

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF THE SENGOKU ERA: RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES OF OTOMO AND IKKO-IKKI CLANS IN THE VIDEO GAME TOTAL WAR: SHOGUN 2

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis narasi sejarah alternatif dalam klan Otomo dan Ikko-Ikki pada permainan Total War: Shogun 2, dengan fokus pada pembentukan identitas sosial serta interaksi melalui peran agama. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana agama berperan dalam membentuk identitas sosial, serta bagaimana narasi permainan merepresentasikan atau menyederhanakan interaksi politik-agama yang kompleks di era Sengoku. Menggunakan metode analisis konten, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa perbedaan agama antara klan Otomo (Kristen) dan Ikko-Ikki (Buddha Ikko-shu) dengan klan mayoritas yang beragama Shinto-Buddha menciptakan dinamika konflik yang signifikan. Dalam permainan, pemain yang memilih klan Otomo atau Ikko-Ikki harus menghadapi tantangan interaksi dengan klan mayoritas, memberikan perspektif baru terhadap narasi sejarah dominan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman bermain dengan perspektif agama minoritas tidak hanya memperkaya narasi tetapi juga menciptakan pengalaman strategis yang lebih kompleks dan menarik.

Kata kunci: *Clan Ikko-Ikki; clan Otomo; identitas sosial; interaksi politik-agama; sejarah alternatif*

Abstract

This study analyses the alternative historical narratives of the Otomo and Ikko-Ikki clans in the game Total War: Shogun 2, focusing on the formation of social identity and interaction through the role of religion. The research aims to discover how religion shape's social identity and how the game's narrative reflects or simplifies the complex political-religious interactions of the Sengoku era. Using content analysis, the study finds that the religious differences between the Otomo clan (Christian) and the Ikko-Ikki clan (Ikko-shu Buddhist) and the majority Shinto-Buddhist clans create significant conflict dynamics. In the game, players who choose the Otomo or Ikko-Ikki clans face unique challenges in interacting with the majority clans, providing a different perspective on dominant historical narratives. The findings suggest that playing from the perspective of religious minority clans enriches the narrative and offers a more complex and engaging strategic experience.

Keywords: *Alternative history; Ikko-Ikki clan; Otomo clan; political-religious interactions; social identity*

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Introduction

The Sengoku Era (1467–1603) was a period of intense civil war and conflict among various Japanese clans. Historians widely agree (Berry, 1994; Chen, 2020; Sansom, 1961) that the origins of this prolonged unrest can be traced back to the Onin War (1467–1477), which lasted for eleven years. According to Sansom (Sansom, 1961), the war arose immediately from a quarrel between angry warlords, but this was only a spark which set fire to a mass of inflammable material. Tsunoda (Tsunoda, 2020) observed that the Onin War served as a catalyst for numerous clans to seize the chance to break away from the faltering central government, resulting in widespread decentralization. Cartwright (Cartwright, 2019) states that the Ashikaga Shogunate served as the central government of Japan at the onset of the Sengoku era. While the Shogunate functioned as the political nucleus, much of the land was controlled by semi-autonomous warlords, known as daimyo. These daimyo acted as both regional leaders and clan heads, exercising authority over their respective territories. Following the outbreak of the Onin War, many daimyo asserted their independence, engaging in conflicts either to expand their domains or to defend them from rival factions.

