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# **Oda Nobunaga**

## **The Ruthless Warlord**

**Thesis for a B.A. degree in Japanese language and culture**

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**Abstract**

This essay examines the somewhat negative legacy of the Japanese warlord Oda Nobunaga, by providing proper context to the time period that he lived in, and fully exploring the more heinous acts he committed to see if his reputation is deserved or not. Many people see Nobunaga as a one sided villain or even an evil tyrant that was responsible for the deaths of thousands of people. By reviewing the life of Nobunaga and understanding the context in which many of his acts occurred I want to bring into focus the many positive changes Nobunaga made to Japan in his lifetime. I do not wish to defend the heinous acts Nobunaga committed, but simply provide context to these events and allow people to judge for themselves how they wish to see the man, the good and the bad parts of him. Was Nobunaga as brutal of a warlord as many believe, or like so many things, is the answer more complicated.

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## Introduction

Oda Nobunaga was a very important man in the history of Japan, being the first of three men who eventually united Japan in 1590 after a long civil war, also known as the Warring States period (1467-1615). Nobunaga is seen by many as a ruthless and ambitious warlord who committed many brutal and heinous acts against his enemies. A man should not be defined by only a few acts, no matter how ruthless they may seem, and in order to get a better picture of Nobunaga's character his entire life and the environment he grew up in must be examined and taken into consideration. Starting with the time period Nobunaga grew up in, the family he was born into, the expectations given to him, along with examining some of the battles he fought as warlord, and the changes he brought to the lands he conquered and Japan as a whole.

Most of the sources used are from a few known Japanese history books along with some articles from websites about individual battles. An important source to note is a Japanese archaeological report done in the 1980s which directly contradicts several written sources regarding Nobunaga's siege of Mount Hiei, believed to be one of the most heinous acts committed by Nobunaga.

When Nobunaga's life is examined as a whole and his heinous acts are given their proper perspectives, a complex individual is discovered, a man whose legacy is deserving of far more than just a fictitious self-proclaimed title used as a villain or a tyrant used in video games or anime. Is Oda Nobunaga deserving of the title Demon King ?

## 1. Japan's Warring States Period

### 1.1 How the War Started

In the 15th century Japan was a feudalistic nation with two powerful positions ruling the country. First there was the emperor himself as the head of state serving as mostly a ceremonial symbolic role rather than an actual imperial ruler, second there was the shogun (military dictator) appointed by the emperor as the main general in charge of the army. According to Knighton (2015) :

The shogun ran Japan. In theory, the military dictator was chosen by the emperor. In practice, the power relationship was the other way round, with shoguns maintaining emperors as figureheads. The shogun, always a man from a powerful noble family, ruled through military might. He had his own court and civil service, the bakufu, with which to run the country. (para 4)

The power of the emperor was mostly for show and even if the shogun was nominally appointed by the emperor, in practice however the title was hereditary and all the real power rested with the shogun and his shogunate (bakufu) who was the *de facto* leader of the nation.

The Warring States period (Sengoku Jidai) was a brutal period in Japan's history, a civil war lasting for almost a hundred and fifty years. The war started in the year 1467 following a controversy over who should succeed the current shogun of Japan, sparking a war between the emperor's son and the emperor's brother. This succession war was called the Ōnin war and lasted for eleven years ending in a stalemate leaving the city of Kyoto in

ruins. The former shogun and his shogunate were all killed or turned into political puppets with no real power behind them. According to Knighton (2015), “The war that almost destroyed Kyoto did the same for the shogunate” (para 26).

After the Onin war all of the shugo's (governors) that governed the many provinces of Japan became effectively powerless, since they relied on the backing of the shogunate to stay in power and rule the provinces and the clans that lived under them. With no power behind the shogun this would mark the end of the feudal era in Japan resulting in a massive power struggle between all the warlords in Japan to see who would emerge victorious in the end and dominate all of Japan as the new shogun.

## **1.2 Buddhist Supported Rebels**

With the fall of the shogunate and the threat of the warlords looming many Buddhist temples feared that their lands would be taken from them or be subjected to harsh taxation. During this time, temples had control over private estates, holding the rights to tax and administer those realms with autonomous authority. These rights were given to them by the government and with the fall of the shogunate there was nothing holding back the warlords from conquering these private estates from the Buddhist temples. According to Kyohei and Collcutt (1990).

