**Bushido, Chivalry and the Crusades in Japan from the 1870s to the First World War[[1]](#footnote-1)**

*Oleg Benesch*

**Introduction**

As in much of the world, the crusades and the medieval European knight were powerful symbols in Japan at the turn of the twentieth century. This may at first glance seem surprising given Japan’s lack of a direct historical connection to the crusades or medieval Europe. As I argue in this chapter, however, the crusades were a significant concept in the social, religious, and cultural dynamics of the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taisho (1912-1926) periods, and influenced Japan’s evolving relationship with the rest of the world. I further contend that consideration of the crusades in Japan should be seen as part of a response to, and participation in, a larger global medievalist moment that reached virtually all societies in some form in the decades before the First World War. Throughout, I use the concept of ‘medievalism’ to refer to the use of medieval symbols and ideas in contexts removed in time and/or space from the Middle Ages and ‘medievalising’ to emphasise the active processes by which a ‘medieval’ past is ‘made’ rather than ‘found’. Alongside the expansion of European empires and their projects of imperial knowledge-making, Western medievalists and other figures sought to discover or assign a ‘medieval’ past to non-European societies. Japanese intellectuals and leaders first internalised this medievalising project and thereby contributed to the internationalisation of the crusades as part of their participation in a supposed shared medievalist heritage, before nationalising *against* the crusades and the European Middle Ages to create a new Japanese medieval identity. This study focuses on the period from the broad dissemination of the concept of the crusades in Japan in the 1870s to the relative decline of the universal European medievalist model around the time of the First World War.

Mike Horswell has argued for the rise and fall of ‘crusader medievalism’ in Britain during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an important part of the broader revival of medievalist symbols and themes in almost all areas of art, culture, and society.[[2]](#footnote-2) In Japan, arguably Britain’s closest ally from the time of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902 through the end of the First World War in 1918, crusade narratives were influenced by a range of interrelated factors. Images of the crusades were introduced, interrogated, and sustained in various spheres of Japanese society, including (as will be shown) education, diplomacy, and religion. At the same time, discussions of the crusades were firmly entangled with emerging debates around the concept of the ‘medieval’ more generally, and the popularization of the concept of bushido (*bushidō*; the ‘way of the warrior’ or ‘way of the samurai’) from the 1890s onward. These debates were in turn closely tied to the search for a new national identity in Japan that drew on both foreign models and native traditions – real and invented.

In the nineteenth century, especially in popular discourse, it was not always possible to clearly separate the concepts of knights, chivalry, and the crusades.[[3]](#footnote-3) This continued to be the case as the crusades became more closely aligned with modern nationalism from the 1830s onward, when they were claimed by existing and emerging European nations.[[4]](#footnote-4) The crusades were also increasingly seen as an essential formative influence on European knighthood and chivalry, a notion that was reinforced by popular literature that was often set in the Holy Land or incorporated crusading themes such as knights and kings returned from crusade. This correlation was taken up in Japan, where the crusades were portrayed as the crucible of, and inseparable from, European knighthood and chivalry. Japanese responses to this amalgam can be seen to replicate the shape of this European medievalism, including the indistinct borders of chivalry and crusading: Japanese discussions of European (especially British) strength alighted upon a perceived continuity of medieval spirit in the form of chivalry, of which the crusader knight was an exemplar. In turn, through the invocation of bushido and the samurai, Japanese thinkers attempted to resurrect elements of an imagined, newly-designated ‘medieval’ past in order to address perceived present deficiencies. The crusades, then, figured both directly and obliquely in Japanese thinking between the last decades of the nineteenth-century and the First World War.

This chapter has three parts. It begins by discussing Japan’s engagement with what I call the ‘global medievalist moment’ that began in the late nineteenth century, and considers how European models were entangled with the rediscovery and rehabilitation of Japan’s historic samurai warriors. The second section looks at the influence of crusader and chivalric heritage on diplomacy, especially between Japan and Britain. The third part considers the unique role played by Japanese Christians in the dissemination of bushido discourse in Japan, as well as the promotion of Japanese medievalism abroad.

1. **Samurai, bushido, and medievalism**

To have lived through the transition stage of modern Japan makes a man feel preternaturally old; for here he is in modern times, with the air full of talk about Darwinism, and phonographs, and parliamentary institutions, and yet he can himself distinctly remember the Middle Ages […] The Japanese boast that they have done in twenty years what it took Europe half as many centuries to accomplish.[[5]](#footnote-5) – Basil Hall Chamberlain, 1891

This study uses the concept of ‘medievalism’ to designate the use, revival, and reinterpretation of ideas and symbols associated with a perceived Middle Ages; indeed, with the creation of a medieval period itself. Definitions of ‘medievalism’ often focus on temporality, specifically the use of the medieval after the end of the (European) Middle Ages. If, however, one considers medievalism on a global scale, we see that people in Western nations were ‘medievalising’ their contemporaries, especially in the colonised world. In Japan, Chamberlain and his contemporaries – foreign and Japanese – were engaged in a ‘medievalising’ process.