During the Sengoku Era, conflicts were not limited to power struggles among warlords and clans but also extended to ideological and religious differences. The majority of clans adhered to Shinto-Buddhism, and the divergence in cultural and religious beliefs introduced new challenges. These differences emphasized the uniqueness of each clan, rendering certain beliefs unfamiliar and often unacceptable to the majority. One significant conflict emerged from the Ikko-Ikki, or "single-minded uprisings". Tsang (Tsang, 2007) describes the Ikko-Ikki as a coalition of individuals united by their devotion to a sect that practiced the worship of Amida, a Buddha who vowed to save all beings by granting them rebirth in his Pure Land (*Jodo Shinshu*). Similarly, Remington (Remington, 2021) characterizes the Ikko-Ikki as a rebellion rooted in complex religious dynamics, functioning as a semi-autonomous and self-governing movement. This structure enabled the group to mobilize large numbers of followers into highly effective fighting forces. In addition to Ikko-Ikki, the introduction of Christianity in Japan during the 15th century also posed significant challenges, particularly in Kyushu, where the faith first took root. Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (1506-1552) introduced Christianity in 1549 (Rahwati, 2023), which quickly gained prominence in the region. Some clans, such as the Otomo clan, converted to Christianity. The clan's leader, Otomo Sorin, adopted the Christian faith and was baptized under the name Francisco. Strathern (Strathern, 2020) states that Otomo's conversion is believed to have been politically motivated rather than purely religious. This religious shift led to the establishment of Christian institutions and churches within Otomo's domain, alongside the destruction of numerous Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. These acts of iconoclasm likely stemmed from Sorin's policies and were initiated even before his formal conversion to Christianity.

With the advancement of technology, historical narratives such as those from the Sengoku period are no longer confined to books; they are increasingly accessible through digital media, including films and video games. While video games are primarily designed for entertainment and leisure, they often carry deeper meanings and purposes, depending on the theme and narrative presented. This concept is highlighted by Eric Zimmerman (Zimmerman, 2008), who introduced the idea of *Gaming Literacy*, where video games become a literacy system through their rules, the structure of human interaction within the gameplay, and the creation of meaning through the game's design. One notable example of a video game that incorporates historical narratives, particularly from the Sengoku period, is *Total War: Shogun 2*. This game is a continuation of the previous *Total War* series, specifically *Total War: Shogun*, developed by *Creative Assembly* and published by *SEGA*. The *Total War* series has explored various historical themes, such as *Empire: Total War* (focused on the Seven Years' War and the

American Revolution) and *Napoleon: Total War* (centered on the Napoleonic Wars). Additionally, the series has ventured into fictional settings, as seen in the *Total War: Warhammer* series. As previously discussed, *Shogun 2* focuses on the Sengoku period, addressing the political and religious complexities of the era. We have chosen this game as the subject of study due to extensive personal experience, having played and completed the game multiple times, including all 12 playable clans available within the game.

In this article, we propose a different approach by using *Shogun 2* as a primary data source. *Shogun 2* allows players to explore the complex relationships between religion and power during the Sengoku period. Moreover, the game presents historical events and actively engages players in its narrative. Players can choose from 12 clans (10 available by default, while Otomo, Ikko-Ikki, and Hattori clans require separate purchases). These clans represent historically significant factions from the Sengoku era, each with substantial historical records, such as the Oda, Tokugawa, and Date clans. Once a clan is selected, players are tasked with capturing Kyoto and controlling specific regions around their starting territory. Players face off against AI-controlled opponents, which operate minor clans (non-playable factions) and major clans (the remaining 11 playable factions not chosen by the player). Each clan comes with unique strengths and weaknesses, as well as distinct characteristics—for instance, the Otomo clan's Christian faith and the Ikko-Ikki clan's adherence to *Jodo Shinshu* Buddhism.

Three prior studies have explored related themes, albeit with different focuses. Neves et al., (Neves et al., 2020) investigated *Total War: Shogun 2* as a case study for applying the contract agency model, highlighting literacy practices within the game. Remington (Remington, 2021) examined the fall of the Ikko-Ikki to Oda Nobunaga, marking a significant step in his quest to unify Japan. Rahwati (Rahwati, 2023) analyzed Tsushima Yuko's novel *Jakka Dofuni Umi no Kioku no Monogatari* (2016), which addresses the struggles of marginalized groups, including the Christian community persecuted under the Edo government (1603–1867). However, these studies primarily focused on religious themes or examined the game itself without delving into the interplay between religious narratives. The exploration of the Otomo clan's Christian faith and the Ikko-Ikki's Jodo-Shinshu Buddhist sect, as depicted in *Total War: Shogun 2*, represents what the authors believe to be the first study of its kind.

