

Study of Japanese Religion and State Power in the Early Tokugawa Period Based on the Religious Rule of Tokugawa Ieyasu

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Abstract—Tokugawa period has been highly discussed by many scholars as the transition from a feudal society to a capitalist one. Religion was a very significant feature of Tokugawa period because of the association of religion and state power. One important way to interpret the relationship between religion and state power in Tokugawa period is to discuss the religious rule of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who was the first general in the Tokugawa period. In the past researches, Sonehara and Hirano have discussed the religious belief of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Sonehara focuses on the Ieyasu's religious belief of Tendai Sect and his religious activities. He holds the view that Ieyasu proceeded religious activities frequently in his old age is aimed at consolidating his political position. Compared with the analysis of Sonehara, Hirano's analysis pays more attention to the connection between Tokugawa Ieyasu and Jyodo Sect. On the other hand, such as Takaki, Okuwa and other researchers have also discussed the religious belief of Ieyasu. However, most of the research has focused on the exploration of Ieyasu's religious view, ignoring the specific religious rules and interpretation of the concept of Ieyasu's deification. This paper aims to focus on religious policies and activities and the deification of Ieyasu to investigate the religious rule of the early Tokugawa period by the method of thought history and religious history. Analysis of the historical data of temples and the last words of Ieyasu shows that he adopted flexible policies for different denominations in the early period. Furthermore, the deification of Ieyasu is close to Mars, who comes from Roman mythology. By creating thus deification, Ieyasu made religion turn into a vital part of the Shogunate power.

Keywords—Tokugawa period, religion, state power, Tokugawa Ieyasu, deification.

I. INTRODUCTION

AFTER World War II, Japan promulgated the *Constitution of Japan* in 1947, which stipulated the separation of religion and state power, before which the combination of state power and religion was one of the characteristics of society including the modern period of more than 200 years.

Regarding the religious characteristics of modern Japan, Fukaya (1991) [1] believes although there is no specific religion to be listed as a "national religion" in the state, the existence of "theocratic power" equivalent to religious elements has perfectly outlined the modern religious ideology. Such ideology is presented by Toshogu belief that values Tokugawa Ieyasu as a god, predominant through the entire modern Japan. Although the name "Toshogu" was given after Ieyasu's death, it was based on the last words of him. His positioning, control and structure of different religions and his own personality directly affected the

religious trends throughout the modern period. Therefore, to understand the social characteristics, power patterns, and religious characteristics of modern Japan, it is indispensable to interpret the religious conception of Ieyasu in the early days of modern times.

Therefore, this article analyzes the historical documents of Ieyasu's temple documents and his last words and use the diary of his close servants and religious followers, including *Sunpuki* and *Shunkyuki* to outline the religious rules and his relationship with the power of the Shogunate.

II. FORMULATION OF RELIGIOUS POLICY

As the first general in the modern period, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616) experienced a bumpy but wonderful military career. At the age of six, Ieyasu was sent to Sunpu, where he began his life as a hostage of Imagawa Yoshimoto. It wasn't until 1560 that Yoshimoto was killed in the battle of Okehazama and Ieyasu was able to return to his hometown of Mikawa, Okazaki. Later in 1563, shortly after he returned to Okazaki and took office, a big riot broke out among religious believers of Ikko Sect in the Mikawa, which lasted for six months.

The riot stemmed from the sectarians' opposition to his rule in Mikawa. Ieyasu finally managed to quell the riots. This war also made Ieyasu aware of the power of religion and played a vital role in the formulation of temple policies.

Since the Mikawa riot, Ieyasu has regarded religious control as an important part of the regime's rule. In 1582, after more than ten years of war with the Takeda clan, when he won a great victory and captured Suruga and Kai, he issued the 10 documents within two months (February 1582-April 1582), among which six included a ban on the protection of local temples. The documents also stated that the army and others must not run rampant at the temple, and prohibited fire setting in front of the temple. The temples covered a wide range including Shingon Sect and Rinzaï Sect. In the same year, Ieyasu issued a series of documents recognizing the ownership of local temples, among which the case of Kai Ichiren Temple was outstanding.