During the Heian period (794-1185) absentee proprietors, including nobles, temples, and shrines, and members of the imperial family acquired collections of private rights, *shiki*, in reclaimed or commended holdings scattered throughout the provinces. These holdings, known as shoen, were gradually sealed off from the

taxing power and administrative supervision of state officials. (p. 89)

During the Warring States period another faction formed to oppose the warlords and their ambition to rule Japan. These rebels were known as the Ikko-ikki, they consisted mainly of peasants, priests, merchants and local lords who were opposed to being ruled by the warlords and the constant violence that followed the civil war. The Ikko-ikki were supported by the Buddhist temples. With this union the temples gained a force to help defend themselves from the warlords and the rebels gained a powerful ally, and as the war dragged along, more and more people decided to join the Ikko-ikki and over the course of the civil war they became a large and powerful force economically, politically and militarily.

### **1.3 Arrival of Europeans**

In 1543, during the Warring States period, Japan met its first Europeans. These were three Portuguese men who reached the small island of Tanegashima when they had been blown off course by a typhoon. Sansom (1961) Wrote:

The Muskets which they carried caused excitement among the rescuers, and for a long time after this event the Japanese name for such firearms was Tanegashima.

The weapons were soon copied in considerable numbers, but it would be a mistake to suppose that the use of firearms at once brought about a great change in methods of warfare in Japan. (pp. 263-264)

A year or two later, the first of the Portuguese traders arrived in Japan bringing with them exotic goods to sell, including Portuguese hand-held guns, also known as matchlock

firearms. The Japanese were already familiar with gunpowder weapons and had been using Chinese firearms and cannons, however the Portuguese matchlock firearms were far lighter and easier to use and aim comparably. Within a year of the arrival of the Portuguese traders in Japan, sword smiths and iron smiths managed to reproduce the matchlock firearms and mass produce the Portuguese firearm.

Along with Portuguese traders arriving in Japan during the Warring States period were a number of Jesuits. Jesuits were members of the Society of Jesus, a Catholic religious order engaged in missionary work across the world, hoping to spread the Christian faith to Japan.

## **2. The Warlord Oda Nobunaga**

### **2.1 Nobunaga's Early Years**

Oda Nobunaga was born on the 23rd of June 1534 in the Owari province of Japan, situated to the south of the capital of Kyoto. Nobunaga was the second son of the minor noble and warlord, Oda Nobuhide. Nobunaga had many siblings, eleven brothers and two sisters, including an elder brother named, Oda Nobuhiro, and a younger brother named, Oda Nobuyuki. Nobunaga was the legitimate heir to the Oda clan. Nobunaga's older brother Nobuhiro was born of another woman who was not the official wife of Nobuhide making him unable to succeed his father as the head of the Oda clan.

Soon after Nobunaga was born his father gave him Nagoya Castle, which he had conquered from one of his rivals, the Imagawa clan, and assigned him four house elders to take care of Nobunaga's estate while he was young. Nobunaga's majordomo, the chief steward of his household, was Hirate Masahide, a man who would become Nobunaga's mentor and tutor. When Nobunaga was thirteen he celebrated his coming of age in his father's castle at Furuwatari, along with Masahide. The very next year Nobunaga went on his first military campaign accompanied by his majordomo. Even though no fighting happened during this short outing Nobunaga was already being groomed for military leadership as soon as he reached maturity. Nobunaga also found a fascination for guns and trained to use a harquebus, an early type of portable firearm (Ota, 2011, pp. 53-55).

Nobunaga was often seen exhibiting peculiar behavior and conducting himself in a manner not fitting his status. He seemed to have contempt for tradition and keeping place in

society. Although he was a noble, he associated with commoners and peasants. Because of this behavior he earned the nickname "The Fool of Owari" .

## **2.2 The Oda Clan**

When Oda Nobunaga was only four years old, his grandfather Oda Nobusada died, making his father, Oda Nobuhide the head of the Oda clan and deputy shugo of Owari province in 1538. The Oda clan was divided into two main branches, first of all there was the Kiyosu branch ,which Nobunaga was born into, who controlled the four southern districts of Owari province, secondly there was the Iwakura branch, who controlled the four northern districts of Owari province.

Originally the Oda clan answered to the Shiba clan, since the head of the Shiba clan was the shugo (governor) of Owari province. The head of the Oda clan was the deputy shugo of Owari; however, over the years the Shiba clan's power weakened and the Oda clan became more powerful and had occupied the greater portion of Owari province. During the Warring States period the power of the shugo was rendered mostly ceremonial, same as the power of the shogunate. At this time the Shiba clan, led by Shiba Yoshimune, was so weak that they had been made puppets by the Iwakura branch of the Oda clan (Sansom, 1961, pp. 275-276).

