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HISTORY 497
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The "Bountiful Minister" and the "Southern Barbarians"

Japanese history in the sixteenth century was marked by a series of unprecedented changes. Apart from the long years of violent conflicts between warlords, the coming of Portuguese merchants and missionaries, especially the Jesuits, significantly influenced Japanese society as well. The introduction of Christianity and the presence of the so-called "Southern Barbarians" attracted the authority's attention. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the warlord who once unified the country and became the most powerful figure in Japan, also showed his interest in the Jesuits and their social impacts. Although Hideyoshi has been considered as the first ruler in Japan who were unfriendly or even hostile to Christianity, he did not hesitate to utilize the Jesuits' influence for his good. He expelled the missionaries from the land of Japan while receiving the bishop and other Jesuit envoys in his castle. In this paper, I will try to examine Hideyoshi's perception of the Jesuits and Christianity and to discuss the dynamics and motivations behind Hideyoshi's reaction toward Christianity.

Before we scrutinize Hideyoshi's attitude toward the Jesuits, it is important to make a brief introduction to the legend of this unifier. The origin of Hideyoshi was a myth: most of the modern scholars consider that he was a low-born peasant warrior while Hideyoshi himself claimed that inside his body flows the blood of nobility.[1] His version sounds less credible to the public; after all, the family name of Toyotomi, meaning the "Bountiful Minister," was

[1] George Elison, "Hideyoshi, the Bountiful Minister," *Warlords, Artists, and Commoners: Japan in the Sixteenth Century.* 1981. 223-225.

awarded by the Emperor for Hideyoshi's effort in unifying the country.[2] Instead of claiming the title of *Shogun* as the previous central authorities did, Hideyoshi decided to represent himself as the bearer of the imperial will and strive for the title of *Kanpaku*, which required a high family background. Needless to say, his claim was scorned by the enemies: when Hideyoshi presented himself as *Kanpaku* in ordering the Shimazu family to stop making war in Kyushu, the latter concluded that "a response treating Hashiba (Hideyoshi's original family name) as *Kanpaku* would be no laughing matter," since it was "notorious that Hashiba was without any ancestry whatsoever.[3]" Hideyoshi well recognized this flaw in his legitimacy: he used different approaches to justify himself as a proper aristocrat, as one who deserved the title of *Kanpaku*.

Hideyoshi's endeavor to assert legitimacy by relying on a traditional, aristocratic approach sheds light on the motivation behind many of his doings, especially those related to the Jesuits and Christianity. The status of the traditional Japanese aristocracy was justified by the Shinto belief. Under this religious system, the imperial family is the descendant of the Sun Goddess – *Amaterasu*. Other well-known aristocrat families, such as Fujiwara, Minamoto, and Taira, were all believed to be the descendants of different gods as well. Therefore, the legitimacy of Hideyoshi was tightly bonded to the Shinto belief, for not only his claim of being a member of Taira[4], but also the symbolic function of *Kanpaku* – "the bearer of the imperial will." As a result, the efficicacy of Hideyoshi's approach depended on the Japanese people's expectation and trust in their traditional pattern; in other words,

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[2] Tadachika Kuwata. "Toyotomi Hideyoshi," *Encylopedia Britannica*. September 14, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Toyotomi-Hideyoshi

[3] Elison, 229.

[4] Elison, 231.

Hideyoshi would be legitimate only if all of his subjects, allies, and enemies regarded his connection to the authority of Shinto belief seriously. However, the presence of the Jesuits in Japan made Hideyoshi's traditional legitimacy unstable because the Christian theology presumably conflicted with the Shinto theology, thus challenging Hideyoshi's religious-bounded authority.

Before we investigate Hideyoshi's reaction toward the Jesuits' influence in his territory, it is helpful to look at the stance of another contemporary Japanese authority. The Jesuits' activities in Japan date back to the time of Hideyoshi's predecessor, Oda Nobunaga, who once revealed a "welcoming" attitude toward the missionaries. Luis Frois, one of the Jesuits in the Japan mission, recorded his experience of meetings with Nobunaga. This unifier not only "left many kind words" to Frois, but also served tea to Frois using his own bowl.[5] However, Frois's depiction of Nobunaga did not reveal the latter's passion or enthusiasm for toward Christianity. Such an intimate attitude was emphasized by Nobunaga's hostility toward the powerful Buddhist sects. Frois recorded Nobunaga's complete destruction of Hieizan, one of Nobunaga's Buddhist enemies. He noticed that Nobunaga despised on the Buddhist monks' lavish lifestyle and customs before the Jesuits.[6] The contrast between Nobunaga's attitudes toward the Jesuits and the monks implies that Nobunaga considered the Jesuits more as a potential ally, which could help him to fight against the enemies; his focus and perception of the Jesuits, after all, might be more political than theological.