Modern medievalist movements in Europe have been widely studied over the past century, especially in Britain, France, and Germany.[[6]](#footnote-6) More recently, attention has turned to uses of medievalism in the former European settler colonies in the Americas, Australia, and elsewhere.[[7]](#footnote-7) In a separate development, scholars in the early twenty-first century have begun to examine the application of the medieval paradigm to non-Western societies, examining the possibilities and limitations of a ‘global Middle Ages’.[[8]](#footnote-8) In contrast, the study of *medievalism* has not been systematically extended beyond Europe and some of its former imperial possessions. As the case of Japan illustrates, however, a ‘global medievalist moment’ from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries influenced many societies in a complex entanglement of ideas that often decentred Europe.

In Europe, interest in an idealised medieval past grew slowly before accelerating rapidly with the proliferation of nationalist sentiment in the nineteenth century, with art, literature, and architecture celebrating medieval themes. Significantly, the medieval age also served as the inspiration for European nations’ martial traditions, and was important not only in intra-European conflicts, but was instrumental in the imperial expansion of the European colonial powers. Soldiers and colonial administrators were often inspired by an idealised martial crusader past during their encounters with the societies they subjugated, and the colonisers frequently classified people in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere as being in a ‘medieval’ stage of development between ‘primitive’ and ‘civilised’.[[9]](#footnote-9)

This approach reflected a clear tension between negative understandings of the ‘feudal’ age as Europe’s backward past – and many non-Western societies’ present – and the positive invocation of medieval symbols and concepts as the basis for European nations’ dominance, historical legitimacy, and martial prowess. This tension was at the heart of the global medievalist moment in the decades before the First World War, as Europe’s exaltation of its medieval past was juxtaposed with its contemporary dominance built on the most modern military technologies. At the same time, many non-Western thinkers were attracted to the popular Social Darwinist theories in spite of their pejorative portrayal of their own societies, as they were predicated on the possibility of social evolution towards the ‘civilisational’ levels attained by the West.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Outside Europe, the medievalist paradigm became increasingly influential, especially in the former European settler societies that attempted to build on an idealised medieval Europe to define their own identities. Medievalism also spread readily to areas that had been in direct contact with Europe during the medieval period, especially the regions around the Mediterranean that had been directly affected by the crusades. The increased popularity of Saladin (Salah ad-Din) in the Arab world in the late nineteenth century is one example of this.[[11]](#footnote-11) Similarly, the Ottoman Empire became heavily invested in the medievalist project especially during the World’s Fair in Vienna in 1873, where the Ottoman Pavilion was designed in a medievalist style based on Orientalist European portrayals of the past.[[12]](#footnote-12) Further East, there were attempts to apply medievalist periodisation and models to many parts of Asia, including India and China. Academic and popular attempts to define a ‘medieval’ period in India, as elsewhere, were influenced by political, national, and religious agendas, and the applicability of the term ‘medieval’ to periods of Indian history continues to be a topic of debate.[[13]](#footnote-13) In China, there were similar attempts to impose a Eurocentric periodization on Chinese history, also with limited success.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Medievalism arguably became most firmly established in Japan, which is frequently used as a non-Western comparative case study by scholars of the Middle Ages. As in Europe, the boundaries of the medieval period in Japanese history vary considerably, although the current scholarly consensus uses the four centuries from the end of the Heian period (794-1185) to the unification of Japan by the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868). In this context, in both Japanese and Western scholarship, the medieval is closely entangled with the concept of ‘feudalism’ in popular understandings, even if its meaning and applicability to both Japan and Europe is debated.[[15]](#footnote-15) In Japan, the term ‘feudal’ was often used retrospectively to describe society before major historical ruptures, especially the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and Japan’s defeat in 1945.[[16]](#footnote-16)

At the start of the Meiji period (1868-1912), an era known as the age of ‘civilisation and enlightenment’, the recent Tokugawa age was rejected as ‘feudal’ and backward; a classically pejorative characterisation of a ‘medieval’ period. Instead, Japan’s leaders sought to make up more than one thousand years of European ‘progress’ in just a few decades. By the late 1870s, the rigid class structures of Tokugawa society had been abolished, the formerly elite samurai warriors lost their swords, stipends, and other privileges, and the vast majority of Japan’s monumental historic castles were torn down as ‘useless things’.[[17]](#footnote-17) By the 1880s, increasing awareness of the idealised European past began to change attitudes, as competing visions of national identity sought to distinguish Japan from the traditional and new cultural hegemons, i.e. China and the West. This search for identity was informed and legitimised by similar European explorations of the proto-national past, especially the medieval period. Physical, spatial, visual, and textual encounters with European medievalism fed into re-evaluations of Japan’s own history.

Already in the late Tokugawa period, Western history was a subject of considerable interest in Japan, and this increased greatly from the 1860s onward as more information became available and accessible. The famous educator and founder of the school that would later become Keio University, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) was one of the first to discuss the crusades in his bestselling 1866 text *Conditions in the West* (*Seiyō jijō*).[[18]](#footnote-18) With the establishment of a new education system in the early Meiji period, translations and summaries of Western textbooks on ‘world history’ proliferated, with the philosopher Nishi Amane (1829-1897) coining the Japanese term for crusade, *jūjigun* (‘cross army’), in his 1870 *Encyclopedia* (*Hyakugaku renkan*).[[19]](#footnote-19)