Nobuhide spent many years fighting against his neighboring rivals, most notably the Imagawa clan, led by Imagawa Yoshimoto, who controlled Mikawa, Suruga and Totomi province to the east of Owari province. Nobuhide was able to win a large battle against Yoshimoto in 1542; however, even if Nobuhide was able to hold his own against his rivals

he never succeeded in fully uniting Owari under his rule due to constant infighting among the Oda clan.

In 1549 Nobuhide made peace with one of his rivals, Saito Dosan of Mino province to the north of Owari, by arranging a political marriage between his eldest son, Nobunaga and Saito's daughter, Nohime (Ota, 2011, p. 58). This allowed Nobuhide to focus his efforts towards Yoshimoto, even going as far as gaining a foothold in Mikawa Province.

The Oda clan was not a large clan; however, during the Warring States period, even with all the infighting, the Oda clan still managed to hold their own against their enemies with Nobuhide in charge. This would all change in 1551 when Nobuhide contracted a contagious disease, and despite all kinds of prayers and medical treatments he passed away at the age of forty two.

### **2.3 The Oda Clan's Succession Crisis**

With the sudden death of Oda Nobuhide, the Oda clan would now be led by his heir Oda Nobunaga, a man in his early twenties known for behaving like a fool. At his father's funeral, Nobunaga acted in a bizarre and inexplicable way. In a society where observing ancient rituals and strict protocols was of extraordinary importance, Nobunaga displayed shocking acts of sacrilege such as being inappropriately dressed for a man of his station and throwing ceremonial incense at the altar (Ota, 2011, p. 61). His behavior turned some of his retainers against him and caused dispute among the family. This act alienated many of Oda's retainers, convincing them of Nobunaga's mediocrity and lack of discipline and they began to side with his more soft-spoken and well-mannered younger brother, Oda

Nobuyuki. Even though Nobunaga was Nobuhide's legitimate successor, the Oda clan became divided.

Two years after Nobunaga's shameful behavior at his father's funeral, Nobunaga decided to promote himself to gubernatorial rank, pretending that this would make him the governor of Owari. Hirate Masahide, Nobunaga's majordomo, struck with despondency at Nobunaga's lack of seriousness, committed seppuku (ritual suicide). According to Ota (2011), Before Masahide committed suicide he said "I can discover no sign of the upbringing I gave him," said Nakazukasa no Jo, "so there is no point to my life anymore" (p. 61). His motivation was the shame and disapproval of Nobunaga's antics, especially the desecration of his father's funeral.

The Oda clan was still technically under the control of Owari's shugo (governor), Shiba Yoshimune. Thus Oda Nobutomo, Nobunaga's uncle, used the powerless Yoshimune as his puppet and challenged Nobunaga's place as Owari's new ruler, taking Kiyosu castle with the support of Yoshimune in 1553. Nobutomo began plotting to have Nobunaga assassinated and to usurp his place as the head of the Oda clan. This did not sit well with Yoshimune who sent word to Nobunaga, warning him of his uncle's plot. When Nobutomo learned that Yoshimune had warned Nobunaga about his scheme he had Yoshimune put to death. A year later Nobutomo's plans to assassinate and usurp Nobunaga came to an end when Nobunaga's ally, Oda Nobumitsu, captured Nobutomo and forced him to commit suicide (Ota, 2011, p. 75).

The Oda clan's succession crisis did not end with the death of his uncle Nobutomo, since after the shameful display Nobunaga showed at his fathers funeral many of Oda's

retainers had turned to his younger brother Nobuyuki, who had begun his own rebellion against Nobunaga. In 1555 Nobunaga defeated Nobuyuki at the Battle of Ino. Nobunaga would have killed his younger brother had it not been for the intervention of his mother, Tsuchida Gozen, convincing Nobunaga to spare his brother. This failed rebellion did not stop Nobuyuki's ambition to overthrow his older brother and he started planning for another rebellion. Nobunaga caught wind of this and decided to fake an illness and refuse to show himself in public, Nobuyuki's mother urged him to go visit Nobunaga, after all, they were brothers. In 1558 Nobuyuki traveled to Kiyosu and was killed on Nobunaga's orders, leaving only the Iwakura branch of the Oda clan left to oppose Nobunaga's rule (Ota, 2011, p. 93).

In 1556 Saito Yoshitatsu turned against his father Saito Dosan, Nobunaga sent an army to assist his father-in-law; however, Dosan was killed in battle and the alliance Nobunaga had with the Saito clan of Mino province was broken, and Nobunaga was now faced with a new enemy to the north.