Ieyasu promulgated three documents related to Ichiren Temple on June 26, July 12, and November 19, 1582. The first was implemented before entering the Kai, and he was granted monastic territories including Ichiren Temple and other affiliated Temple, with a noting at the end saying, "Duty of the temple must be carried out with industry." (translated by the author) [2]. Immediately afterwards, Ieyasu entered

Koshu on July 9, and three days later, issued a ban on Ichiren Temple, with the aim of guarding against chaos in the monasteries and protecting them accordingly. In November, Ieyasu issued the third document, which contained five injunctions, the fifth of which reads, "(Forbid) to change the territory for private reasons" (translated by the author) [3]. This also showed Ieyasu's tighter control of Ichiren Temple.

From the documents, it can be seen that Ieyasu's control over the urban land did not limit to the troop recruitment or care of the people, but also exerted comprehensive protection over the local temples. During this period, he also issued other documents and bans on other temples including the Kai Asama Order on November 23, which was extremely brief with one ban. For other temples, Ieyasu only issued a sub-ban or one ban. Therefore, although the interpretation of the contents of each document of the Ichiren Temple is of little significance, the act of releasing three documents to the same temple within half a year is of great significance. Then, why Ieyasu paid such attention to the Ichiren Temple?

One of them is to discuss the status of Ichiren Temple in Kai. Ichiren Temple is located in the southern part of Koshu (now Yamanashi Prefecture) and is the largest temple of Jishu sect in Kai. There are seven sub-temples including Tamade Temple, Jinryu Temple, Enpuku Temple, Kadai Temple, Kiyomizu Temple, Enmyo Temple and Hanshu Temple. The predecessor of Ichiren Temple dates back to 1184, when Ichijo (Takeda) Tadayoshi was murdered by Minamoto Yoshitomo, and his wife changed his former residence into a Buddhist temple. Later, this temple became the birthplace of Ichiren Temple. Because of "the origin of Takeda's family" (translated by the author) [4], until Takeda's death in 1582, Ichiren Temple was sheltered by his family. During Kamakura and Muromachi periods, the bustling "Front-door Street" came into being. The prestige of Ichiren Temple can be seen.

Second, during the last half of the military expedition, Ieyasu realized his wish to destroy Takeda, but because of a sudden coup at Honno Temple in June of the same year, Oda Nobunaga was assassinated, and chaos reigned for a while. Following Takeda, Hojyo sent troops to Ieyasu, with the intention of occupying Kai and other places. At that time, Ieyasu faced the danger of the resurgence of the aboriginal indigenous tribe and the invasion of external forces like the Hojyo family. Half a year later, Ieyasu and Hojyo negotiated peace, and after stabilizing the rule of the Kai, they triumphed in Hamamatsu (now west of Shizuoka Prefecture). The third document was issued shortly after. Therefore, against the background of fierce war, Ieyasu trained military forces, distributed land, soothed local residents, and made great effort in conquering major monasteries.

As Ieyasu knew about the origin of Ichiren Temple and Takeda and the high status of Ichiren Temple in the state of Kai, he promulgated the documents on the integration of three documents within one year. In fact, there is a 1665 Ichiren Temple document, which states "according to the order on April 19th, 1583 and 1641, the leadership of the Ichiren Temple can never be violated" (translated by the author)[5]. Although the original manuscript of 1583 has not been preserved, it is speculated that according to the historical content of *Kanbun Documents*, re-issued a related ordinance of the temple in April 1583, from which his emphasis on the

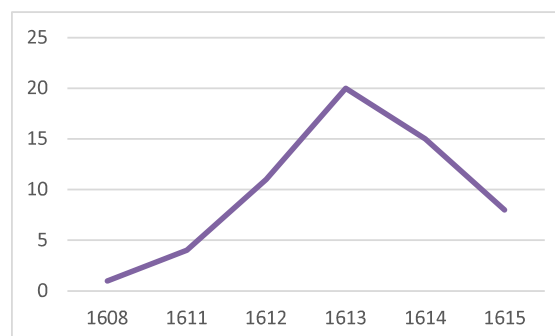
temple can be seen.

