

Authenticity doubt on the Tomioka (Yishen Lun) manuscript: A discourse analysis



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In 1918, Toru Haneda of Tokyo Imperial University published a brief article introducing the Tomioka manuscript as an ancient Chinese Christian (Tang Jingjiao) text titled 'Yishen Lun 一神論 [Discourse on God]'. He noted that it originated from the Dunhuang Mogao Grotto and was acquired by Tomioka Kenzo through a bookseller in 1917. In subsequent publications, Haneda dated the manuscript to 641 CE and published the complete text. In 1930s, P.Y. Saeki translated the text into English and affirmed the manuscript's authenticity. In his 2000 and 2005 articles, Lin Wushu raised questions about the manuscript's authenticity, doubts that Rong Xinjiang echoed in a 2014 book chapter. Rong further recommended that the Tomioka manuscript be excluded from the Jingjiao corpus. These articles launched the authenticity doubt on the Tomioka manuscript and have since become central to the discussion of this issue. This article applies James L. Kinneavy's discourse theory to analyse the nature and robustness of Lin and Rong's arguments. While confirming or denying the authenticity of the manuscript is outside the scope of this article, it aims to shed light on the issues as raised and argued within Lin and Rong's articles. The analysis concludes that Lin's approach is primarily exploratory, but it lacks strong initial probabilities to advance the discourse to a more formal (or scientific) level. On the other hand, Rong attempted a scientific approach using deductive reasoning; but even if the facts he used are valid, they do not logically support the conclusion that the Tomioka manuscript is a forged 'Aluoben document'. Furthermore, the article underscores the fact that the concept of 'forging an Aluoben document' is inherently problematic, as the notion of an 'Aluoben document' did not exist at the time of the alleged forgery.

Contribution: The Tomioka manuscript, praised in *Jingjiao* scholarship for its originality and theological breadth and depth, and comprising half of the entire *Jingjiao* corpus, faces dismissal because of authenticity doubts. This article argues that the case for forgery is neither well-established nor proven, making the proposal for exclusion premature.

Keywords: Tomioka manuscript; Yishen Lun; Aluoben documents; Jingjiao; authenticity of Dunhuang manuscripts; Kinneavy's theory of discourse.

Introduction

In 1918, Toru Haneda, a scholar of Central Asian history and languages at Tokyo Imperial University, published a brief article introducing the Tomioka manuscript as a Tang Christian (*Jingjiao*) text titled 'Yishen Lun 一神論 [Discourse on God]'. He highlighted its notable features, including a passage resembling the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 6–7 and terms translating Christian divine appellations. Haneda identified the manuscript's origin as the Dunhuang Mogao Grotto and noted its acquisition by Tomioka Kenzo through a bookseller in 1917 (Haneda 1918, in 1958, 235–236). His later publications in 1923 and 1931 dated the manuscript to 641 CE and published the text (Haneda 2023, 2031). P. Y. Saeki translated the text into English between 1933 and 1934, and presented it as having three sections: *Yu Di'er* (Lines 1–60), *Yitian Lun Diyi* (61–206) and *Shizun Bushi Lun Disan* (207–404). In his 1937 book (*repr.* 1951), he attributed the authorship of this manuscript (as well as the Takakusu manuscript) to Aluoben, reasoning that it was composed only a few years after Aluoben's arrival in China in 635 CE. (Saeki 1951:317). He provided annotations for the text and affirmed the manuscript's authenticity, saying that:

As far as we know, no scholars at home or abroad have ever expressed their opinion against the genuineness of these documents, whilst those who made a special study on the subject are all convinced of the genuineness of these Nestorian manuscripts from both external and internal evidences. (Saeki 1951:114)

¹*Jingjiao*, often translated as 'Luminous Religion', stands for the tradition of Christianity that arrived, spread and developed within China during the Tang Dynasty.

Note: Hangzhou City University Section: Cross-cultural Religious Studies, sub-edited by Chen Yuehua and Ishraq Ali (Hangzhou City University, China).

