

# The VOC during the Shimabara Rebellion

A critical analysis of the discourse used by the VOC during the Shimabara Rebellion

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MA Thesis Asian Studies: History, Arts, and Culture of Asia (60EC)

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June 19, 2019.

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## Introduction

At the end of 1637 a rebellion started in Shimabara, an area on the Japanese island of Kyushu, which quickly spread to the neighboring island Amakusa. If we are to believe the victors, the Tokugawa *Bakufu* (administration), the rebels were Christians and they were fighting because of their Christian faith. As I will show later on in this chapter, however, the nature of the rebels has been a cause for debate among researchers. While the shogunal army besieged the rebels, who had holed up in a previously abandoned castle on the coast of Shimabara, the VOC was ordered to assist. The VOC helped by providing gunpowder, canons, and the expertise necessary to operate an effective bombardment. By operating the Japanese cannons, and bombarding the rebels from their own ships, the VOC facilitated the killing of thousands of rebels.

Why the Tokugawa *Bakufu* asked the VOC to assist has been a question that has engaged several researchers. The army of the *Shogun* was more than capable of defeating the rebellion without outside help, so why would they ask help from outsiders? The assistance of the VOC made the *Shogun* lose face. It seemed like the Japanese army was not strong enough to defeat some insurgent farmers on their own. Some researchers claim that the *Bakufu* made the VOC help as a test of loyalty, echoing what the VOC themselves had reported.<sup>1</sup> A Japanese primary source, *Menkōshūroku*, gave a different reason for the Dutch participation. According to the source, it was all part of a plan to demoralize the Christian rebels.<sup>2</sup> The rebels expected Portuguese assistance, a hope that would be shattered once a European ship started firing on them. I think the decision to make the VOC join the conflict was influenced by both reasons. The decision was both a way to exercise power over the VOC, by making them attack fellow Christians, as it was a way to demoralize the rebels.

The fact that the VOC assisted the Japanese army in beating down the rebellion, fitted with the position that the VOC had maneuvered itself in. As I will show in the next chapter, the VOC had turned itself into a vassal to the Tokugawa *Bakufu*. It was, however, surprising that they were willing to fight against Christians. The Tokugawa *Bakufu* and the VOC had both emphasized the religious nature of the rebellion before the VOC had participated. Religion was a central part of people's lives in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Europe was divided between Catholics

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<sup>1</sup> For the primary source see: Ed. *Shiryō Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan: Dagregisters gehouden bij de opperhoofden van de Nederlandsche factorij in Japan vol III* (Tokyo 1977), 175-176. For a researcher see, for example: I. Morris, *The Nobility of Failure: tragic heroes in the history of Japan* (New York 1976), 167.

<sup>2</sup> This primary source is mentioned and translated by N. Kreeft, *Deus Resurrected: A fresh look at Christianity in the Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion of 1637* (2011), 43-44. Since I am unable to read Japanese, I am dependent on translations by others.

and Protestants, and between Christians and non-Christians. The Protestant Dutch Republic was fighting an independence war against their Catholic Spanish lords. Religion dictated many of the relations between major nations and ordinary people alike. In the middle of these tensions, the VOC had not only failed to defend Christians, they had even actively participated in their demise.

On the surface it was a very uncharacteristic thing to do. State and Church were intertwined. In 1623, the VOC had added to its charter an obligation to maintain “public belief”. The VOC had an obligation to support Calvinism. In the statutes of Batavia, it was determined that only the Reformed Church had the right to propagate their religion in Dutch-controlled areas, even other Protestants movements were forbidden to preach until the 18th century.<sup>3</sup> By doing this, the VOC had complied with the wishes of the *Staten-Generaal* and the Synod of Dordrecht. It was working towards the advance of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, as the Synod of Dordrecht had decided it had to.<sup>4</sup> The rebels of the Shimabara Rebellion, however, were not Reformed, or even Protestant for that matter. The rebels were Catholic, which changed the situation somewhat. Since the rebels were introduced to Christianity and converted by Jesuits, who in turn were assisted by the Portuguese, the rebels were linked to the Portuguese enemies of the VOC. The question then becomes, what was more important? Were the rebels allies because they were Christians fighting against non-Christians in a religious conflict or were they enemies because they were Catholic? Did their religion matter at all?

The exact nature of the rebels of the Shimabara Rebellion has long been the center of debate. One side of the mostly Western scholars looking at the rebels, focused on the religious nature of the rebels, following the Tokugawa’s narrative. According to researchers such as Ivan Morris and Charles Boxer, the rebels were Christians fighting against oppression and persecution.<sup>5</sup> On the other side, researchers focused on the socio-economic reasons for the rebellion. Researchers such as James White and Nam-Lin Hur argued that socio-economic reasons, such as exorbitantly high taxes and cruelty, were the core reasons for the rebellion.<sup>6</sup> Besides researchers who focus completely on one of the two arguments, several researchers acknowledge both sides and either favor both equally or focus on one of the two without

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<sup>3</sup>B.W. Andaya, “Between Empires and Emporia: The Economics of Christianization in Early Modern Southeast Asia”, in J. Gommans Ed., *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient: Empires and Emporia: The Orient in World Historical Space and Time*, Vol. 53 Part 1-2 (Leiden 2010), 377.

<sup>4</sup> Andaya, “Between Empire and Emporia”, 377.

<sup>5</sup> See: C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549 – 1650* (Los Angeles, 1967); I. Morris, *The Nobility of Failure: tragic heroes in the history of Japan* (New York 1976).

<sup>6</sup> See: N. Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan: Buddhism, Anti-Christianity, and the Danka system* (Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2007); J.W. White, *Ikki: Social Conflict and Political Protest in Early Modern Japan* (New York 1995).

disregarding the other.<sup>7</sup> While my thesis will not directly focus on this debate, it is important to understand the nature of the rebels. The VOC, in their reports, reported on both the socio-economic motivations, as well as the religious motivations of the rebels.

Religion appeared to be not as important to the VOC as it was to the Catholic European powers. The unwillingness to propagate the Reformed resulted in a negative view of the missionary work done in the early colonial years. According to Gaastra, the church was an instrument of colonial suppression and state building. Not all researchers agree with that statement. Schutte contests the idea that the colonial church was “*door en door vals*”, which is an idea that originated from the 19th century, but still resonates in modern day studies.<sup>8</sup> Where other researchers see the church as an instrument used by the VOC, Schutte sees a relationship between church and VOC that resembled the relationship in the Dutch Republic.<sup>9</sup> While much of the research has been focused on the East Indies, I would like to add to the discussion by looking at a casus in East Asia. There is no denying that the VOC attacked (what they perceived to be) Asian Christians in Japan, the question, however, is how they reported it. Through their discourse we get a glimpse of what the VOC-members thought the leadership of the VOC thought acceptable. Therefore I answer the following question: What discourse was used by the VOC to describe its encounter with Asian Christians during the Shimabara Rebellion? To answer my main question, I critically analyzed the discourse from the *Dagregisters*. *De Dagregisters* are something close to a diary written by the head of the trade-factory in Hirado. During the Shimabara Rebellion Couckenbacker was the *Opperhoofd* or *President* of the *factorij* in Hirado. His accounts tell a lot about what was accepted and what wasn't, through his use of words. I use a literature study of secondary sources to correctly create a context in which *de Dagregisters* were written.

The first chapter is an outline of the historical context relevant to my thesis. In this chapter I first examine the VOC. I look at how it was founded and operated. After which, I discuss the situation in Japan leading up to the rebellion. I also examine what motivated the VOC to offer its assistance during the Shimabara Rebellion. In the second chapter I discuss the motivations of the different rebel groups during the rebellion, as was given by the VOC. I answer the following questions: According to the VOC, what drove the rebels to rebel? How do the motivations of the rebels shape the way we perceive the conflict? The VOC portrayed

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<sup>7</sup> See: K. Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan* (Norfolk, 2009); M.E. Keith, *The Logistics of Power: Tokugawa response to the Shimabara Rebellion and power projection in seventeenth-century Japan* (Ohio 2006).

<sup>8</sup> G.J. Schutte, *Het Indisch Sion: Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Hilversum 2003), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Schutte, *Het Indisch Sion*, 12.

the motivations of the peasant rebels different from the motivations of the Christian rebels, which changed the way the conflict was perceived. In the third chapter, I give an outline of three instances in which the discourse changed, or I suspected it to change, noticeable in the reports. The three instances in question were: (1) when it became clear the Christians had joined the rebellion; (2) when the VOC had offered its assistance; and (3) when the rebellion was over. I answer the following questions: In what ways did the discourse regarding the rebels change? What prompted these changes? In the next chapter I delve into how the actions of the VOC were described by the VOC. In this chapter I answer the question: how did the VOC describe its own actions? And why did they frame it the way they did? Followed by how the information was presented by the Colonial Government in Batavia to the Heeren XVIII. Using the *Generale Missiven* I will answer the questions: Did the colonial government change or leave out information? And if they did, why? In the final chapter I conclude my work with a comprehensive summary of my findings and a reflection on my thesis.

The main sources of my research are a collection of journals dictated by the *Oppeerhoofden* - in the sources often referred to as *President* - of the trade posts in Hirado. The *Dagregisters* present a very complete collection of contemporary sources. Their value, according to Reinier Hesselink, lies in the fact that everything was recorded.<sup>10</sup> Factual accounts of how many shots were fired at the castle of Arima, rumors which in the end turned out to be either true or false, and even the daily weather was included. We, however, must keep in mind the context of the journals. The *Oppeerhoofden* wrote down what happened to give the necessary information to their successors, and to account for their actions towards their superiors. Especially the latter might have resulted in slight alteration of events. These alterations or specific focusses are especially interesting, and don't diminish the value of the sources to my research. Al though it is important to watch out for instances when the information might have been framed in a certain way, or even altered. My second primary sources, the *Generale Missiven*, need a similar reservation. The information is framed a certain way, I aim to find out how. The *Generale Missiven* were a document that was sent on a regular basis by the colonial government in Batavia to the heads of the VOC in the Dutch Republic, *de Heeren XVII*. In the *Generale Missiven* the colonial government had to inform the *Heeren XVII* on what had happened and it was an ideal medium to justify the actions of the VOC in Asia.

Several copies have survived of the *Dagregisters* from Hirado. This proved vital to Tokyo University. The university has started a massive project to transcribe and publish all

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<sup>10</sup> R.H. Hesselink, "A New Guide to an Old Source." *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2005, pp. 515–523, 516.

these journals. As I have experienced myself, when I was working on the copy kept by the *Nationaal Archief*, some of the pages have partly, or completely, decayed. While the pages are protected now, in most cases the damage had already been done. Ink, and age, caused major gaps in the texts. Using multiple copies and comparing any missing pages, Tokyo University was able to publish an almost complete transcription of the journals. While this is still work-in-progress, the journals from the years necessary for my research have thankfully been finished.<sup>11</sup> Luckily the *Generale Missiven* are also transcribed and published. Since the editor's goal, in both cases, was not to change the grammar or words of the text, the transcriptions are ideal for critically analyzing the discourse.

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<sup>11</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan: Dagregisters gehouden bij de opperhoofden van de Nederlandsche factorij in Japan vol III* (Tokyo 1977).

## Historical Context

### Introduction

According to the stories, Martin Luther presented his 95 theses to the Catholic Church in 1517 by nailing them on churches in Wittenberg and sending a copy to the archbishop of Mainz. These Theses set in motion a discussion which would split Europe for centuries to come. The VOC was founded during the Dutch Revolt, also known as the Eighty Years' War, when the Protestant Dutch Republic fought against its former Catholic overlord, Habsburg Spain.

While Europe was plagued by religious tumult during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, Japan underwent a unifying process that ended between 1603 and 1614, thereby ending the *Sengoku Jidai*, a period of 150 years of instability and war. The Tokugawa *Bakufu* was the first administration to control the *Daimyos* since the downfall of the *Ashikaga Bakufu*. The Europeans arrived in Japan in 1543, right before the unifying process started. Since their first arrival, Europeans noticed the potential of trade with Japan. Especially Portugal and the VOC, tried to enter the trade vacuum, which arose after the Chinese lost their share. The VOC had to compete with an already established Portugal, which it did by positioning itself as a vassal of the Japanese *Shogun*. Through their submissive attitude, the VOC ended up in the Shimabara Rebellion.