Almost during the same period, Ieyasu's attitude towards the Ikko Sect was sharply changed. The Mikawa riot mentioned at the beginning of this section was a fierce battle fought by Ieyasu and the clan 20 years ago. Afterwards, with the crusade of Uesugi Yoshinobu and Oda Nobunaga, the political power of the clan declined. In 1583, Ieyasu faced a competition with Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Therefore, he changed the suppression of the apostles in the past, instead, he made peace with them. he wrote in a letter, "criminals of Honganji Temple shall be pardoned, and the affiliated temples in the country shall not be contradictory." (translated by the author)[6]. To the contrary, his attitude towards Christianity was anything but tolerate. In March 1612, he issued a decree prohibiting the spread of Christianity, and ordered people to destroy Christian temples in Kyoto, claiming that "evil rules destroyed the righteous principle of Buddhism" (translated by the author) [7]. He has continued to suppress Christianity since then. On January 19, 1614, Okubo rushed to Kyoto, destroying and burning away all Christian temples in central city. All foreigners and believers living in Christian monasteries were arrested and escorted to Nagasaki. It can be seen that Ieyasu's ruling for the same religious power is flexible according to the time instead of being consistent.

To sum up, Ieyasu attached great importance to attracting different denominations in the early days when the regime was stable and would also adopt a power strategy to prevent riots if necessary. Also because of his focus on religion, after the Shogunate was founded in 1603, he began to focus on religious activities. In the next section, a series of religious activities carried out by Ieyasu will be discussed.

III. RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Most of Ieyasu's religious activities were carried out after he gave up his post as a general and relocated to Sunpu. "The greatest feature during the Sunpu Period was the appointment of monks" (translated by the author) [8]. Regrettably, as far as the historical data is concerned, he did not leave a self-reporting record such as a diary. Therefore, the discussion of Ieyasu's religious activities can only be limited to the analysis of the literature written by his close attendant. See Tables 1, 2 for details. Due to historical data limitations, the period of investigation here mainly refers to the period between 1611 and 1615.



Fi. 1 Number of religious activities of Ieyasu

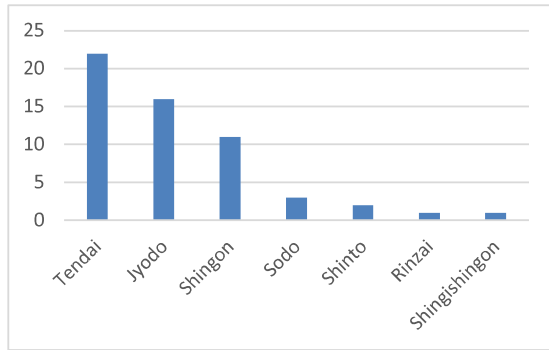


Fig. 2 Religious Activities of Ieyasu

Judging from the statistics, 1613 was the most frequent year for Ieyasu to participate in religious activities. However, the records in September, October, and November of 1612 are missing, so the details of his participation in religious activities in the second half of this year are yet to be verified. And in fact, according to *Sunpuki*, Sunpu held the most religious activities in 1614, but many records did not mention the participation of Ieyasu. After September 1614, he was busy with the Battle of Osaka, and the number of activities decreased significantly. According to statistics, from 1611 to 1615, Ieyasu participated in 58 religious discussions, dialogues and chats. However, the number is slightly different from the statistics of Sonehara (2008) [9]. According to him, from 1611 to 1616, Ieyasu conducted 121 religious discussions and questions. The tables compiled by Sonehara (1996) [10], such as the Tendai Sect discussions on February 18, 1613 and on June 21 the same year, and the Shingi Shingon Sect discussion on November 4 the same year. These religious activities did not record the direct participation of Ieyasu. Secondly, Sonehara included Sodo Sect based on *Sunpuki* on January 6, 1612, whereas the research shows no record of historical information in *Sunpuki*. In addition, on October 25, 1611, November 7, and November 18 of the same year, Tokugawa participated in chats about Jyodo Sect, and on July 25 and 28, 1612, he conducted a discussion on Shingon Sect, which were not included in Sonehara's record. Therefore, it is believed that there is still omission in the record. Moreover, it was found that most of the missing records are mostly about the participation of Jyodo Sect, Shingon Sect and other religions other than Tendai Sect. Therefore, it can be speculated that the conclusions partially exaggerated the influence of the Tendai Sect on Ieyasu's deification.