In his 2000 and 2005 articles, Lin Wushu expressed scepticism about the authenticity of the Tomioka manuscript, a view later supported by Rong Xinjiang in his 2014 book chapter, where he proposed excluding the Tomioka manuscript, among others, from Jingjiao studies (Rong 2014:288). These works by Lin and Rong initiated doubts about the authenticity of the Tomioka manuscript and have since become central to the ongoing discussion of this issue. This article does not focus directly on the question of authenticity but instead seeks to critically assess the strength and validity of Lin and Rong's arguments through the lens of James L. Kinneavy's theory of discourse. This framework, taken from Kinneavy's seminal work *A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse* (1971), offers a structured method for analysing the nature of the arguments presented by Lin and Rong, enabling a more well-grounded perspective for understanding and analysing their claims.

The article is structured as follows. The sections titled 'Lin's 2000, 2005 articles' and 'Rong's 2014 book chapter' provide a summary of Lin and Rong's arguments, while the section 'Responses in scholarship' reviews the academic responses. The section 'Kinneavy's theory of discourse' introduces and discusses Kinneavy's theory of discourse, and the sections 'Lin's articles as an exploratory discourse' and 'Rong's article as a scientific-proof discourse' apply this framework to assess the nature and robustness of Lin and Rong's arguments.

Note: Lin and Rong raised doubts not only about the Tomioka manuscript but about also the entire category of manuscripts referred to as the 'Aluoben documents', which comprises the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts. They frequently discussed both manuscripts in tandem, implying that issues found in one would inherently affect the other (Lin 2001, 2005b; Rong 2014). The classification of 'Aluoben documents' was introduced by Saeki in his 1937 book, based on the assumption that they were composed by Aluoben and his companions in the first few years after their arrival in China in 635 CE (Saeki 1951:11–117). However, scholars have long noted significant theological and philological differences between these two documents (Drake 1935, 677–687; Nie 2010:325–326; Weng 1995:10–16), underscoring the need for a more comprehensive study of their distinct origins, authorship and interrelationship. Until these issues are clarified through future research, this article will refrain from assuming the categorisation of 'Aluoben documents' or treating these two manuscripts as inherently linked. Instead, it will focus exclusively on the Tomioka manuscript, mentioning the Takakusu manuscript only when necessary for reference.

Lin's 2000, 2005 articles²

Lin's 2000 article spans approximately 15 pages, with the first half addressing the emergence of the Tomioka manuscript, the current state of research on the manuscript, and an overview of various transcriptions and commentaries by

²These two articles (Lin 2000 and 2005b) have been reprinted or incorporated multiple times. Refer to Lin 2003, 2005a, 2005c, 2011, and 2021 in the reference list for further details.

scholars. Lin noted Zhang Fengzhen's observation on the manuscript's archaic character forms, Luo Xianglin's comment on its Tang Zhenguan-era language, Weng Shaojun's praise of its theological depth and F.S. Drake's view that it was an original Chinese work, not a translation (Lin 2000:67–71; 2021:158–164).

In the latter half of the article, Lin detailed his initial concerns about the authenticity of the Tomioka manuscript. He recounted a conversation with Wu Qiyu in Paris in the early 1990s, where Wu suggested that the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts might not be authentic relics from the Dunhuang Mogao Grotto. This conversation prompted Lin to view the lack of specific information on the origin and provenance of the two manuscripts as suspicious (Lin 2000:72–73; 2021:164–165). Despite Haneda and Saeki's affirmation of the manuscripts' Dunhuang origin, Lin questioned their credibility, doubting their ability to detect forgeries, because of what he perceived as their error regarding the Kojima document, as well as his belief that a skilled forger could manipulate a genuine ancient paper from Dunhuang, using the right kind of ink and calligraphy styles to evade detection (Lin 2000:73). Nonetheless, Lin acknowledged that parts of the manuscript text might be derived from genuine materials, citing the unique narration of the Passion and the use of terms such as *xuangao* 縣高 for crucifixion, which he considered as unique and archaic (Lin 2000:73–74; 2021:165–166).