As one who had to secure the immense but unstable political power in a chaotic time, Toyotomi Hideyoshi's perception of the Jesuits paralleled Nobunaga's stance, although he

[5] Michael Cooper. "First Meeting" "The Alarum Clock," *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1646.* 1995. 96.
[6] Cooper, 95.

indeed recognized the potential challenge posed to his legitimacy by Christianity. At first, Hideyoshi realized the bond between the Jesuits and the Portuguese merchants: a good relationship with the Jesuits might improve the trade with Portugal, thus repairing the war-devastated economy in Japan. Although the missionaries did not possess any control over the merchants, Hideyoshi believed that the Jesuit presence at Nagasaki was necessary for the continuation of the coveted trade with Macao.[7] He kept this assumption in his mind, and later, when he held a meeting with the missionaries in Kyushu, he wished the Portuguese ship to come to a port near Sakai, which at that time was Hideyoshi's power center.[8] Therefore, it is clear that Hideyoshi presumably perceived the missionaries and the trade with Portugal as a whole: the presence of Jesuits promised the coveted trade with Portuguese merchants. From this perspective, the Jesuits undoubtedly offered benefits to Hideyoshi's regime.

However, the other side of the coin was the socio-economic effects of the Jesuits' customs and missions. Hideyoshi worried that the Jesuits' activities in Japan have already caused social instability in specific regions. On the eve of enacting his edict to expel the Jesuits, Hideyoshi arranged a special negotiation with the missionaries in order to address his concerns. As Ehalt discussed, Hideyoshi proposed three "irrefutable offers" to the Jesuits. The first offer concerned about the Jesuits' method of operation: "wandering around the land, preaching in places other than in the temples, actively spreading the religion between the people.[9]" Here, Hideyoshi was worrying about the Christian converts who moved to different regions in order to follow the missionaries. By mobilizing the whole population, the Jesuit

[7] Michael Cooper, "Post-Mortem," *Rodrigues the Interpreter: An Early Jesuit in Japan and China*. 1974. 142.
[8] Rômulo da Silva Ehalt, *Jesuits and the Problem of Slavery in Early Modern Japan*, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2017, 317.
[9] Ehalt, 327.

activities had a deep impact in regions where labor force was inadequate.[10] The second offer addressed the meat-eating custom of the “Southern Barbarians." Again, Hideyoshi’s concern related to the well-being of the Japanese society, since the main source of protein for the Jesuits was cows and horses, which were also important resources for war and manual labor.[11] The last offer questioned the missionaries about the human trafficking carried out by the Portuguese merchants. The significance of this offer was three-folded. First, it could be perceived as a result of Hideyoshi’s moral struggle. Second, the essence of the issue of slavery echoed Hideyoshi’s concern about losing labor forces, which was addressed in the first offer. Lastly, the return of people to local authorities was a significant political contract made between Hideyoshi and other warlords, and the ongoing practice of human traffic undoubtedly hindered Hideyoshi’s fulfillment of the contract, thus encroaching on the political stability of his regime.[12] Therefore, the offer of asking the missionary to regulate the slave trade involved Hideyoshi’s political consideration as well. In sum, all the offers revealed Hideyoshi’s concern about the economic, social, and political effects caused by the Jesuit activities. In many respects, those effects might undermine not only Hideyoshi’s legitimacy as *Kanpaku* but also his rulership as the central authority of Japan.

During this negotiation, the Jesuits did not recognize the dynamics behind the three irrefutable offers and failed to provide satisfying replies to any of them. As a result, Hideyoshi’s reaction was unavoidable, and the edict of expelling the Jesuits came right after the negotiation. Hideyoshi’s characteristics and behaviors had been denounced not only by his contemporaries but also by modern historians, but I believe, Hideyoshi revealed wisdom

[10] Ehalt, 327.
[11] Ehalt, 328.
[12] Ehalt, 330-331.

of a great politician. If one scrutinizes the context of the edict, he or she will find that Hideyoshi well combined his practical consideration with his legitimacy-related concern into the single expelling order. In the first clause of the decree, Hideyoshi soundly claimed his stance in regards to Christianity: "Japan is the Land of the Gods"[日本ハ神国たる処], and Christianity is "a pernicious doctrine"[邪法].[13] The religious implication in this clause echoed Hideyoshi's legitimacy as *Kanpaku*. As we discussed earlier, the title of *Kanpaku* and the traditional pattern of Japanese aristocracy were closely related to Shinto theology. As a result, the first statement in the edict could be understood as a strong justification for such a legitimacy: *Kanpaku* is the bearer of the imperial will and has the full responsibility to stop the diffusion of an evil heterodoxy in the land of *Kami*, the Shinto deities. The first clause, along with the second and the third clauses which talk about the specific forms of regulation and prohibition, illustrated the ideological reasons for Hideyoshi's expelling of Christianity.