Method and Theories

In this study, the authors utilize *Total War: Shogun 2* as the primary data source, focusing exclusively on the Otomo and Ikko-Ikki clans in campaign mode. The research employs a descriptive-analytical method (Loeb et al., 2017) to explore the religious narratives presented in the game. This method aims to characterize the game world or phenomenon by identifying patterns within the data, addressing questions related to who, what, where, when, and to what extent. Descriptive analysis simplifies data and can serve as a standalone research output, particularly when it identifies phenomena or patterns in data that have not been previously recognized. To apply this method, the first step involves collecting data by identifying elements within *Total War: Shogun 2* that represent religious aspects and the dynamics of the Sengoku era. This includes analyzing gameplay features such as missions, diplomatic mechanics, and conflicts influenced by cultural and religious themes. The second step entails describing the data by outlining how religion is depicted in the gameplay narrative, including an examination of elements like clan descriptions, characters, and gameplay mechanics. Finally, the third step focuses on analyzing the data using theoretical frameworks to explore identity representation, cultural dynamics, and political-religious interactions. This step also examines how the game constructs representations of cultural and religious diversity within the contact zones of Sengoku-era Japan.

The theoretical framework applied in this study is Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Islam (Islam, 2014), SIT is a foundational social psychological theory that explains intergroup conflict as stemming from group-based self-definitions. SIT provides a lens to understand how players construct their identity within *Shogun 2* by choosing among the 12 playable clans based on their individual perspectives. Each clan possesses unique weaknesses, strengths, strategies, and features, which reflect religious, political, and cultural identities, represented through the game's mechanics. Vinney (Vinney, 2024) further explains that socially identifying with a group prompts individuals to act in alignment with the perceived behaviors of that group. This concept resonates with the game's narrative, where clans adhering to Shinto-Buddhism display distrust or hostility towards clans following different religions, such as *Jodo-Shinshu* or Christianity. In gameplay, this dynamic creates significant challenges for players choosing the Otomo or Ikko-Ikki clans. These clans face difficulties in forging alliances, as other clans perceive them as dishonorable and untrustworthy. Consequently, players must adapt to these challenges by employing unique strategies and plans, thereby deepening the strategic complexity and narrative immersion of the game.

To enrich this study, we also incorporate the *contact zone* theory by Mary Louise Pratt (Pratt, 1991). Pratt defines the contact zone as spaces where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today." This theory is particularly relevant in examining how *Total War: Shogun 2* portrays interactions between clans with differing religious affiliations, offering players opportunities to observe or even engage in dynamic cultural and religious conflicts. Bizzell (Bizzell, 1994) further emphasizes that focusing on the contact zone in literary studies involves integrating all material relevant to the struggles occurring within these spaces. This perspective is instrumental in identifying political-religious tensions within the game, particularly as they manifest in the Otomo and Ikko-Ikki clans. Using the contact zone theory, we analyse how traditional Japanese cultural norms encounter Christian influences within the Otomo clan and examine the complex conflicts among Buddhist factions, including the Ikko-Ikki's clashes with other Buddhist-aligned clans.

The integration of descriptive-analytical methods with social identity and contact zone theories enables a comprehensive exploration of cultural, political, and religious representations in *Total War: Shogun 2*. The descriptive-analytical methods provide a foundation for detailed data collection and categorization, while the theories offer a conceptual framework to analyse the interplay between identity, cultural and religious interactions, and gameplay mechanics. This combination allows for a nuanced understanding of how these elements converge within the game's narrative and structure.

