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CARON'S JAPAN: TOKUGAWA STATE AND SOCIETY THROUGH A EUROPEAN LENS

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Abstract:
Dutch East India Company (VOC) merchant François Caron describes Tokugawa Japan as a rigid political hierarchy controlled by the Shogun, similar to the governments established by absolute monarchs in Europe. Caron understands and insightfully describes Tokugawa society by emphasizing perceived and real similarities between Tokugawa Japan and Early Modern Europe. He struggles to understand religious differences between these societies, but his description of Japanese religious practices still reflects how the Shogunate utilized Buddhism and anti-Christian policies to uphold their rule. Caron also depicts Tokugawa Japan as a land of plentiful resources prime for lucrative trade. He includes the writings of other VOC officials in his work, who suggest that the VOC can maximize their profits in Japan by conforming to Tokugawa social and political norms. Caron's account supports a revisionist perspective in scholarship about Tokugawa Japan, which suggests that political and technological similarities between Tokugawa Japan and European colonial powers forced European merchants to negotiate with the Shogun and compete against each other to eke out an existence in Japanese international commerce.

In 1617, a French Huguenot refugee in the Dutch Republic boarded a Dutch East India Company (hereafter abbreviated as VOC) ship set for Japan. This refugee, named François Caron, served as a cook aboard the VOC trade vessel during its two-year voyage. When the ship arrived at the Dutch port in Hirado in 1619, Caron found employment at the VOC trade post, where he developed a knack for the Japanese language and served as chief interpreter for a meeting with the Tokugawa Shogun at his capital in Edo in 1627. Over the next seventeen years, Caron would be promoted to *opperhoofd* (or "chief merchant") at Hirado, serve as the Governor of Formosa, marry the daughter of a Japanese noble, and father six children before returning to Europe with his wife and family in 1646.[1]

Caron came to Japan during a period of significant social and political change. Just two decades before Caron's arrival, Tokugawa Ieyasu unified the Japanese mainland and its southern islands of Kyushu and Shikoku under his rule. Ieyasu then adopted the ancient military title of Shogun, positioning himself, his family, and the Tokugawa *bakufu* ("military government") at the absolute peak of the Japanese political and social hierarchy.[2] In addition to the challenges of establishing a unified government after about a century of continuous warfare, the *bakufu* had to contend with the new arrival of European colonial powers looking to trade with – and potentially colonize – Japan and other Asian societies. The Dutch and their East India Company were one of several European powers that interacted with Japan at this time, and they maintained a foothold in Japanese international commerce for the longest period.

In 1636, a VOC official in the Dutch Republic wrote to Caron requesting information about Japan. Five years after Caron returned to Europe, he published his responses to the VOC

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[1] Fritz Vos, "Mihatenu Yume—An Unfinished Dream: Japanese Studies until 1940," In *Leiden Oriental Connections 1850-1940*, ed. Willem Otterspeer (New York: E.J. Brill, 1989), 355.
[2] Andrew Gordon, "The Tokugawa Polity," in *A Modern History of Japan: from Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9-12.

official's questions in a book titled *Beschrijvinghe van het Machtigh Coninckrijcke Jappan*, or "Description of the Mighty Kingdom of Japan." The book became fairly popular throughout Europe, even receiving translations into French, German, and English.[3] The picture that Caron paints of Tokugawa Japan certainly would have captivated his European audience; he describes a government and society not unlike Europe, complete with knights, lords, court magistrates, and even an emperor or two. This essay aims to use Caron's account of Tokugawa Japan and scholarship on the early Tokugawa period to answer the following questions: How does Caron present Tokugawa Japan to his European audience? What does Caron's description of Japan reveal about Dutch perceptions of Japanese society in the 17th century? How does Caron's account support or complicate scholarly analysis of the Tokugawa period?

Scholarship about the Tokugawa period and European trade with Japan during this period usually tends towards one of two perspectives. The first perspective primarily comes from scholars like Charles Boxer in the first half of the twentieth century. These scholars take a Eurocentric approach, defining Tokugawa Japan as a stagnant, feudal society, and major political changes like *sakoku* occurred solely because of European trade and anti-Christian sentiment in the Tokugawa *bakufu*. Both Japanese and Western scholarship in this perspective assert that the "backwardness" and stagnation of the Tokugawa regime stemmed from their refusal to interact with the Western world from the 1640s up to the arrival of Townsend Harris and Commodore Perry in the 1860s.[4] This perspective also supports a European "cultural confidence" which asserts that European political and technological superiority allowed colonial powers to establish colonies in the Western hemisphere relatively unchallenged, and that this cultural confidence

[3] Vos, "Mihatenu Yume—An Unfinished Dream," 356.
[4] John W. Hall, "The New Look of Tokugawa History," in Hall and Jansen, *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 55-56.

also applies to colonial efforts in East and Southeast Asia.[5] Caron's account at first seems to affirm this eurocentric perspective; his description of the relationship between the Shogun and *daimyo* echoes the lord-vassal structure of feudal societies, and Caron emphasizes the Shogun's firm anti-Christian stance. However, deeper analysis reveals a complexity to Caron's account that better aligns with the more recent scholarship.

The second perspective is more recent than the first, and it falls into a greater trend of historical revisionism in studies of early 17th century East and Southeast Asia. Historians who follow this perspective include John Hall, Peter Rietbergen, and Adam Clulow; these historians argue against European cultural confidence in East and Southeast Asia, instead asserting that European colonial powers encountered Asian societies that were politically and technologically similar to their own.[6] These similarities, according to revisionist scholarship, forced European colonial powers to negotiate with Asian societies and compete against each other to eke out an existence in East and Southeast Asia. Clulow's work focuses on the VOC and Tokugawa Japan, arguing that the Dutch maintained trade with Japan for about two and a half centuries by adopting Tokugawa social and political norms.[7] Analysis of Caron's account aligns more closely with the revisionist perspective, complicating the eurocentric perspective's assertions that Tokugawa Japan was a strictly feudal society and that anti-Christian sentiment in the Shogunate solely and directly led to the implementation of *sakoku*.

In *A Description of the Mighty Kingdom of Japan*, Caron insightfully portrays the rigid political and social hierarchy present under Tokugawa rule and the complexities and profits of

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[5] Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 4-5.
[6] Peter Rietbergen, "Before the Bible, beyond the Bible…? VOC Travelogues, World Views and the Paradigms of Christian Europe," in *Transformations of Knowledge in Dutch Expansion*, ed. Susanne Friedrich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 232.
[7] Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun,* 6.

trade with Japanese merchants. Even when Caron struggles to grasp subjects like religion in Tokugawa Japan, his attempts at comparison speak to cultural barriers between European colonial powers and the Japanese. In this essay I will argue that Caron's account of Tokugawa Japan speaks to political and technological similarities and religious differences between Japan and European colonial powers. These similarities and differences created obstacles to the establishment of permanent colonies and trade posts, leading the VOC to adopt Tokugawa social and political norms to maintain their presence in and profits from Japanese trade.