By the 1870s, Japanese people would have had considerable access to knowledge about the crusades.[[20]](#footnote-20) Translations of textbooks by authors such as Peter Parley (Samuel Goodrich, 1793-1860), William Cooke Taylor (1800-1849), and William Swinton (1833-1892) were the most influential sources for world – essentially Western – history until the turn of the twentieth century. These translated texts went into considerable detail, reflecting the significance of the crusades in the original; the 1878 translation of Taylor’s *A Manual of Modern History*, for example, devoted 75 pages to the crusades.[[21]](#footnote-21) Several elements of the crusade narratives in these Japanese texts are particularly relevant. One of these is that the crusades were generally depicted as the catalyst for chivalry to become fully formed and medieval knighthood to reach its apex.[[22]](#footnote-22) As Taylor wrote in the *Manual*, ‘Chivalry, though older than the crusades, derived its chief influence and strength from these wars. The use of surnames, coats of arms, and distinctive banners, became necessary in armies composed of men differing in language, habits, and feelings, collected at hazard from every Christian kingdom.’[[23]](#footnote-23)

Another key aspect of crusade narratives from the perspective of Japanese readers was the notion that the crusades represented an extensive interaction between East and West, even if this was sometimes portrayed as a ‘clash between races’.[[24]](#footnote-24) More importantly, the crusades were seen as the moment when Europeans were exposed to ‘Oriental’ thought and culture, which had a lasting positive and even ‘enlightening’ effect.[[25]](#footnote-25) As Parley’s *Universal History* described it, ‘the half barbarous inhabitants of Europe brought from the East many arts that tended to refine and civilise the people. In this, and other ways, the crusades produced some good results.’[[26]](#footnote-26) This passage was accurately rendered in the Japanese translation published by the Japanese Ministry of Education in the 1870s.[[27]](#footnote-27) Taylor’s *Manual* presented the growth of commerce in the European Mediterranean and the development of the Hanseatic League as results of the crusades.[[28]](#footnote-28) Furthermore, several texts causally linked the crusades to the subsequent ‘spirit of adventurous navigation’ that seemingly marked the rise to power of the European empires and led to their global dominance by the late nineteenth century.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Inspired by the narratives of the crusades and chivalry that were a key part of the global medievalist moment, Japanese in the late 1880s began to rediscover their own ‘medieval’ past as a source for a modern national identity, and to place Japan into a chronological framework of progress that reflected European models.[[30]](#footnote-30) The wholesale demolition of Japan’s hundreds of obsolete castles ceased, while the gradual rehabilitation of the samurai heritage culminated in the creation of bushido as a counterpart to European chivalry. Contrary to popular perceptions, historians have shown that bushidois largely a modern construct with few direct connections to the premodern samurai, with the term ‘*bushidō*’ only coming into widespread use in the late 1890s.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Bushido was proposed not by conservative reactionaries, however, but by relatively progressive individuals with considerable international experience and a good command of one or more Western languages. The first modern writings on bushido by the influential journalist and later politician Ozaki Yukio (1858-1954) from 1888 onward posited the concept as a potential Japanese equivalent to the English ethic of ‘gentlemanship’, which was popularly traced back to medieval chivalry.[[32]](#footnote-32) Books and articles on bushido began to be published increasingly after 1900, with the concept becoming a core part of the civilian and military education systems until the end of the Second World War in 1945.[[33]](#footnote-33) Japanese thinkers from the late nineteenth century onward frequently engaged with more established discourses on European chivalry, going beyond mere translation of Western texts. As Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933) wrote in his 1900 bestseller *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*: ‘Few historical comparisons can be more judiciously made than between the Chivalry of Europe and the Bushido of Japan’.[[34]](#footnote-34) Indeed, since that time, many volumes have been published comparing knights and samurai in Japanese and Western languages (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2)[[35]](#footnote-35); Japan represents arguably the most comprehensive application of the medieval paradigm to a non-Western society.

<< Insert Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 here >>

1. **Diplomacy**

If military interests had operated alone, without higher moral support, how far short of chivalry would the ideal of knighthood have fallen! In Europe, Christianity, interpreted with concessions convenient to chivalry, infused it nevertheless with spiritual data. ‘Religion, war and glory were the three souls of a perfect Christian knight’, says Lamartine.[[36]](#footnote-36) – Nitobe Inazō, 1900

For the leaders of the new Meiji government in 1868, the security of Japan was of paramount concern just as it had been for their Tokugawa predecessors. The collapse of the shogunal order was largely the result of domestic conflicts over how Japan should deal with the increasingly frequent foreign threats, especially after the arrival of the American fleet in 1853 resulted in the placement of a permanent consul soon thereafter. This broke sharply with previous practice in Japan’s international relations, and one of the great challenges for the Tokugawa rulers was to understand the new methods of diplomacy that were being standardised and imposed by the Western empires. Like China and many other Asian states before, Japan was forced to sign so-called ‘unequal treaties’ that gave the Western powers a wide range of unreciprocated rights and controls over their citizens and trade that passed through newly-established ‘treaty ports’ such as Kobe and Yokohama. China’s devastating defeat by Britain in the Opium Wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60 provided a stark warning to Japanese leaders of the dangers of resisting the treaties, leading the Tokugawa into a conflict with powerful domestic anti-foreign factions that ultimately led to the collapse of the shogunate.