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss the situation in the Dutch Republic in which the VOC was established and in which it had to operate. This part focusses on the Reformation in the Dutch Republic. The Dutch Republic was right between the Spanish Catholic side and the German Protestant side. I also examine the VOC itself, how it was founded and the role of the government of the Dutch Republic. In the second part of the chapter I examine the historical context in Japan. It starts with the Japanese unification, by Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, and the hardships they had to overcome. After which, I look at the consequences of said unification, and especially the consequences that would result in the Shimabara Rebellion. Next, I give a short history of Christianity in Japan. I also look at what made Japan important to the VOC, its position in the intra-Asia trade. This part ends with a summary of the Shimabara Rebellion. At the end of the chapter, I have given all background information necessary for the rest of my thesis.

The aim of this chapter is to create the context necessary to understand the primary sources. The origins of the rebellion and the motivations of the VOC should be understandable now. It is important to understand why the VOC got in the position it was in, and what it was trying to achieve. Only then, the discourse makes sense.



## The V.O.C. and the Dutch Republic

Before we can examine the discourse used by the VOC, it is important to be aware of the VOC's position within the Dutch Republic and we will have to start at the founding of the VOC. In the years 1594 - 1602 several *compagnieën* were founded. A *compagnie*, or company, was a cooperation between multiple individuals, who collectively paid for a trade venture towards Asia. When a company had finished its journey, its profits were divided among the participants and the company was disbanded. The first companies were very profitable. The success of these companies almost turned out to be their downfall as well. More and more companies arose in order to profit from the Asia trade. A fierce competition between the companies, was the result. The companies, in their quest for profit, created a surplus of Asian goods on the European markets, which shrank their profit margins.<sup>12</sup> The Dutch government, and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, understood the potential of the Asia trade: In order to turn the competition into a financially sound operation - and to possibly even threaten the Portuguese and Spanish power in Asia - the companies had to be united. On the 20th of March 1602, The *Staten-Generaal* issued an *octrooi*, or charter, detailing the founding of a new, united, company, the *Vereenigd Oostindische Compagnie*. The charter outlines the organization of the VOC, and its position within the Dutch Republic. But most importantly, the *Staten-Generaal* granted the VOC monopoly rights to the trade east of the Cape of Good Hope. The *Staten-Generaal* also transferred their sovereign rights to the VOC, enabling the VOC to build fortresses and to open diplomatic relations.<sup>13</sup> It essentially enabled the VOC to act as if it was a country. The *Staten-Generaal* wanted little control in return for the rights it granted. Orders sent to governors had to first be approved by the *Staten-Generaal*, the most influential individuals within the VOC had to swear an oath in front of the *Staten-Generaal*, and the VOC had to keep the *Staten-Generaal* up to date on its dealings in Asia. Its limited control was even further limited by the fact that the VOC did not honor its requirements.<sup>14</sup> While the *Staten-Generaal* decided to not press its control, in essence the VOC operated because the *Staten-Generaal* allowed it to do so.

As mentioned before, the VOC was founded in volatile times. In Europe both the Roman Catholic Church and the various Protestant branches struggled for control. The Dutch Republic was on the frontline of the religious conflict. Just like many principalities in the Holy Roman Empire, the area that would become the Dutch Republic was receptive of the Protestant teachings. Their monarch, Philip II of Spain, was Catholic. Phillips predecessor, Charles V, had

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<sup>12</sup> F.M. Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de V.O.C.* (Zutphen 2002), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de V.O.C.*, 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 22.

tried to stop Protestantism in the Holy Roman Empire, but he had lost. The religious disunion, fueled by a multitude of other problems, eventually resulted in a rebellion of the Dutch provinces against their Spanish overlord. The revolt took 80 years (1568 - 1648) and is simply called *De Opstand* in Dutch. The Dutch Republic was formed during this rebellion in 1581, as was the VOC in 1602. When the VOC was founded, the Dutch were fighting against Portugal and Spain. The VOC would continue this battle in Asia wherever possible. In Japan, for example, it had to compete with the already settled Portuguese. The situation in Europe explains why Catholics in Asia, both Europeans and Asians, were not seen as allies, but as heretic enemies.

As a reaction to the Reformation, the Catholics underwent a Counter-Reformation. The Counter-Reformation was a period in which Catholics addressed the issues put forward by Protestants during the Reformation. The Society of Jesus was a result of the reinvention of Catholicism during the Counter-Reformation. The Society of Jesus spread throughout Europe and the rest of the World to teach and convert. One of its founders believed a renewed focus on popular devotion, instead of politics, was necessary. The Jesuits worked with zeal throughout Asia, managing to convert a large amount of people. While they did try to conform to the wishes of local rulers, they did not shy away when the local ruler did not wish his population to be converted. Japan is an example of the devotion of the Jesuits. Even when Christianity was banned, the Jesuits kept coming and converting, risking their lives in the process. The VOC, on the other hand, showed no interest in clashing with local rulers over religion.

Protestants not only clashed with Catholics; several Protestant branches clashed among each other. At the start of the 17th century, the Arminians and Gomarists struggled for control in the Dutch Republic. The *Staten-Generaal* allowed a national synod, meant to discuss several disagreements within the Reformed faith, to take place in Dordrecht in 1618-1619.<sup>15</sup> While the synods goal was to determine who was right, the Arminians or the Gomarists, the subject of missionary work throughout the world was also covered. The Synod concluded that, since all true Christians were obliged to spread God's honor, and since God had opened the way to the Indies where people lack knowledge of God, the *Staten-Generaal* ought to support and enable missionary work using “all those resources that can be serviceable to the propagation of the Gospel in the overseas areas”.<sup>16</sup> The description of these resources is vague at best. L.J. Loosse

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<sup>15</sup> L.J. Loosse, ‘*Scoone dingen zijn swaere dingen*’: Een onderzoek naar de motieven en activiteiten in de Nederlanden tot verbreiding van de gereformeerde religie gedurende de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw (Leiden 1992), 179.

<sup>16</sup> Loosse, *Scoone dingen zijn swaere dingen*, 325.

argues that with ‘the resources’ the Synod of Dordrecht meant: financial support to pay for missionaries, keeping the public peace, and “*bescherming [...] voor de doortocht van de ware christelijke religie onder volken en mensen*”.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the Synod of Dordrecht concluded that it was the Christian duty of the *Staten-Generaal*, and its executive bodies, to provide financial support, protection, and assistance with reaching those who were yet to meet God. When the monopoly on trade was extended in the charter of 1622/1623, one of the reasons for the continuation of the monopoly was “conservation of the public Reformed faith”.<sup>18</sup> Meaning that the *Staten-Generaal* acknowledged that the VOC had to provide support for the Mission. The Synod of Dordrecht, brought into being by the *Staten-Generaal*, provided the religious argumentation by which the *Staten-Generaal* and the VOC were made co-responsible for converting the people of Asia.

### The VOC and Hirado

1467: A civil war starts in Japan between the two leading clans, the Hosokawa and the Yamana clan. The war came down to whom could control the *Shogun*, and thus have the power. While the Ashikaga *Bakufu* survived the enormous destruction of the civil war, its seat of power was in ruins and it had lost all control over Japan. The *Onin* war marks the beginning of the Sengoku Period (150 years of constant unrest and lack of central power). While the clans constantly fought against one another, none managed to control all the other clans. Oda Nobunaga was the first who came close to achieving this feat. Instead of using the blessing of the *shogun* as a right-to-rule, he deposed the Ashikaga *shogun*, ending the Ashikaga *Bakufu* after their near 250-year reign. Before Nobunaga could conquer the rest of Japan, he was betrayed and killed by one of his trusted commanders. After exacting revenge on the ones responsible for the death of Oda Nobunaga and their followers, Toyotomi Hideyoshi took over from Oda Nobunaga. Hideyoshi conquered the rest of Japan, and tried to invade Korea. After initial successes, he failed. The last unifier, a trusted advisor of Hideyoshi, Tokugawa Ieyasu succeeded where the previous unifiers had failed. He built a lasting regime, the Tokugawa *Bakufu*.

*Daimyo's* were not the only ones trying to profit from the downfall of central government during the *Sengoku* Period. Several Buddhist sects managed to overthrow local lords and take control of their lands in the 15th and 16th century. The *Ikko* sect had a strong militaristic character. Their stronghold Ishiyama Hongan-Ji, in Osaka, was an immense castle,

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<sup>17</sup> Loosse, *Scoone dingen zijn swaere dingen*, 327.

<sup>18</sup> Schutte, *Het Indisch Sion*, 47.

which could withstand years of siege. The *Ikko-shu*, or uprising, propagated a peasant uprising against their feudal overlords. The *Ikko* sect was a powerful populist movement and controlled important areas in Japan: regions close to the capital containing major trade routes. The Buddhist sects were a legitimate threat to Oda Nobunaga's plans to unify Japan, not only because of the land they controlled, but also because they supported the enemies of Oda Nobunaga.<sup>19</sup>

The Tendai monks of the Enryakuji monastery allied themselves to Asai Nagamasa, and Asakura Yoshikage, both important enemies of Oda Nobunaga. In 1571, Oda attacked the Enryakuji monastery, killing 3000 Tendai monks, and destroying all of the roughly 400 temples on the complex. Several years later, he focused on the destruction of the *Ikko* sect, and in 1580 he succeeded. In 1574, Oda Nobunaga sieged down one of the *Ikko-shu* strongholds, Nagashima. Twice, he had tried to capture the castle, to no avail. The third time, he did not come to capture, he came to destroy. After driving 20.000 men, women, and children into the enclosure, he closed it off and burned it to the ground. During the siege, an additional 20.000 people had starved to death setting the total death toll to around 40.000 people.<sup>20</sup> In 1580 he managed to conquer the temple fortress Ishiyama Hongan-Ji after an 11-years siege. Oda Nobunaga razed the temple-fortress to the ground, without its defenders this time. During his efforts to exterminate the Buddhist sects, Oda killed tens of thousands of followers. Christianity, and the Shimabara Rebellion in particular, was portrayed resembling the *Ikko-shu*, a popular movement against the rightful masters incited by religion. As I will show later on in my thesis, the Shimabara rebels in Hara castle eventually met a similar fate.

When Hideyoshi died, his heir was still a child. While Hideyoshi had hoped that Tokugawa Ieyasu, together with four other regents, would protect his heir and son. Ieyasu had a different plan in mind. Tokugawa Ieyasu saw the opportunity to rule Japan, by taking the office of *Shogun*. His decision divided the regents, some backed the Tokugawa's rise to power, and others defended the rightful heir of Hideyoshi, Toyotomi Hideyori. The conflict came to a conclusion at the battle of Sekigahara in 1600, where Ieyasu managed to defeat the armies of his enemies. The side you were on during the final battle determined your position in the Tokugawa Shogunate. If you had fought on the side of the Tokugawa clan, you were a *fudai* (vassal lords), part of the trusted inner circle of Tokugawa Ieyasu. If you had fought against the Tokugawa clan, your future was uncertain. Enemy generals were beheaded, and their heads were displayed in Kyoto. Even if you had survived the first massacre, chances were that you

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<sup>19</sup> B.L. Walker, *A concise History of Japan* (Cambridge 2015), 106.

<sup>20</sup> Walker, *Concise history of Japan*, 107.

lost everything. 213 Lords lost their lands in the fifty years following the battle at Sekigahara. Other lords were reassigned new lands throughout Japan, far away from their home regions.<sup>21</sup> In doing this, Tokugawa Ieyasu took away the trusted and loyal foundation of lords who had opposed him, rendering them unable to mount a resistance against the Tokugawa Bakufu. Not every lord had chosen between Hideyori and Ieyasu, some had decided to try and please both sides. Ensuring they would stay in good graces of the victor. In the end this tactic did not have the expected outcome. Both the unaligned lords and the former enemy lords were put in the same category, the *tozama* (outside lords). *Tozama* were not deemed loyal enough to enter the decision-making circles.

The former lord of Arima lost his lands after Tokugawa Ieyasu got in control. He was reassigned to another domain and had to leave his trusted troops and advisors behind. The new lord of Arima, however, was allowed to take his entourage with him during the reassignment, including his troops. As a result, the *samurai* loyal to the former lord had no more employment. They had to cultivate land themselves, in order to eat. The *samurai* became peasants and farmers. They, however, did not forget how to use swords and guns. This explains the initial effectiveness of the rebellion. Large parts of the peasants had had military training. They were able to lure their enemies into traps and mount an impressive defense during the siege of Hara Castle. As a result of punishing the untrusted lords, the Tokugawa *Bakufu* had created a peasant group that had lost everything and was capable of seriously threatening their lords. The new lord of Arima never seemed to trust the former *samurai*. If we are to believe the *Dagregisters*, the lord of Arima acted as harsh as he did in order to spite and break the former *samurai*.<sup>22</sup>

The Tokugawa *Bakufu* used several methods to control the *Daimyo* 's, continuing on the foundations placed by Hideyoshi. The 'Sword Hunt', started by Hideyoshi in 1588, removed the *jizamurai* from rural Japan, making both the peasants and the low-standing samurai easier to control. In 1635 the *Bakufu* added the *Sankin Kotai*, or alternate attendance system, to the Regulations concerning Warrior Households.<sup>23</sup> *Sankin Kotai* was a system in which *Tozama* had to keep a permanent residence in Edo and live in Edo for at least a certain amount of time each year. When they returned to their domain, they were obligated to leave their spouse and heir in Edo. In 1642, the system was expanded to include all *daimyo*, both *tozama* and *fudai*. Planning a coup against the Tokugawa *Bakufu* became near impossible in this system, not just because of the hostages. Each *daimyo* was given at least two plots of land, to build their primary

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<sup>21</sup> Walker, *Concise history of Japan*, 120-121.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, 88-89.