Tokugawa Government through a European Lens

Caron uses European titles to describe the Shogun, the *daimyo*, and the other members of the Tokugawa court and governmental structure. He uses four separate terms to describe the *daimyo*: Kings, Princes, Dukes, and Lords. The reason for this differentiation of terms becomes obvious when Caron lists the *daimyo* in order of their wealth. The richest of the *daimyo* are kings, followed by Dukes, then Princes, and finally Lords. Some of the *daimyo* are also described as a "Knight and Lord," implying that they bear some military prestige.[8] Through these titles, Caron communicates the influence of each *daimyo* and implies that a wealth-based hierarchy exists within their ranks.

Caron refers to the Shogun as "Emperor" throughout his writing, but he does not describe the Shogun as the leader of an expanding Japanese empire. Instead, the Shogun is "[styled] Emperor" according to Caron; "in respect of the Kings and Princes that are under his Obedience, He is [Sovereign] Lord and Owner of the whole land and hath power… to banish and punish with death, at pleasure, his offending Kings and Lords."[9] Through this statement, Caron asserts

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[8] François Caron and Joost Schorten, *A True Depiction of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan and Siam*, trans. Roger Manley (London: Samuel Broun and John de l'Ecluse, 1663), 6-15.
[9] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 15-16.

that the Shogun is an "Emperor" in that he is an absolute leader who exercises total control over his lands and, most importantly, the *daimyo*. Throughout this work, Caron provides several examples of the ways in which the Shogun exerts social, economic, and political control over the *daimyo*.

Caron first describes *sankin kotai*, the system of alternate attendance which required *daimyo* to spend half of each year in Edo and the other half in their home domain. Caron states that no expense is spared for these visitations, and even implies that the *daimyo* constantly endeavor to outspend each other on beautification projects in Edo to curry the Shogun's favor.[10] While the *daimyo* travel back and forth between Edo and their home domains, their wives and children are required to remain in Edo, "continuing always under the Emperor's eye as Hostages of their fidelity."[11] This is but one example of how the Shogun uses marriages specifically to exert control over the *daimyo*.

When describing marriage practices, Caron states that the Japanese people "neither make love nor woo, all their marriages being conducted by their Parents or… by the next of kin,"[12] showing that Tokugawa society as a whole employed a system of arranged marriages. Rather than allowing the *daimyo* to arrange marriages for their children, Caron states that "the Emperor disposes of the marriages of his great Lords." Additionally, while *daimyo* are permitted to keep concubines, only the children born of the *daimyo's* Shogun-assigned wife are legitimate heirs; if this wife bears no male heirs, the Shogun assigns a male from a different family to serve as their heir.[13] This description aligns with Tokugawa legislation which shows that the Shogun used arranged marriages to control the lives and activities of the *daimyo*. Throughout the 17th century,

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[10] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 38-40.
[11] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 18
[12] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 74.
[13] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 41.

the Shogunate issued a number of edicts called "house laws" with the intention of regulating and controlling the activities of the *daimyo*. The eighth house law covers marriage, stating that "to form a factional alliance through marriage is the root of treason."[14] The house laws indicate the Shogun's fear that the *daimyo* may use marriages to form alliances against him, and Caron's account confirms that the Shogunate used arranged marriages to prevent the *daimyo* from forming those alliances.

Caron's description of the Tokugawa military structure also demonstrates the absolute control that the Shogun exerts over the *daimyo*. Caron states that the *daimyo* are required to maintain a minimum of twenty foot-soldiers and two cavalry for every one thousand *koku* their domain produces yearly as part of their duties to the Shogun. Caron also specifies that these soldiers are not the personal armies of the *daimyo*, instead stating that they are "always in readiness for the Emperor's service."[15] In describing the military, Caron again suggests that the *daimyo* would try to outspend each other on their military units, "all to out vie each other, and the better to ingratiate themselves with their common Master."[16]

Just as the *daimyo* eagerly endeavor to curry favor from the Shogun by spending money, Caron also suggests that the servants of the *daimyo* eagerly give their lives to serve their masters. Caron illustrates this relationship between a *daimyo* and his servants in the following passage:

> If the Lord cause a wall to be built, either for the King or himself, his servants often times beg they might have the honour to lie under, out of a belief, that what is founded upon a living man's flesh, is subject to no misfortune: This request being granted, they go with joy unto the designed place, and lying down there, suffer the foundation stones to be laid upon them, which with their weight, immediately bruise and shiver them to pieces.[17]

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[14] James L. Huffman, ed. and trans, "The land of Shogun and Daimyo," in *Modern Japan: A History in Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15.
[15] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 35.
[16] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 36.
[17] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 50.

A *daimyo's* servants are willing to lay down their lives in service to their lord, attempting to earn the *daimyo's* favor in a manner similar to how the *daimyo* interact with the Shogun. Caron also states that the *daimyo* "hath the right of Justice over his Subjects and Servants," asserting that the *daimyo* have legal control over the lives of their servants and others living on their lands.[18]

Through this description, Caron illustrates the following political hierarchy: the Shogun – or "Emperor" – sits at the top and controls the lives and actions of the *daimyo*; The *daimyo* in turn control the lives and actions of their servants and subjects in the lands they control. It should be noted that Caron's conception of an "Emperor" – an absolute monarch at the peak of the political hierarchy – is not the same as the seventeenth century Japanese conception of an "Emperor." The Japanese Emperor, or Mikado, existed in Tokugawa Japan under the title *dairi*.[19] Caron (or perhaps the English translator Roger Manley) incorrectly transliterates *dairi* as "deyro" and positions him as a religious and cultural figurehead.[20] Caron does not use the term "Emperor" in the Japanese sense; he is not confusing the roles of the Shogun and the Mikado in Tokugawa society. Rather, Caron uses "Emperor" in an idealized European sense, allowing him to better communicate the role and significance of the Shogun in Tokugawa Japan.

