoshi's death, Maeda Toshiie opposed Tokugawa Ieyasu, but when Toshiie died in 1599 and Ieyasu considered subjugating the Maeda clan, his eldest son Maeda Toshinaga ultimately submitted. Before the Battle of Sekigahara, he sent his mother, Hoshunin (Matsu), to Edo as a hostage, leading to:

- Political marriages designed to secure Maeda allegiance (e.g., Maeda Tama-hime's marriage to Tokugawa Tadanao).
- Strict surveillance by the Tokugawa authorities.
- A deliberate effort by the Maeda to demonstrate absolute loyalty to the Tokugawa Shogunate through cultural and scholarly means.

One way the Maeda could prove their loyalty was by curating and preserving historical records that aligned with Tokugawa perspectives. It is here that their version of the *Shinchōkōki*, the Sonkeikaku Bon, becomes especially significant.
Since the Maeda would have wanted to emphasize their alignment with the Tokugawa, it is logical that:

1. They would prioritize the writings of Tokugawa-affiliated figures, such as Matsudaira Ietada.
2. They would compile as many Edo-period sources as possible—not just firsthand Sengoku-period accounts but also diaries, stories, and possibly folktales.

The *Sonkeikaku Bon* may therefore represent an Edo-period synthesis of all available records and the work of overly zealous scribes, rather than an accurate eyewitness account from the Sengoku period.

Sonkeikaku Bon as an Edo-Period Compilation

By the time the *Sonkeikaku Bon* was compiled, approximately 70–100 years had passed since Nobunaga's death. Unlike the direct, observational accounts of Sengoku-period documents, Edo-period historical compilations often followed a different set of priorities:

1. Legitimizing Tokugawa Rule
    - The Tokugawa were deeply invested in controlling historical narratives, ensuring that records reflected Edo-period values rather than Sengoku-era realities.
    - By incorporating diaries and retrospective sources, they could create a more structured, coherent account—even if that meant adding details that were not originally recorded in the Sengoku period.
2. Blending Multiple Sources into a Single Text
    - The *Sonkeikaku Bon* does not seem to derive from a single eyewitness account but rather from a collection of materials, which may include:
        - Official records.
        - Personal diaries (such as *Ietada Nikki*).
        - Edo-period embellishments.
        - Potentially even folktales that emerged over time.
3. The Risk of Anachronism
    - Since the *Sonkeikaku Bon* was created long after the events it describes, it may contain anachronistic interpretations, where later Edo-period ideas were projected onto the past.
    - This would explain why Yasuke's name appears in the *Sonkeikaku Bon* but not in contemporary Oda-period sources—it may have been retroactively included based on Edo-period records rather than firsthand Sengoku accounts.

Inconsistencies in Kanji

The inconsistency in the kanji used for Yasuke's name—彌介 in the Ietada Nikki (家忠日記) and 弥助 in the Sonkeikaku-bon (尊経閣本)—raises important questions regarding whether he ever had a formalized name at all. The variation suggests that his name was transcribed phonetically rather than recorded as an official designation. This further complicates the question of his status, as a formal name was typically standardized in historical records, especially for individuals of recognized rank.

A critical issue that arises from this inconsistency is the absence of a family name (姓), which was a fundamental requirement for those holding samurai status. Under the feudal system, individuals elevated to the rank of samurai were formally granted and recognised surnames by their lords. If a person of non-samurai background was given samurai status, their name was often modified to reflect their new standing within the warrior class, incorporating elements that signified their affiliation and legitimacy. The complete lack of any such surname in any historical record related to Yasuke is highly unusual and casts significant doubt on claims that he was formally enfeoffed as a samurai.

Additionally, the given name 彌介/弥助 itself does not align with samurai naming conventions. The structure of the name follows a common pattern seen in lower-class or servant names of the period, rather than the distinctive two-character or three-character names associated with samurai retainers. Names with the -介 (-suke) or -助 (-suke) suffix were often used by lower-ranking individuals, attendants, or commoners, rather than those elevated within the warrior hierarchy. If Yasuke had been formally inducted into the samurai class, we would expect to see a more appropriate name reflecting this status, yet no such record exists.