<sup>23</sup> J.L. McClain, *Japan: a modern history* (New York, 2002), 39.

and secondary compound on.<sup>24</sup> Building and maintaining not one, but two compounds was an expensive endeavor, as was travelling to and from Edo. Even if lords wanted to rebel against the Shogunate, they simply did not have the financial resources to achieve an effective rebellion. The *Sankin Kotai* was meant as a tool to exert the power of the Shogun. *Sankin Kotai* contained requirements to perform certain ritualized acts of service and homage. The *Daimyo* had to visit Edo castle several times to express their gratitude for receiving both their domain and the peace, which the Tokugawa Bakufu brought to the land. Naturally, words were not enough. *Daimyo*'s had to present gifts in the form of exquisitely forged swords, suits of armor or horses.<sup>25</sup> *Tozama*, especially had to please the Shogun and be as loyal as possible. Taking *Sankin Kotai* seriously was an important and expensive start.

To be able to afford their increasingly expensive life, the lord of Arima increased taxes to an impossibly high amount. High taxes alone have always been a reason to rise against rulers, even today, as the yellow vests protests in France prove. High taxes and the start of a famine were combined with a high level of cruelty. The *Dagregisters* report several gruesome practices performed by the lords of Arima and Kuratsu. The lords, for example, made peasants perform a *Minos Dans* when they could not pay their taxes. The Dutch described the “mino dance” in vivid detail:

*d'selfde een ruijgen mantel van langh ende breet gedrooch gras gemaect, bij Japanders mino genaempt, [...], om den hals ende 't lijf toegebonden, hanghen, de handen wel vast op den rugge geknevelen, ende alsdan den brandt in de voorsz. stroo mantel strecken. Waerdoor niet alleen versengden, maer eenige gansch verbranden; jae sommige haer selven met hoofd tegen d'aerde te smijten, ende in 't water te springen, 't leven benamen; ende werd dese tragedie noch huijden daechs den minos dans genoemt.*<sup>26</sup>

The victim would have his arms bound behind his back, and a mantle made of *mino* (dried grass) attached around his neck. The mino mantle would be lit on fire, quickly covering the entire body in flames. When the victim burned to death, the movements he or she made apparently resembled a dance, therefor the name *Minos Dans*. High taxes in combination with cruel and capital punishments resulted in a fertile soil for a peasant uprising.

The quest for subservience and the resulting taxes accounted for one cause of the Shimabara Rebellion, another cause was Christianity. In the middle of the *Sengoku* Period, the

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<sup>24</sup> C.N. Vaporis, *Tour of Duty: Samurai, Military Service in Edo, and the Culture of Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu, 2008), 131.

<sup>25</sup> McClain, *Japan*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 85-86.

Europeans arrived in Japan. During a storm in 1543, Portuguese merchants accidentally landed on the Japanese coast of Tanegashima.<sup>27</sup> The encounter would turn out to have a big impact for both parties. The Japanese got access to firearms. Oda Nobunaga was the first to use them to their full potential, profoundly changing the way battles were fought in Japan.<sup>28</sup> The Portuguese merchants got access to a new market, jumping in the vacuum left by the breakdown of the *kango* system in 1547.<sup>29</sup> The Portuguese moved in on the very profitable trade between China and Japan. Following in the wake of the Portuguese merchants were Jesuit missionaries. The first group was led by Francis Xavier in 1549. He was one of the most prominent members of the Jesuit Order in Asia. The Jesuits used a top-down approach for their Mission. They first focused on local lords to provide them protection and assistance with the conversion of the rest of the population. In 1551 Xavier managed to persuade Ouchi Yoshitaka to help the Jesuit order. Yoshitaka publicly announced his permission for missionaries to preach and encouraged his people to embrace the new religion. This success would be at the basis of the policy of reliance on the *daimyo*, which the Jesuits pursued throughout Japan.<sup>30</sup> The policy turned out to be very effective, by 1590 the Jesuits had converted 130.000 Japanese, mostly in Kyushu. Even Toyotomi Hideyoshi had interest in the new religion.<sup>31</sup>

The initial successes made the Jesuits overconfident. The Jesuits colonized Nagasaki, their central place of power.<sup>32</sup> Hideyoshi proclaimed his first anti-Christian Edicts a mere week after meeting Padre Coelho, who acted as the holder of administrative and judicial sovereignty of Nagasaki. Hideyoshi condemned Christianity, and the padres, for several reasons, most of them centered on Christianity's ability and attempts to undermine local authority. Hideyoshi gave a detailed comparison between the Ikko sect and Christianity in 1587. By making this comparison, he marked the Christians as an enemy of every feudal lord in Japan. The Tokugawa *Bakufu*, however, forbade the usage of the word *Ikki* while describing the Shimabara Rebellion,

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<sup>27</sup> O.G. Lidin, *Tanegashima: The arrival of Europe in Japan* (Copenhagen 2002), 24, 58-59, 71-72; both the year 1542, and the year 1543 are mentioned as the year the Portuguese stepped foot on Japanese soil for the first time. As Lidin explains in her book, the most convincing sources, the *Teppōki* and the *Tanegashima Kafu*, agree on the date being 1543. For that reason, I use the year 1543 as the date Europeans arrived in Japan.

<sup>28</sup> In the Battle at Nagashino, Oda Nobunaga used defensive positioned soldiers with muskets to break the Takeda charge, and subsequently winning the battle. In doing so, he changed the offensive orientated battle tactics into predominantly defensive positions. Not all historians agree with the notion that firearms were the cause of the aforementioned change. Further reading on both sides of the argument: Brown, D.M., 'The impact of firearms on Japanese Warfare', *The Far Eastern Quarterly* vol. 7 no. 3 (1948) 236-253; S. Morillo, 'Guns and government: a comparative study of Europe and Japan', *Journal of World History* vol. 6 no. 1 (1995) 75-106; M. Stavros, 'Military Revolution in early modern Japan', *Japanese Studies* vol. 33 no. 3 (2013) 243-261.

<sup>29</sup> A. Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York, 2014), 151.

<sup>30</sup> J.W. Hall, *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge 1991), 313-314.

<sup>31</sup> Walker, *History of Japan*, 91.

<sup>32</sup> I. Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief & Practice* (Leiden, 2001), 129.

because they feared what it represented.<sup>33</sup> The fact that Coelho presented himself as the sovereign over Nagasaki only strengthened Hideyoshi's argument of the intruding nature of the Jesuits, and Christianity.<sup>34</sup> Higashibaba argues that, while all the aforementioned reasons might have influenced the decision, the anti-Christian discourse was part of a strategy to combine all political, economic, and religious forces under the control of Hideyoshi.<sup>35</sup> Several incidents occurred during Hideyoshi's remaining reign during which the Jesuit Brotherhood was targeted by the Hideyoshi, most importantly, reclaiming control of Nagasaki and the crucifixion of 26 Christians. He, however, refrained from taking definite actions to exterminate Christianity in Japan. To the contrary, the relationship even took a turn for the better. During the invasion of Korea, many of the Japanese forces bore standards with a cross.<sup>36</sup> Hideyoshi's anti-Christian discourse, in the end, was nothing more than a quarrel with the elite, a quarrel that was eventually resolved. His successors, however, fought to wipe out Christianity from Japan. The core of their discourse was similar to the 1587 proclamation: "Christianity would upset the domestic political order of Japan through disturbing hierarchical relations between Japanese".<sup>37</sup>

Tokugawa Ieyasu's relationship with Japanese Christians started off well. Several Christian *Daimyo*'s supported Ieyasu's bid for power, some even played vital roles in the battle of Sekigahara. The favorable attitude towards Christians changed after the Daihachi incident in 1612. In that year, a scheme was uncovered in which Okamoto Daihachi, an aide to one of Ieyasu's councilors, accepted bribes to forge a document for Dom Protasia Arima, a Japanese Christian lord, in order to assassinate Hasegawa Sahyoe, the *bugyo* or commissioner in Nagasaki.<sup>38</sup> The immediate consequences were the executions of both Daihachi and Arima. To Ieyasu the incident proved that he had Christians in his retinue, something he had forbidden in 1605, probably because of the political threat it represented.<sup>39</sup> The incident resulted in the start of anti-Christian regulations in Tokugawa Japan. At first, the *Shogun* prohibited Christianity in shogunal domains, which eventually was in most cases imitated by the *daimyo*. The prohibition of Christianity was a political move in order to stabilize the heartlands of the *Shogun*.<sup>40</sup>

In 1614, Tokugawa Hidetada, son and successor of Tokugawa Ieyasu, started the general persecution of Christians in Japan. Missionaries were expelled from Japan, but many of them

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<sup>33</sup> A. Walthall, *Peasant Uprisings in Japan* (Chicago 1991), 123.

<sup>34</sup> Hall, *The Cambridge History of Japan*, 359-362.

<sup>35</sup> Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan*, 129.

<sup>36</sup> Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan*, n.4 177.

<sup>37</sup> Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan*, 77.

<sup>38</sup> Hall, *The Cambridge History of Japan*, 366.

<sup>39</sup> Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan*, 53.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, 54.



defied the order and some new missionaries even tried to slip into Japan. The persecution intensified in 1616, and became crueler. Even through constant oppression the missionaries were successful. The Jesuit padres claimed to have baptized over 17.000 Japanese between 1614 and 1626.<sup>41</sup> Tokugawa Iemitsu, who took over from Hidetada after his death in 1623, was the first *Shogun* who managed to hit a devastating blow against the Jesuit padres and Christianity in Japan. The first (out of five) administrative directive proclaimed in 1633 was an immediate success. The *Bakufu* offered financial compensation for everyone who could provide the whereabouts of Christian priests or their accomplices. As a result people began spying on their neighbors and some even made it their profession to find Christians.<sup>42</sup> The last directive was issued in 1639, after the Shimabara Rebellion. Iemitsu expelled all Portuguese, including the traders, and cut off all contacts with Portugal. Effectively ending the Portuguese presence in Japan.

After the Portuguese were banished from Japan, the Dutch became the only European country to be allowed to trade in Japan. The Dutch had to outmaneuver their competition in Asia to achieve this unique position. The Dutch presence in Japan started in 1609. They were welcomed by the local government and opened a base in Hirado upon arrival. Staying in the good graces of the Tokugawa Shogunate, however, did not turn out to be an easy task. In other parts of Asia, the VOC either managed to slowly gain the upper hand in the relationships with local rulers, turning them into puppet rulers or vassals. Especially in modern-day Indonesia they rendered former rivals, such as Makassar and Banten, powerless. Or the VOC engaged in equal relationships with mighty empires, such as Ayutthaya and Ming China, in which they were willing to provide services and military assistance in return for, for example, trade concessions. In most instances the VOC started on the back foot, but managed to take complete control of the trade relationship or at least create a balanced and equal one. The relationship between the VOC and the Tokugawa *Bakufu* was an exception. Instead of slowly gaining control, the VOC used increasingly subservient discourse and acted the part of loyal vassal. Every time the VOC and the *Bakufu* clashed, the VOC lost ground. Until it eventually provided the same services and military assistance to the *Bakufu* as it did to the kings of Siam and more, without gaining political or economic favors. Instead they had to act, because they were “trapped by their own

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<sup>41</sup> Hall, *The Cambridge History of Japan*, 368.

