The Samurai by Shusaku Endo provides an interesting view of life in the early seventeenth century. Lord Shiraishi sent the samurai and the Japanese envoys on their “diplomatic mission”. They ended up setting sail from Tsukinoura, a tiny port on the Ojika Peninsula on the fifth day of the fifth month. Once these mere lance-corporals Japanese envoys left, their struggle with the view of the world begins compared to their humble lives in Japan.

Throughout the Japanese envoy’s mission to bring trade to Japan with Nueva España, they were always questioned how valid their claim Christianity would be accepted into Japan. Their main opponent was the Jesuits who have long been in Japan and were facing much persecution from the Japanese government. One example is Father Valente. He lived in Japan for thirty years and was not optimistic about future Christian success in Japan. However, the Franciscan missionary and interpreter for the envoys, Velasco, opposed this and argued that God’s will has not forsaken Japan. But in the end, Father Valente’s view caused the church to abandon sending any more missionaries to Japan because of all of the persecution that was taking place. In addition with the letter he brought forth that said the Japenese government no longer accepts Christianity and no longer wants trade with Nueva España. Father Valente did not think the Japanese as a whole was capable of sincerely accepting Christ into their hearts. Through his thirty years of living in Japan, he noticed that the only reason Japanese take on or claim to believe in a religion is for earthly gain. In the instance of the envoys and Japanese merchants, he thought they would claim to be Christians and be baptized in order that they gain wealth and trade with Nueva España. Valente also knew that for a Japanese to become a Christian, they’d have to turn against all of their ancestors. It was not a matter of converting one person because it affected all of the people in a Japanese person’s life. While in Japan, he also experienced many of the “so-called Christians” abandon their faith once they were to face any persecution. What made Father Valente convinced that it was hopeless in Japan is that when those “so-called Christians” dropped their faith, they lived the rest of their lives as if it didn’t matter to them at all. They had no regret or sad feelings and went back to their old practices. All of this prompted Father Valente to oppose any more missionary work in Japan because, in his view, they were the least likely to accept Christianity in all of the world.

Throughout this novel, Endo refers to the face of Christ relentlessly. In particular, whenever the samurai thinks of Christ, he describes it as the emaciated face. This is significant because in all of Japan, all of the religions or praised figures were respected, had great wealth, or lived like royalty. However, the Japanese envoys, mainly the samurai, looked at Christ and saw how his head was drooped and that he looked like a skinny, wretched man. They wondered how all of these great nations worship such a person. How could such a despicable man whose face was strained with pain be righteous? It was hard for them to grasp the whole concept of Christianity and the fact that the “benefit” comes in the afterlife rather than their earthly life.

The Jesus of the renegade monk in Nueva España was different than the Jesus of the Franciscan monks. In his view, the Spanish Christians were hypocrites. He could not believe that these people who preach the love of Christ, could also come and massacre the Indians the way they did. He also believed that each person could find their own Christ. For him, he saw it with the Indians. The Indians suffered, were poor, and were at the mercy of the Spanish. Because of this, the Japanese monk saw Christ in them. Christ suffered at the expense of others as well and came for such people as these. This explained why at the end when the envoys offered to take him back to Japan, he declined. He was content where he was and even sent some words back with the envoys about Christ. He told them to think of his view and find their own Christ in their lives.

Endo has several characters that depict Christ throughout this book. Yozo, the samurai’s servant was a great example of this. Throughout their journey, Yozo was also with Hasekura the samurai. He never once wavered at loyalty towards him which made Hasekura was very grateful and appreciative of him. Yozo suffered greatly and did not question the samurai’s decisions. Yozo initially went to Nueva España and then to Spain always being a loyal servant and saying to Hasekura that he would do whatever the master wishes. This resembles Christ’s attitude towards God the Father. Jesus was willing to obey God’s will no matter what. He always had a servant’s heart and was willing to put others ahead of himself. The samurai recognized this in the end and even asked Yozo if he believed in Christ. Once Yozo said he did, the samurai accepted this because he realized that Christ came for people such as this. Even though Yozo was a lowly servant, he was loyal and had a servant’s heart in all situations which portrayed Christ throughout the course of the novel.

The Samurai enlightens the reader in the effect of Christianity back in the early seventeenth century. It takes an interesting perspective because it goes back and forth from the view of the missionary, Velasco, and the Japanese samurai. This enables one to see what a missionary would be thinking in a situation at that time and how they learned the Japanese view of Christianity verses the view of Japanese Culture. In addition, one can further understand what a Japanese person would see and react to Christianity in their perspective and try to grasp how it becomes such an influence to the Western life.