Caron's use of the word "Emperor" to describe the Shogun illustrates that Caron sees similarities between the political structure of Tokugawa Japan and those of Europe. Revisionist scholarship also argues that European visitors to Japan found more similarities between their societies than differences. In fact, Tokugawa historical revisionism stemmed from analysis of seventeenth century English and Dutch accounts of Japan; as historian John Hall writes, "To these early European observers the Shogun and *daimyo* appeared to rule with no greater severity

[18] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 53.
[19] Cyril H. Powles, "The Myth of the Two Emperors: A Study in Misunderstanding," *Pacific Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (February 1968): 41.
[20] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 26-27.

than the kings and princes of Europe."[21] These early modern European and Japanese societies were even technologically similar. Caron lists firearms among the weapons used by Tokugawa soldiers, demonstrating that firearms were integrated into the Tokugawa military either before or very shortly after European visitors first came to Japan.[22]

Separate from the writings of European visitors to Japan, direct comparison of Tokugawa and European political structures reveals striking similarities. In the mid-seventeenth century, Louis XIV required landed nobility to attend court at Versailles. According to French historian David Sturdy, the purpose of this mandated court attendance was to firmly establish the supremacy of King Louis XIV over the French aristocracy.[23] Much like how Caron describes the *daimyo's* interactions with the Shogun, French nobles constantly worked against each other while attending court at Versailles to curry favor from Louis XIV.[24] When Caron looked at the government structure of Tokugawa Japan, he likely saw a reflection of European royal courts in the Japanese system.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, historians who study the Tokugawa period have described Tokugawa Japan as a feudal society, and much of Caron's description of the Tokugawa political structure seems to support this designation. The lord-vassal relationship central to historical conceptions of feudalism is present in Caron's description of the relationship between the Shogun and the *daimyo*, where the Shogun allows the *daimyo* to maintain their land holdings in exchange for military service. Additionally, Caron states that the *daimyo* "hath the whole product of the Land and Sea; the Gentlemen and Soldiers live upon that portion their Lord assigns them out of the Country… and the Laborers by that portion which their Lord allows them

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[21] Hall, "The New Look of Tokugawa History," 55.
[22] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 38.
[23] David J. Sturdy, *Louis XIV* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 19.
[24] Sturdy, *Louis XIV*, 20.

out of the fruit of the earth."[25] This description of how agricultural products are distributed also fits within the feudal model: peasants work the land, soldiers protect the peasants, and the *daimyo* distributes agricultural products between these subjects as he sees fit. However, historians like John Hall assert that Tokugawa Japan more resembles a feudal society in decline, pointing to both the rise of international trade and internal political changes during the Tokugawa period.[26] Caron's description of Tokugawa society better fits Hall's assessment, as it includes the hallmarks of a declining feudal system that Hall describes.

According to Hall, an increase in foreign trade contributed to the beginnings of feudal decline in early seventeenth century Japan. As European colonial powers engaged with Japanese merchants, the merchant class amassed wealth and experienced increased social mobility.[27] Caron states that in Japan, "there are many very rich Merchants who drive great Trades, these go themselves, or have Factors at Meaco [Kyoto], where they exchange their commodities for Silver, Gold, and other Wares, each according to his Fancy and Convenience."[28] Caron also explains that "neither the Emperor, nor his subordinate Kings or Lords, do gain anything at all by the Commerce of their Subjects, the Merchants [only] profit by it."[29] Caron lived in Japan before and immediately following the implementation of *sakoku*, which initially banned most European trade in Japan and later expanded to prevent Japanese vessels from venturing far from their home waters.[30] Caron's description of international trade and the profits amounting from it contradict

[25] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 52.
[26] John W. Hall, "Feudalism in Japan – A Reassessment," In Hall and Jansen, *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 46.
[27] Hall, "Feudalism in Japan – A Reassessment," 46.
[28] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 81-82.
[29] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 84.
[30] Tokugawa Ieyasu, "Closed Country Edict", 1635 http://users.wfu.edu/watts/w03_Japancl.html

the assertion that Tokugawa Japan was entirely feudal, instead demonstrating the rise of a merchant class indicative of a feudal society in decline.

Hall cautions historians against overstating the impacts of foreign trade on the decline of feudalism in Japan. While these influences certainly existed, Hall also asserts that political changes within the Tokugawa *bakufu* independent from foreign influence were also indicative of feudal decline.[31] Scholarly definitions of feudalism emphasize the social nature of the lord-vassal relationship; in feudal societies, the subservience of vassals to their lords was enforced by social custom rather than formal legal procedure.[32] As Caron's account reveals, however, the Shogunate sought to formalize the relationship between shogun and *daimyo* through arranged marriages and court attendance at Edo – practices which were mandated by Tokugawa law rather than suggested through social custom.[33] These legal changes concentrated political power towards the Shogun and slowly transformed the *daimyo* from landed nobility with a social obligation to serve the Shogun into bureaucratic leaders with a legal mandate to serve the Shogun. The process of feudal decline began while Caron was in Japan, but feudal aspects remained present in Japanese society until the end of the Tokugawa period in the nineteenth century and helped Caron and other European visitors draw similarities between Japan and their home countries.[34] Regardless, Caron's account demonstrates that Tokugawa Japan was not entirely feudal, complicating scholarly arguments about the presence and form of feudalism in Japanese history.

Historian Peter Duus provides a more recent understanding of form feudalism took in Tokugawa Japan that closely aligns with both Caron's description and Hall's arguments.

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[31] Hall, "Feudalism in Japan – a Reassessment," 46.
[32] Hall, "Feudalism in Japan – a Reassessment," 47.
[33] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 38-41.
[34] Hall, "Feudalism in Japan – a Reassessment," 48.

Following scholarly definitions of feudalism in medieval Europe, Duus defines feudalism as thus:

> Feudal government in medieval Europe was thus characterized by the absence of a strong centralized state, the devolution of political power into local political units, or domains, the control of these domains by an aristocracy of mounted warriors linked by ties of vassalage and the fief, and a political economy in which control over land constituted the principal form of wealth.[35]

Applying this definition to Tokugawa Japan, Duus describes the Shogunate as "a confederation of small states held together by feudal bonds at the top and by bureaucratic means at the bottom."[36] Further, Duus asserts that Tokugawa Ieyasu and his military force could not match the sheer numbers of the daimyo, even in their weakened state following the Battle of Sekigahara. Instead, Ieyasu opted to control the daimyo in a manner similar to his own vassals, imposing a feudal lord-vassal system on a state-wide scale.[37] This is likely why Caron and other visitors to Japan described the Shogun as an "Emperor;" Caron saw the Shogun as the head of a centralized government that employed feudal systems of military protection and court visitation to exert control over the *daimyo* and the lands they controlled. The Japanese society Caron interacted with was only feudal insofar as the Shogun used feudal institutions to increase his power by controlling the lives and actions of the *daimyo*.

The similarities between early modern European and Japanese societies can help explain why Caron uses European terms to describe the Tokugawa political structure: These terms help Caron frame the hierarchical structure of Tokugawa society in a way that his audience can understand and relate to. Given Caron's proficiency with the Japanese language, he likely knows that the lords of Japan's various domains are called *daimyo*, and the ruler of Japan is called the

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[35] Peter Duus, *Feudalism in Japan* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 8-9.
[36] Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*, 74.
[37] Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*, 79-80.

Shogun. But Caron wrote this work for Europeans who do not speak Japanese and have likely never been to Japan, so he refers to these political positions using parallel terms that communicate their roles and significance to his audience. This technique works to great effect throughout Caron's description of the Tokugawa political hierarchy, as evidenced by the book's popularity both in the original Dutch and in its translated versions.