With Japan facing a perceived existential threat from the Western powers, diplomacy was more important than it had been for several centuries. Japanese rulers had engaged diplomatically with a highly diverse group of counterparts during the Tokugawa age, including the great Ming and Qing empires, the neighbouring kingdom of Korea, the semi-dependent Ryukyu Kingdom, the Dutch in their small factory at Nagasaki, as well as various Russian missions and the Ainu people to the north. Overall, diplomacy was largely conducted on Japan’s terms, although reflecting the balances of power between the parties. Interactions with the West, however, forced Japanese leaders to quickly adapt to new standards and practices of diplomacy from a vulnerable position. At the same time, Meiji leaders also realised the utility of these practices and soon applied them to their own interactions with Korea, which they then threatened to invade due to its ‘backwardness’ relative to Japan.

In this context, although modern international relations were redefined by the emergence of the nation state, many diplomatic protocols and ceremonies were directly and indirectly related to European medievalism and crusader heritage, which could also conveniently dovetail with certain existing Japanese practices. These dynamics could be seen in Japanese missions to Britain, British missions to Japan, and in the influence of medievalist European notions of nobility in the construction of a modern Japanese aristocracy.[[37]](#footnote-37) As the quote from the later diplomat and Undersecretary of the League of Nations, Nitobe Inazō, at the top of this section shows, these interactions were coloured throughout by martial aspects that were never far below the surface in international relations during this period.

From the 1860s, Western visitors to Japan were fascinated by castles, swords, samurai, and other accoutrements of the ‘feudal’ past. The perception of a shared martial medieval past was reinforced by diplomatic gifts of swords and armour, and Japanese craftsmanship in these areas had been renowned for centuries in East Asia. In turn, medievalism, including crusader heritage, could not be overlooked by diplomats and other Japanese travellers to Europe. Modern monarchs often lived in medieval castles, where they received Japanese visitors in traditional halls with attendants dressed in medievalist costume. At Windsor Castle, home to the most powerful monarch in the world, visitors were awed by the Victorian Gothic embellishments such as the great expansion of the Round Tower in the 1820s and 1830s that doubled its height.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Perhaps the most revealing episode in this regard is the journey of the Iwakura Mission, an unprecedented undertaking in which a large proportion of the Meiji leadership embarked on a journey of diplomacy and research around the world from 1871-73. The members of the mission visited dozens of European castles at the behest of their various hosts, including – just in Britain – Beeston, Blair, Edinburgh, Finlarig, Peckforton, Rosslyn, and Warwick. In addition to calling on the queen at Windsor, the mission visited the Tower of London, already one of the top sights on the London tourist circuit. The account of the Tower of London in the mission’s official record is extensive, discussing its holdings of historic swords and armour, but also the very concept of repurposing an obsolete fortification as a military museum to educate the populace about the great martial exploits of the nation; a trend that struck the Japanese observers across Europe.[[39]](#footnote-39) The Iwakura delegates were also taken by the presence of Japanese swords and armour from the seventeenth century in the Tower’s collection, even if they deemed these items to be of inferior quality by Japanese standards.[[40]](#footnote-40)

It is important to note that the Tower of London as visited by the mission was no mere medieval relic, but had been substantially renovated and enhanced by medievalist constructions such as the Waterloo Barracks and the Regimental Headquarters of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, completed in the 1840s. Similarly, the Palace of Westminster was rebuilt in a Gothic style after a fire in 1834 destroyed the mix of structures that housed parliament up to that time. This mammoth project took several decades, and was only completed in 1870, shortly before the Iwakura Mission arrived in Britain.

The journey through Europe convinced the Japanese mission of the significance of religious conflict in Western history. As the official chronicler of the mission recorded:

From the Crusades of the Middle Ages up until the Protestant revolts of early modern times, blood flowed for hundreds of years as people were massacred and cut down like reeds. More recently, when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Russia, [...] The Russians […] made the clergy tell the people that their foes [the French] were enemies of the Greek faith and that the fate of the Orthodox Church itself rested on the outcome.[[41]](#footnote-41)

In Japan, which had not experienced religious conflict for over two centuries, since the violent suppression of the Christian Shimabara Rebellion in 1637-38, Christian militarism seemed especially concerning. As the mission record observed, ‘Looking at other wards in Europe, it is invariably religion which unites the hearts of the people, and in wars involving religion their fury is as terrifying as that of raging lions and tigers.’[[42]](#footnote-42) The discourse of the Meiji period also led to a longer-term claim by some Japanese commentators that European wars such as the crusades were much more violent than Japanese wars, as the former were fought against other ‘races’, whereas the domestic nature of Japan’s civil wars made them more tragic.[[43]](#footnote-43) Coverage of international events became increasingly widely disseminated with the rapid growth of newspapers and other popular media in Japan throughout the Meiji period, while Japan’s station in the world continued to rise. Throughout this time, the British Empire was the primary reference point for Japan, and Japan became increasingly important for Britain, as well, especially after victory in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895.[[44]](#footnote-44)