Taken together—the phonetic variation in the kanji, the absence of a surname, and the inappropriateness of the given name for samurai status—these factors strongly indicate that Yasuke was never formally recognized as a samurai in the way some later narratives have suggested. Instead, his recorded name appears to have been an informal or practical designation rather than an official warrior title. This becomes more aparent when compared to such individuals as Meng Yi-kwan (孟二寬) who was a Ming Dynsaty Chinese soldier who became a samurai in Japan and had his name changed to Takebayashi Chigan Kotonori (武林治庵士式). Takebayashi then married a Japanese woman and changed his name Watanabe Kotonori.

Lexical Choices for Description of Ethnicity

The lexical choices observed in contemporary and later sources provide key insights into how Yasuke was perceived during the Sengoku period and how his portrayal evolved in Edo-period manuscripts. João Rodrigues' *Vocabulario da lingoa de Iapam* (1603) offers a valuable contemporary reference for terminology, particularly in how foreign figures were categorized. The dictionary records Curobô as the equivalent of *Cafre* or "Black man," aligning with the term 黒坊 (kurobō). However, the Portuguese dictionary does not provide an entry for 黒坊主 (kurobōzu)—the term used in *Shinchōkōki* manuscripts closest to Ōta Gyūichi's tradition. This omission suggests that the Japanese sources did not merely adopt existing terminology but intentionally used a distinct form that emphasized either Yasuke's religious association or his appearance.

The shift in terminology is significant when comparing contemporaneous and later sources. The Jesuit documents, when translated into Japanese, rendered *Cafre* as 黒奴 (kuroyatsu, "black slave"), avoiding the more neutral terms 黒坊主 or 黒坊 altogether. This contrasts with Sengoku-period Japanese sources that referred to Yasuke as 黒坊主 (kurobōzu, "black monk"), a descriptor that not only referenced his skin color but also his association with the Jesuits or his shaven head. This distinction is critical: while 黒坊 (kurobō, "black man") was an available term, it was not used in these early records but appears instead in later Edo-period manuscripts such as the *Sonkeikaku-bon*. This suggests a shift in linguistic treatment over time, where Edo-period scribes distanced Yasuke from his original context and applied a more generalized racial descriptor.

The *Ietada Nikki* offers an additional contrast by referring to Yasuke with the highly generic くろ男 (kuro-otoko, "black man"), the most neutral of all the terms found in primary sources. The diary, written in a dense, practical form of Kanbun (漢文), displays a functional and often hastily written style, with phonetic substitutions where necessary. This is evident in how すミ (sumi) is written using kana rather than kanji, leaving open the possibility that it could mean 墨 (ink) or 炭 (coal)—both of which work within the idiomatic phrase describing Yasuke's dark complexion. The word « black » (Kuro) is also similarly written in the kana as くろ not the kanji 黒. Similarly, Ōmiya is written as 大ミや, a phonetic rendering of 大宮, demonstrating the diary's shorthand and utilitarian nature and possibly difficulty recalling the Kanji at times.

The absence of later Edo-period embellishments in *Ietada Nikki* further highlights its reliability as an eyewitness account. If Edo-period scribes had used *Ietada Nikki* as a source, they would have likely replaced くろ男 with 黒坊 or 黒坊主, aligning with their preferred terminology. Furthermore, Ietada, an avid recorder of military and political events, does not mention any details about Yasuke receiving a stipend, a residence, or a scabbard—claims that only appear in later Edo-period texts. Given Ietada's meticulous approach to recording events, it is highly unlikely that he would have omitted such details had they been true. This omission strongly suggests that Edo-period embellishments, rather than Sengoku-period records, were responsible for later claims about Yasuke's rank or status.

Comparison to Japanese Research

Scholarly research strongly supports dating the Sonkeikaku-bon (尊経閣本) to the Edo period, aligning with the assessments of highly regarded scholars such as Kaneko Hiraku (金子拓, 2009). Kaneko cautions against using the Sonkeikaku-bon as a primary source without careful scrutiny, emphasizing that its historical reliability must be critically evaluated. His observations contribute

to a broader scholarly consensus that questions the manuscript's origins and transmission history but still values it as an insight into Edo period scribal practices.