The popularity of Caron's work and his use of European parallels made Tokugawa state and society much more digestible for European observers, but it also contributed to some misunderstandings. Historian Cyril Powles analyzes how observers like Caron portrayed the complex hierarchical relationship between two "Emperors:" the Shogun, which Caron and other authors call "Emperor" throughout their works; and the Mikado, which translates to "Emperor" in Japanese. Powles argues that Caron's work, along with the writings of other European visitors to Tokugawa Japan, contributed to the belief throughout the Western world that "there were two emperors in Japan – one political, the other religious."[38] According to Powles, "Caron's account provided material for later misinterpretations"[39] by positioning the Shogun as Japan's chief political and military leader and the Mikado as a religious and cultural figurehead; The "Myth of the Two Emperors", partly inspired by Caron's account, persisted in European and American thought up until the mid-nineteenth century, when diplomats like Townsend Harris and Commodore Matthew Perry visited Tokugawa Japan at the end of its decline.[40]

Caron's use of European parallels to describe the Tokugawa political hierarchy highlights both real and perceived similarities between Tokugawa and European political structures. Following recent scholarship on Tokugawa Japan, Caron's account fits into a revisionist trend

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[38] Powles, "The Myth of the Two Emperors," 35.
[39] Powles, "The Myth of the Two Emperors," 39.
[40] Powles, "The Myth of the Two Emperors," 45.

which argues that political and technological similarities between early modern European and Asian societies made it difficult for European colonial powers to exert imperial control over Japan and other Asian societies. Revisionist scholarship also asserts that cultural differences between European and Asian societies, namely differences of religion, created barriers to cross-cultural understanding that eventually led to conflict. Just as Caron's account comments on European and Japanese similarities, it also highlights religious differences between the two societies.

Japanese Religion and Christian Persecution

Caron begins his depiction of Japanese religious practices by stating, "this nation is neither very superstitious nor very devout,"[41] almost dismissing the role and presence of religion in Tokugawa society from the outset. As Caron continues in this section, his description of Japanese religion remains surface-level and superficial, lacking the nuanced depth of his previous chapters on the Tokugawa political hierarchy and court procedure. This either suggests that Caron cared very little about Japanese religion, or that he – like many European Christians who visited Japan in the early 17th century – struggled to understand Japanese religious beliefs and fit them within his Christian worldview.

Whether for his own understanding or the edification of his predominantly Christian audience, Caron endeavors to draw parallels between Christian and Japanese religious beliefs. First, Caron asserts that Japanese religion is at least somewhat monotheistic by stating that a being called *Nammanda* is one of Japan's "chiefest Deities."[42] During the Tokugawa period, three major religions or philosophies influenced Japanese society and spirituality: Buddhism,

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[41] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 62.
[42] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 62.

Shintoism, and Confucianism. While none of these faiths or philosophies mention a deity named *Nammanda*, "Namandabu" is part of a Japanese prayer referring to Amitabha, a Buddha of the Pure Land sects of Buddhism. While Amitabha certainly would have been a major figure for Japanese members of the Pure Land sects, Caron's claim that a prayer is one of the "chiefest Deities" of all Japanese people is but one example of his misunderstanding of Japanese religion.

The *Nammanda* issue also speaks to Caron's broader assertion that Buddhism is the dominant religion in Tokugawa Japan. In fact, Caron makes no reference to Shinto practices or Confucian philosophies in religious terms. He also never refers to any faiths or philosophies by name, referring to the Buddhist practices he describes as "the Japanese religion." Combined with his opening statement that the Japanese are "neither very superstitious nor very devout," Caron presents the whole of Tokugawa society as mostly homogenous in faith yet passive in religious practice. With this homogeneity and passivity in mind, Caron's misinterpretation of Japanese Buddhism becomes more evident as he describes it in further detail.

Caron also characterizes Japanese priests as passive, but certainly not homogenous. According to Caron, the Japanese "have many Temples and Churches dedicated to their Idols, every one of them inhabited by their Priests, two, ten, or twenty, according to their greatness and revenues."[43] Caron also states that each priest and temple belongs to one of twelve different sects, eleven of which practice celibacy and vegetarianism.[44] The twelfth is the most important and most lenient; priests of this sect can marry and practice no dietary restrictions. As Caron writes, "this sect, called *Icko* or *Ickois*, is the most superstitious of all, and hath its Pope, or head, respected and served with the same honor with their Kings."[45] The sect Caron describes here is

[43] Caron, *A True Depiction…,* 62.
[44] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 63.
[45] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 63-64.

likely the *Jodoshinshu* sect; also called *Ikkoshu*, this sect was one of the more popular Pure Land sects in the Tokugawa period, which revered Amitabha.[46] Caron's identification of *Ikkoshu* as a prominent sect somewhat explains the previous confusion surrounding the "deity" *Nammanda*, as "*Namandaba*" is part of a prayer to Amitabha. Further, referring to the head of this sect as its "Pope" demonstrates another attempt to draw parallels between Christianity and Buddhism.

Caron makes mention of homosexuality within Tokugawa society twice throughout the whole work. Through these mentions, cultural differences are exemplified not through Caron's misunderstanding of Japanese culture, but through his condemnation of homosexual acts as "unnatural." Caron's first mention of homosexuality involves the story of a Shogun in the 1630s who was "much given to Sodomy."[47] This Shogun's sexual tendencies created problems when he refused to find a wife and sire an heir. Caron illustrates these difficulties through a "quote" from the foster-mother of a potential bride that the Shogun rejected:

> How is it possible that your [Majesty's] affections should be carried away with such unnatural pleasures, and that so beautiful a Creature as your own Handmaid, who would rejoice you in bearing another like your Self, should be forgotten, certainly she ought to be preferred.[48]

According to Caron, the Shogun felt such offense at this statement that he locked the foster-mother in a castle far from Edo as punishment. The second time Caron mentions homosexuality, he claims that both priests and nobles are "much given to Sodomy, that unnatural passion, being esteemed no sin, nor shameful thing amongst them."[49] In both of these instances, the difference between European and Japanese cultural norms seems so stark that Caron makes no attempt to draw parallels, instead simply condemning the sexual habits of Tokugawa priests and nobles.

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[46] Nam-lin Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan: Buddhism, Anti-Christianity, and the Danka System*, (Cambridge: Harvard University East Asia Center, 2007), 4.
[47] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 24.
[48] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 25.
[49] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 65.