Afterwards, Lin made an observation that he believed would reinforce the suspicion of forgery, namely a stark contrast between the manuscript's highly polished exterior and its disorganised content (Lin 2000:74–80; 2021:167–173). Externally, he noted the manuscript was written in superb calligraphy, and it was free of any corrections for miswritten characters, which he found unusual (Lin 2000:75; 2021:168). Internally, relying on Saeki's structuring and transcription of the document, Lin found the sections to be out of order, and the characters (about 6950 of them), while uncorrected, to be riddled with errors (at a rate of 1.4 per 100 characters) (Lin 2000:76–77; 2021:168). He also found the wording of the section subtitles to be inconsistent and incongruous (Lin 2000:78–80; 2021:168–173).

Lin proposed a forgery theory, suggesting that a forger had some genuine but dilapidated *Jingjiao* fragments in hand, and he could not sell them for a good price. Driven by profit and indifferent to the content, he then copied the characters from those fragments and manufactured a fake Dunhuang *Jingjiao* manuscript (Lin 2000:81; 2021:174–175). He said that while it would be hard to prove his theory (or in his word, *chaxiang* 差想) as those fragments would have been discarded, but tantalising hints (*zhushimaji* 蛛絲馬跡) of the forgery could be found. For example, while the forger strived to imitate archaic forms of characters (e.g., '宀', '囧', '與', and '作'), occasionally he would be careless and render them in forms used more often only in modern times (e.g., '肉', '因', '与', and '作') (Lin 2000:82; 2021:175).

In closing, Lin stated that if the Tomioka manuscript was eventually proven not to be an authentic relic from the Dunhuang Mogao Grotto, but rather a forgery, its value as an artefact would be lost, although its content would still retain research significance. He emphasised the importance of exercising caution when using the manuscript until doubts about its authenticity are fully resolved (Lin 2000:82; 2021:175).

In 2005, Lin, referencing an email comment by Peter Hofrichter, who described the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts as appearing “overly Catholic”, proposed that if these manuscripts were forged in the early 20th century, the forgers likely lacked familiarity with ancient Eastern Christian theology. Instead, they would have drawn upon European missionary writings from the Ming and Qing periods, which, according to Lin, may have led to Hofrichter’s observation. (Lin 2005b:38–39; 2021:238). Lin suggested that comparing the manuscripts with Syriac Jingjiao texts could help demonstrate their inauthenticity (Lin 2005b:39; 2021:238). In the 2005 article, Lin also highlighted the term ‘Tianzun [天尊]’, one of the main divine appellations used in the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts. He argued that this interpretative translation was ahead of its time, as later Jingjiao documents used a more rudimentary transliteration, ‘Aluohē [阿羅訶]’ (Lin 2005b:39–41; 2021:238–241).

To sum up, Lin raised the question of the Tomioka’s authenticity on the premise of a lack of clear evidence linking it to Dunhuang. He supported this doubt by pointing to a perceived contrast between the manuscript’s polished exterior and its error-ridden interior. Lin later speculated that European missionary writings from the Ming and Qing periods could have been the forgery’s source. While he acknowledged he lacked conclusive evidence, he pointed to ‘tantalising hints’, such as character forms used more often in the modern times and a divine appellation too early for its time.

Rong’s 2014 book chapter

In his 2014 book chapter, Rong expressed agreement with Lin’s doubts about the authenticity of the ‘Aluoben documents’ (Rong 2014:282). He argued that if the ‘Aluoben documents’ were indeed, as suggested by earlier authorities, among the earliest Jingjiao translations produced by Aluoben during the Tang Zhenguan period, they would have been official religious manuscripts of the Tang Dynasty (Rong 2014:284). Such religious texts were meticulously prepared, reviewed and vetted, as exemplified by the *Fudi Jing* [佛地經]. However, the issues Lin identified in these two Jingjiao scriptures – disorganised structure, content misaligned with the subtitles, and numerous textual errors – preclude their classification as official religious manuscripts, rendering it impossible to recognize them as ‘Aluoben documents.’ (Rong 2014:284–285). Rong further noted that the officially endorsed translations for ‘Christ’ and ‘Jesus’ were *Mishihe* [弥施訶] and *Yishu* [夷數], respectively, but they appear as *Mishihe* [弥師訶] and *Yishu* [翳數] in the Tomioka

(Rong 2014:285–285). He also highlighted an inconsistency in paper quality, citing the *Tonko Hikyaku: Koushu Shoya Kura* [敦煌秘笈：杏雨書屋藏] (Takeda Science Foundation 2009), which described the first sheet of the Tomioka as being of lower quality than the other sheets in the scroll. Such inconsistency in paper usage would be inconceivable for an authentic official religious manuscript, and the Tomioka, as an ‘Aluoben document,’ was expected to meet this standard (Rong 2014:287–288).