In the context of crusader medievalism, the first decade of the new century was the most significant, as Japan and Britain concluded the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902. From the 1870s, the Japanese government followed other countries in adopting court titles and diplomatic ceremonies modelled on idealised medieval European precedents in line with the developing international standards.[[45]](#footnote-45) This was exemplified by the conferment of the Order of the Garter on the Meiji Emperor by King Edward VII in 1906, covered in great detail in the 280-page account by Algernon Freeman-Mitford (1837-1916), 1st Baron Redesdale, who had been stationed as a diplomat in Japan around the time of the Meiji Restoration. As Anthony Best has argued, the decision to bestow the Garter on the emperor was highly controversial for reasons of racism and religious difference, with the latter especially relevant in the case of the professed Christian ideals of the chivalric order.[[46]](#footnote-46) As the prince said to the emperor during the ceremony, ‘Your Majesty is no doubt aware that the Order of the Garter was instituted nearly six hundred years ago, as an Order of chivalry, by King Edward the Third, and it is recognised as our most noble Order of Knighthood’, thereby explicitly tying the Garter to the medieval and crusading past.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Freeman-Mitford’s account was fully in keeping with the medievalist and Orientalist view of Japan common at the time. While himself witnessing a medievalesque diplomatic ceremony that drew on Britain’s distant medieval legacy, when Freeman-Mitford wrote of the Japanese medieval period, he saw this as much more recent: ‘By “mediaeval times” I mean the times which preceded the great Revolution of 1868.’[[48]](#footnote-48) He elaborated:

To us who are separated by centuries from the chivalry and the poetry of feudal times, these things seem remote indeed; but to the Japanese, to whom they are nearer than the days of stage-coaches and blunderbusses and Hounslow Heath are to the Englishman, they are no dream of the past, but a reality, living in a new form in the spirit of patriotism and loyalty which is their dearest inheritance.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Despite the great differences in chronology, for Japanese and British leaders, the mutual recognition of one another’s martial medieval past was a key component of their close relationship. In this way, the Garter Mission served to link elements of the crusades, often seen as the origins of the Order of the Garter, and the samurai spirit that had supposedly seen Japan to victory over Russia the previous year and confirmed the empire as Britain’s closest ally.

1. **Religion: baptising bushido**

Bushido is the greatest product of the Japanese nation, but bushido itself does not have the power to save Japan. Christianity grafted to the stock of bushido is the world’s greatest product, and has the power to not only save the Japanese nation but the entire world.[[50]](#footnote-50) – Uchimura Kanzō, 1916

The great potential ascribed to bushido by the Protestant minister Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930) reflects its high profile, while Uchimura’s childhood friend, the Quaker Nitobe Inazō, celebrated bushido as the ‘animating spirit’ and ‘motor force’ of Japan*.*[[51]](#footnote-51) Uchimura and Nitobe were representative of a generation of prominent Japanese Christians in the Meiji period who sought to combine their faith with samurai ideals in order to both promote Christianity in Japan and Japanese culture in the West. Due to their engagement with Christianity, which was reintroduced to Japan after having been banned from the early seventeenth century to 1873, Japanese Christians were much more closely engaged with the larger global moment of reinvention and celebration of the Middle Ages, and especially the role of the crusades and medieval knighthood.

This section focuses on Japanese Christians in the global medievalist moment, when the appropriation of samurai ideals provided patriotic legitimacy and a possibility for expanding Christian conversion, while also providing a tool for explaining Japan to foreigners through perceived commonalities. Although the mainstream bushido ideology of the time has become widely associated with Japanese militarism and traditional values, bushido was also a key vehicle for Japanese Christians to defend and disseminate their ‘foreign’ faith in the nationalistic and often hostile climate of the late Meiji period.[[52]](#footnote-52) Christians have never exceeded one percent of Japan’s population, but have had a disproportionately large influence on the nation’s cultural and intellectual life, and this includes Japanese bushido discourse. Christians simultaneously stressed the historicity of bushido as well as its compatibility with Christianity; acknowledging the recent provenance of bushido as an invented tradition would have undermined this project.

Bushidoprovided a religiously neutral yet patriotically sound basis for a new Japanese Christian identity, which was vital at a time of burgeoning nationalism and lingering suspicion of Christianity. Although Christianity was not banned again, the dismissal of Uchimura Kanzō from his teaching post at the First Higher School for allegedly failing to bow sufficiently to the sacred Imperial Rescript on Education in 1891 reflected the precarious position of Japanese Christians. This *lèse-majesté* incident made national headlines, further spreading distrust of Christians throughout the country.[[53]](#footnote-53) In this context, bushido presented a unique opportunity, and a disproportionate number of early Japanese writers on bushidowere Christians. The majority of prominent Japanese Christians felt compelled to address bushidoin their writings, and some scholars have divided modern bushido discourse into two broad streams along ‘nationalist’ and ‘Christian’ lines.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Many Japanese Christians were drawn to bushidoout of a combination of medievalist interest and a desire for patriotic legitimacy. Bushido was a conveniently ambiguous concept that could be appropriated by Christians and other marginalised groups in an increasingly nationalistic climate in which medievalism was a significant cultural force. Nitobe hinted at this opportunity: ‘One remarkable difference between the experience of Europe and of Japan is, that, whereas in Europe when Chivalry was weaned from Feudalism and was adopted by the Church, it obtained a fresh lease of life, in Japan no religion was large enough to nourish it’, suggesting that this could change with the arrival of Christianity.[[55]](#footnote-55)

The Tokugawa ban on missionary activity was lifted in 1873, combining with the large-scale recruitment of Western specialists for Japan’s ambitious modernization plans. Many Japanese enrolled in Western schools as foreign training and language study provided significant opportunities for advancement. Exposure to foreign ideas often included contact with Christianity, and many foreigners reinforced the notion that Western technological and institutional progress were closely linked to Western religion.[[56]](#footnote-56) This could be seen in the case of the Sapporo Agricultural College, where the American principal William S. Clark (1826-1886) strongly influenced the conversion of his young students, including Uchimura, Nitobe, and many others.