When compared with relevant scholarship, Caron's denunciation of homosexual acts as "unnatural" reflects dominant perspectives on homosexuality in the seventeenth century and further similarities between European and Japanese elites. In his 2011 book, art historian Christopher Reed uses artistic representations of homosexuality to trace the development of ideas and perspectives on homosexuality across various cultures from premodern history to the present day. Reed argues that attitudes towards homosexuality in seventeenth century Europe began to improve among aristocrats, with homosexual acts between and among both men and women becoming an acceptable substitute for recreational, heterosexual sex.[50] Reed directly compares this attitude to the Tokugawa idea of *ukiyo*, or the "'floating world' – from a Buddhist term signifying the transience of material pleasures."[51] This form of sexual expression in Tokugawa Japan included crossdressing, androgyny, pornography, and homosexual acts between both men and women also seen in the courts of European rulers and aristocrats like Louis XIV.[52] Caron's perspective follows a more restrictive, popular conception of homosexuality in Europe that, according to Reed, stems from Medieval restrictions on homosexual acts imposed by Christian doctrine.[53] Even the term that Caron uses to describe homosexual activities – "sodomy" – derives from Christian scripture. Caron also attributes homosexual activities specifically to Tokugawa society's religious elites and aristocracy, unintentionally drawing the same parallels between sexual expression among European and Japanese aristocracy that Reed draws in his analysis. The fact that Caron does not draw these parallels himself demonstrates his unawareness or disapproval of homosexual activities among European aristocracy, and that Caron's Christian worldview created barriers to cross-cultural understanding.

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[50] Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 56-57.
[51] Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 30.
[52] Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 57.
[53] Reed, *Art and Homosexuality,* 42.

Caron's misunderstandings and condemnations of Japanese religious beliefs and social norms indicate that he found difficulty in understanding the purpose and form of these practices. Caron was not the only traveler with the Dutch East India Company who struggled to fit the non-Christian beliefs they encountered in Asia into their Protestant worldview. Peter Rietbergen examines the writings of Dutch visitors to Asia and how these visitors stretched their interpretations of biblical "Truth" to accommodate the non-Christian beliefs they encountered. Rietbergen groups these Dutch accounts into two camps: those whose writings went "before the Bible," asserting that humans must have originated earlier than biblical chronology suggests; and those whose writings went "beyond the Bible," suggesting that biblical chronology does not account for the full breadth of human existence.[54] While Caron makes no effort to accommodate biblical chronology to fit Japanese religious beliefs, his several attempts to draw parallels between Japanese Buddhism and Christianity suggest some level of learning by assimilation; Caron seeks to fit his observations of "Japanese religion" into a Christian worldview by comparing Japanese religious practices to the Christian practices he and his European audience are most familiar with. However, drawing these parallels also reveals just how little Caron actually knows about or understands Japanese religious practices. Despite Caron's lack of understanding, the way he depicts Japanese Buddhism supports scholarly arguments about the role of Buddhism in Tokugawa society.

While Caron's positioning of Buddhism as the dominant religion in Tokugawa society neglects the influences of Shintoism and Confucianism, Caron's implication of Buddhist dominance and homogeneity is corroborated by the writings of historian Nam-lin Hur. In his book *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan*, Hur asserts that the Tokugawa Shogunate

[54] Peter Rietbergen, "Before the Bible, beyond the Bible…?", 233-242.

used the rise of funerary Buddhism in the 17th century to transform Japan into an anti-Christian "surveillance state."[55] Caron states that Buddhist priests mostly handled burials and all the religious rites associated therein. According to Hur, funerary rites were the primary means of income for Buddhist temples, who received consistent patronage from noble households who wished to have their dead properly entombed in line with Buddhist tradition. This system of funerary patronage became known as the *danka* system, and it sustained Buddhist temples throughout the Tokugawa period.[56]

While called the *danka* "system," this framework was actually a cultural custom rather than an enforced legal structure; that is, until the Tokugawa Shogunate co-opted it as a "public surveillance system" to enforce anti-Christian policies by ensuring every noble family interred their dead within a Buddhist temple and followed Buddhist burial practices.[57] With this system in place, it makes sense that an outside observer like Caron would describe Japanese religion as both homogenous and passive; every noble family was required to inter their dead at a Buddhist temple out of fear of being branded as Christian by the Tokugawa *bakufu*, but that was the extent of required Buddhist practice. The anti-Christian efforts of the Tokugawa *bakufu* also defined European interactions with Tokugawa Japan, and Caron dedicates an entire chapter of his book to Christian persecution.

Caron titles his chapter about Christian persecution "The Persecution of the Romish Christians," identifying that Catholic orders controlled most evangelical efforts in Tokugawa Japan. He first describes the treatment of "those of this [Country] which were converted to Christianity," which makes Caron's account unique among contemporary writings on this topic

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[55] Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan*, 13-14.
[56] Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan*, 9.
[57] Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan*, 13-14.

in Europe.[58] Most primary sources about the persecution of Christians in Tokugawa Japan focus on the martyrdom of European missionaries, often ignoring the treatment of Japanese converts and the efficacy of conversion efforts.[59]

In spite of continuous persecution by the Tokugawa *bakufu*, Caron notes that missionaries kept coming and Christianity continued to spread:

> When these cruel Idolaters perceived that Death was not formidable to those martyred Christians… and that the great numbers of them that suffered did no way discourage or diminish the remaining, but rather strengthen and increase their multitudes, they resolved to break them by more exquisite and sensible structures… but seeing yet there was no end, and that death in what shape soever was not terrible to affright those Saints to an Apostacy, they intended and practiced other more dreadful [ways] and pains, for to oblige them to quit and change their opinions and religion.[60]

In Caron's view, the Tokugawa *bakufu* tortured and executed Christians in an effort to make them recant their faith, but this actually had the opposite effect. Comparing this account to secondary source analysis of Catholic missionary letters from the early 17th century can help explain the broader impacts of Tokugawa Christian persecution.

Matthew Brockey's article "Books of Martyrs: Example and Imitation in Europe and Japan, 1597-1650" in *Catholic Historical Review* uses 17th century correspondence between Catholic orders in Europe and their missionaries in Japan to argue that these orders took advantage of Christian persecution in Tokugawa Japan to improve their status and prestige. In the early days of Christianity, the faithful believed that the truest Christians lived and died like Jesus Christ: murdered at the hands of detractors of their religion.[61] As Christianity became the

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[58] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 66.
[59] Matthew Brockey, "Books of Martyrs: Example and Imitation in Europe and Japan, 1597-1650," *The Catholic Historical Review* 103, No. 2 (Spring 2017): 210.
[60] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 66.
[61] Brockey, "Books of Martyrs," 208.

most prevalent religion in Europe, martyrdom became harder to achieve until the Tokugawa *bakufu* began executing Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries in the early 17th century. Brockey argues that this led to the resurgence of a "Cult of Martyrs," where Jesuit, Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian congregations in Europe would send waves of missionaries to Japan primarily so that they would die and increase the prestige of these orders by adding more martyrs to their ranks. Stories of martyrs keeping the faith while enduring unimaginable torment also attracted more Europeans to join these Catholic orders, further increasing their status and influence.[62]

The above passage from Caron's account reveals that the Cult of Martyrs even attracted Japanese converts, stating that the martyrdom of Christians "did no way discourage or diminish the remaining, but rather strengthen and increase their multitudes." While witnessing martyrdom may have converted several Japanese people, it did not instill these converts with the same level of devotion; According to Caron, many Japanese converts renounced their faith while being tortured.[63] Caron writes about these torments in the past tense, explaining later that Christians were "almost rooted out" at the time of his writing.[64] This suggests that *bakufu* anti-Christian policies, such as torture, execution, and the Closed Country Edict (*sakoku*) of 1635, were eventually successful.