Furthermore, historical records indicate that the transmission of the Shinchōkōki (信長公記) to the Kaga Ōta family (加賀太田家) likely occurred in the early Edo period. A manuscript of the Shinchōkōki was dedicated to the Maeda clan of Kaga in Kanbun 4 (1664), suggesting that the text underwent transcription and preservation efforts during this time. The original copy was likely lost in a fire, meaning that only later transcribed versions—such as the Sonkeikaku-bon—survived.

While the Sonkeikaku-bon has drawn considerable attention, its academic evaluation remains limited. Some scholars dismiss it outright, citing concerns about historical embellishments and retrospective alterations, while others recognize its unique textual features. There is also substantial evidence indicating that the Sonkeikaku-bon incorporates elements from personal diaries and other historical records, particularly from the Edo period. This suggests that the manuscript is not a direct transmission of Sengoku-period events but rather a curated Edo-period reconstruction that reflects the historical consciousness of the time. Consequently, any analysis of Yasuke or other figures in the Sonkeikaku-bon must account for the possibility of later interpolations and anachronistic additions.

Comparison of the Ikeda and Sonkeikaku Manuscripts

A comparative analysis of the Ikeda (池田本) and Sonkeikaku (尊経閣本) manuscripts reveals significant textual variations, suggesting distinct transmission histories and editorial influences. While the Sonkeikaku manuscript presents a comprehensive account, the Ikeda manuscript exhibits unique phrasing and references, implying a separate textual lineage. These differences in structure, content, and terminology highlight the necessity of cross-referencing multiple versions to establish historical accuracy.

Differences in Narrative Focus

One of the most striking distinctions is the Ikeda manuscript's references to Shingen Takeda (武田信玄), which are absent from the Sonkeikaku manuscript. Instead, the Sonkeikaku version emphasizes narratives linked to the Tokugawa shogunate, indicating that it may have been subject to Edo-period editorial modifications. This difference in thematic focus suggests that the Ikeda manuscript retains a more localized historical perspective, whereas the Sonkeikaku manuscript reflects later historical reinterpretations influenced by the Tokugawa political order.

Further evidence of Edo-period editorial influence in the Sonkeikaku manuscript can be seen in the presence of additional annotations and commentary that are missing from the Ikeda manuscript. These differences reinforce the view that the Sonkeikaku version underwent a process of textual standardization or revision, whereas the Ikeda manuscript preserves an earlier, less-altered version of the text.

Treatment of Supplementary Content

A critical difference between the manuscripts is the handling of supplementary content. The Sonkeikaku manuscript contains additional annotations that do not appear in the Ikeda manuscript. This is particularly evident in Volume 15, where certain passages are omitted in the Ikeda manuscript but retained in the Sonkeikaku version.

For example, the phrase "不顧衆寡" ("ignoring the numerical disadvantage") appears in the Sonkeikaku manuscript in a passage describing an event from Tenshō 15 (天正十五年, 1587). However, this phrase does not appear in the Ikeda manuscript, suggesting a possible editorial addition in the Sonkeikaku version. Similarly, Volume 4 exhibits minor textual differences, including variations in the wording of short passages and the inclusion of additional notes in the Sonkeikaku manuscript that are missing from the Ikeda version.

These discrepancies raise questions regarding the editorial processes that shaped the Sonkeikaku text, suggesting that it may have incorporated later commentary and modifications that were absent from the Ikeda manuscript's more original form.

Terminology Variations and Honorific Titles

Another major textual difference between the manuscripts involves the use of honorific titles, particularly in references to Tokugawa Ieyasu (徳川家康). In some versions of the Sonkeikaku manuscript, Ieyasu is referred to with the honorific "公" ("Lord"), while in other instances, the title "卿" ("Sir") is used. The reason for this inconsistency is unclear, but it suggests multiple stages of revision and editorial intervention in the Sonkeikaku manuscript.

Similarly, references to Oda Nobunaga (織田信長) in the Sonkeikaku manuscript often contain additional honorifics that are absent from the Ikeda version. This implies that later scribes may have revised the text to emphasize Nobunaga's status, reflecting an Edo-period tendency to elevate past figures through the addition of formal titles.