Rong suggested that the ‘Aluoben documents’ were likely forgeries, crafted using material copied from Chinese Christian texts dating to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with the copyist inventing new terms to obscure the original source. He admitted that proving this would be difficult as the source materials had not survived (Rong 2014:288). Rong advised that until these doubts were resolved, the Tomioka (and Takakusu) manuscripts should not be treated as genuine Tang Dynasty Christian literature and in fact should be excluded in *Jingjiao* corpus (Rong 2014:288–289).

Responses in scholarship

The initial scholarly response to Lin and Rong’s articles on the authenticity of Jingjiao manuscripts was relatively limited. Studies by Tang Li (2001) and Standaert in 2001, as well as Zeng Yangqing in 2005, acknowledged Lin’s claims of forgery in relation to the Kojima manuscripts, but did not extend their discussion to include the ‘Aluoben documents’. Matteo Nicolini-Zani was one of the first to address the issue directly with his 2006 article, ‘Past and Current Research on Tang *Jingjiao* Documents – A Survey’, presented at the 2003 Salzburg conference on ‘Research on Nestorianism in China’. After summarising Lin’s 2000 article, Nicolini-Zani proposed a reformulation of the *Corpus Nestorianum Sinicum*, excluding the ‘Aluoben documents’, among others. He said that they could not be definitively placed in the corpus because of uncertain origin, although its content was genuinely *Jingjiao*, valuable for study (Nicolini-Zani 2006:27–30). In a book co-authored with Yao Chongxin and Wang Yuanyuan in 2013, Chen Huaiyu dedicated a chapter to providing an overview of the Jingjiao corpus. Notably, the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts were not mentioned (Yao et al. 2013:347–375). In 2016, Nie Zhijun claimed that scholars generally agreed that the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts did not originate from Dunhuang and were forgeries based on some genuine but lost texts. However, when making reference on this point, he cited only Lin’s 2000 article (Nie 2016:6).

On the opposing side, Wu Changxing argued in 2015 that Lin’s evidence primarily addressed external factors rather than internal characteristics (Wu 2015:66). In 2016, Zhang Xuesong contended that the contrast between an attractive manuscript and chaotic content should not necessarily suggest forgery, as this could result from a series of copying events (Zhang 2016:51). Regarding the dual forms of characters (e.g., ‘宀/肉’, ‘囧/因’, ‘與/与’, and ‘住/作’), Zhang pointed out that at least in the case of ‘宀/肉’, both forms had appeared in a single text, such as the 5th-century *Jinshu – Suo Dan Zhuan*

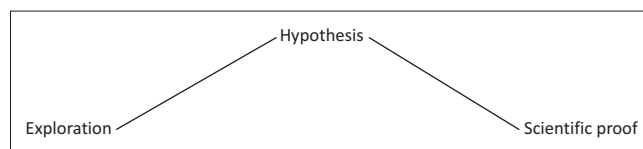
[晉書·索紞傳] (*Jinshu – Biography of Suodan*) (Zhang 2016:51). Wang Lanping, in his 2016 article, offered a detailed survey of Dunhuang manuscripts for characters that appeared in varying forms, and he identified at least 65 characters. This, to him, demonstrated that the writing habits in the Tomioka manuscript matched those exhibited in authentic Dunhuang manuscripts (Wang 2016a:10–33). Additionally, Wang noted that Lin and Rong had not personally seen or examined the manuscripts, which weakened their claim (Wang 2016a:13). On the divine appellation ‘Tianzun’, Wang argued that its ‘superiority’ over ‘Aluohe’ did not necessarily indicate forgery, as it could be explained by multiple historical and language backgrounds in the texts (Wang 2016b:81–85). In a 2019 article, Xiang Bingguang undertook a detailed hermeneutical study of 10 passages from the Tomioka manuscripts (and a few from the Takakusu manuscripts) to ascertain their meaning, concluding that the manuscript contained many colloquial and folk expressions, and a lack of understanding in this regard had unfortunately led to suspicions of forgery (Xiang 2019:262–271).