Before concluding this section, a mention should be made about Caron's depiction of Confucianism and its role in Tokugawa society. While he never outright states that anything he describes is "Confucian" or even makes mention of this philosophy by name, Caron describes

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[62] Brockey, "Books of Martyrs," 118-120.
[63] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 69.
[64] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 70.

social hierarchies that certainly have a Confucian character. In his description of crime and punishment under the Tokugawa *bakufu*, Caron writes the following:

> "A [Merchant], how rich soever, is not esteemed at all, because they say, He liveth by his lying, making no conscience to [cousin] and deceive the People for his filthy lucre sake: The Citizen and Artificer are likewise undervalued, because they are but Servants to the Commonalty, and forced to live by their labours and manufactures: Neither are the Country People of more account, because of the miserableness of their condition, being subject to perpetual slavery and [toiling]. But the Gentlemen and [Soldiers], who are numerous, are honoured and feared."[65]

This tangent hints at a Confucian-inspired class system imposed by the Tokugawa Shogunate when they rose to power at the turn of the 17th century. Caron identifies all four classes present in this system – Soldiers and *Samurai*, Peasants, Artisans, and Merchants[66] – and correctly indicates that soldiers are at the top of this system and merchants are at the bottom. However, he also asserts that members of the middle two castes are "undervalued" like the merchants. Caron includes this description of Tokugawa social order in his section on crime and punishment because it impacts how executions are conducted: soldiers and nobles, according to Caron, can commit *seppuku* if sentenced to death, while the remaining castes "suffer by the common Executioner."[67] This suggests that Confucian social order was imposed by the *bakufu* to some extent. Even when Caron demonstrates that he does not fully understand the complexities of Buddhist worship or Confucian philosophy in Tokugawa Japan, his surface-level observations hint at deeper trends in Tokugawa government and society.

Revisionist scholarship on European-Japanese interactions in the early Tokugawa period argues that religious differences between the two cultures proved difficult to overcome for both European visitors and the Tokugawa *bakufu*. Caron's account clearly supports this argument: he

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[65] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 53.
[66] Gordon, "The Tokugawa Polity," 14-16.
[67] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 53.

struggles to differentiate between the several different belief systems at play in Tokugawa Japan, insinuating the Japanese universally yet passively follow Buddhism and describing Confucian teachings as a quirk of the *bakufu*-imposed social order. Through his vivid depiction of Christian persecution, Caron illustrates how the steadfast dedication of European missionaries and the fervent anti-Christian policies of the *bakufu* led to a continuous stream of torture and executions that eventually drove the Shogun to enact the Closed Country Edict and ban Christian missions altogether. Face-to-face with the daunting power of the Shogun and his seemingly absolute control over every aspect of Tokugawa politics, religion, and society, Caron and the VOC determined that they needed to carefully navigate Tokugawa court diplomacy to maintain their position in Japanese international trade.

Engaging with the Japanese Economy

According to Caron, the Shogun and the *daimyo* are all incredibly wealthy. The first section of this paper mentions the practice of competitive spending between the *daimyo*, who aimed to use their wealth to curry favor with the Shogun. As a result of these incredible expenditures, Edo became a luxurious reflection of the wealth of both the Shogun and the *daimyo*; as Caron states, the city of Edo "appears at a distance not unlike a Mountain of Gold."[68] Further, Caron states that the Shogun spends the equivalent four hundred thousand shillings sterling on his home each year, and another five hundred thousand solely on personal guards.[69] In describing this immense wealth, Caron reinforces the power of the Shogun and the importance of Edo as the seat of the Shogun's power. Thanks to the expenditures of the *daimyo*, the wealth of Tokugawa Japan's political elite was concentrated in the capital city of the Shogun's realm.

[68] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 18.
[69] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 15.

Where did the *daimyo* get all this wealth from? Early in his account, Caron provides a list of every *daimyo*, the lands they control, the locations of their estates, and the amount of "Revenue" each *daimyo* produces. Caron records these revenues in "Cockyens," which is likely a transliteration of the Japanese word *kokuyen*. *Kokuyen* was a measure of the monetary value of the crops (predominantly rice, measured in *koku*) produced by each of the *daimyo's* domains. This measurement of agricultural production determined the stipend each *daimyo* received from the Shogun; domains that produced more *koku* of rice and other crops received larger stipends.[70] Therefore, the *kokuyen* produced by a given *daimyo* is an accurate indication of the wealth and prestige of said *daimyo*. By Caron's estimation, the combined lands of all the *daimyo* produce over 18 million *kokuyen* annually; using the conversion rates Caron provides, this sum translates into 180 million Dutch guilders, or 360 million shillings sterling.[71] The stipend system created a closed loop of agricultural income. The *daimyo* would send agricultural products from their lands to the Shogun, who would compensate the *daimyo* with a monetary stipend proportional to the *daimyo's* agricultural output. By Caron's account, the *daimyo* would then funnel much of this stipend back to the Shogun by raising armies and beautifying and traveling to Edo. This system of production and compensation existed separately from the Japanese commercial trade networks Caron interacted with.

While Caron describes the Shogun and the *daimyo* as incredibly wealthy, he and the other VOC merchants never conducted trade with the Shogun or the *daimyo* directly; to reiterate, "neither the Emperor, nor his subordinate Kings or Lords, do gain anything at all by the Commerce of their Subjects, the Merchants [only] profit by it."[72] The separation of the Shogun

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[70] Gordon, "The Tokugawa Polity," 15.
[71] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 6-15.
[72] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 84.

and the *daimyo* from foreign trade brings into question why Caron and other European merchants would need to interact with the Tokugawa government structure at all. Caron's account suggests that, while the Shogun did not profit from foreign trade, he controlled where and how it was conducted. As Caron writes:

> "The Emperor of [Japan] would neither offend nor be offended by any Strangers, which had already happened by the extortions of the Governors of [Siam] and [Taiwan]; and therefore none of his Subjects should any more traffick or deal with Strangers out of their own Country… But the chief cause of this [inhibition] is, least the Natives of this Country, traveling into strange places, might be converted to the Christian Religion, and upon their return infuse those [foreign] principles into their Country-Men, which they have endeavored to suppress with so much blood and violence."[73]

In this passage, Caron asserts that the Shogun prevented Japanese merchants from trading outside Japan partly because of "offenses" committed by these merchants while abroad. Clulow's work sheds some light on the nature of these offenses; he argues that 17th century Japanese merchants "existed along a shifting continuum, transforming into mercenaries when it suited them but equally swiftly reclaiming their role as merchants when opportunities for profit emerged."[74] Clulow bases his argument on diplomatic communications between the Shogun and Southeast Asian societies in Siam and Cambodia, which state that many Japanese merchants initially seemed intent on trade, they quickly resorted to violence "without warning or apparent provocation."[75] Combining Clulow's analysis with Caron's account indicates that the Shogun was concerned with how other Japanese merchants represented Japan abroad, leading him to ban Japanese merchants from international travel altogether.