In 1559 Nobunaga captured and destroyed the fortress of the Iwakura branch, eliminating the final opposition within the Oda clan and became the uncontested ruler of Owari province. From the death of his father in 1551 to the final destruction of the Iwakura in 1559, eight long years of infighting came to an end. Nobunaga had not only defeated his cousin, Nobutomo, and forced him to commit suicide, but he also defeated his younger brother, Nobuyuki, when he started a rebellion, but spared Nobuyuki's life at the behest of his mother only to later on order Nobuyuki's death when it was discovered that he had started plotting a second rebellion. This was only the beginning of Nobunaga's conquest, he

now ruled over only a single province within Japan, surrounded by enemies, he would need to keep fighting just to survive in this time of civil war.

### **3. Oda Nobunaga's Conquest**

#### **3.1 Battle of Okehazama**

In 1560, a long time rival of the Oda clan, Imagawa Yoshimoto, was attempting to march his troops through Owari province and reach the capital city of Kyoto in order to install a new shogun to the throne, one which he could control from behind the scenes. This was only a year after Nobunaga had finally managed to unite Owari under his rule, and now he was faced with a massive army planning to march right through his province. Sansom (1961) wrote:

Late at night on June 21, 1560, at the fortress of Kiyosu where he was now established, Nobunaga received news that Imagawa, with a force reckoned at 25,000 or more, was moving into Owari from Suruga on his way to the capital (p. 276).

On his way through Owari, Yoshimoto quickly conquered two of Nobunaga's fortresses. Nobunaga's advisors pressed him to make a stand at Kiyosu but he refused, saying that only a strong offensive could make up for the superior numbers of the enemy, and ordered a counterattack. At this time Nobunaga's forces were believed to be somewhere around two-three thousand troops, these numbers are unclear since Nobunaga may have recruited some support from local robber bands (Sansom, 1965, p. 276).

Nobunaga's scouts reported that Imagawa's main army was resting, after its two successful attacks on Nobunaga's fortresses, at a place called Dengaku-hazama. This place Nobunaga knew well from when he was a boy, it was in a narrow gorge, which made it hard to maneuver. Nobunaga planned to ambush Yoshimoto's forces while they celebrated. Nobunaga led his men to a fortified temple called Zensho-ji, a short distance away from

Okehama village, and ordered his men to setup an array of flags and dummy troops and place them in key positions where the Imagawa forces could see them, giving the impression that Nobunaga had significant manpower in the field. With the decoy set, Nobunaga moved his army closer to Yoshimoto's main camp. Nobunaga was in luck, for a thunderstorm passed over them as they moved, giving them plenty of cover to move quietly without getting noticed (Ota, 2011, pp. 88-89). The weather that day had been hot, and as Yoshimoto's men were celebrating their victories with drinking, they had removed their armor and not secured their weapons properly, so when the thunderstorm hit, the field became muddy and the armor and weapons that had not been safely secured were deep in mud. As the storm let up, Nobunaga ordered his men to attack, taking Yoshimoto's forces by surprise, rushing the enemies command post and killing Yoshimoto and most of his senior officers. After the battle Nobunaga had a burial mound erected for Yoshimoto. He also had one thousand *sutras* read in honor of the memory of the deceased and built a large *stupa* for him. When Yoshimoto was killed, he was bearing the priceless sword Samonji, as indeed he always did. Nobunaga kept it as a trophy (Ota, 2011, p. 92).

The Battle of Okehazama is considered to be one of the biggest turning points in Japanese history. On this day Nobunaga not only defeated a long term rival of his father and the Oda clan, but had done so heavily outnumbered. After the battle, the Imagawa clan had been severely weakened, and many warriors and minor warlords pledged loyalty to Nobunaga, who had gained much prestige from this battle, and many praised him for the cunning he used to defeat his opponent and the respect he showed his father's former rival.

### 3.2 Nobunaga's Ambition

In 1561 Saito Yoshitatsu, the leader of the Saito clan and ruler of Mino province and the man who killed Oda Nobunaga's father-in-law, died suddenly of illness and was succeeded by his nineteen year old son, Saito Tatsuoki. Tatsuoki was not nearly as effective of a ruler or strategist compared to his father or his grandfather. These turn of events were quite advantageous to Nobunaga, and that same year Nobunaga started his campaign in Mino to defeat the Saito clan. The campaign in Mino ended up taking Nobunaga seven years to win, even after convincing many Saito retainers to abandon their master and bribing several minor warlords in the Mino area to support the Oda clan, victory over the Saito clan was not quick, and in the end not as easy as Nobunaga had hoped. In 1567, the final battle against the Saito clan was the siege of Inabayama castle, after taking the castle Nobunaga renamed it and the surrounding town to Gifu (Ota, 2011, p. 114), and moved his base of operations to the recently conquered castle. Nobunaga derived the name Gifu from Mount Qi in China, where the Zhou dynasty is said to originate from. With this act Nobunaga announced his ambition to rule all of Japan, and he also created a personal emblem that read “Tenka Fubu”, which means “All the world by force of arms” or “Rule the empire by force” (Sansom, 1965, p. 278).