In addition, it is inferred that the statistics of include religious activities that do not describe Ieyasu's direct involvement. We believe that it is more appropriate to regard these religious activities as those of Sunpu, rather than activities that Ieyasu participated in. However, as described in historical materials, "Saifuku Temple was summoned to Ieyasu, and Ieyasu discussed with him (about the Tendai)" (translated by the author)[11], "It should have been discussed. However, as the monks returned to the mountains, Tenkai reported to Ieyasu, and the discussion was postponed." (translated by the author)[12]. This also demonstrated his control over religious activities in general. Even if some religious discussions do not record the direct

participation of Ieyasu, it can be seen that his concern for religion is an important internal cause which leads to a significant increase in Sunpu's religious activities.

In addition, seen from the investigation of the mysteries of different religions, the types of religious discussions and the objects included in the chats, Ieyasu has very diversified beliefs. For example, it is stated in the historical materials that "(Ieyasu) summoned the monk to teach him the mystery of the Shingon Sect" (translated by the author)[13], "Tenkai talked (to Ieyasu) about the mystery of the Tendai Sect"(translated by the author)[14]. However, because the Tokugawa family came from Jyodo Sect, he was influenced in the early days. For example, in a letter written to Tokugawa Hidetaka's wife named Asai, Ieyasu wrote, "In recent years, one of the things I must do every day is to read the Buddha for 60,000 times. I need to learn the skills every day, from morning to night, without slackness, to eat and drink for health, which is the bless of the Buddha." (translated by the author) [15]. The basic teaching of Jyodo Sect is "Remembering the Buddha till death ". It can be seen that the daily behavior of Ieyasu is deeply influenced by Jyodo Sect.

But then, Ieyasu apparently began to incline towards Tendai Sect. Sonehara had very detailed description about this. From 1611 to 1613, whether for Buddhism talk or religious discussion, Shingon Sect and Jyodo Sect took a larger proportion. From 1613, Ieyasu's contact with the Tendai Sect increased significantly. One of the vital figures was Tiankai. At the request of him, Ieyasu issued a decree of Kanto Tendai Sect in February 1613, using Kita Temple as the main temple of Kanto Tendai Sect to divide the domination nationwide. It coincided with Ieyasu's appointment of Tenkai as Nikko's "permanent leader" in the same year. As mentioned in the next section, Nikko is an important place name that appears in his last words. To explain why Ieyasu changed from his Jyodo Sect to Tendai Sect, the doctrines must be discussed first.

Unlike the Buddhism doctrines of Jyodo Sect, the biggest feature of Tendai Sect is to advocate the combination of theory and practice. Zhao Junyong (2016) [16] mentioned the characteristics of Tendai religious view. "Theory" is the study of Buddhist scriptures, which belongs to the theoretical system of thought; "Practice" is the practice of the true meaning of thought. Among the Da Cheng Buddhist in China, the Tendai is "the one that 'theory' and 'practice' combine best". In the process of introducing the Tendai Sect from China to Japan, its characteristics changed according to local elements, but "combination of theory and practice" was preserved. When issuing a decree of a Tendai Sect, Ieyasu wrote, "to be specific in both theory and practice, and perform Buddhist rituals" (translated by the author) [17]. This has been Ieyasu's attitude towards this doctrine. In this way, the practice of the Tendai Sect is incomparable to Jyodo Sect.

Besides, in the religious discussions that Ieyasu participated in, many topics related to deification were found. Interestingly, Tendai Sect and Shingon Sect were two of the sects that put most emphasis on this idea. According to *Sunpuki*, discussions of Tendai Sect are mostly around deification, which is consistent with Ieyasu's focus. In summary, it is not difficult to explain his preference of Tendai Sect in his later years. It is also speculated that at that time Ieyasu had had the concept of becoming the God after his

death, especially when Nobunaga Oda and Hideyoshi Toyotomi had been precedents.