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[73] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 83-84.
[74] Adam Clulow, "'A Great Help from Japan': The Dutch East India Company's experiment with Japanese soldiers," In *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, eds. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 187.
[75] Clulow, "'A Great Help from Japan'," 184.

This travel ban is one aspect of *sakoku*, the "closed country edict" that defined Tokugawa foreign policy from the 1630s to the end of the Tokugawa period in the 1860s. Older scholarship, such as Charles Boxer's *The Christian Century in Japan: 1550-1650*, presents *sakoku* through a eurocentric lens, arguing that the Shogun enforced this policy primarily to halt the spread of Christianity through Japan.[76] Caron's account reveals that, while Christianity was certainly a major concern for the Shogun, concerns about the behavior of Japanese merchants abroad also led to the implementation of *sakoku*. Additionally, Japan was not completely "closed off" from the rest of the world as scholarship like Boxer's work seems to suggest. Caron lived at the Dutch trading post in Hirado and visited Edo and Kyoto several times throughout the 1630s. When the Shogun moved the Dutch to Deshima in 1640 as part of their enforcement of *sakoku*, Caron received permission to remain on Hirado with his wife and family for one year. Caron continued participating in trade with Japan from Deshima until he became the governor of Formosa in 1644 – a position he held for two years before finally returning to the Dutch Republic in 1646.[77] Even after Caron left, the Dutch maintained trade relations with Tokugawa Japan until they abandoned Deshima in 1860.[78] Japanese merchants also continued to accept trade from China, Cambodia, and other Asian societies at major ports like Nagasaki and Kyoto throughout the Tokugawa period, demonstrating that *sakoku* did not entirely prevent the people of Japan from interacting with societies beyond their borders.

Caron also states that the Dutch were not the first European arrivals to Japan. The Spanish and Portuguese had been interacting with Japanese merchants for about 100 years by Caron's account, likely from their trading posts in Macau and the Philippines.[79] The English

[76] Clulow, *The Dutch Encounter with the Shogun*, 11.
[77] Vos, "Mihatenu Yume—An Unfinished Dream," 355.
[78] Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*, 11.
[79] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 80.

came to Japan shortly after the Dutch, but only stayed for about a decade because they saw "little profit and great [expense]."[80] Looking beyond Caron to establish a timeline of European trade with Tokugawa Japan provides more specific timeframes: the Portuguese traded with Japan from their first arrival in 1542 until their expulsion by the Shogun in 1639;[81] the English came to Japan in 1613 then left in 1623, likely due to the lack of profits Caron describes;[82] the Dutch remained in Japan for 260 years, from their first visit to Japan in 1600 until they abandoned Deshima in 1860.[83] Caron's account demonstrates that the Dutch maintained trade with Japan for so long because they remained in the good graces of the Shogun.

The last two chapters of *A True Depiction of the Mighty Kingdom of Japan* were not actually written by Caron. Instead, Caron includes two excerpts from communications to the Overseers of the VOC: the first penned by an unnamed "Governor of the [Indies];" and the second by Leonard Camps, the *opperhoofd* at Hirado from 1621 to 1623. Both excerpts recommend different actions that the VOC should take to maximize their profits in trading with Japan. The Governor's account requests "fifteen Tonne of Gold and Merchandise" – equivalent in value to 1.5 million 17th century Dutch Guilders – and claims that the VOC will be able to double that investment over the course of the next year.[84] According to the Governor's assessment, over one third of that profit will come from Japanese trade alone.[85] The Governor also writes that, "if we do not meddle with Christianity, but behave ourselves modestly, they [the Japanese] will grant us the more liberty, and greater freedom in trading."[86] The Governor's

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[80] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 81.
[81] Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*, 109-110.
[82] Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere: Europe's Encounter with Japan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4.
[83] Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*, 10-11.
[84] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 95.
[85] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 96.
[86] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 97.

strategy for maximizing profits required the VOC to conform to anti-Christian sentiments in Japan and be respectful in their dealings. Leonard Camps echoes this sentiment in his excerpt, but also takes a more aggressive stance against the Portuguese.

Camps begins his letter by stating that the Shogun allows trade "only to [show] the goodness of his Nature, the greatness of his Dominions, and his [civility] to Strangers."[87] Camps argues that the VOC can increase their profits in Japan by eliminating European competitors, namely the Portuguese. More specifically, Camps suggests that the VOC attempt to wrestle control of Macau from the Portuguese, allowing the VOC to act as a mediator in trade between China and Japan.[88] Camps also claims that the VOC has an advantage over the Portuguese: "Although we have not profited so much as the Portugals, we have gained more honour than they."[89] The relationship between the VOC and the Shogun is very important to Camps; he even references the Governor's strategy of maintaining respect, stating that "Japan will be more useful for us, and more profitable [than] it hath been to the Portugals, if your affairs succeed according to the Governor General's meaning."[90] VOC leaders in Japan and the East Indies agreed that the VOC could at least maintain – if not improve – their position in Japanese trade by respecting the Shogun and the Japanese merchants they interacted with.

Camps' letter hints at some skepticism amongst the Overseers of the VOC about the prospects of profit from trade with Japan. This skepticism may derive from the failure of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) in the Americas. According to Dutch historian Maarten Prak, the WIC failed because they came to the Americas fairly late, forcing them to compete with

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[87] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 98-99.
[88] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 104-105.
[89] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 102
[90] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 105.

well-established English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies.[91] VOC Overseers may have anticipated a similar problem in East and Southeast Asia, where the Spanish and Portuguese preceded the Dutch by about half a century. Additionally, the Governor's letter states that VOC trade in the previous year "hath been but little [advantageous], by reason of the disasters at Sea, which hath much [weakened] and put [behind] hand the India Capital or Stock."[92] Camps attempts to ease skepticism by stating that "the plenty of Gold, Silver, Copper, Iron, Lead, and Pewter Mines is great; and the abundance of Silk, Cotton, Hemp, and thousands other commodities incredible."[93] Camps also references the Portuguese and Spanish directly, arguing that "it is not imaginable that the Portugals and Spaniards are such fools, as to search of places to seat themselves in, and to carry on a trade, where there is no advantage to be got."[94]