A significant development occurred in 2020 when the Kyo-U Library released its report *Tonko Hikitsu Keikyo Kyoten Shishu* [敦煌秘笈 景教經典四種] [Dunhuang Secret Scrolls: Four *Jingjiao* Scriptures]. This report aimed to address doubts about the authenticity of the four *Jingjiao* manuscripts in their collection, including the Tomioka. It provided new details on their acquisition, transmission, calligraphy and paper analysis. The analysis confirmed that the calligraphy and characters of the Tomioka were of the Tang Dynasty, and the paper, made from mulberry bark and dyed with yellowhorn juice, was not modern. In his 2022 book, *The Luminous Way to the East: Texts and History of the First Encounter of Christianity with China*, Nicolini-Zani reviewed the latest developments in the debate and revised his stance, re-incorporated both the Tomioka and Takakusu manuscripts into his corpus (Nicolini-Zani 2022:154–192).

Recently, Yin Xiaoping undertook a review of *Jingjiao* study in Chinese scholarship and with respect to the authenticity of Tomioka and Takakusu, she said that the counter-arguments against forgery had not undermined the fundamental basis of Lin and Rong’s doubt, which were: the manuscripts’ questionable provenance, the contrast between their appearance and content and the ‘ethics of manuscript copying’ (Yin 2024:8).

Kinneavy’s theory of discourse

The preceding sections demonstrate that Lin and Rong’s articles are central to the ongoing debate surrounding the authenticity of the Tomioka manuscript, and this article seeks to contribute to this discussion by gaining a deeper analysis of their arguments and evaluating their strength and validity. This assessment is essential for addressing the authenticity issue, and as Rong advocates for excluding the Tomioka manuscript from the *Jingjiao* corpus because of these doubts, a thorough evaluation of their arguments has become even more critical.



Source: Kinneavy, J.L., 1971, 1980, *A theory of discourse; the aims of discourse*, p. 100, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

FIGURE 1: The continuum of exploratory and scientific-proof discourses.

This article undertakes this assessment using James L. Kinneavy’s theory of discourse, a framework widely acclaimed for its role in revitalising rhetoric and discourse studies (Sipiora 2000:383). In his seminal 1971 work, *A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse*, Kinneavy categorises different types of discourse, exploring their underlying logics, organisational structures and stylistic features. His model introduces a continuum of discourse aims, from exploration to scientific proof (see Figure 1), where hypotheses generated during exploration are either validated or refuted through scientific proof (Kinneavy 1971:100).

The distinction between ‘exploration’ and ‘scientific proof’ in discourse hinges on the types of logic used and the level of probability involved. In exploratory discourse, questions and hypotheses are proposed based on initial probabilities, often lacking a formal logic of discovery and sometimes considered ‘abductional’ (Kinneavy 1971:96–103). In contrast, scientific discourse seeks to verify these hypotheses with certainty through deduction and induction, aiming for ‘demonstration’, synonymous with ‘confirmation’ and ‘justification’ (Kinneavy 1971:76–89). This distinction is particularly relevant to this study, as it helps evaluate the nature, strength and validity of Lin and Rong’s arguments in the nuanced debate surrounding the authenticity of the Tomioka manuscript, determining whether their claims remain speculative or move towards demonstrable proof.

An exploration or investigation begins, according to Kinneavy, when researchers encounter perceived facts that conflict with established ideas or dogmas, creating cognitive dissonance and a state of crisis. This crisis challenges the validity of existing ideas and necessitates the search for a new framework. Merely rejecting old ideas is insufficient; researchers must actively seek new theories or perspectives that can resolve the issue and offer fresh insights. In this context, Kinneavy’s approach emphasises the need for discourse to move beyond speculation, advancing towards frameworks that provide clarity and resolution (Kinneavy 1971:142).