In addition to Buddhism, Ieyasu also values Confucianism for governing the country. In 1607, he appointed Hayashi Razan. In fact, it is Razan's use of Confucianism that provided a theoretical basis for Ieyasu's vassal of the Hideyoshi. This also became the prelude to the prosperity of Confucianism during the Tokugawa Period. However, unlike Razan's teacher Fujihara, Razan is a thorough "paganist". Although Ieyasu respected Confucianism, in contrast, in his late years, his focus was still on the discussion of religion. Political appointments are also based on religious people including Tenkai, rather than Razan. Because of Ieyasu's favor for Buddhism, his conceived deity, Toshogu, presented a strong Buddhist color in the early days of modern times.

Through the above two sections, an overview of Ieyasu's religious policies and activities are discussed. But what has been his blueprint and conception of his own deity to serve the regime with religion? Clues might be found in the last words of Ieyasu.

IV. DEIFICATION IN THE LAST WORDS

On April 17, 1616, Tokugawa Ieyasu died in Sunpu. There are three main versions of his last words:

Historical material one: "One or two days ago, Honda Masazumi, Tenkai and I were summoned to the Ieyasu, and (Ieyasu) ordered to receive the imperial body in Kuno Mountain, set the funeral at Zojo Temple, establish the sign at Daijyu Temple. At the one – year anniversary, set a temple at Nikko Mountain, as the guardian of the 'Hasshu'." (translated by the author) [18].

Historical material two: "(April) 2nd, (Ieyasu) gave his last words towards Souroku, Tenkai and Honda Masazumi that, the coffin shall be preserved at Kuno Mountain, and the ceremony shall be held on Zojo, establish the sign at Daijyu Temple. At the anniversary, build a small shrine at Nikko Mountain for worship, and another one at Nanzen Temple in Kyoto, so that the officials can worship "(translated by the author)[19].

Historical material three: "(April) 2nd, Souroku, Tenkai and Honda Masazumi were summoned to the bed. (Ieyasu) was seriously ill, and (the body) shall be stored at Kuno Mountain, the ritual should be held at Zojo Temple and the sign at Daijyu Temple. At the anniversary, a small shrine should be built and worshipped in Nikko Mountain, and another one shall be built at Nanzen Temple in Kyoto, so that the warriors can worship." (translated by the author) [20].

Generally speaking, three versions do not differ much. In particular, the three officials summoned by Ieyasu and place names appeared in the first half are the same, which indicated high credibility. The first version was most cited and analyzed by scholars in the previous research. Whereas similarities can be analyzed first: the four place names in the last words. First, Kuno Mountain is located in the southeast of Shizuoka Prefecture, only ten kilometers away from his residence in Sunpu, which is a reasonable place for the settlement of the remains. In addition, according to Takafuji (1996) [21], Kuno Mountain is also a place of choice near Sunpu in a religious sense, with the Kuno Temple embracing beliefs of the Middle Ages. It is also located in the east of Okazaki, Horai Temple, and Sunpu, which are all important

places for Ieyasu. In the concept of deities in Japan since ancient times, the east, where the sun rises, has been regarded as the "realm of god." Therefore, the burial of Ieyasu in Kuno Mountain is a necessary condition for his deification.

Takafuji called the east-west axis connecting Kuno Mountain and Okazaki the "sun-way"; Zojo Temple is located in Tokyo's Minato Ward, and Sonehara (2008) proposed that Daijyu Temple was a family temple in the Matsudaira era, whereas Zojo Temple is the family temple of the Tokugawa era for the Tokugawa family. Ieyasu was born Jyodo Sect, which is the religion of Zojo Temple as well. After entering the shogunate, he had discussed Buddhism for many times with monks at Zojo Temple. Daijyu Temple, which is the required place for the sign, is located at Okazaki, Aichi Prefecture. As mentioned above, it is also a family temple for the previous three generations. Therefore, there is no objection for the choice of place. But why Ieyasu chose the far-away Nikko Mountain for the small shrine still worth discussion. In this regard, Takafuji (1996) proposed the "Polaris Theory". He believes that both ancient China and Japan held Polaris as a sacred star, whose feature of "eternal steadiness" gives it the name of "god of the universe". Nikko Mountain is located on the north-south line that connects Tokyo and the Polaris, which is named by Takafuji as "the Polaris way". Besides, Mount Fuji is located on the line connecting Kuno Mountain and Nikko. The pronunciation of Fuji is similar to immortality in Japanese, which is why it has been considered the mountain for immortality. Takafuji therefore named the line "Immortal way (fuji-way)". In Ieyasu's last words, the four places construct the "sun-way", the "the Polaris way" and "Immortal way (fuji-way)". Therefore, it can be said that his deification has merged many religious elements such as Shinto, Buddhism, Yinyang, and Japanese folk beliefs.