Skepticism about profits from trade also speaks to a disconnect between orders made by VOC overseers in the Dutch Republic and the experiences of merchants living and working in Japan. Clulow highlights this disconnect well when discussing the VOC's brief experiment with hiring Japanese mercenaries. Clulow explains that, like many European colonial powers in East and Southeast Asia, VOC military power proved inadequate to secure their trade interests.[95] After hearing about the strength and loyalty of Japanese mercenaries, a small group of VOC Overseers in the Dutch Republic – many of which had never visited Japan – pushed for VOC merchants to hire Japanese mercenaries instead of sending soldiers from Europe. The Overseers believed these mercenaries to be orderly, well-trained warriors that would easily fall into the

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[91] Maarten Prak, "A Worldwide Trading Network," In *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century,* trans. Diane Webb (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 115.
[92] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 95.
[93] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 99.
[94] Caron, *A True Depiction…*, 101.
[95] Clulow, "'A Great Help from Japan'," 179.

rank and file of European military traditions.[96] The VOC generals who organized these mercenaries instead found them quite unruly and unresponsive to European techniques of military discipline.[97] Military inadequacies were not the only issues the VOC faced, as reflected by Camps' and the Governor's letters and additional scholarship.

The accounts provided by Camps and the Governor support arguments in revisionist scholarship about the difficulties European colonial powers faced in their interactions with Tokugawa Japan, and the methods the VOC devised to overcome these difficulties. Clulow again argues that European colonial powers could not leverage military and technological superiority in East and Southeast Asia as they had done in the Americas. Instead, Europeans in Asia had to negotiate with Asian political leaders and compete between each other to eke out a presence in Asian trade.[98] The letter excerpts from the Governor and Leonard Camps reveal how the Dutch overcame these difficulties: they avoided spreading Christianity, sought to remove the Portuguese from the trade system, and endeavored to maintain a good relationship with the Shogun.

VOC efforts to undermine their trade rivals and stay in the Shogun's good graces did not always go to plan. The VOC attempted to capture Macao in 1622 but failed, eventually resulting in the establishment of a trading post on Formosa so that the VOC could still engage in trade with China.[99] Matsukata Fuyuko's analysis of diplomatic letters between the VOC and the Shogunate shows that the VOC initially struggled to understand their place in Tokugawa society; VOC officials hoped to act as both diplomats and merchants, while the Shogun only viewed them as merchants. According to Fuyuko, these struggles somewhat subsided in 1640 when

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96 Clulow, "'A Great Help from Japan'," 181-82.
97 Clulow, "'A Great Help from Japan'," 188.
98 Clulow, *The Dutch Encounter with the Shogun*, 6.
99 Clulow, *The Dutch Encounter with the Shogun*, 208.

VOC representatives in Deshima became "pseudo-subjects" of the Shogun.[100] This analysis illustrates that the Dutch did not just seek to appease the Shogun; they positioned themselves as subjects of the Shogun's rule, filling a similar role in the Tokugawa political hierarchy as the *daimyo*. In order to continue trade, the VOC integrated themselves into the Tokugawa court structure and refrained from spreading Christianity in Japan. By expelling the Portuguese and Spanish from Japanese trade in 1639, the Shogun also drove away the VOC's main competitors, making the Dutch the sole European presence in Japan for the next two centuries.

Conclusion: Caron's Japan in European Consciousness

Caron's *Description of the Mighty Kingdom of Japan* presents Tokugawa Japan as a society not unlike Europe in many ways, yet vastly different in others. Caron's writings and the writings of others that he includes in this work also present Tokugawa Japan as a country of immense wealth, prime for the taking by anyone willing to navigate Japanese social norms and court procedure. Through this depiction, Caron corroborates and supports a revisionist trend in scholarship on the Tokugawa period and complicates eurocentric arguments about feudalism in Japan and policies like *sakoku*.

Caron's description of Tokugawa Japan and the descriptions provided by later European visitors defined conceptualizations of Japan throughout the Western world, all the way up until Townsend Harris and Commodore Matthew Perry came to Japan in the mid-nineteenth century. "The Myth of the Two Emperors" described by Cyril Powles partly originated from Caron's description of the Shogun and the Mikado and persisted through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Clulow, Hall, and Powles also suggest that travel accounts like Caron's contributed to

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[100] Matsukata Fuyuko, "Contacting Japan: East India Company Letters to the Shogun," in *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, eds. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 80-81.

a romanticization of Tokugawa Japan in European thought. To European scholars of the eighteenth century – many of whom had never visited Japan due to *sakoku* – Japan seemed like a time capsule of late medieval or early modern Europe, complete with the kings, knights, and courtly traditions that romantics yearned to return to. According to Powles, the misconception of a "political Emperor" and a "religious Emperor" also spoke to enlightened absolutist ideals of a secular, hereditary government present in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[101] More research into accounts like Caron's from the later seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries can expand upon the European perspectives expressed in Caron's account and how they developed over the next two centuries.

Conceptions of Tokugawa Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not entirely positive, however. Karl Marx and 19th-century European historians who followed his theory were some of the first to brand Tokugawa Japan as a feudal society. Following Marxist theory, feudalism is a necessary precursor to capitalism; through this statement, Marx asserts that Tokugawa Japan lagged behind Europe's industrialization and emergence into capitalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[102] Leading up to and immediately following the Meiji Restoration, pro-Meiji Japanese scholars would use Western criticisms like Marx's to justify their opposition to the Tokugawa government and further assert that the failings of the Shogunate prevented Japan from becoming an imperial power like England or the United States.[103] As this essay has shown, however, Caron's account refutes assertions about the feudal nature of the Tokugawa Shogunate; while many aspects of the Tokugawa government structure resemble feudal institutions, these institutions were intentionally employed by the Tokugawa

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[101] Powles, "The Myth of the Two Emperors," 45.
[102] Duus, *Feudalism in Japan*, 4-5.
[103] Hall, "The New Look of Tokugawa History," 55-56.

Shogunate to control the *daimyo* and increase the Shogun's power and influence. Rather than highlighting differences in societal progress, Caron's description indicates the wealth of similarities between early modern Japan and Europe. Further research into comparative histories Europe and Japan can build upon Caron's account to determine if his assessment of the similarities and differences between these societies persist into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Caron's account is critically understudied in comparison to other European accounts of Tokugawa Japan, such as the eighteenth-century account written by Englebert Kaempfer. This paper has demonstrated that Caron's *A Depiction of the Mighty Kingdom of Japan* brings new insights into comparative histories of European societies and Japan, revisionist scholarship on Tokugawa interactions with European colonial powers, and studies of European perspectives on Tokugawa Japan and other early modern Asian societies. This paper contributes to all of these fields by providing unique insights from a source that is otherwise underrepresented in relevant scholarship, while also encouraging further research and analysis of Caron's account to learn more about European perspectives on Tokugawa Japan.

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