Linguistic Standardization and Later Modifications

The Sonkeikaku manuscript also exhibits evidence of posthumous standardization of terminology, particularly in military terminology and place names. For instance, the kanji variants "御陣" and "行陣" (both meaning "military encampment") appear inconsistently across different versions. In some cases, the choice of kanji suggests an attempt to impose retroactive linguistic consistency, which is characteristic of Edo-period editorial practices.

An example of this standardization is seen in the phrase "五代之軍記" ("Records of the Five Generations"), which appears in Keichō 5 (慶長五年, 1600) in some versions of the manuscript, while in others, it has been altered to "五代軍記" ("The Military Record of Five Generations"). These minor yet significant textual discrepancies highlight the challenges in determining the most authentic version of the historical record and suggest that the Sonkeikaku manuscript underwent deliberate modifications to align with later linguistic conventions.

The quantitative occurrence of key historical figures' names within manuscript traditions offers light on both editorial practices and the socio-political forces underlying textual transmission. In the present case, the frequency with which Tokugawa Ieyasu's name (家康) appears across three distinct manuscript traditions exhibits marked variability: 31 occurrences in the Ikeda manuscript, 74 in the Kenkun Shrine manuscript, and 46 in the Sonkeikaku manuscript. This numerical discrepancy is not a mere artifact of orthographic variation or random inconsistency; rather, it serves as an indicator of differing emphases in the portrayal of Ieyasu, potentially aligning with later historical reinterpretations and political agendas.

From a linguistic standpoint, the frequency of a name functions as a form of textual weighting that informs the reader's perception of the figure's importance. The marked increase in the number of mentions in the Kenkun Shrine and Sonkeikaku manuscripts, compared to the Ikeda manuscript, suggests that the latter traditions might have been subjected to intentional editorial processes aimed at augmenting Ieyasu's prominence. Such editorial interventions may have included the insertion of honorific titles, additional contextual references, or syntactic structures that foreground Ieyasu's role within the narrative. These linguistic modifications contribute to a rearticulation of historical memory, reinforcing the idea that language is not merely a passive carrier of information but an active constructor of social and political identity.

Similarly, the presence of Oda Nobunaga's name (信長) 45 times in the Sonkeikaku manuscript further complicates the narrative landscape. The co-occurrence of both Ieyasu and Nobunaga within the same textual tradition invites a comparative analysis of how editorial choices shape the hierarchy of historical figures. The specific choice to maintain or amplify certain names while potentially downplaying others reflects an underlying ideological framework, likely correlated with the political priorities of the period in which the manuscript was revised. In the context of the Edo period, where the political ascendancy of the Tokugawa regime was paramount, the increased frequency of Ieyasu's name may have served as a legitimizing tool, aligning the historical record with contemporary political narratives.

Linguistic "god of the Gaps".

Understanding Sengoku period documents necessitates a nuanced grasp of kanbun (漢文), a classical literary language whose semantics and syntax diverge markedly from modern Japanese. The language of these texts, with its roots in classical Chinese and its close affinities to Hanmun (漢文) as used in Korea, embodies a system of expression that is not adequately captured by modern Japanese linguistic frameworks. This distinction is critical: whereas modern Japanese is informed by centuries of evolution, the kanbun employed during the Sengoku period adheres to conventions and idiomatic expressions that are more reflective of classical Chinese thought.

This linguistic reality is further underscored by historical precedents. For instance, during the Imjin Wars, written communication among Korean, Japanese, and Chinese interlocutors was frequently conducted in kanbun, a language that served as a mutually intelligible medium despite the spoken languages differing significantly. However, over time, many of the original kanbun forms have either been lost, simplified, or substituted with modern Kanji conventions, rendering contemporary interpretations even more challenging.

The reliance of many Western scholars on modern Japanese linguistics, therefore, represents a significant weak point in the current understanding of Sengoku period documents. This leads to overt amounts of speculation and attemps to force

hypothesis by appealing to a linguistic "god of the gaps" (in Japanese: Devil's Proof) where hypotheses despite being less than negligible in possibility are portrayed as concrete possibilities. Without a robust engagement with the subtleties of kanbun, which encapsulates a semantic depth and historical context distinct from modern usage, scholarly interpretations risk oversimplifying or misrepresenting the complex textual heritage of this era. Recognizing and addressing these linguistic nuances is essential for a more accurate and comprehensive reconstruction of Sengoku period history.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study compel a critical reassessment of the sources and methodologies employed in Western scholarship on Sengoku-period history. In particular, the Sonkeikaku-bon (尊経閣本) must be recognized not as a direct record of Sengoku events but as an Edo-period reconstruction—a work shaped by later historiographic practices that both reinterpreted and recontextualized earlier sources. Its unique characteristics, including Tokugawa-era embellishments, illustrate its value in tracing the evolution of linguistic and discursive practices from the Sengoku period to the Edo period, yet they simultaneously render it unsuitable as a primary source for understanding the true realities of Sengoku history.