<sup>42</sup> Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan*, 59-60.

rhetoric and past promises”.<sup>43</sup> The VOC became a vassal in the Japanese system of *daimyo*’s, and they acted the part.<sup>44</sup>

The subservient attitude of the Dutch was used to gain access to the Japanese market, and it was worth it. Japan became an essential part of the VOC’s intra-Asian trade. Japan was the main supplier of precious metals for the VOC. These metals were in high demand in China, India, and other parts of Asia. Until 1668 Japan mostly exported silver. In 1668, the Tokugawa *Bakufu* introduced limitations to the amount of silver that could be exported every year. The VOC also exported large amounts of copper, mainly to sell in India. Japan not only played the part of mint to the VOC, by providing the VOC with the necessary metals necessary to buy trade goods elsewhere. Japan also became a new market for goods from all over Asia. Japan imported, among other things: textiles (from both Europe and Asia), pelts, sugar, and especially Chinese, and later Bengali, silk. Especially the early years of Dutch-Japanese trade were highly profitable for the VOC. The profit margin was highly dependent of the Tokugawa *Bakufu*. When the Tokugawa *Bakufu* introduced new policies, designed to further control and profit from exporting Japanese products, in 1671, Japan became less profitable for the VOC. In 1638, the VOC had not yet managed to become the sole European power to be allowed entrance to Japan, as it had to compete with other Europeans. The Portuguese, who had arrived in Japan over half a century before the VOC, were its biggest competitors. The Shimabara Rebellion ended the competition in favor of the VOC.

It is unclear what exact moment made the peasants rise up. According to Keith, the Shimabara Rebellion started on December 11th 1637. It all started with the murder of a local magistrate after the daughter of a villager had been tortured.<sup>45</sup> According to the *Tokugawa jikki*, the uprising was triggered ‘late in the tenth month of 1637’ when two villagers were imprisoned on the charge of being Christian.<sup>46</sup> While Morris places the start of the rebellion on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December, which is in line with the first report on the rebellion by the VOC.<sup>47</sup> While researchers debate the exact date, they agree that the rebellion started when the lords of both Shimabara and Amakusa resided in Edo.

After the rebellion started, an angry mob of peasants left for Shimabara castle, but was not able to conquer it. They were, however, able to trap the troops in the castle. Villages on the

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<sup>43</sup> Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*, 261.

<sup>44</sup> For further reading on how exactly this situation came to be see: A. Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Keith, *The Logistics of Power*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan*, 64.

<sup>47</sup> Morris, *The Nobility of Failure*, 153.

islands of Amakusa soon joined the rebellion in Shimabara. At this time, the rebellion consisted of both peasants and rural samurai, providing both sheer number of forces and the military expertise needed to be remotely effective. Mid-January, the rebels learned of a Tokugawa force marching for them, and decided to entrench themselves in Hara Castle. The military expertise was shown when the first army was unable to retake the castle in three assaults, sustaining 10.000 casualties in the process.<sup>48</sup> The second army took a different approach. Instead of going for a frontal assault, they went for a battle of attrition. The VOC provided assistance in the form of cannons and gunners. On March 12th, after having shot hundreds of cannonballs against the castles defenses, the VOC was given permission to leave. The Dutch bombardments were not as successful and the Tokugawa generals were ridiculed by the rebels because of their use of foreign troops. Shortly after the Dutch left, the Tokugawa generals learned of the state of the rebels in the castle. A defector told the generals that the rebels were starving, a fact which was proven after rebels, killed in a sortie, were examined.<sup>49</sup> This moved the Tokugawa generals to a frontal assault on April 11th. After two days of brutal fighting, the Tokugawa army won. Most of the 35.000 rebels were killed in the aftermath. The Tokugawa army did not leave the battle without scars either. The total amount of casualties ended up around 20.000.<sup>50</sup>

The Tokugawa *Bakufu* blamed the Christians for the uprising. According to the *Bakufu*, the rebellion was caused when two Christians were imprisoned, an imprisonment that was just within the context. Shortly after the start of the rebellion, a messenger was dispatched by shogunal deputies with the following message: “In the domain of Matsukura Nagato no Kami, Hizen Shimabara, The Kirishitan bandits rose up, mustered their sectarians, and set fire to everything, including the houses of the Matsukura’s castle town. They have now shut themselves up in Arie and Arima.”<sup>51</sup> The Christian legacy of the region was used as the explanation for the rebellion. Which made the Tokugawa propaganda believable, but nonetheless wrong. While Christianity had played a role in the start of the rebellion, the core reason that made the rebels rise up was the way they were abused by their lord. The Tokugawa *Bakufu*, however, used the rebellion to once again prove the danger of Christianity to the stability of the empire.

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<sup>48</sup> Keith, *The Logistics of Power*, 56.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, 160-161.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, 164.

<sup>51</sup> Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan*, 64.

## **Motivations of the rebels**

### Introduction

How we judge conflicts between subjects and authorities depends on the context of the conflict. The fight for a Kurdish state in Syria is not portrayed as something evil in the Dutch media. The Kurdish troops were backed by Western countries in their fight against ISIS. Their fight against a common enemy, ISIS, and the fact that western powers supported the Kurds, meant that in Western media the Kurds were often portrayed as ‘just’ in their actions. The Kurds had faced oppression and persecution in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, and were threatened by ISIS’ advance. Female Kurdish Peshmerga warriors were treated as heroes. Russian separatists on the Crimea, on the other hand, were treated as a front for the Russian greed for power. The notion that the people of Crimea were better off being part of Russia was rejected immediately. The Russian separatists were stripped of their own agenda and agency. The Kurds and Russian separatists fought a similar battle, but because one was backed by the West and the other was backed by Russia, we perceived the Kurds as liberators and the Russian separatists as conquerors. Context and motivation matter for how outsiders perceive a rebellion or conflict.

This chapter is about the motivations of the rebels. In this chapter I try to answer the following questions: According to the VOC, what drove the rebels to rebel? How do the motivations of the rebels shape the way we perceive the conflict? I have broken the first question down into two parts. In the first part I focus on what motivated the peasants of Arima (and a few days later Amakusa) at the start of the peasant rebellion. In the second part I look at the motivations of the Christian rebels, who joined the rebellion a little over a week after the start. In both the first and the second part of the chapter I will also answer the second question. To answer both questions, I use three reports from the *Dagregisters*. The first report is from the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 1637, when news about a rebellion in Arima first reached the VOC. The second report is from the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, when the news about the Amakusa rebellion first reached the VOC. The last report is from the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, when the VOC first heard about Christian rebels joining the Arima rebels.

My argument is that, at first, the VOC used discourse to make people side with the rebels: their cause was portrayed as just. The VOC could be positive about the peasants, because the conflict did not directly harm the VOC and the VOC did not expect that they had to act against the rebels. The attitude towards the rebels changed when they became a threat to the trade. When the Christian element of the rebellion became clear, the VOC had to distance themselves from the rebels, because they were Christians themselves. Either to pave the way to

their involvement in the conflict on the side of the *Shogun*, or to explain their unwillingness to help Christians against a non-Christian entity.

#### The motivation of the peasants

*[Hiermede hield sich den] nieuwen Heer niet tevreden, maer injungeerde dese luijden, als de resterende die 't lant cultiveerden verscheijde lasten, ende soodanigen quantiteijt rijs op te brengen, dat hare niet mogelijk was; ende de geene die in defect bleven, ende haer g'ordonneerde niet opbrengen conden, d'selfde een ruijgen mantel van langh ende breet gedroocht gras gemaect, bij Japanders mino genaempt, de berckiers ende andere lantluijden voor den regen gebruijcken, om den hals ende 't lijf toegebonden, hanghen, de handen wel vast op den rugge geknevelen, ende alsdan den brandt in de voorsz. stroo mantel strecken. Waerdoor niet alleen versengden, maer eenige gansch verbranden; jae sommige haer sel[ven met] hoofd tegen d'aerde te smijten, ende in't water te springen, 't leven benamen; ende [wer]d dese t[raged]ie noch huijden daechs den minos dans genoempt. Desen wraekgierigen Heer ofte wel een tijran genoempt, hielt sich met dese tragedie noch niet vernoecht, maer dede daerenboven alle de vrouwen van soodanige met de beenen moedernaeckt ophangen, als andere smaden ende oneerlijckheden aen; 'twelcq ten dien tijde door sijne presentie wierde verdraegen ende met patientie gedult. Doch den tegenwoordigen Heer, houdende sijne res[identie in Je]d[o zijns vaders voetstaffen m]ede willende naervolgen met, de lantluijd[en meerder als opbrengen konde te last te leggen], ende soodanich dat bijnae van hongher [versmagten, ende niet dan met worstele ende aardvr]uchten haer leven onderhielden, hadde sij[ne gestelde regenten g'ordoneerd met] des vaders gepleechde enorme actie dreijgen, ende oock effectuuren laten. Waerdoor dese revolte geschiet, ende geresolveert sijn geworden eenmael ee[nen, als veele langduwrigen] dooden te sterven, hebben eenige van de principaelste haer vrouwen ende kinderen, ofte [niet a]ndermael t' aenschouwen de smaet ende schande die haer te verwachten stont gedoot, ende om 't leven gebracht.<sup>52</sup>*

- Fragment 1, from the 17th December 1637 report

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<sup>52</sup> Ed. Shiryō Hensan-jo, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 85-86.

In the report of the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 1637, the reasoning for the rebellion is described. As shown in the fragment above, the peasants suffered greatly under their lord's reign. The fragment paints a clear picture, the peasants suffered and the lord was cruel. In this part of the chapter I will closely analyze the reports of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of December.

After the Tokugawa Shogunate gained control, they moved around several *daimyo* in order to better control their vassals. The previous lord of Arima was moved to another area and was not allowed to bring his troops and loyal subjects. The new lord of Arima, however, was. As a result, the soldiers of the old lord were forced to work on the land to provide for their family. According to the report, this was not enough for the new lord - he was not 'satisfied' yet. He imposed new taxes, as usual paid in rice, which the peasants could not afford. The VOC did write two things that made the reader take the side of the peasants. First, the sentence "*Hiermede hield den nieuwen heer niet tevreden*" was added. Instead of writing "the new lord imposed new taxes", they added a personal reason to the taxes: the lord was not satisfied yet. The lord was not satisfied with taking everything the soldiers had. In writing so, the VOC created a tyrannical or evil image of the lord of Arima. An image that is further strengthened by the claim that the taxes were "[of] *soodanigen quantiteit rijns op te brengen, dat hare niet mogelijk was*". Not only did the lord of Arima impose new taxes out of spite, he also made them impossibly high. The effects of the taxes are described later on in the report. The peasants of Arima almost died of starvation, and only survived on "*worstele ende aardvruchten*". The accounts emphasized the tyrannical tendencies of the lord.

As shown in fragment 1, the consequences of not paying taxes were brutal. The *minos dans* was described in detail. The peasant's hands were bound on their backs and a cloak of dried grass was bound around their necks. The cloak was then set on fire, severely burning, and sometimes even killing, the poor fellow who could not pay his taxes. The cruelty of the punishment was further emphasized by, firstly, claiming it was called a '*minos dans*'. The phrase eliminates the suffering of the peasants, replacing the horrors with a lighthearted 'dance'. The people exacting the punishments supposedly enjoyed the suffering of the peasants, as some wicked form of entertainment. Secondly, the cruelty was emphasized by the word '*jae*'. The word, 'yes', was meant as a way to emphasize the writer's disbelief. The cruelty was of such a level, that it was almost unbelievable. The word stood out, because the writer had not used it anywhere else in the reports. By deeming it necessary to stress the accuracy of the report, the writer highlighted the cruelty of the situation.

According to the VOC, the *minos dans* was not enough vengeance for the lord of Arima. He also targeted the female peasants: "*alle vrouwen van soodanige met de beenen*

*moedernaecht ophangen.*” The lord subjected the peasants also to other *smaden* and *oneerlijckheden*. By using the words *wraekgierigen Heer* and *noch niet vernoecht* as reasoning for the punishments, the writer confirms what was implied earlier. The lord did it out of spite, not out of necessity. To dramatize the severity of the punishments and humiliations, the writer claims that some of the *principaelste*, or most important, peasants killed their wives and children. It was the only way to protect them from the inevitable pain and suffering. It was a powerful image to close the report with: the self-sacrifice and suffering of the peasants. At this point in time, nobody doubted who was the perpetrator and who was the victim. The punishments the peasants underwent, were described using the words *tragedie*, *smaden*, and *oneerlijckheden*. While the lord was described with the words *wraekgierigen*, and *tijran*. According to the writer, he was a vindictive, hot-headed and evil man.