While Nitobe was the writer of the most influential work on bushido outside of Japan, other Christian bushido theorists were more significant to discourse within Japan as it developed in the 1890s. Perhaps the most important was the Protestant minister Uemura Masahisa (1858-1925), who worked primarily in Japanese and pre-empted many of Nitobe’s ideas, although they can both be seen as Japanese Christians within the global medievalist moment. If Nitobe endeavoured to have Japanese medievalism recognised by Western audiences, Uemura similarly outlined a medievalist heritage of a global standard to domestic Japanese audiences.

Uemura was the earliest significant Meiji Christian bushido theorist, and was one of the first thinkers to specifically use the term. His views on the subject remained remarkably consistent, making his commentaries a useful barometer for the changes in broader bushido discourse. When Uemura felt that bushido discourse was being corrupted as it began to attract broader interest following the Sino-Japanese War, he lamented that the concept had been hijacked by nationalists.[[57]](#footnote-57) Uemura’s primary concern was promoting Christianity within Japan, leading him to promote elements of Western history and thought, including medievalism, while maintaining a critical stance towards contemporary Japanese society.

Uemura published two articles on bushidoin his *Fukuin shinpō* (*Evangelical Weekly*)newspaper in March and June 1894, in which he sought to reconcile the supposed Japanese ‘warrior spirit’ with Christianity. Like Ozaki and other writers on bushido at the time, Uemura was motivated to write about bushido by the perceived decay in morality and vitality that had occurred during the first twenty-five years of Meiji: ‘current society is anesthetised and lifeless as never before. Without turning to Christianity we will not be able to revive this country. At the same time, we must look to our past.’[[58]](#footnote-58) While promoting what was perceived as a Western religion, Uemura joined many other Japanese thinkers of the 1890s in arguing that aspects of Westernization were undercutting Japanese traditions and ethics, and that modernization exacerbated this by promoting materialism and increasing feelings of inequality.[[59]](#footnote-59) In other words, one of the most pressing issues facing Japan was addressing the moral vacuum that had arisen during the Meiji period.

Uemura opened his ‘Christianity and Bushido’ by establishing similarities between the West and Japan, and was especially interested in Europe’s medieval period. Like his contemporary Ozaki Yukio, Uemura sought the foundations of Western economic and military primacy in feudal knighthood. Following the successive collapses of the Roman and Holy Roman Empires, Uemura wrote, medieval Europe was partitioned and dominated by warlike and barbarian Teutonic tribes. During this dark and isolated time:

in feudal society another unique type of spirit was born. Fearing God and respecting man, revering the old and cherishing the young, earnestly striving for justice, this spirit did not shrink from flood or fire. Readily exposing false accusations and crushing arrogance, helping the weak and facing the strong, in turn being composed and silently praying for the emperor, offering one’s life for God or the church with purpose and dedication, and especially showing loving respect to women, all of these were viewed as being sacred. Historians have given this a name and call it chivalry. In short, this is what is known as warriors grasping a sword with the right hand and holding the Holy Scriptures in the left.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Uemura’s description of chivalry arising from martial Christianity reflected the dominant crusade narratives in Japan at the time, as seen in the mainstream history textbooks.

In comparison, Uemura pointed out that Japan had from ancient times been known as a martial land, and that ‘the thing known as bushido is that which has come to take the most distinguished and beautiful form of the spirit that worships martiality.’[[61]](#footnote-61) While claiming that bushido had existed from ancient times, Uemura saw the pinnacle of its development under the Tokugawa, when ‘the vitality of society was in the samurai [*bushi*], and the vitality of the samurai was in bushido, while those areas of society that had bushido had the truest character and were the best regulated.’ Furthermore, ‘If one desires to understand European chivalry, one must not forget the influence of Christianity. If one desires to know the development of bushido, one must not forget the amount of strength that Buddhism and Confucianism contributed.’[[62]](#footnote-62) However, Uemura contended, when feudal society collapsed, Buddhism and Confucianism collapsed with it, and even the remnants of bushidowere in the process of being buried, for when the samurai put away their swords and bows, they also consigned bushido to the past. Uemura lamented the demise of bushido, this ‘beautiful flower of the human mind’ which had been nurtured by the Japanese people for hundreds of years.[[63]](#footnote-63) Uemura called upon his countrymen to not stand idly by while the nation’s spiritual inheritance from the warrior class disintegrated or, even worse, was intentionally expunged from society. ‘Bushido’, he argued, ‘is truly like a type of religion, and society was able to maintain its life through it [...] Society must revive the old bushido. Or rather, what I desire is a bushido that has received the baptism.’[[64]](#footnote-64) Drawing on both Christianity and Japan’s own martial past, Uemura proposed the conversion of Japan to Christianity.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Uemura’s laments concerning the decline of bushidofrom its medieval ideal echoed contemporary European concerns. A core aspect of the medievalist revival in the nineteenth century was the notion that chivalry had declined from an earlier ideal and needed to be consciously resurrected. This discourse was picked up by Japanese thinkers, including Nitobe, who wrote, ‘The particular and local causes for the decay of Chivalry which St. Palaye gives, have, of course, little application to Japanese conditions; but the larger and more general causes that helped to undermine Knighthood and Chivalry in and after the Middle Ages are as surely working for the decline of Bushido.’[[66]](#footnote-66) The work in question was *Mémoires sur l’ancienne chevalerie,* first published in 1759 by French historian Jean-Baptiste de la Curne de Sainte-Palaye (1697-1781), who influentially discussed the origins and influences of crusading and chivalry on European ‘civilisation’ and strengthened associations between the two.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The decline of feudalism in Japan left bushido‘an orphan’, and unable to be sustained by Shinto, Confucianism, or secular institutions. For European thinkers, Japan was an example of a society that had maintained its medieval chivalric heritage even as their own had declined.[[68]](#footnote-68) As Arthur May Knapp wrote in 1896, to people in Japan, the samurai represented ‘the same lofty virtues and heroic devotion which we associate with the truest knight of Mediaeval Romance’, and that the ‘knightly virtue’ of the samurai ‘has escaped the degeneration which it has suffered in Europe, and has remained to this day a stainless glory.’[[69]](#footnote-69) For many Japanese thinkers, the opposite was true: Europe had preserved its knightly virtues even as samurai traditions were being lost. The grass tended to seem greener on the other side.

