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THE UNIFICATION OF JAPAN:

An Analysis of the Roles Played by
Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi,
and Tokugawa Ieyasu from 1559 - 1614

An Abstract of

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The roles and character of the three individuals who contributed most to the unification of Japan are examined in this thesis. Japanese refer to the period from 1477 to 1600 as the "Sengoku Jidai" or the age of the country at war. At the beginning of this era Japan was in a chaotic condition. Anarchy, civil strife, and almost constant warfare prevailed. The emperors possessed little political power and were so poor that one was reduced to peddling samples of his calligraphy. Traditionally, control of the country lay in the hands of an hereditary line of shogun, or great generals, who ruled in the emperor's name. By 1477, however, the Ashikaga family, who were then shogun, had little power. Hundreds of minor barons ruled small fiefs and engaged in endless struggles with their neighbors and marauding bandits. By the end of the sixteenth century all of Japan was unified under one powerful shogun, and law and order had been restored to the country.

Beginning in 1560 Oda Nobunaga, the first of the three protagonists, began a military campaign that swept him into control over the emperor and a major portion of Japan. After his death in 1582, his most prominent general, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, took control and proceeded to conquer all of Japan and even attempted to subjugate Korea as well. After Hideyoshi's death in 1598, Tokugawa Ieyasu, a powerful lord who had assisted both Nobunaga and Hideyoshi in their campaigns, took control and proceeded to establish his family as hereditary shogun. The Tokugawa Shogunate ruled Japan

until the middle of the nineteenth century.

During the lives of these three great men, Japan had its first contact with western civilization. Portuguese merchants and priests carried out extensive trade and missionary activity during the entire period of unification. Their influence, through the introduction of firearms and Christianity, added further interest to the period.

This thesis analyzes the contribution of each of the three great men who unified Japan. The personality of each one is examined particularly in their reaction to similar circumstances such as the influence of Christianity or the surrender of an important rival. Particular emphasis is given to the interaction of the three individuals because it is difficult to conceive of any one of them accomplishing unification singlehandedly.