Lin’s articles as an exploratory discourse

When analysing Lin’s articles, it becomes evident that their purpose was not to definitively establish that the Tomioka was a forgery, nor to prove that its content was derived from genuine Christian writings discovered in Dunhuang or written after the arrival of the Jesuits. The title of Lin’s initial article in 2000 characterised his discourse as one that entertained doubts (*cunyi* 存疑), with the intention of ‘boldly

introducing doubt' into the discussion (Lin 2000:75). Regarding the sources of content, he acknowledged that he was speculating (*caixiang* [猜想]) when discussing the Passion passage, the term *xianguo*, and Hofrichter's later remark, and admitted that he had yet to find conclusive evidence supporting the claim of forgery (Lin 2000, 81–82, 2005c:224). Nonetheless, the overall tone and rhetoric in his discourse leaves little doubt that he was convinced that the Tomioka and Takakusu were forged.

In Kinneavian terms, Lin's work is exploratory, driven by the conflict between the claim that the Tomioka manuscript is a genuine artefact from Dunhuang and the perceived lack of definitive information connecting it to Dunhuang. This conflict is further exacerbated by another: the manuscript's outward appearance as a highly appealing religious scripture contrasts sharply with its irreverent and negligent content. Other elements in the text also strike him as odd, including characters appearing in varying forms – some of which are perceived to be more commonly used in modern times – and a divine appellation that seems more fitting for a later period. These conflicts lead to cognitive dissonance and confusion, challenging the validity of the convention (dogma) that Tomioka is a genuine Dunhuang manuscript. To resolve the issue, Lin conjectures a forgery scenario.

An exploratory discourse should be evaluated based on the initial probabilities it seeks to establish, which are contingent on the strength and robustness of the statements presented within the discourse. One of Lin's key observations in highlighting his doubt is that, while the manuscript appears clean and uncorrected, its content is riddled with errors and inconsistencies. This suggests an irreverent forger prioritising a polished appearance over accurate content. However, this argument would be undermined by any intentional and subtle corrections found in the text. For instance, as Haruyuki Tono notes, a close examination of the high-quality, life-size photographs of the manuscript reveals a small symbol resembling '乙' inserted between 'shi' [食] and 'zhong' [種] in line 125, reversing their original order (Tono 2020:213). Such meticulous corrections demonstrate a level of precision that contradicts the notion of a forger indifferent to the content, thereby challenging Lin's assertion that the creator showed a lack of concern for the manuscript's substance.

Furthermore, Lin's assertion that the document is riddled with copyist's errors is weakened by his reliance on Saeki's annotations (Saeki 1951 IV:30–70) for his error statistics,³ rather than conducting a firsthand, word-by-word examination of the text. This position is further compromised by Lin's questionable assumption that all of Saeki's annotations are meant to correct errors. Many of these annotations, in fact, are intended to clarify or explain archaic character forms, rather than to correct them. Examples include placing

3. Lin also cited Luo Xianglin as his source, besides Saeki; however, a comparison between Luo's transcription (in Luo 1966, pp. 194–207) and Saeki's (in Saeki 1951, pp. 30–70 of Part IV) reveals striking similarities, suggesting that Luo largely follows Saeki's interpretation.

'ran' [燃] next to each of the three 'ran' [然] in lines 87–88,⁴ 'jijiao' [計較] alongside 'jijiao' [計校] in line 167,⁵ 'zhahui' [智慧] next to 'zhahui' [智惠] in line 167,⁶ 'yinci zhenzhuo' [因此斟酌] beside 'zhenzhuo yinci' [斟酌因此] in line 25,⁷ among others.