1. **Conclusions**

Adrian Pinnington has suggested that Japanese Christians were attracted to bushido due to a sense of nostalgia and the potential for comparison with European chivalry.[[70]](#footnote-70) The influence of nostalgia in Meiji Japan should not be underestimated, but it must be noted that it went beyond Christians and arguably had a greater effect on many other segments of society.[[71]](#footnote-71) The widespread interest in chivalry was certainly reflected in works by Christians and non-Christians alike, at least until the turn of the century. In the midst of the global medievalist moment, we can see how a parallel Japanese medievalism sought to identify a local ‘medieval’ past, create an indigenous version of chivalry in the form of bushido, and to see samurai warriors as occupying the same place within this system as crusader knights came to occupy in nineteenth-century Europe – namely as embodiments and paragons of this cultural project.

After 1900, however, as the environment became considerably more nationalistic, bushido discourse also became more chauvinistic. There was a dramatic change in the previous position of the West as primarily a model for Japan to emulate, and this included views of chivalry and the crusades. While Uemura had emphasised that part of chivalry was ‘showing loving respect to women’, the right-wing philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō attacked European chivalry as mere ‘woman-worship’ that was vastly inferior to bushido, and these disparaging views were even repeated by some Japanese Christians.[[72]](#footnote-72) Although Christian thinkers continued to write about bushido and chivalry, their views were relegated to the margins as an emperor-centred ‘imperial bushido’ ideology became dominant. Even Nitobe’s heavily Christian-influenced *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, which became a global bestseller in the first decade of the twentieth century, was widely criticised by Inoue and other commentators to the extent that Nitobe resisted its translation into Japanese until after the Russo-Japanese War, and it had limited impact on Japanese bushido discourse.

As in Europe, the crusades and chivalry were influential in Japan until the First World War. While earlier historians located the death of medievalism in the mechanised and industrialised warfare of the Great War, more recent scholarship has shown that medievalist trends in the West continued well into the interwar period and even until 1945. This is certainly the case in Japan, where medievalism remained strong until defeat in 1945. That said, Japanese medievalism underwent a significant shift around the time of the First World War, and Western chivalry was largely displaced from popular discourse by nativist Japanese models based on the samurai and bushido. At the same time, the interwar period also saw the first substantial original research by Japanese scholars on European medieval history, and only in the 1960s did crusades research in Japan become an established field.[[73]](#footnote-73) Having first contributed to internationalizing chivalry and the crusades in the late nineteenth century, Japan followed an established pattern in nationalizing its medieval history as it moved into the twentieth.