Whereas in the first report on the rebellion the VOC clearly took sides, in the second report, a mere two days later, their attitude towards the rebels showed signs of a change. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, the news that the rebellion had spread to Amakusa reached the VOC. When addressing the reasoning behind the rebellion, the VOC was less detailed. The only reason given was: “*ende dat om redenen haren Heer die van Crats, die voordesen mede eenige vexation hadde te laste geleijt.*”<sup>53</sup> The peasants rebelled because the lord of Karatsu had given them some troubles. When the reports from the 17<sup>th</sup> of December and the 19<sup>th</sup> of December are compared, the differences are telling. The lord of Karatsu was not characterized as an evil man. He was not described at all, except for the fact that he had troubled the peasants. His reasoning was not mentioned, the severity of the ‘troubles’ was not mentioned, and the effects of the ‘troubles’ were not mentioned. All the information that was necessary to judge the justness of the uprising, was not presented. As a result, the peasants were not portrayed as victims - which made it harder to take their side in the conflict and thus easier to side with the lord.

To conclude, the writer of the first report created a narrative in which the peasants were the victims. He used several techniques to make the reader pity the peasants of Arima, and, as a result, understand their uprising. By reporting the suffering of the peasants and their motivations for the rebellion, while only briefly mentioning their killing and burning, the rebels were portrayed as just. The lord of Arima, on the other hand, was portrayed as an evil man who acted out of spite. Only two days later, the narrative towards the peasants had changed. The suffering of the peasants was not discussed. This removed much of the justification of the rebellion and allowed the VOC to take a different course of action.

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<sup>53</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 86-87.

*d'Arimasche Christenen haer [minde hadden opgeworp]en ende bij de lantbouwers van wien seer minnelijk wierden ontfan[gen gevoegd, alle de] Japansche kercken afgebrant ende een nieuwe kerck daerinne [de beelden van Jesu ende] Maria opgerecht hadden, voerende hare troepen onder vaend[els (met cruijsen)]<sup>54</sup> geevende d]aermede te kennen, ende oock uijtroepende, het sij d'overwinning [ofte nederlaeg] becomen ter [haren dien]st van haren Godt wesen sal, ende n[u den rechten tijd gebooren te weezen] hunlieden over het Christenen ende priesteren [vergoeten bloed wreeke ende reve]nge te nemen ende voor haer religie te sterven.<sup>55</sup>*

- Fragment 2, from the 27th December 1637 report

### The motivation of the Christians

The discourse towards the rebels changed even more, when it became clear that Christians had joined the rebellion. A group of Christians had joined the rebellion and were well received. Instead of not mentioning the motivation of the Christians, like what the writer had done when discussing the Amakusa rebels, the writer put their motivation in a bad light. I argue he intentionally framed the motivation and actions of the Christian rebels in a negative way. The Dutch wrote the following: “[geevende d]aermede te kennen, ende oock uitroepende.” In other words, the sentence that followed was, at least in part, an interpretation by the Dutch of what the rebels ‘let everybody know’. An interpretation partly based on the actions of the rebels, and partly based on what the rebels supposedly had said.

According to the report, the rebels had burned down all the Japanese temples. The rebels had replaced them with a new church, containing figures of Jesus and Mother Mary. The statement tells us several things about the motivation of the Christians. The rebellion was motivated by religious repression. They wanted a place to worship. While this in itself was not a bad cause, their actions were framed otherwise. For starters, the Christians had built their own place of worship by destroying those of the non-Christians. The destruction of the rebels was highlighted, which the writer did not do in the first report on the peasant rebellion. Secondly, the Christian rebels were Catholic. The worship of Mary was and is a Catholic tradition. By highlighting her presence in the church, the Protestant readers would distance themselves from the rebel cause. The distance between the Dutch and the Christian rebels was further

<sup>54</sup> According to a letter from Couckenbacker the Christian rebels used banners *met cruijsen*, with crosses: Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 87.

<sup>55</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 87-88.



emphasized later in the report. Instead of referring to God as “our God”, the writer referred to the God using the words “*haren Godt*”, their God. By taking away the only common ground, the Christian God, the writer had distanced the VOC from the rebel cause.

As for the motivation of the Christian rebels, the Dutch were brief. According to the Dutch, the Christian rebels were only motivated by revenge: “[...] *over het Christenen ende priesteren [vergoeten bloed wreeke ende reve]nge te nemen [...]*. Similar to the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, the focus was not on the suffering of the Christians. The Christians had suffered similarly at the hands of the lord of Arima, arguably even more, because of religious persecution. By emphasizing the need for vengeance and revenge, however, the focus of the rebellion was not on self-preservation. The focus was on hurting their enemies. By shifting the focus this way, the rebels were no longer depicted as victims. When looking at a conflict in which victimized rebels rise up against evil overlords, it is easy to determine who is just. In taking away that relationship between lord and subject, the Dutch made it easier to oppose the Christian rebellion.

To conclude, the motivation of the Christian rebels was not discussed as extensively as the motivation of the peasants. The motivation that was given focused on revenge and destruction. The Christians wanted a place to worship their Catholic God, achieved through the destruction of Japanese temples. They wanted revenge for what was done to fellow Christians and priests. The rebels lacked a constructive goal, an endgame. The Dutch did not mention if the Christian rebels wanted to be accepted, or wanted an end to the persecutions of fellow Christians. Since the rebels lacked a clear end goal and were willing to fight to the death, only one outcome was likely. The report of the 27<sup>th</sup> of December ended with the phrase: “[...] *wijle wel een groote bloedt stor]tinge te geschieden geschapen stont*.”<sup>56</sup> The Dutch were expecting a bloodbath.

## Conclusion

The peasants of Arima had to endure humiliation and punishment by a vindictive ruler, sometimes even leading to death. The lord of Arima introduced taxes that were nigh impossible to pay. Not paying your taxes resulted in harsh punishments. As a result, the peasants were driven to the brink by hunger and abuse. The desperateness of the peasants was best portrayed by men killing their wives and children out of kindness, to save them from a worse fate. When the lord of Arima was in Edo with a bunch of his soldiers, the peasants saw an opportunity to

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<sup>56</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 88.

rise up. As a result of how the conflict was portrayed, the rebels were perceived as just. They were victims fighting against oppression, with self-preservation as their only goal. The report was written in a way to emphasize the suffering of the peasants and to mark the Lord of Arima as a tyrant. As a result, if one had to take a side after reading the report, I reckon most would have chosen the side of the rebels.

When the rebellion had spread to Amakusa, the tone of the report changed. Instead of highlighting the suffering and hardships of the rebels, the writer only mentioned the ‘troubles’ of the rebels as an afterthought. The reasoning behind the change in tone is hard to establish. Possibly the tone changed because, by spreading to nearby areas, the rebellion had become a real threat to the stability of the region, and thus interfered with the Dutch trade interests. Whatever the reasons, the effect of the changed tone was a changed conflict. Instead of the oppressed fighting the oppressors, neither side was favored. The key to the justification of the rebellion was left out, resulting in a rebellion that lacked a clear cause. The rebels were no longer portrayed as just. Which opened the way for military intervention, by both the Tokugawa *Bakufu* and possibly the VOC, without supporting tyranny and oppression.

The motivations of the Christian rebels were portrayed even worse than those of the Amakusa rebels. For starters, they were of the “wrong” religion. The report emphasized the fact that the Christian rebels were Catholic. A fact that sided the rebels with the enemies of the Dutch, the Portuguese and Spaniards. One of the motivations, the desire for a place of worship, was achieved through destruction. The destructive nature of the rebels was repeated in the other motivation for the rebellion: revenge. The report did not accentuate the brutal life of Christians in Japan. Besides having to pay the same exorbitant taxes as the other peasants, the Christians also had to hide their faith, or risk death. In the report, the bloodshed is mentioned briefly, but as the reason for the revenge the Christians were striving to achieve. Because of the focus on the destructive nature of the motivations of the Christian rebels, it is much harder to support them. The Christian rebels were portrayed as the perpetrators, not victims, which made the Christian uprising unjust. Since the VOC distanced themselves from the Christian rebels, nothing stopped the VOC from assisting the Tokugawa *Bakufu* in its fight against the rebels.

## *Changes of the image of the rebels*

### Introduction

The image of the rebels did not stay the same over the course of the rebellion. As discussed in the previous chapter, within the span of a week the image of the rebels had already taken a drastic turn. Instead of relatively harmless victims, the rebels had become a destructive force. The timing of these changes is interesting, because it can tell us something about the reasoning behind the changes. At the start of the rebellion, the rebels were portrayed in a good light. But when the rebellion had spread, it became clear it was a threat to the VOC. This could explain the change of the image of the rebels. Instead of taking the side of the rebels, the VOC took sides against them. After the Christians joined the rebellion, the rebellion became an even greater threat. Not because the rebel forces had grown, but because of a possible association between the Christian rebels and the Christian VOC. Which prompted the negative image of the Christian rebels. The VOC had to make sure it was not associated with the rebels. Which turned out to be a smart move. The presumed link between the Portuguese and the Christian rebels would turn out to be a deciding factor in their expulsion from Japan.

In this chapter I analyze the changes regarding the image of the rebels in the *Dagregisters*. I answer the following questions: In what ways did the discourse regarding the rebels change? What prompted these changes? By answering these questions, I aim to find out what shaped the discourse on the rebels. The first part of the chapter continues on the changes I mentioned in the previous chapter. In this part I examine how the image of the Christian rebels was established and how their actions were portrayed. I compare that image with the image of the peasant rebels as they were portrayed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December. In the second part of the chapter, I tackle how the image of the rebels changed once the VOC took on a more active role in fighting the rebels. In the last part of the chapter I analyze the image of the rebels after the rebellion.

My argument is that at first, the VOC focused on the religious aspect of the rebellion. By portraying the rebels in a bad light, the VOC could distance themselves from the rebels. But after the VOC offered its assistance, they removed the Christian aspect from the reports as much as possible. It looks as if the VOC was not comfortable admitting that they helped a non-Christian entity fighting Christians (even though they were Catholic). In the final chapter of my thesis I give further support for this argument.

## Rebels as Christians instead of peasants

*Sijn gecleet met witte linne rocken, 't hair afgeschooren met een cruijs, haer veltgeschrij is Sint Jago, soo de Portugeesen in haer krijgen uitroepen, waermede te kennen geven dat afgodt der oorloge; alle welcke parten een grooten schrick in de aldaar ontrent gelegen plaetsen veroorsaect.*<sup>57</sup>

- Fragment 3, from the 8th January 1638 report

The image of the rebels described in fragment 1 was vastly different from the image of the rebels described in fragment 3. Even though the descriptions were of the same rebels, written by the same person, and were only weeks apart from each other. In this part of the chapter I examine how, and why the image of the rebels changed after the initial report on the Shimabara Rebellion.

At first the rebels were victims, fighting against their oppressor. As shown in the previous chapter, that image had already shifted by the time the Christians had joined the rebellion. A change that continued in the report of the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1638. Fragment 3 is a description of “*de boeren ofte op geworpen in Arima*”, who tricked and killed a large group of nobility. The rebels had split up into three groups, two of whom were hidden. The visible group, looked weakened, and feigned a retreat, which prompted the army of the local nobility to recklessly give chase. The two other rebel groups cut off the army. Through their deceit, the rebels had forced the army of the lord of Arima in a disadvantaged fight. A fight the rebels won. The situation once again highlighted that the rebels were no longer victims. They were on par with the army of the lords, at least at first.

The description of the rebels during the ambush is interesting. The report did not make a distinction between the peasants and the Christians, describing the whole lot as Christian zealots. As shown in fragment 3, the rebels were dressed in white and had shaved heads. It is unclear what the writer referred to with the words “*met een cruijs*”. I think the writer meant that the rebels wore white linen skirts with a cross on them, but it is also possible that he meant that they had shaven their hair off in the form of a cross.<sup>58</sup> Whether they wore a cross, had a cross on their clothing or had their hair shaved in a cross, the fact remained that they identified as Christians and the writer of the report noted them as such. Supposedly the rebels used a

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<sup>57</sup> Ed. *Shiryō Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 91-92.

<sup>58</sup> Since the writer wrote a comma before “*t hair afgeschooren*”, I think he had also meant to place a comma after *afgeschooren*. Either the writer forgot the second comma, or it got lost in transcription. Either way, I think the meaning of the sentence was: Dressed in white linen skirts with a cross, their hair shaven off, [...].

Christian Saint as their battle cry, in order to call upon the Portuguese to support them. *Sint Jago*, as far as I can discern, means Santiago (the Spanish and Portuguese name for James the Apostle). I, however, am hard pressed to believe that the rebels did use that battle cry in order to call upon the Portuguese, and here is why. The statement that they used *Sint Jago* as a battle cry required a witness whose information reached the Dutch. To give accurate information, this witness would have needed knowledge of the Catholic religion, otherwise the battle cry, consisting of a foreign name, would not have made sense to the witness. Even if, by some chance, the witness did indeed hear the rebels call upon Santiago, and was able to place it in the correct context, it still would have been nearly impossible to prove that the rebels used the battle cry in order to call upon the Portuguese. Someone would have needed to ask the rebels why they used that battle cry. All in all, with so many ifs in place, I argue the battle cry and its meaning was either added by the Dutch or the *Bakufu* as a way to negatively impact the image of the rebels and to link them to the Portuguese more directly.