Lin's claim that the document's content is disordered is also compromised by his reliance on Saeki for insights into the document's structure, which is superficial as it only considers a few phrases assumed to be section subtitles: namely 'Yu Di'er' [喻第二], 'Yitian Lun Diyi' [一天論第一] and 'Shizun Bushi Lun Disan' [世尊布施論第三]. There is no evidence that Lin has undertaken a hermeneutical analysis on the document. Efforts by others in this regard have revealed a clear and coherent structure typical of a theological treatise, systematically summarising the principal doctrines of the Christian faith. An example of such a structure is presented by this author (Tam 2022:3):

- Lines 1–60: Doctrine of God
- Lines 61–159: Human Beings and Creation
- Lines 159–166: Hymn
- Lines 166–205: Demon and the Fall
- Lines 207–249: Sermon on the Mount
- Lines 249–326: Passion Gospel
- Lines 326–390: History
- Lines 390–404: Final Judgement

Regarding the 'subtitles', their origin and function should remain subjects for further inquiry; their mere presence does not inherently suggest that the document is disorganised.

Concerning the 'tantalising hints' of '宀/肉', '囧/因', '與/与' and '在/作', as mentioned, Zhang and Wang have shown that variation in character forms is a common feature in Dunhuang texts. For the first pair, as previously noted, Zhang observed that both forms appear within a single classical text. More broadly, across all the pairs, Lin has not provided adequate evidence to substantiate the claim that the second member of each pair was more commonly used in modern times than in earlier periods. As to the use of the appellation 'Tianzun', it does not necessarily postdate 'Aluohe'. As Wang has pointed out, it may actually indicate a more complex and multi-faceted history of early Christianity in China than conventionally understood.

The source materials for the alleged forgery were initially claimed to be ancient *Jingjiao* fragments but were later suggested to be

4. According to the classical *Kangxi Zidian* [康熙字典] [*Kangxi Dictionary*], '然' [ran] also can mean 'burning' in ancient texts [說文: 燒也; 註: 徐鉉曰俗作燃, 蓋后人增加; 孟子: 若火之始然].

5. The equivalence of '計較' and '計校', which are pronounced the same (*jijiao*), is attested in classical texts such as *Sanguozhi* [三國志] [*Three Kingdoms*]: '當今之務, 宜君臣上下, 並用籌策, 計校府庫, 量入為出'. The terms mean 'after taking into account'.

6. The equivalence of '智慧' and '智惠', which are pronounced the same (*zhahui*), is attested in classical texts such as *Xunzi* 荀子 [*Sayings by Xunzi*]: '道德純備, 智惠甚明, 南面而聽天下, 生民之屬莫不震動從服以化順之'. The terms mean 'wisdom'.

7. An example of having *yinci* 因此 [therefore] not leading a sentence (or a clause) can be found in *Qianfu Lun* [潛夫論] [*Sayings of the Anonymous*]: '誠宜因此遣大將誅討, 迫脅離逃破壞之'.

writings of Catholic missionaries. These unsupported conjectures undoubtedly weaken the credibility of Lin's arguments.

Overall, Lin's discourse on raising authenticity doubts, particularly his perceived contrast between a manuscript that appears polished on the exterior but flawed internally, lacks robustness, providing insufficient initial probabilities to significantly advance the debate. Regarding the issue of the absence of information linking the manuscript to Dunhuang, Lin emphasised this point in his 2005 article as supporting evidence for his scepticism (Lin 2005c:224), an argument repeated by Yin Xiaoping in her recent article (Yin 2024:8). As noted in the section 'Lin's 2000, 2005 articles', the provenance issue forms the foundational premise for raising the authenticity doubt, and relying on this same issue as an argument to support the premise raises the concern of circular reasoning.

Rong's article as a scientific-proof discourse

Rong's reasoning can be structured as follows:

- Official translations of foreign religious manuscripts from the Tang Dynasty, such as the Aluoben documents, are characterised by precise translations, absence of errors, coherent structure, consistent terminology and uniform paper quality.
- The Tomioka manuscript, however, is plagued with errors, structural disorganisation, inconsistent terminology and varied paper quality.
- Consequently, it is unlikely that the Tomioka is an official translation of a foreign religious manuscript from the Tang Dynasty, and hence it is not an Aluoben document.