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1. I am very grateful to Mike Horswell and Ran Zwigenberg for their detailed comments on various versions of this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mike Horswell, *The Rise and Fall of British Crusader Medievalism, c.1825–1945* (Abingdon, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., pp. 11-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ronnie Ellenblum, *Crusader Castles and Modern History* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 3-4; Adam Knobler, ‘Holy Wars, Empires, and the Portability of the Past: The Modern Uses of Medieval Crusades’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48 (2006): 293–325. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Chamberlain, Basil Hall, *Things Japanese* (London, 1891), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For example, Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (London, 1981); Elizabeth Emery and Laura Morowitz, *Consuming the Past: The Medieval Revival in Fin-de-siècle France*. Aldershot, 2003; Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany,* *1914*–*1940* (Cambridge, 2007); Patrick J. Geary, and Gábor Klaniczay (eds.), *Manufacturing the Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Leiden, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul, *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of the ‘Middle Ages’ Outside Europe* (Baltimore, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See, for example, the special issue of *Past & Present* on *Towards a Global Middle Ages*, edited by Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen (Vol. 238, November 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See: the introduction to this volume, and Amanda Behm, *Imperial History and the Global Politics of Exclusion: Britain, 1880-1940* (London, 2018), pp. 11-17, 33, 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For a comparative discussion of this dynamic, see Margrit Pernau et al. *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Asia and Europe* (Oxford, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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15. There is insufficient space here to discuss the complex problems inherent in the term ‘feudal’, the use of which has been persuasively challenged with regard to European history, as well (Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted,* Oxford, 1994). This study uses the concept as it was commonly cited by Meiji writers on *bushidō*, many of whom directly transposed a nineteenth-century European understanding of medieval society onto Japanese historical models. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. John W. Hall, ‘Feudalism in Japan – A Reassessment’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1962), pp. 15-51; Karl F. Friday, ‘The Futile Paradigm: In Quest of Feudalism in Early Medieval Japan’, *History Compass* 8 (2010), pp. 179–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Oleg Benesch and Ran Zwigenberg, *Japan’s Castles: Citadels of Modernity in War and Peace* (Cambridge, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Japanese names in this study are given in the traditional order, with the family name first. Fukuzawa is the family name, and Yukichi is the given name. Yatsuzuka. ‘Jūjigun kotohajime’, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., pp. 70-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid, p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. William Cooke Taylor, Kimura Ippo trans. *Bankoku shi Volume 3* (Tokyo, 1878), pages 387-454 deal with the crusades. Yatsuzuka. ‘Jūjigun kotohajime’, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Yatsuzuka Shunji, ‘Nihon ni okeru jūjigun kenkyū 1: Meiji jidai kōhan’, *Shiyū* 9 (2001), p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Taylor, *Manual*, p. 428. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Yatsuzuka, ‘Jūjigun kotohajime’, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Samuel Goodrich, *Peter Parley’s Universal History on the Basis of Geography* (New York, 1850), pp. 35-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Samuel Goodrich, *Pārē bankoku shi Volume 2*, trans. Makiyama Kōhei (Tokyo, 1876), p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Taylor, *Bankoku shi,* pp. 448-50. Taylor, *Manual*, p. 429. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Shunji, ‘Nihon ni okeru jūjigun kenkyū 1’, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. For an examination of this process, see: Thomas Keirstead, ‘Inventing Medieval Japan: The History and Politics of National Identity’, *The Medieval History Journal* 1 (1998), pp. 47-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See, for example: Karl F. Friday, ‘Bushidō or Bull? A Medieval Historian's Perspective on the Imperial Army and the Japanese Warrior Tradition’, *The History Teacher* 27 (1994), pp. 339-49; Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushido in Modern Japan* (Oxford, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ozaki Yukio, ‘*Shinshi* (Gentleman)’, *Ozaki Gakudō zenshū Vol. 3* (Tokyo, 1955), pp. 743-48; Ozaki Yukio, ‘Bushidō’, *Naichi gaikō* (Tokyo, 1893). pp. 25-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Benesch, *Inventing,* chapters 4-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Nitobe Inazō, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Tokyo, 1908), p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Takagi Takeshi. *Tōzai bushidō no hikaku*. Tokyo: Tsūzoku Tosho Chūō Hanbaijo, 1915, pp. 122-23. Figure 5.1 was originally created by Alphonse-Marie-Adolphe de Neuville (1835–85), and appeared on p. 371 of François Guizot’s (1787-1874) *L’histoire de France depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu’en 1789, racontée à mes petits enfants, vol. 1* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1872). The book was translated into English c.1883. I’m grateful to Mike Horswell for this reference. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
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42. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Benesch, *Inventing*, p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
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46. Antony Best, ‘Race, Monarchy, and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-1922’, *Social Science Japan Journal* 9 (2006), pp. 178-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
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48. Ibid., p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
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53. John F. Howes, *Japan’s Modern Prophet: Uchimura Kanzo 1861-1930* (Vancouver, 2005), pp. 4, 70-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
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60. Uemura, ‘Kirisuto kyō to bushidō’, pp. 391-392. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid., pp. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid., pp. 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid., pp. 394-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
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68. Colin Holmes, and A.H. Ion, ‘Bushido and the Samurai: Images in British Public Opinion, 1894-1914’ *Modern Asian Studies 14* (1980), pp. 309-29; Chika Tonooka, ‘Reverse Emulation and the Cult of Japanese Efficiency in Edwardian Britain’, *The Historical Journal* 60 (2017), pp. 95–119. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Arthur May Knapp, *Feudal and Modern Japan* (Boston, 1898), pp. 49-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Adrian Pinnington, ‘Introduction’, in *Critical Readings on Japan, 1906-1948: Countering Japan’s Agenda in East Asia*, vol. 1, ed. Peter O’Connor (Tokyo, 2008), p. xxxvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. For a case study of nostalgia in Meiji, see Carol Gluck, ‘The Invention of Edo’, in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions in Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (Oakland CA, 1998), pp. 262-84*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Inoue, *Bushidō,* pp. 6-7; John Toshimichi Imai, *Bushido in the Past and Present* (Tokyo, 1906), p. 69. Sarah Thal has put forward a compelling argument that many conservative bushido theorists saw the lack of respect for women in the samurai ethic, relative to European chivalry, as a point of pride and strength. <https://meijiat150.podbean.com/e/episode-45-dr-sarah-thal-wisconsin/> [accessed 18 April 2022]. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Yatsuzuka. ‘Nihon ni okeru jūjigun kenkyū 1’, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)