While the VOC at almost all times kept a clear distinction between the peasant rebels and the Christian rebels, the VOC did focus its reports on the actions of the Christian rebels. By doing this, the VOC changed the image of the rebels. The question becomes then, what image did the VOC create? For starters, the rebels were mainly Catholic. In both descriptions the VOC went out of their way to point that fact out. A link to Catholicism was also a link to the main adversary of the Dutch, the Portuguese. The link to the Portuguese marked the rebels as potential enemies of the VOC. Furthermore, the VOC linked the rebels to martyrdom in two ways. First, in the report of the 27<sup>th</sup> of December they wrote that the rebels were willing to die for their religion. And second, in the report from the 8<sup>th</sup> of January the rebels supposedly called upon Santiago, the first Christian martyr. The second reference to martyrdom might have been accidental, but it does fit the image the VOC was trying to create. The rebels were not Christian peasants, they were Catholic zealots. While in the first description, the appearance of the rebels was not extreme, in the second description it was. The rebels wore white clothing with crosses and shaved their heads. By describing the rebels this way, the VOC essentially took away their role as oppressed farmer and replaced it with religious zeal. It is easier for people of a different religion to understand and side with people handling out of oppression and persecution, than it is to understand people handling out of religious zeal. Instead of focusing on the thousands of ordinary farmers who joined the rebellion out of necessity, the VOC focused on the destruction and fear brought about by the Christian rebels. Both the description of the rebels, as well as the battle cry emphasized the idea of a religious rebellion fought by religious zealots, rather than a peasant rebellion fought by ordinary people.

<i>Timespan</i>	<i>Number of reports in which the rebels were mentioned</i>	<i>Number of times Christians were mentioned separately</i>
27-12-1637 – 08-02-1638	9	6
09-02-1638 – 17-04-1638	18	0
<i>Total</i>	27	6

- Graph 1, reports mentioning rebels and Christians

### Rebels with an active VOC instead of a passive VOC

Another instance in which the image of the rebels changed was when the VOC offered its assistance to the *Shogun* in defeating the rebels. A friendly lord, in the *Dagregisters* by the name Phesodonno, recommended the VOC to offer its service because it, “*ons meerder voordeel in veele saecken wercken can*” (it could prove to be in their advantage to do so).<sup>59</sup> As a result the Dutch sent a letter to “*hare Hoocheden*”, it is unclear who that refers to. In this letter the VOC offered the following: *in des Hollanders vermogen daermede vEdele Hoocheden connen dienen, gelieft ons te ontbieden*.<sup>60</sup> In other words, the Dutch were willing to do everything in their power to help. The order to go to Arima with all ships would eventually arrive on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February.<sup>61</sup> In this chapter I examine if the decision to actively participate in the fight against the rebels had any effect on the way the rebels were portrayed.

During the early months of the rebellion, if the rebels were mentioned, most of the time both the peasants as the Christians were mentioned separately (see graph 1). The VOC usually referred to the rebels as “*d’opgeworpene ende Christenen*”. Out of the nine times, they mentioned the rebels like this six times. Once, the VOC even implied that all rebels mentioned in the report were Christians (see fragment 3). The VOC portrayed the Christian rebels as religious zealots, and Catholics to boot, marking them as enemies of the VOC. Since the rebels were enemies, one would assume that changing the discourse surrounding the rebels should not be necessary. Graph 1, however, shows that the VOC did deem it necessary.

Between the moment the VOC offered its assistance and the moment they received the news the rebellion had been defeated, the VOC mentioned the rebels in eighteen reports. In those eighteen reports, they never mentioned any Christians. To be even more specific, in only four reports did the VOC not refer to the rebels specifically as peasants. In other words, out of the eighteen reports only four could possibly have referred to the Christian rebels. In all the

<sup>59</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 102.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, 103.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, 110.

other reports the VOC specifically mentioned peasants. While before the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, the VOC only mentioned the peasants specifically once.<sup>62</sup> All the other times, they either mentioned the Christians or used a generic term, such as “*de gerebelleerde*” or “*opgeworpen*”.<sup>63</sup> As a result of this change, by only reading the reports it seemed as though the VOC was not fighting Christians at all.

The rebels got a more passive role in the *Dagregisters*, likely as a result of the nature of the conflict. The first few reports of the rebellion addressed how the rebels, through the use of deceit and better tactics, were able to defeat the army of the local lord on multiple occasions. The focus of these reports lay on how the rebels deceived and killed. On the one hand, this made the rebels look somewhat evil and untrustworthy. By pretending to be friends, for example, the rebels lured their enemies into ambushes on multiple occasions. On the other hand, however, it also made them look clever. They were able to outsmart their professional opponents, who were often killed as a result. The reports made it clear many of the rebels had had military training. After the report of the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, the rebels lost their pro-active attitude and were almost always portrayed as the targets of actions, such as bombardments and assaults. As a result, the rebels were no longer the focus of the reports. This change, however, could have been the result of the circumstances of the conflict. The rebels were trapped in Hara Castle and simply did not have many ways to be pro-active.

The last time the VOC mentioned the Christian rebels, during the conflict, was in a report from the 6<sup>th</sup> of February. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February the VOC offered its assistance. Since the change in discourse was as abrupt as it was, after the VOC offered its assistance, I think it was done intentionally. By removing the Christian identity of the rebels and removing them from the spotlight, the VOC changed the perception of the conflict again. Rather than siding against Christians in a religious conflict, the VOC helped the *Shogun* return peace to its domain. The common view is that the VOC was willing to do anything for profit. However, as I have shown above, fighting Christians made the local VOC members wary of how the colonial government in Batavia, and the *Heeren XVII* in the Dutch Republic, would perceive their choices. It seems, therefor, not all was permitted in the expansion of the Dutch trade empire. Joining a religious conflict and siding against fellow Christians, even Catholics, might have been a line not easily crossed.

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<sup>62</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 100.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, 93 and 97.

## Rebels after the rebellion instead of during the rebellion

*[...] noch jaerlicx papen in't Rijck van Japan te brengen, ende de Christenen leere te verbreijden, mitsgaders de hier sijnde noch tot stantvasticheijt vermanen, ende aenporren, gelijk het daervooren wert gehouden d'eenichste oorsaecke te wesen van de geresen moeiten ende rebellie in de lantschappen Arima ende Amaxa, ende jaerlicx ontelbare ende veele menschen om der papen wille gedoot, ende om't leven ghebracht werden.*<sup>64</sup>

- Fragment 4, from the May 19th 1638 report

After the rebellion, the *Bakufu* blamed everything on the Catholics. On 19<sup>th</sup> of May *Raetsheer Taeckemondonno* was reportedly claiming the Catholics were the sole reason for the rebellion in Arima and Amakusa (see fragment 4). Since the Portuguese were the reason for the Catholic presence in Japan in the first place, they were also to blame for the rebellion. Directly after the rebellion, the *Bakufu* was even scared of a large-scale Portuguese naval attack as retaliation for thousands of Catholics killed in Arima.<sup>65</sup> While the fear turned out to be unfounded, it was exemplary for the way the *Bakufu* framed the rebellion afterwards. The only cause for the rebellion was Catholicism, introduced by the Portuguese. A few months earlier, at the start of the rebellion, the *Bakufu* had a different stance. The lords of Arima and Amakusa were blamed for the rebellion in a report from the 16<sup>th</sup> of January:

*Want een wijs heer regeert verstandich, ende met soodanige goede ordre dat sijne ingeseetenen ende dienaren hem alijt onderdanich blijven, daer ter contrarie den Regent hebbende geen goed beleidt ende achteloos sijnde werden d'onderdanen wrevelich ende opposeren hun luijden tegen hare Heeren & cetera.*<sup>66</sup>

Because of their reign, the lords were portrayed as the cause of the rebellion. While the *Bakufu* changed their discourse after the rebellion to blame the Christians, the VOC did not.

After the rebellion, the VOC still did not refer to the rebels as Christian. In all cases they either referred to the rebels in a general term or referred to the rebels as farmers specifically. The Dutch discourse stayed mostly the same. The only difference was that in several instances the Dutch mentioned the Catholic influences as they were portrayed by the *Bakufu*. Fragment

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<sup>64</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 151.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 153–154.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, 95.



4 is an example of this. The Dutch also reported on the fact that the rebels, before their demise, held a Catholic service twice a week.<sup>67</sup> While in both cases the VOC mentioned Catholic influences, the focus was still on the peasant rebels. Some of which might have been Catholic.

After the rebellion, the VOC barely changed its discourse surrounding the rebellion. Which is remarkable since the Tokugawa *Bakufu* had done exactly that. The VOC reported on what the *Bakufu* claimed, but did not change the discourse surrounding the rebels. As a result, the Catholic influences were mentioned again, but in the end the rebels were still referred to as peasants, or rebels.

## Conclusion

During and after the conflict, the discourse surrounding the rebels changed several times. At the start of the rebellion, the rebels were portrayed as peasants who were driven to the brink of despair by their tyrannical lord. The discourse changed once it became clear Christians joined the rebellion. Christians fighting Christians was something that was hard to justify. The Christian element prompted the VOC to distance themselves from the rebels. In order to achieve that, the VOC changed the image of the rebels from ordinary peasants fighting for survival, into religious zealots fighting for their God and trying to exact vengeance for their fallen brethren. The descriptions of the Christian rebels made them look like zealots, with white clothing and shaved heads. The VOC added misinformation, to enforce the idea of Catholic zealots. Both the notion that the Christian rebels wanted to fight to the death, and the notion they used “*Sint Jago*” as a battle cry to call upon the Portuguese, were most likely made up - or at least heavily influenced by the image the VOC was trying to create. As a result, the distance between the VOC and the rebels had increased. The Christians called upon the mortal enemy of the VOC - the Portuguese - and they were Catholic.

While the VOC focused on the Christian identity of the rebels at first, they stopped doing so all together once they had offered their assistance to the *Bakufu*. Even though, the Christian rebels were enemies of the VOC: The Christian rebels were fighting against the *Bakufu*, were Catholic, and had deep connections to the Portuguese. The Christian element of the rebellion was completely removed from the Dutch discourse, after the VOC had offered its assistance in quelling the rebellion. This supports the argument the VOC had some reservations when it came to assisting non-Christians in fighting against Christians. The VOC members in Japan tried to obscure the fact that they helped fighting against Christians from their superiors in Batavia and

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<sup>67</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 174.

in the Dutch Republic. Even after the rebellion, when the Tokugawa *Bakufu* propagated the Christians as the only cause for the rebellion, the Dutch did not refer to the rebels as Christians. The Dutch did not obscure the fact as much as they had done previously, but they mostly kept the same discourse as during the rebellion.

The Christian nature of the rebellion was the reason for a discourse change twice. At first, the Christian element was emphasized and magnified. In doing so, the Dutch positioned themselves as obvious adversaries to the rebels. That way, the rebellion would not endanger VOC trade interests in Japan. But, after the VOC was strongly advised to lend their support in crushing the rebellion, they felt the need to change the discourse again. The VOC members in Japan did not want to highlight they were fighting fellow Christians. Most likely, they felt like their superiors would disapprove of their choice. Trade interests were important, but apparently some of the VOC members in Japan felt like it would not trump religion, at least not for some of their superiors.