The above discussion originates from Takafuji's arguments from the perspective of location and put forward "Universe Theory" from the choice of site. However, the interpretation of "Immortal (Fuji) Way" is a bit far-fetched, as no historical material today can support Ieyasu's belief in Fuji. Therefore, compared with the location, Nikko Mountain's own religious meaning might be more closely linked with his deification.

First, emphasis should be put on the religious meaning of the Nikko Mountain. Origins of Nikko records that "every generation of Lords and Generals admire it" (translated by the author) [22]. During the Kamakura period, Minamoto Yoshitomo had strong belief for the Nikko, which had been the symbol of the warriors' belief and the existence of the regime. In addition, from historical materials such as *Sunpuki*, Ieyasu has always been extremely concerned about the old practice of the Minamoto Yoshitomo's regime.

Secondly, there is a very important word in historical material three: warriors. Whereas in historical material two, the words used were "officials". According to origins of the material, historical material three is more reliable. Historical material two comes from compilation of Naito Kanso, who was an active historian during Meiji period in Japan, whereas historical material three is the official history of the Tokugawa Shogunate, edited by the 8th generations, whose records mainly came from diaries of the shogunate. In historical material two, "so that the officials can worship"

means the deification is actually for officials and samurais rather than the general public. Therefore, the choice of location for small shrines at Nikko might stem from his religious belief of Nikko samurai.

Also, "Hasshu" in historical material one should be paid attention to, which is controversial among past studies. There are two main views: Kanto area, and the whole Japan. The second is considered to be closer to what Ieyasu originally meant. Both historical material two and three mention the construction of a small shrine in Kyoto for sacrifice, which demonstrated Ieyasu's ambition towards the whole country rather than only the Kanto area. It is believed that the scope of the deification is not limited to the eastern region, but is intended to deter the entire Japan, especially powers in the west. Therefore, "Hasshu" shall be interpreted as "the whole nation".

To sum up the interpretation of Ieyasu's last words, it can be seen that he wanted to create a god-like image with a weak relationship with the people, mainly based on the "army deity" and "samurai deity" characteristics. The image later became "Toshogu" after his death. Compared to homage from the people, the ultimate intention was to deter the warriors and to maintain authority of the Tokugawa family. Although this feature has undergone some changes during Tokugawa generals in subsequent generations, deity stipulated has been inherited to some extent, for example, the public need to go through tedious procedures before their worship of the Toshogu, and warriors and counties are prohibited from private rituals at Toshogu.

V.CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the relationship between religion and government, religious policy, activities, and deification concept of Ieyasu have been discussed, and conclusions are as follows:

- Tokugawa Ieyasu recognized the power of religion from an early age, and thus began a series of policy controls on temples as one of the links of political power. Moreover, seen from Ikko Sect and Christianity, his attitude towards different denominations is not absolute, but changes with the situation.
- Because of the importance attached to religion, Ieyasu carried out a wide variety of religious activities such as discussions and questions. By analyzing his activities, it can be discovered that the religious beliefs of Ieyasu are very diverse. But even so, he was more deeply influenced by Jyodo Sect from his family and Tendai Sect.
- Ieyasu hopes to serve the regime with religion with his last words, and wants to create a character image alienated from ordinary people mainly based on the "god of samurai", which became "Toshogu" in 1617 through official deity names. It was aimed as a deterrence of warriors around the country to secure political reign of the whole nation. Its political significance far outweighs simple belief of the folk.

Above are the elaboration and analysis of his religious strategy and conception, and the political significance of Toshogu. In fact, Toshogu, as a modern theocratic ideology, is not without changes throughout modern Japan. Against the

backdrop of Buddhism and Confucianism and Shinto, how it has evolved and how it has integrated with Shogunate power after Ieyasu, still worth further discussion.

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