With the Saito clan defeated, Nobunaga was now the ruler of Mino and Owari province, which together formed the Nobi plain, one of the three great alluvial plains of Japan. With a strong base of operations Nobunaga began planning the economic development of his lands. His first step was to break local trade monopolies by declaring free markets in the leading towns. He started with the town of Kano, where he made a

notification which provided for free markets and open guilds and for penalties in case of dishonest practices. These were the preliminary steps towards freedom of trade, and since Kano was the castle town below his fortress of Gifu, and therefore under his full control, the prevention of closed markets was simple (Sansom, 1961, p 300).

### **3.3 The Siege of Mount Hiei and its Aftermath**

In 1570, Oda Nobunaga began his ten year long campaign against the Ikko-ikki and the Buddhist temples that supported them. At this time the Ikko-ikki had grown quite large and occupied many strongholds to the west of Kyoto, meaning that almost every road that led east towards Kyoto had to go through Ikko-ikki controlled land (Japanese Wiki Corpus). This gave the Ikko-ikki significant economic power, and if that was not reason enough for Nobunaga to want them destroyed, they also chose to ally themselves with nearly all of Nobunaga's enemies or rivals.

Of the many Buddhist temples and monasteries that opposed Nobunaga and supported the Ikko-ikki, were the Buddhist monasteries of Mount Hiei, located just northeast of Kyoto, including the famous temple at its summit, Enraku-ji. In 1571, Nobunaga launched his attack against the monasteries of Mount Hiei, bringing with him thirty thousand troops. The souhei (warrior monks) were no match for Nobunaga's army and were quickly defeated, Nobunaga then ordered his men to kill everyone on the mountain and burn down all four hundred or so temples. At least that is what some historians would like people to believe.

Mount Hiei is where Nobunaga's most brutal act is said to have happened, where he

supposedly ordered his troops to murder twenty thousand people and burn down the entire mountain and every building on it, not only killing the souhei, but also women and children, this act is fabled to have earned Nobunaga the title of Demon King. The many sources that refer to this event cannot agree upon the number of people killed or the number of temples burned down. According to Turnbull (2003), over twenty thousand men, women and children were killed, and over three hundred buildings burned down during the Siege of Mount Hiei (p. 20). Other written sources have vastly different numbers of people killed and levels of destruction caused compared to Turnbull. According to Walker, B (2015), the number of people killed by Nobunaga's forces during the siege of Mount Hiei to be three thousand monks (p. 106). In his book, Walker also quotes the Portuguese Jesuit Luís Fróis, who claims that Nobunaga ordered his men to burn down the four hundred or so temples and monasteries of Mount Hiei including the very famous Enryakuji complex at its summit. Fróis however claims that the number of people killed by Nobunaga's troops to be around fifteen hundred, eleven hundred and twenty of them being monks. It is unlikely that the numbers of people killed given by Fróis to be fully accurate since being a Jesuit there were not many warlords willing to accommodate him or others like him, meaning he may have been biased towards Nobunaga and not wanting to portray him in a negative way.

Since most written sources can't seem to agree upon the level of destruction caused to the many monasteries of Mount Hiei or the number of people killed by Nobunaga's forces, other sources must be sought to find out what happened during the Siege of Mount Hiei. An archaeological article was written by Kaneyasu Yasuaki in 1981, published in the *Shiga Archaeological Journal* volume 1. The article's title "Archaeological Re-

examination of Oda Nobunaga's Burning and Killing of Mount Hiei.". This report is in Japanese but it covers the East Pagoda, West Pagoda, and Yokokawa areas of Mount Hiei. In this report they found only the main hall and a few of the surrounding buildings to have clear evidence of destruction to the time. Burnt earth could be found in other places but they do not date to the time period. The report directly contradicts sources that claim the entire mountain and everything on it was burned to the ground. As a note, the report does not cover the Sakamoto area which is at the foot of the mountain, where most of the fighting likely took place. This means that it could be argued that the report does not contradict the claim that over twenty thousand people were killed, if they all died at the foot of the mountain; however, most sources claim that the massacre happened after the battle, when Nobunaga supposedly ordered his troops to burn down the mountain and everyone on it. It is also highly unlikely that the souhei of Mount Hiei numbered at twenty thousand strong, since that would make them stronger than most of the warlords in Japan at the time.