However, the fourth and the fifth clauses completely shifted the focus from religion to economy: "The purpose of the Black Ships is trade and that is a different matter. As years and months pass, trade may be carried on in all sorts of articles. All those who do not disturb the Law of the Buddhas, (merchants, needless to say, and whoever) are free to come here from the Kirishitan (Christian) Country and return.[14]" Both clauses might sound abrupt since the edict is supposed to be one strictly focusing on the issue of Christianity, rather than the international trade with Portugal. Such irrelevant mentions might reflect that Hideyoshi's perception of the Jesuits had been changed. As Ehalt mentioned, in Hakata, Hideyoshi had

[13] Ehalt, 340.
[14] Ehalt, 340.

the experience of meeting with Portuguese captains[15], who could make more sound and creditable decision than the missionaries in terms of the trade. As a result, Hideyoshi might realize that the bond between the Jesuits and the merchants is not as tight as he thought. What Hideyoshi tried to do in this edict, therefore, could be considered an effort to separate religious affairs and commercial activities. If he succeeded to manage the missionaries and the merchants separately, he could maximize the benefit that could gain from the trade with Portugal, while minimizing the risks and challenges imposed by Christianity. Similar practical considerations had been well demonstrated in his three offers given to the Jesuits. Indeed, Hideyoshi might portray himself as a supporter of the Jesuits' mission, but once the presence of Christianity gave him more challenges than benefits, he would not hesitate to show a completely different attitude toward those monks of the "Southern Barbarians."

If Hideyoshi's reaction toward the Jesuits could be termed as practical and flexible regarding his legitimacy and regime, he was more indifferent in terms of the Christian-related factors in his life. One of his most intimate family members, the adopted daughter Gō, was a Christian convert. Gō's time of conversion was in early 1600s[16], at least fifteen years later, after his father announced the edict of expelling the Jesuits. As Kitagawa noticed, Gō was the first and only family member of Hideyoshi who became a Christian.[17] Although the Jesuits' report claimed that Gō was baptized after the death of Hideyoshi and "in strict confidence,"[18] it is reasonable to speculate that with all the powers and resources, Hideyoshi might still be informed about his daughter's interest in Christianity by whatever means. However,

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[15] Ehalt, 318.
[16] Tomoko Kitagawa. "The Conversion of Hideyoshi's Daughter Gō," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34/1:9-25, 2007. 22.
[17] Kitagawa, 22.
[18] Kitagawa, 22

Hideyoshi was very fond of this adopted daughter regardless of her religious preference. Only two months before his death, Hideyoshi wrote a letter to an unknown person named “Gomoji," expressing his depression and loneliness, while Boscaro suggests that Gō might be one of the most possible receivers of this letter.[19] Among all the letters collected by Boscaro, there is a considerable amount of passages addressed to Gō from Hideyoshi. Moreover, none of the letters were directly related to Christianity. There is no evidence in the letters suggesting that Christianity was a daily-involved factor in Hideyoshi’s life; even the only mention about the “Southern Barbarians” is in letter No.25, when Hideyoshi was telling his events in Kyushu to Kobo.[20] This fact illustrates the close relationship between Hideyoshi and his adopted daughter was not affected by Gō’s interest in Christianity, which was called a "pernicious doctrine" by Hideyoshi. Therefore, one could speculate that although Christianity was a substantial concern in Hideyoshi’s political career, it was far from a significant factor that could influence his daily life or his relationship with the people around him.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s perception of Jesuits and Christianity, after all, remained one of the most interesting puzzles in Japanese history. His perception of those “Southern Barbarians” who brought a new religion to Japan was multi-dimensional and complex. In terms of his own legitimacy as *Kanpaku* and as the top authority in Japan, Hideyoshi’s stance toward the Jesuits was far from wholeheartedly welcoming. On one hand, he recognized that the Portuguese merchants could bring tremendous wealth to Japan via trade, while the presence of the Jesuits could strengthen such commercial connections between the two states. On the other hand, the Christian theology introduced by the Jesuits posed an ideological

[19] Toyotomi Hideyoshi. *100 Letters of Hideyoshi: the Private Correspondence of Toyotomi Hideyoshi*, translated and edited by Boscaro Adriana. Monumenta Nipponica, 1975. 76-77.
[20] Toyotomi, 29.

threat to his traditional claim of authority. Meanwhile, the missionaries' activities in Japan potentially undermined the socio-political balance that was decisive to his rulership. In order to eliminate the risks imposed by the "Southern Barbarians," Hideyoshi announced the first edict of expelling Christianity in the history of Japan, using both the religious approach and the practical considerations to support his argument. He altered his perception of the assumed bound between the Jesuits and the Portuguese merchants, attempting to separate them from each other. From then on, one could argue that Hideyoshi's perception of the Jesuits had been mostly cut off from his interest in international trade with Portugal. In terms of his personal life, Hideyoshi did not perceive Christianity as an important factor in his life. No evidence suggests that Hideyoshi proactively intervened in the religious preference of the people around him. For instance, his adopted daughter Gō, who had a profound interest in Christianity and baptized after his death, was able to maintain a closed relationship with Hideyoshi. The contrast between Toyotomi Hideyoshi's cautious, well-planned political reactions toward the Jesuits and his indifferent, lighthearted attitude toward Christian elements in his life, reconstruct a part of Hideyoshi's perception of the Jesuits and Christianity. The legend of Toyotomi Hideyoshi provided a paradigm for the next central authority in Japan, the Tokugawa shogunate, which completely banned the presence of Christianity while maintaining the coveted trade with the European states. Therefore, Hideyoshi's perception of Christianity left a heavy stroke in the history of Japan, witnessing the shaping of Japan's stance in a new wave of encounters with different civilizations.

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