## Role of the VOC

### Introduction

On the 9th of February, the VOC was strongly advised by a Japanese lord to offer its assistance to the *Bakufu*.<sup>68</sup> The Japanese used the carrot, by implying that a certain action would result in more trade, and the stick, by threatening a loss in trade. Both the carrot and the stick were presented in the form of *goeden raedt*.<sup>69</sup> The VOC had already positioned itself in such a submissive role, that the Japanese rarely had to promise advantageous results in order to motivate the VOC, implying them was enough. The VOC was happy to comply with the Japanese wishes. The VOC, however, did not do everything in its power to help the Japanese. In fact, the VOC tried to receive the most gratitude, while disrupting the trade as little as possible. When the VOC was ordered to go to Hara Castle with all available ships, the VOC had just sent away one of its two ships loaded with goods towards Batavia. Instead of recalling the ship, Couckenbacker ordered Caron, the leader of the second ship, the following via express letter: *“bij veranderinge vande stroom datelijck onderseijl te gaen, ende met laveeren soo veel te gewinnen dat buijten 't gesicht van Cotchij mochte geraecken, ende aldaer weder ankeren, op dat alhier niet mede gehouden ende in sijne te doene voijagie tot groot nadeel vande Generale Compagnie gestut werden.”*<sup>70</sup> Since involving the second ship would have been bad for the VOC, Couckenbacker chose to lie and tell the Japanese that the second ship was already too far away. While the VOC was easily pressed into a certain action by the Japanese, it would help in a way that was least disruptive of their trade. The VOC always kept its own interests in mind.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the VOC knew very well what it was getting itself into. On multiple occasions before the VOC offered its assistance, the end of the rebellion was foreshadowed. As seen in fragment 2, the Christian rebels were willing to die for their cause. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of January the VOC reported: [several lords had arrived] *oñe de geresen moeijten ende rebelle te dempen mitsgaders de misdadige ofte opgeworpene lantbouwers met de wapenen te straffen, ende geheelijcken 't onderbrengen. [...] haer moetwillige opgeworpene lantbouwers ende Christenen soudē verdelgen, ende gantschelijck 't onderbrenghe*.<sup>71</sup> The

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<sup>68</sup> Ed. *Shiryō Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 102-103.

<sup>69</sup> For example: Ed. *Shiryō Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 105.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, 110.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, 94.

rebels were going to be exterminated, almost like vermin. The VOC also reported on the stance of the rebels. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of January the VOC reported:

*[the rebels and Christians proclaim]: Ingevalle de Keijserlij[cke] Majesteit haer te straffen ijemanden ordonneerde (dat sijlen hare misdate bekennde van dat het lant in assche ende bloet geleyt hebben) gaerne tot sterven haeren hals buijgen wilden; daer ter contrarie soo haren eijgen Heeren haer te castijden ende dooden aencomen, met bloet geteeckent, ende met eede onder den anderen verbonden sijn tot den laetsten man ende uijttersten druppelbloets te vechten, ende haeren Heeren als bijhebbende macht sonder aen te sien haren vader, zoon, broeder ofte eenige vrunden, d'welcke noch bij haren Heeren mochten gebleven sijn, vijantelijcken aen te tasten mitsgaders door water ende vier vervolgen, over vallen ende dooden.*<sup>72</sup>

The rebels were willing to fight till death and refused to surrender. The only likely outcome was the slaughter of tens of thousands of peasants and Christians. The VOC fought to achieve just that. In the previous chapters I examined how the VOC tried to put the rebels in a bad light, in order to make its own involvement less troublesome. In this chapter I analyze how the VOC framed their actions.

I broke the chapter down into two parts. The first part focuses on how the VOC reported on its actions. I examine what the VOC did and how it was described. The VOC used both its own accounts, as well as accounts by Japanese lords, and a Japanese rebel. In doing so I answer the following question: how did the VOC describe its own actions? And why did they frame it the way they did? In the second part of the chapter I examine how the actions were presented to the *Heeren XVII* through the *Generale Missiven*. In this part I will answer the questions: Did the colonial government change or leave out information? And what could be the reasoning behind any changes?

My argument is: the VOC presented its own role as limited as possible. The VOC-members reported on the direct consequences of their actions as little as possible. While on the other hand, the VOC emphasized the benefits of its actions. Through the gratitude of the Japanese lords and the gained trade interest, the VOC steered the conversation towards its achievements, rather than lingering on its actions. By doing this, the narrative focused on gained privileges and outmaneuvering its Portuguese rival, instead of its assistance in killing 35.000

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<sup>72</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 96-97.

men, women, and children. The role of the VOC was intentionally downplayed in the *Generale Missiven*, in order to misinform the *Heeren XVII*.

### VOC's role

The VOC had several roles in fighting the rebellion. It had to provide the Tokugawa army with canons and gunpowder; it had to provide the army with the necessary expertise to set up and operate the canons on land; and had to bombard the castle, both from their ship, *De Rijk*, as well as from the batteries located within the army camp. Over the course of just two weeks the VOC shot over three hundred times at the castle. The VOC, however, barely commented on the effectiveness of all those shots.

On a few occasions, the VOC did hint at the results of their bombardments. Before the bombardments had even started, the VOC claimed the cannons would not have a maximum effect, because the targeted buildings were not made out of stone or wood but out of “*stroo ende matten*”.<sup>73</sup> As a result, the VOC would be able to create holes in those buildings, but it would be impossible to tear them down. After the bombardments had been going on for a few days, the VOC commented on another problem. All the breaches created by day, would be repaired by the peasants by night. The VOC mentioned the peasants repairing the damages on three separate occasions. Once they even commented on the bravery shown by the peasants in repairing the damages on a daily basis.<sup>74</sup> The advisors Insindonno and Sammondonno came up with an idea to prevent the peasants from repairing the breaches. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, the VOC gunners were ordered to keep firing throughout the night. The advisors, however, had not taken in account the lack of visibility, which would make this a near impossible endeavor. Both the rain and the darkness made the advisors realize the idea would not work out.<sup>75</sup> As a result, the VOC implied the bombardments were far from effective, and the effects it did have were short-lived. This implication was strengthened by the fact the Dutch were sent away before they could assist in the assault. Only during an assault would the breaches have been of any use.

In addition to this, we do not know how many shots actually hit their targets. We do know not all shots hit their mark. Friendly-fire was a reoccurring problem. *De Rijk* was hit twice by cannons shot from the battery.<sup>76</sup> The cannons on *De Rijk*, also, managed to miss the castle in such a manner that the *Shogun*'s army was hit: ‘*s Morgens vouch wierde een coegel van 5 tb ijser op gisteren uijt 't schip in 't 's Keijzers leger geschooten door een dienaar vande*

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<sup>73</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 115.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, 119.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, 121-122.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, 123.

*Regente[n] van Firando aen boort gesonden, met ordre beter reguart op schieten te stellen, omme all[e] vordere onheijlen voor te comen.*<sup>77</sup> Friendly-fire was something to be avoided, a point the regent of Hirado had made quite clear. We only read of these occurrences because the VOC reported on the Japanese reaction to its actions. The VOC did not follow up the amount of shots with the effects of the shots. Therefore, we have to rely almost completely on the Japanese estimation of the effectiveness, as reported by the VOC.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, a rebel had defected and gone to the Imperial army. The rebel brought news of the conditions inside the castle. He informed the Japanese lords that food was running low, as was firewood. This strengthened the lords in their plan to keep the siege going, instead of assaulting the Castle. The defected rebel also informed the Japanese lords on the effectiveness of the cannons. According to him, the cannons had “*veel volcx van d'onse in haer wercken doot geschooten ende gequest wierden.*”<sup>78</sup> Sammondonne, a Japanese lord, brings a more extensive account by the same rebel two days later:

*Den boer op gisteren aen dese sijde overgecomen verclaert, dat u geschut veel quaets hadde gewrocht, ende dagelicx 15: 10: ende 5: dooden, ende eenige gequesten hadden becomen.*<sup>79</sup>

According to Sammondonne, the rebel had claimed that the bombardments had done a lot of harm, killing multiple rebels every day. While the focus of the VOC's reports had been on the lack of lasting structural damages, the rebel highlighted another aspect of bombardments: killing people. An aspect in which the VOC had been successful, according to the rebel. The second report was accompanied by praise from Sammondonne. Praise that would benefit the VOC, because if Sammondonne had been available that evening, he would have invited the captain over for dinner.<sup>80</sup> These honors were important in Japanese society and the VOC ended up receiving a lot of honor because of their actions during the rebellion.

Shortly after leaving the army camp at Arima, Couckenbacker went on the *hofreis* to Edo in order to meet with important lords. Before he left for Edo, he visited the lord of Firando who said: “*Wel vernoecht ende gecontenteert te wesen, dat de stucken soo geode operatie ende schade onder 's Keijzers gerebelleerde gedaen hadden; 't waere eere voor de Nederlanders, ende hem selver.*”<sup>81</sup> The lord of Firando stated both the effectiveness of the cannons, as well as

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<sup>77</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 118.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, 124.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, 126.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, 126.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, 129.

the honor it had produced for the VOC and himself, a close associate. During Couckenbackers trip towards Edo and his time in the capital, multiple lords referred to the VOC's assistance in the Shimabara Rebellion. Every single lord who mentioned the rebellion only used praising words. While, on most occasions, praise was the only thing Couckenbacker received, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May he received the opportunity he had been waiting for.<sup>82</sup> While Couckenbacker was at the house of *Raetsheer* Taeckemondonno, Inosickedonno arrived, a *Yokome*. He was to report on the meeting, to the *Shogun*. Taeckemondonno used this moment to present the VOC with a trade opportunity. He asked Couckenbacker if the VOC would be able to take over all the Portuguese trade if the Portuguese were to be banished from Japan. Reasoning for why the VOC were to take this role is not explicitly mentioned, but since the rebellion was used as context, the VOC's assistance was implied as reason. The reason for banishing the Portuguese was directly linked to the rebellion, as seen in fragment 4. While this conversation was between Couckenbacker and a Japanese lord, and nothing had been decided yet, it eventually would happen. The Portuguese were banished and the VOC took over from the Portuguese.

While at first, the Japanese lords were positive about the necessity and effectiveness of the VOC's assistance, the Japanese did change their opinion slightly on the necessity of the assistance. The VOC had proven its worth, but the assistance itself was deemed less important. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, the VOC reported the following words of advisor Insindonno of Nagasaki:

*'t sal voor de werelt vreempt ende geheelijck schijnen dat de Hollanders met haer schip ende geschut in Arima te verschijnen g'ordonneert sijn, alsofte het keijserrijck van Japan niet machtich ende bastant waere; een opgeworpen hoop van boeren met wapenen te verdelgen ende onderbrenghe, sij mosten het daervooren niet houden, maer soodanich verstaen, dat het geschiet was ontstonde om̃e een preuve te nemen ende ondervinden, terwijl d'Hollanders ende Portugesen Christenen waren, sij oock behoorlijk dan wel geveijnst ende gemaecten tegenstant tegens de gerebelleerde, sijnde van de selve leere, soudon doen; doch hadden anders doen blijcken, ende waren de hooghe Overicheijt voor tegenwoordich, als wel voor desen, in't request der Nederlanders van een bijsonder opinie ende gevoelen.*<sup>83</sup>

By adding this statement from a Japanese lord to the *Dagregisters*, the VOC had justified its actions completely. While the importance of their bombardments was lessened, the importance

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<sup>82</sup> Ed. *Shiryo Hensan-jo*, University of Tokyo, *Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan*, 149-158.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, 175-176.

of their participation was proven. It had been a test by the Japanese, to prove that the VOC's highest loyalty was to their Japanese lord, not to their faith. The Dutch had passed the test with flying colors, while the Portuguese had failed it miserably.

During and right after the rebellion, the Japanese lords praised the assistance given by the Dutch. The effectiveness is highlighted multiple times, both by a rebel and by Japanese lords. As a result, the actions of the VOC were portrayed as effective. By focusing on the effects of their assistance, the praise and received honor, instead of what the bombardments had actually done, it was easy to forget the VOC had killed over a hundred Christian rebels. The loss of life was only mentioned once. Because of the statement by Insindonno on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, the VOC turned out to be justified in creating distance between the Christian rebels and themselves, as well as the necessity of their actions against said rebels. It had been a test by the Japanese, failure possibly would have resulted in the end of the Japan-trade.

The VOC reported the bare minimum when it came to its shots fired at the castle. The VOC only gave the number of shots. Because of its way of reporting, it is difficult to get a clear picture of the effectiveness of the VOC - as the VOC saw it. By reporting so little, it is near impossible to imagine the destruction and terror that the Dutch bombardments have caused. Even when the VOC mentioned its effectiveness, it was always focused on structural damages. As a result, the VOC created a distance between their actions and the results. The effects of the bombardments by the VOC were put in a different light when looking at what the Japanese thought of the VOC's actions - as reported by the VOC. The accounts of Japanese lords painted a picture of effective VOC bombardments, killing many rebels. The context of these reports, however, was important. In many cases, the VOC's actions were directly or indirectly linked to Japanese gratitude and eventual financial gains. As a result, the emphasis was on the ends, not on the means. By focusing on why their bombardments would not accomplish much, and almost never commenting on the actual damages or deaths of each bombardment, the VOC created a narrative in which it tried hard, did little, and achieved a lot in regards to increasing their trade interest in Japan. A narrative which is later repeated in the *Generale Missiven*.