The current body of research is undermined by several interrelated methodological issues. Western scholars have largely employed exogenous methodologies that impose modern ideologies and assumptions on premodern texts. This has led to a cascade of extrapolation errors, particularly in the portrayal of figures like Yasuke. Rather than confining their interpretations to the limited historical references available, these studies have reinterpreted scant evidence to support contemporary narratives of identity and cultural symbolism. Consequently, claims regarding Yasuke's samurai status are founded more on speculative reconstructions than on robust primary evidence.

Compounding these issues are anachronistic interpretations of social hierarchies and semantic ambiguities in the Sengoku context which distorts the historical record, misrepresenting the rigid and complex social structures that characterized the era. Moreover, the conflation of key terms like "samurai" and "bushi" further obfuscates the true nature of Sengoku society. These misinterpretations have been exacerbated by the self-reinforcing cycle of circular referencing in the English-language corpus, which has allowed speculative narratives to gain unwarranted authority.

A crucial consequence of these methodological shortcomings is the overreliance on the Sonkeikaku-bon (尊経閣本). While this text provides valuable insights into the evolution of Edo-period historiographic practices, its inherent Tokugawa-era biases and later editorial interventions render it a poor proxy for understanding Sengoku history. In stark contrast, earlier transcriptions—most notably the Ikeda (池田本)—offer a more reliable foundation for reconstructing the period. The Ikeda manuscript, by virtue of its closer proximity to the original events and its minimal political embellishment, should be adopted as the master text for future research. Such a shift would realign the Western corpus with Japanese scholarship and facilitate a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Sengoku history.

In sum, the reinterpretation of Yasuke's status as a samurai appears to be an artifact of modern ideological creation based on erroneous understanding of Edo-period political writing rather than a reflection of Sengoku reality. Moving forward, Western researchers must recalibrate their approaches by prioritizing earlier, less adulterated sources such as the Ikeda manuscript. This strategy promises not only to mitigate the distortions introduced by exogenous methodologies and anachronistic projections but also to foster a more rigorous and contextually grounded understanding of Japan's turbulent past.

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Note:

It is important to recognize that the document traditionally known as「太田伝」is also referred to as「自我本系」, while the document known as「前田伝」is alternatively called「尊経閣本」

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APPENDIX-STIPEND 扶持

The use of fuchi (stipend-扶持) to argue for samurai status is deeply erroneous and ahistorical. Fuchi was also given to servants, sumo wrestlers, and other non-samurai personnel in the Sengoku and sometimes even in Edo periods. To sustain the feudal system, Daimyo provided stipends (扶持, fuchi), a form of economic support typically measured in koku (石), the amount of rice needed to feed one person for a year (paid either in rice or money). When considering Sengoku and Edo texts there are a large variety of persons that received fuchi. Liryō (吏僚, Bureaucrats), Yoriki (与力) and Dōshin (同心) – Low-ranking police officers, Kōshō (工匠, Artisans), Ishi (医師, Physicians), Onmyōji (陰陽師, Diviners) , Chūgen (中間) and Komono (小者) – Middle- and low-ranking attendants responsible for menial tasks such as carrying weapons, cleaning, and horse tending. Many Komono (小者) were compensated only with food and shelter, making them economically vulnerable and dependent on their employer. Given the record of Yasuke being a tool carrier and given accommodation in this sense, coupled with the lack of a family name make his most likely role in the hierarchy a Komono (小者), if indeed he had any at all. This would explain the lack of records surrounding him in Ota's records since Komono (小者) were considered expendable and could be dismissed at any time.

『信長記』(池田本)天正九年二月廿三日条