Regardless of the wide range of numbers killed given by multiple sources, no one denies that the battle occurred and that Nobunaga ordered the killing of women and children. The siege was meant to be a warning towards the Ikko-ikki and other Buddhist forces to not oppose Nobunaga for fear of his wrath. The exaggerated levels of destruction and the huge number of people supposedly killed all served to bring fear to Nobunaga's enemies, which is probably what Nobunaga wanted.

As to the title that Nobunaga is supposed to have earned from the Siege of Mount Hiei, the only source for this can be found in Fróis's annual letter to the Jesuit Company in 1573. According to rumors that Fróis heard, after the sacking of Enryaku-ji, Takeda

Shingen, the leader of the Takeda clan, sent a letter to Nobunaga, where Shingen addressed himself as Sramana Shingen. The title makes it seem that Shingen was speaking as the head of Enryaku-ji, which Shingen was not. In this letter Shingen declared that he was coming after Nobunaga and his forces to avenge the burning of Enryaku-ji. In response to this letter Nobunaga sent a letter back to Shingen, deciding to claim a title for himself. In this letter to Shingen, Nobunaga addresses himself as the Demon King of the Sixth Heaven, as a way to mock Shingen for claiming to be something he was not. There are no Japanese sources for this supposed correspondence between Nobunaga and Shingen, only a letter written by Fróis claiming that he heard this rumor. For some reason this title has stuck with Nobunaga and in many modern media, anime and video games, he is depicted as an evil tyrant or a ruthless warlord called Nobunaga the Demon King.

## **4. Nobunaga's Legacy**

### **4.1 Nobunaga's Death**

Oda Nobunaga did not get to see his dream of a unified Japan come true, for he was betrayed by one of his own retainers, Akechi Mitsuhide. In 1582 Nobunaga's campaign of uniting all of Japan under his banner was going quite well. Nobunaga was the most powerful warlord in all of Japan at this point, and the *de facto* leader of Japan with Kyoto, the capital itself, firmly under his control. Nobunaga was planning to reinforce Totoyomi Hideyoshi, one of his retainers, currently engaged in battle against the Mori clan to the west, and had ordered his generals to muster his armies and send them west, with Nobunaga himself planning to take charge of the expedition. Before Nobunaga left for the western front he decided to go to Kyoto to arrange matters there before departing. He arrived at Honno-jo temple in Kyoto to hold a tea ceremony, bringing only thirty servants with him. Nobunaga's son and heir, Oda Nobutada, was stationed nearby at the Nijo palace stronghold with a force of two thousand cavalry men, besides that Nobunaga was completely defenseless (Sansom, 1965, p. 307). There was no reason for Nobunaga to suspect he would be attacked by one of his own men in the safety of his own lands.

Mitsuhide had mustered his forces in the Tamba province with the perceived intent of sending his forces west along with Nobunaga's forces; however, he marched his thirteen thousand troops straight to Kyoto. Before dawn on June 21st, Mitsuhide's troops surrounded Honno-jo temple and attacked Nobunaga. Nobunaga had no way of fighting off thirteen thousand troops, he ordered his men to burn down the temple to buy him enough time to commit seppuku (ritual suicide). Nobunaga did not want to give his enemy the

satisfaction of claiming his head. The Honno-jo temple burned down and Nobunaga's body was never recovered. Once Mitsuhide believed that Nobunaga was dead, he turned his attention to Nobunaga's son, Nobutada, who was stationed nearby. Mitsuhide attacked the Nijo palace stronghold and defeated the forces stationed there. Nobutada followed in his father's steps and committed seppuku (Sansom, 1965, pp. 307-308).

Nobunaga and his son were now both dead, Mitsuhide had ended Nobunaga's dream of unifying all of Japan. Mitsuhide's reasons for betraying Nobunaga are unknown, but whatever the reason may have been, Mitsuhide's betrayal was short lived. Nobunaga's forces that had been sent to the western front returned to Kyoto under the command of Hideyoshi. On July 2nd, Mitsuhide was defeated in battle by Hideyoshi, thirteen days after his betrayal of Nobunaga, and was killed by bandits while fleeing after the battle (Walker, 2015, p. 110). Hideyoshi took control of Nobunaga's forces, and in 1590, less than ten years after the death of Nobunaga, he managed to finish what Nobunaga had started, and unified all of Japan.