Findings and Discussions

In *Total War: Shogun 2*, players have the option to choose from 12 major clans, each with distinct characteristics, advantages, and challenges. Beyond these 12 clans, numerous minor clans exist, with which players can engage in alliances, trade, or conflict. The 12 playable clans include Date, Uesugi, Hojo, Takeda, Tokugawa, Oda, Ikko-Ikki, Hattori, Mori, Chosokabe, Otomo, and Shimazu. Their geographical locations vary, with clans such as Hojo, Takeda, Tokugawa, Oda, Ikko-Ikki, and Hattori centered in the middle of Honshu Island. Uesugi and Date are located in the northern region, Mori in the Chugoku area, Chosokabe on Shikoku Island, and Otomo and Shimazu in Kyushu. These clans represent prominent historical entities with significant military success or regional influence during the Sengoku period. For instance, the Date clan dominated the northern territories, Chosokabe held substantial sway

over Shikoku, and Takeda established a powerful foothold in the Chubu region. However, not all clans start with strategic advantages. For example, the Tokugawa clan begins as a vassal to the Imagawa clan, limiting its initial diplomatic and territorial opportunities. Similarly, the Hattori clan faces challenges due to its reliance on ninja training programs (*Kisho* Training), which significantly increase army upkeep costs. Religious divergence further complicates gameplay for certain clans. Both Ikko-Ikki and Otomo follow religions—Jodo-Shinshu Buddhism and Christianity, respectively—that differ from the Shinto-Buddhist majority. This religious disparity impacts diplomacy and increases the difficulty of forging alliances, adding an additional layer of complexity to their campaigns.

In the campaign mode of *Total War: Shogun 2*, players begin by selecting a clan they wish to play. Upon selection, the game provides an introductory sequence that outlines the identity and historical context of the chosen clan. This introduction serves as a crucial element for players seeking to understand the clan's unique characteristics and background. Following this, the narrator pans the camera over the clan's starting provinces, providing an overview of the geographical setting, nearby allies and enemies, and a brief mention of suggested strategies for gameplay. Once the introduction concludes, players are left to navigate the campaign independently. Despite variations in starting positions and clan features, the objectives remain consistent across all clans: players must conquer nearby regions, seize control of Kyoto from the Ashikaga Shogunate, and capture a specified number of provinces. The required number of provinces for victory depends on the chosen difficulty level—25 for easy, 50 for normal, and 75 for hard—before the year 1575 (the game starts in 1545).

a. Representation in Social Identity

1) Ikko-Ikki

Ikko-Ikki, which translates to "leagues of Honganji sect members" (Tsang, 2007), represents a branch of Buddhist belief rooted in the teachings of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, also known as True Pure Land Buddhism. This sect teaches that salvation is attainable solely through devotion to Amida Buddha, who vowed to guide all sentient beings to rebirth in his Pure Land. The term "Honganji" refers to both the central temple of the *Jodo Shinshu* sect and its broader religious organization (Remington, 2021). The term "Ikko-Ikki" specifically describes confederations of warrior-followers who served as the military arm of the Honganji. According to Turnbull (Turnbull, 2003), the movement gained momentum when Rennyo (1415-1499), the leader of the Honganji sect in Kyoto, fled to Kaga Province. Under his leadership, the Honganji sect solidified its influence and eventually rose to the status of *shugo*, or provincial lords. By 1521, the Ashikaga Shogunate began formally recognizing the Honganji's governance, sending official documents to their headquarters outside Kyoto, effectively legitimizing their rule over the province (Remington, 2021). As Rennyo re-established the Honganji headquarters, his followers quickly became involved in the ongoing power struggles among various samurai clans and leaders in Kaga Province. This volatile situation culminated in the 1488 conflict, when the Ikko-Ikki rose against samurai rule. For the first time in Japanese history, a province was governed by a group that was neither courtiers nor samurai (Turnbull, 2003). Paramore (Paramore, 2017) characterizes the Ikko-Ikki as a "real alternate order," opposing the traditional Bakufu and *daimyo* governmental systems. While numerous Honganji temples emerged during this period, Tsang (Tsang, 2007) notes that these temples and their associated *jinaicho* (temple towns) operated autonomously. They were self-administering and self-policing entities, owing no allegiance to local samurai or *daimyo* lords. Instead, they recognized only the authority of the Honganji sect.