## VOC's role according to the colonial government

On the 22nd of December 1638, the colonial government in Batavia sent the *Generale Missiven* in which the events in Japan were reported to the Dutch Republic. The account of the event was very similar to the official documents sent to Batavia by Couckenbacker, but it lacked the same level of detail. For example, the *Generale Missiven* mentioned the hardship the farmers had to endure, which made them rebel, but no detailed descriptions of the hardship and torture were included. The colonial government did include the Christian element. In this part of the chapter I analyse role of the VOC, as it was reported in the *Generale Missiven*.

In the *Generale Missiven*, the conflict was changed once again. The report contained a renewed focus on the Christian element. The rebellion was not only a peasant uprising. According to the report, the rebellion was by many believed to have been sustained by “*eenige groote verbannen Edelen ende geestelijke personen*”, several important lords and clergymen.<sup>84</sup> A statement that was supported by a description of the breastworks of Hara Castle: “*hebbende hare borstweeringen beplant met vele vaendels daerinne een roodt cruys nevens verscheyden cleene ende groote houten cruysen.*”<sup>85</sup> This information was new, the *Dagregisters* did not report on the breastworks of Hara Castle. By claiming the rebels were in fact puppets of exiled nobles and clergy, the colonial government took away the agency of the rebels. While the peasants might have fought for a just cause, the conflict was reduced to a political action by some disgruntled lords. In other words, the rebels were not really fighting against oppression, otherwise they would have already stopped. As a result, the VOC fought against exiled lords instead of victims of torture. The conflict itself, and the actions of the VOC in particular, were justified this way.

The colonial government chose to mention only the reports that portrayed the VOC's role in the conflict as not effective. According to the *missiven*, the VOC risked more shame than glory by arriving with only small cannons which were not meant for sieges.<sup>86</sup> The *Dagregisters* gave a different reason for the ineffectiveness, but the results were the same. Low expectations were set and met: “*alhoewel d'onse weynigh schade deden, soo schenen de Japanders genoeg te nemen.*”<sup>87</sup> The cannons did almost no damage, but the Japanese thought it did enough. The *Generale Missiven* failed to mention the loss in life the cannons had caused among the rebels. While in the *Dagregisters* the loss of human life was mentioned through the

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<sup>84</sup> W.P.H. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie: deel 1* (Den Haag 1960), 702.

<sup>85</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 702.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, 701.

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem, 702.

accounts of a Japanese rebel, the *Generale Missiven* only mentioned the lack of damage. Nowhere in the report, did the colonial government state what the bombardments actually did. According to the *Generale Missiven*, the VOC did not play a role of importance in destroying the rebellion.

The *Generale Missiven* repeated the notion that the Japanese army by itself was strong enough to defeat the rebels. The Japanese army consisted of 80.000 soldiers. The colonial government questioned the necessity of the involvement of the VOC and wondered if any ulterior motives were the reason for it.<sup>88</sup> The report did not mention what the ulterior motives could have been. Because the VOC's involvement was not necessary, it had not influenced the outcome.

As a result of how the VOC's role in the rebellion was reported, a distance was created between the rebellion and the actions of the VOC. The rebels were stripped of their agency. Which made fighting against the rebels a 'just' action. The actions of the VOC, however, were hardly successful. The colonial government chose to copy the narrative as it was presented by Couckenbacker: the cannons did hardly any damage. In the narrative of the *Generale Missiven* the VOC was even less effective: the accounts on the loss of human life and the descriptions of the damages done were completely omitted. The colonial government created the following narrative: since the rebels had lost their just cause, the VOC had barely harmed the rebels, and without the help of the VOC the rebels would have also lost, the VOC had gained favours with the Japanese while doing almost nothing. Through the careful choice of information, the colonial government justified the actions of the VOC during the Shimabara Rebellion.

## Conclusion

In the *Dagregisters*, the VOC used its discourse to create a narrative that benefited itself. The VOC intentionally downplayed its own role through several means.

First, the VOC never mentioned the direct effects of their bombardments. Instead of noting down how many shots had hit the castle and the damages they had done, the VOC only reported on how many shots they had fired. The bombardments were reduced to a mere number. A short description of the bombardments, such as "we managed to destroy 5 houses and created 2 breaches, we saw several injured and possibly dead", would have emphasized the work of the VOC. Instead the actions of the VOC were discussed as little as possible.

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<sup>88</sup> Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven*, 702.

Secondly, the reports on the effects of the VOC's involvement focused on the gratitude and honor the VOC received from Japanese lords. On several occasions, Japanese lords were reported claiming that the VOC's actions during the Shimabara Rebellion were the cause for the received honors. The *Dagregisters* focused on the positive results of the bombardments, not on the destruction it had caused. As a result, it was more likely to approve of the bombardments.

Lastly, the VOC used the example of Portugal to justify its actions. If the VOC had not assisted the Japanese army, it would have been in a similar situation as the Portuguese. The Portuguese slowly lost their favorable position in Japan. By participating in the destruction of the rebellion, the VOC had passed a test. The fact that the involvement was called a test, further downplayed the importance of the effectiveness of the actions of the VOC and increased the importance for the actions themselves. The VOC had hardly done anything of note, but since it had assisted in fighting the Christian rebels, it had proven its loyalty to the Japanese *Shogun* – such was the narrative that was created. In this narrative, not the Japanese army was the beneficiary of the actions of the VOC, the VOC itself was the biggest winner.

The *Generale Missiven* largely copied the narrative as was presented in the *Dagregisters*. The colonial government in Batavia, however, decided to renew the focus on the Christian element of the rebellion, after the *Dagregisters* had largely left it out after the 9<sup>th</sup> of February. The agency of the rebels was taken away by the colonial government. The rebels supposedly did what they did because of exiled lords and clergymen. Through taking away the agency and justification of the rebels, and emphasizing that the Japanese army would have destroyed the rebels with or without the VOC's assistance, the colonial government put the VOC's actions in a good light. The VOC had been justified in assisting the Japanese government. Besides, the VOC had hardly done any harm to the rebels. The VOC had only received praise from the Japanese. Which made the VOC's actions a success. The changes made by the colonial government resulted in a narrative similar to the one by the VOC. The main difference was that the narrative focused even less on the actions of the VOC, it focused only on the beneficial consequences.

## Conclusion

Over the course of my thesis I have critically analyzed the discourse the VOC used to report on the Shimabara rebellion. I critically analyzed the discourse to answer the following question: What discourse was used by the VOC to describe its encounter with Asian Christians during the Shimabara Rebellion? The discourse was not a constant, at several times throughout the rebellion the VOC changed it. The discourse did fulfil a certain function. The VOC created a narrative that best suited the situation.

At the start of the rebellion, the rebels formed no threat to the VOC. As a result, the VOC portrayed the rebels in a positive light. The focus was on the hardships the rebels had to persevere through. The VOC emphasized the tyrannical nature of the lord of Arima. The socio-economic motivations of the rebels were portrayed in a favorable light, and were historically correct. When the rebellion spread to other parts in the area, it became a threat. A spreading rebellion could throw the country in disarray and chaos, which would be detrimental to trade. The discourse on the rebellion started to shift towards a less favorable description of the rebels. After it had become clear that Christians had joined the rebellion, the discourse completely changed. Because the rebels were Christians, the VOC could be perceived as their allies, because they shared a religion. As a result, the rebels were no longer portrayed as victims. Instead, the rebels were portrayed as a vengeful lot out for blood. The lack of explanation for their suffering highlighted the destructive nature of the Christian rebels. By disregarding any socio-economical motivators the rebels had and completely focusing on the religious reasons, the rebels lost their just cause, which made it easier for the reader to oppose the rebels. The VOC deliberately emphasized the Catholic nature of the rebels, that way a distance was created between the Protestant reader and the rebels. To summarize, Christian rebels lacked a just cause for their rebellion, as a result the conflict was perceived in favor of the Japanese lords. The VOC altered the motivations of the rebels when it became clear the rebels were a threat to the VOC. The VOC changed its discourse on the rebellion to distance itself from the rebels, and highlight the fact that the rebels were adversaries.

Twice during the rebellion, the discourse changed because of the perceived Christian nature of the rebels. The first shift was perceivable when the Christian rebels joined the peasant rebels. As noted above, the rebels turned from victims into destructive perpetrators. The second time the discourse significantly changed was when the VOC offered its assistance to the Tokugawa *Bakufu*. Instead of focusing on the religious nature of the rebellion, the VOC took the word "*christenen*" out of their discourse. Even though the rebels were portrayed as enemies,

largely based on their Catholic faith, the VOC deemed it necessary to change the discourse. The VOC members in Japan did not feel comfortable in reporting to their superiors that they had attacked Christians. Even after the rebellion was over and the Japanese lords blamed the whole rebellion on Christianity, the VOC did not change their discourse drastically. The VOC changed its discourse first to highlight the differences between the Catholic rebels and the Protestant VOC, and create distance between itself and the rebellion. Later the VOC changed its discourse to conceal the Christian nature of the rebellion, because it was assisting in the destruction of the rebels. Even after the rebellion, religion stayed a difficult subject.

The role of the VOC was from the start minimized in the discourse. On the one hand, the VOC focused on how their actions hardly had any effects. The materials of the defenses made it impossible to inflict large structural damages. The VOC minimized their involvement further by never mentioning the direct effects of their bombardments. It reduced the bombardments to a just a number of shots, “40 shots were fired”. By doing this, we are less inclined to think about the devastating effects such a bombardment can have. Only through the account of a Japanese rebel, do we get an insight of the actual effectiveness of the bombardments. The bombardments killed between 5 and 15 people every day. The kill count of the bombardment was only mentioned once, and even then, it was not presented in a way to emphasize the effectiveness of the bombardments. The reports did, however, emphasize the gratefulness of Japanese lords. As a result, a narrative arose in which the VOC did little, but the Japanese were grateful anyway. This narrative was further enforced by emphasizing that the Japanese army did not need the VOC to defeat the rebels. The report that claimed that the VOC’s involvement was part of a test, to test the loyalty of the VOC, added to the narrative: the VOC did little, because its presence was not needed, but if the VOC had not shown up, it would have been in trouble. The VOC had minimized and justified its involvement at the same time.

The colonial government used a different discourse. Instead of copying the narrative of the *Dagregisters*, the colonial government reintroduced the Christian nature of the rebels into the narrative. Some information that highlighted the Christian nature of the rebellion was not present in the *Dagregisters* but was still added by the colonial government. The origin of that information remains unclear. In the *Generale Missiven*, the effects of the bombardments were minimized: The cannons were too small to have any real impact (which was a different reason than the *Dagregisters* gave for their ineffectiveness) and the colonial government did not mention the loss of human life. The actions of the VOC were justified by taking away the

agency of the rebels. The conflict was changed from a popular uprising, into a political move by exiled lords and clergymen. As a result, the rebels were reduced to puppets.

The VOC had a difficult time positioning themselves during the Shimabara Rebellion because of the religion of the rebels. On the one hand, the VOC marked the rebels as adversaries by highlighting their religion, Catholicism. But on the other hand, the VOC concealed the religion of the rebels once they offered their assistance. The VOC had no problem in portraying Catholic Asians as enemies, but it did have problems with acting against them. While the VOC might have gone to lengths to gain more trade interest, not everything was allowed: fighting Christians was something that was not easily explained.

There are several ways in which my research can be expanded upon. The narrative of the rebellion presented by the VOC could be compared to the narrative presented in Portuguese primary sources. Since the research focused only on the Dutch primary sources, it was hard to fact check the Dutch statements. Comparing the Portuguese narrative with the Dutch narrative could result in some interesting differences. The discourse used to describe the Dutch encounter with Asian Christians during the Shimabara rebellion could also be compared with the discourse regarding other encounters with Asian Christians in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. By comparing the actions and justifications of the VOC, it might be possible to observe a common policy. Since I cannot read Japanese, looking at Japanese sources, especially primary sources, is another way in which my research can be expanded upon. It could be very interesting to compare the personal accounts of involved Japanese lords, soldiers and rebels, the *ran ki*, with the accounts of the VOC. Was the VOC's involvement truly a test of loyalty, or was it added later because the situation was shameful. Lastly my research can be broadened by using personal accounts of Couckenbacker. Since the *Dagregisters* were his work diaries, it would be very interesting to compare them with his personal diaries and letters. That comparison might help better explain why the discourse was changed, and provide new insight in how it was changed.

Even though several ways exist in which my research can be broadened, I have shown how the VOC used discourse to create a favourable narrative when it came to encounters with Asian Christians. The VOC could not indiscriminately attack Asian Christians, because even though they were mostly Catholic enemies, they were Christian brethren as well. The VOC would go over bodies for a profit, but they preferred if the bodies turned out to be not Christian.

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