#### **4.2 Nobunaga's Influence on Japan**

Nobunaga's influence during the Warring States period can not be underestimated, for he not only changed the way war was fought in Japan, but the economic policies he implemented during his reign provided a huge boost to the economy of the provinces under his control.

Nobunaga started to equip his ashigaru (foot soldiers) with matchlock firearms, which was frowned upon by his enemies as this would mean that the common soldier

equipped with a firearm could now contend with trained samurai, with this change Nobunaga had made it possible for samurai to be killed by peasants. Nobunaga introduced new patterns of warfare in which the ashigaru armed with a matchlock displaced the mounted man carrying a bow and a sword. According to Sanson (1961).

He paid special attention to the discipline of his troops, a matter of growing importance as hand-to-hand fighting was superseded by mass infantry movements.

He developed the ashigaru as a regular trained foot soldier, and he fostered esprit de corps among his men by dressing them in smart uniforms which made a strong impression upon spectators. (pp. 309-310)

Nobunaga was not a military genius, for he bungled some of his campaigns and at times used unnecessarily large numbers against weak adversaries. Nobunaga's strength came from his courage and iron will along with some luck in regards to the opportunities he was presented with, Nobunaga however took full advantage of those opportunities, for he had a restless energy of mind and body, and he was not bound by tradition like so many other warlords of his time (Sansom, 1965, p. 309).

Once Nobunaga had taken control of Owari and Mino province he started to implement a plan to increase the economic development of those provinces and boost their economy. Once Nobunaga's started conquering other provinces, he started implementing and spreading his economic policies there as well. Along with Nobunaga's economic growth he also controlled the Nobi plain that stood between Owari and Mino, this provided him with immense agricultural growth to go along with with his economic growth that far outstripped that of any of his opponents and played a key part in Nobunaga's dominance

against the other warlords.

Once Nobunaga had taken control of Kyoto in 1568, he started to develop new policies for civil administration. One of his first steps was to issue a set of elaborate currency regulations. Before this time a lot of trade was done with barter transactions using rice as a unit of exchange. Nobunaga set a fixed ratio of value between copper, silver and gold and also made counterfeit money forbidden. Nobunaga also started to abolish the barriers within the territories which he occupied, and repair of roads and bridges (Sansom, 1965, p. 301). Nobunaga issued special orders concerning the upkeep of roads and bridges in his own provinces, which were to be regularly inspected. The roads were made wide enough to allow both trade to flow freely through his lands and also allow his troops to move quickly on well maintained roads from place to place.

#### **4.3 How Nobunaga is Remembered**

Nobunaga is frequently portrayed in all manner of manga, anime, video games and cinema, as well as featuring in fiction. Many modern depictions of Nobunaga show him as a ruthless villain or even an unholy or demonic character. While Nobunaga is depicted in a few films and novels as a kind or even as a saintly character, these instances however are in the minority.

In the Onimusha game series Nobunaga is mortally wounded by an arrow during his great victory at Okehazama, but makes a deal with the demon king to return to life as a demon and conquer Japan on behalf of the demons.

Samurai Warriors has Nobunaga as one of many playable characters, voiced by

Juurouta Kosugi. He has a reputation for brutality and is called "The Demon King" as a *nom de guerre*. Also, the ruff of his armor tends to shed black feathers everywhere, he's using a black lightsaber as a weapon, and his victory line is literally an evil laugh.

However, despite his incredibly sinister appearance, the series as a whole tends to paint him as more of a ruthless pragmatist willing to do whatever it takes to unite Japan and bring about peace than a genuinely evil bastard, mirroring the complex re-evaluation he has begun to receive in modern times. Nobunaga further seems to get less evil with each incarnation, to the point that Magoichi Saika, a man who loathes him with a passion, finds the rule of Nobunaga preferable to the chaos that happened after his death. Heck, in the first installment of the crossover, Nobunaga is practically the protagonist, uniting humanity behind him into a single Resistance Army to defeat the Serpent King.

In *Sakura Wars: So Long, My Love*, Nobunaga appears as the immortal demon lord antagonist.

*Nioh* establishes Nobunaga as a major antagonist alongside Edward Kelley, as the opening CG cinematic sets the tone for the game. Although the events are set before the Battle of Sekigahara, years after Nobunaga has died, Kelley resurrects him near the climax of the story, hoping to reignite civil war with the help of the most bloodthirsty, brutal warlord Japan has ever seen. However, Nobunaga is incensed he's back from the dead, calling out Kelley for doing so, as he isn't interested in forcing the land through another conflict to rebuild something whose time is past, returning to the afterlife immediately. *Nioh 2*, on the other hand, chronicles Nobunaga during his younger days.