This reasoning follows a deductive structure. Clause 1 offers a general statement about a category of documents – namely, official translations of foreign religious manuscripts from the Tang Dynasty – which serves as the premise and is assumed to be true. Clause 2 presents a specific observation regarding the Tomioka manuscript, as noted by Lin and Rong. From these, Clause 3 draws a conclusion that logically follows from the premise and the observation, asserting that the Tomioka manuscript does not fit the category of official translations from the Tang Dynasty and, consequently, is not an Aluoben document.

The applicability of Clause 1 to the Tomioka manuscript is debatable, as scholars such as F. S. Drake have argued that the Tomioka appeared to be original works in Chinese, and not translations from another tongue (Drake 1935:687). The validity of Clause 2 is also questionable, as it is based on Lin's exploratory discourse, whose initial probabilities are uncertain. Additionally, Rong's concern about the consistency of paper quality is contradicted by Kyo-U Library's paper analysis report, which indicates that the

Tomioka is composed of 15 sheets of paper, all made from the same material – amur cork tree-dyed mulberry paper [黄蘗染めの楮紙] (Tono 2020:109–110). Consequently, both Clauses 1 and 2 are weak, resulting in a conclusion that is both fragile and questionable.

For the sake of discussion, if Clause 1 and Clause 2 were considered applicable and valid, they would logically lead to the conclusion that the Tomioka manuscript is not an Aluoben document. While this reasoning is sound and logical, it does not, in any way, justify a leap to the conclusion of the Tomioka being a forged Aluoben document, as neither premise supports such a conclusion. Moreover, the concept of 'forging an Aluoben document' is fundamentally flawed because of its anachronistic nature: the alleged forgeries had to have occurred before the manuscripts were sold to Tomioka in 1917 and to Takakusu in 1922 (Saeki 1951:115), yet the very concept and term 'Aluoben document' were not conceived by Saeki until the 1930s.

Conclusion

Lin and Rong's articles are central to the debate on the Tomioka manuscript's authenticity, and this article critically evaluates their arguments. With Rong advocating for its exclusion from the Jingjiao corpus, a deeper critique of their positions is essential. Using James L. Kinneavy's *Theory of Discourse*, which categorises discourse along a continuum from exploration to scientific proof, this article evaluates the nature of Lin and Rong's arguments, assessing the strength and weaknesses of their discourses.

Lin's articles can be seen as exploratory, raising doubts about the authenticity of the Tomioka manuscript rather than proving it a forgery. He speculated on the manuscript's content, but acknowledged that he had not found conclusive evidence. His argument, based on the manuscript's polished exterior and inconsistent content, is weakened by the presence of intentional corrections in the text. Lin's reliance on Saeki's annotations, assuming they all indicate errors rather than, at least in part, clarifications of archaic forms, further undermines his claims. Additionally, his suggestion that the structure is disorganised lacks depth, as other scholars have identified a coherent theological framework. Lin's sudden shift from referencing ancient Jingjiao fragments to European missionary writings also weakens his argument. The reliance on provenance as both premise and supporting evidence raises concerns about circular reasoning. Overall, as an exploratory discourse, Lin's articles seem to fall short of establishing the initial probabilities necessary to support more formal investigations.

Rong argues that the Tomioka manuscript is unlikely to be an official Tang Dynasty translation, and therefore not an Aluoben document, citing Lin's critiques and his own concerns about divine appellations and paper consistency. However, scholars like F.S. Drake suggest it may be an original Chinese work rather than a translation, and Lin's

initial premises are tenuous. A 2020 analysis further challenges Rong's claims regarding paper consistency. Even if Rong's argument holds, it does not substantiate a claim of forgery, and the notion of a 'forged Aluoben document' is flawed, as the term 'Aluoben document' was only coined in the 1930s.

Rong once stated, 'We should not easily dismiss valuable manuscripts, nor can we base academic research on forged documents' (Rong 1997:5). This article argues that Lin and Rong have not convincingly established the case for the Tomioka manuscript being a forgery. Conversely, the manuscript may hold significant value, a potential that will remain undiscovered if it is dismissed rather than studied.

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Author's contributions

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Ethical considerations

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