Admiral Akainu from *One Piece* has a VERY similar personality and is method-

wise to Nobunaga. He is even paired with two other admirals who fit the Hideyoshi (Kizaru) and Ieyasu (Aokiji) characters.

Nobunaga is a major antagonist in *Samurai Deeper Kyo*. Voiced by Shou Hayami, who even voices Akechi Mitsuhide's, to top it off.

Most depictions of Nobunaga are negative or at the very least depict him in a more historically neutral way. This should not come as a shock since a lot of what Nobunaga did was not only contrary to accepted tradition in Japan but in some cases quite ruthless and brutal. There is no denying that Nobunaga performed many heinous acts but most people lack the context in which those acts were performed and only focus on what is most shocking to hear and simplest to remember. When people talk about Nobunaga's reputation they tend to focus on a few select events in his life. For example how he murdered his younger brother and had his uncle commit suicide when he rose to power as the head of the Oda clan, leaving out the rebellion organized by his younger brother and the assassination plot of his uncle. People hear of the way he treated his enemies by showing them no respect or mercy, ignoring the way he treated Imagawa Yoshimoto, his father's long standing rival, by erecting a burial mound for him and having one thousand *sutras* read in honor of the memory of the deceased from the Battle of Okehazama. Seemingly the worst act committed by Nobunaga, in most people's eyes, is the alleged slaughter of twenty thousand men, women and children during the Siege of Mount Hiei. The many sources that describe the event that transpired during the Siege of Hiei cant seem to agree on the numbers of deaths or the levels of destruction inflicted on the monasteries. With the archaeological report, made by Yasuaki Kaneyasu, seeming to contradict the exaggerated reports of the siege, it

begs the question of whether Nobunaga's most heinous act was, at the very least, not as brutal as previously believed. Unfortunately Nobunaga did not help his reputation by allegedly claiming a fictitious title for himself, as the Demon King of The Sixth Heaven. Nobunaga also helped to spread his negative reputation by following up every victory in the field by a merciless pursuit and slaughter of fugitives (Sansom, 1961, p. 310).

Nobunaga can be described as the first Japanese europhile, for he not only modernized his army with Portuguese matchlock firearms, he would also wear European clothes on occasion and collect pieces of western art as well as arms and armor (New World Encyclopedia, para. 45). Nobunaga never converted to Christianity but he became the patron of many Jesuit missionaries and supported the establishment of a Christian church in Kyoto, the first Christian church in Japan. Nobunaga's friendship with the Jesuits may have simply been a way to ensure the Portuguese ships would keep arriving and trading in his ports, or he may have wanted to use the Jesuits to weaken the Buddhist hold in Japan, since the Ikko-ikki and the Buddhist temples and monasteries were among his most persistent enemies, which Nobunaga ended up spending over ten years defeating. Nobunaga's war against the Buddhist and his friendship with the Jesuits is also something that would form people's opinion of him depending on what religion they follow (Modern Tokyo Times, 2015, para 10).

No matter where people stand on Nobunaga's character, on his vices or his virtues, no one can deny that he is one of the most influential man in Japanese history and without Nobunaga it would be impossible to know how the Warring States period would have ended up looking like, or how long the war would have lasted, or even how many more

people would have died as a result of it. So it would be fair to say that a lot of people see Nobunaga as a ruthless but necessary evil that paved the way for those who came after him to unite the country once more after a long and bloody war.

## **Conclusion**

Simply calling Oda Nobunaga an evil tyrant or a ruthless dictator is a gross oversimplification of a man who had such a massive impact on one of the most important periods in Japanese history. There is no denying that Nobunaga killed quite a lot of people and that he would also chase down his defeated enemies and kill them, he showed no mercy to his enemies, he was a ruthless man in a ruthless age. One would argue though that thanks to Nobunaga's quick success in conquering a large portion of Japan within his lifetime it meant that fewer people died overall during the Warring States period.

Nobunaga's legacy should not be boiled down to his over exaggerated acts of brutality and his supposed self proclaimed title of Demon King, completely ignoring the impact of his economic policies and the sweeping changes he made to Japanese warfare, along with breaking the secular power of the Buddhist temples and monasteries. Nobunaga was not a good man but a necessary one, for he broke the systems of old and built the foundations that his successors would use to bring an end to the constant fighting.

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