In the game, unlike most clans that start with only one province, the Ikko-Ikki begin with control over two provinces, Kaga and Echizen. Due to their distinct religious affiliation, most clans do not recognize the Ikko-Ikki as a legitimate clan but rather as a rebellious faction.

This perception leads to hostility from many factions, making alliances and trade agreements difficult to secure. Additionally, Ikko-Ikki generals begin the campaign with low honor, reflecting the widespread mistrust and disdain other clans hold for them. As a result, players must adopt a more strategic and militaristic approach, focusing on building their own military power while avoiding reliance on diplomacy. Simultaneously, players are encouraged to spread the Ikko faith, influencing surrounding regions and potentially turning their populations to support the Ikko-Ikki cause. As with other clans in the game, the Ikko-Ikki can recruit specialized agents to support their cause. For the Ikko-Ikki, this role is fulfilled by monks who are instrumental in spreading the influence of the Ikko faith. While the monks of other clans can only incite rebellion within enemy territories, Ikko monks possess a unique ability: they can not only provoke uprisings but also convert a rebelling region directly into Ikko-Ikki territory. This capability allows the player to eliminate rival clans and gain territories without engaging in military conflict, bypassing the need for direct warfare. The spread of Ikko faith through these monks can also affect neighboring regions, influencing their populations and sowing dislike among rival clans. However, this strategy comes with its own risks, as the growing influence of the Ikko faith often provokes hostility from other clans. The Ikko-Ikki's unconventional approach to expansion—using religion as a tool for territorial gain—frequently results in multiple clans declaring war on them. This situation underscores the importance of the previously mentioned strategy: focusing on building strong military power to withstand and counter these inevitable attacks while continuing to expand influence through religious means.

The Ikko-Ikki's distinctiveness extends to their military forces, which reflect their self-governing, religiously driven nature. Their army composition diverges significantly from other clans in the game. Rather than relying heavily on samurai units, the Ikko-Ikki favor *ashigaru* (foot soldiers) and *souhei* (priest soldiers or warrior monks), while could also recruit *ronin* units, a much preferable albeit weaker than samurai units. This preference aligns with their grassroots origins as a movement of commoners rather than traditional samurai leadership. *Ashigaru* units are available to all clans in the game and are widely valued for their affordability and utility. These units are inexpensive to recruit and maintain, making them a cost-effective option for bolstering armies. Despite their low cost, *ashigaru* are particularly effective against cavalry and in defensive roles, such as holding castles or strongholds. However, in the Ikko-Ikki clan, *ashigaru* units are distinctively superior to their counterparts. They are larger in number and enjoy a morale boost, making them more resilient and dependable in battle. The Ikko-Ikki clan has a distinct military advantage in *Total War: Shogun 2* through its access to *Loan Sword Ashigaru*, a unique unit that helps compensate for their lack of traditional samurai troops. While weaker than the more elite *Katana Samurai* available to other clans, the *Loan Sword Ashigaru* offers a powerful and cost-effective alternative. This unit becomes available much earlier in the campaign, allowing players to field competent melee units without the economic strain associated with samurai. This unique enhancement to their *ashigaru* units emphasizes the Ikko-Ikki's reliance on massed ranks of commoner soldiers and symbolizes their collective spirit, a hallmark of their religious and socio-political ideology. These differences give the Ikko-Ikki a unique playstyle that distinguishes them from the other clans in *Total War: Shogun 2*.

2) Otomo

The introduction of Christianity to Japan is often attributed to Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (1506–1552), who arrived in 1549. Historians (Cohen, 2013; Morris, 2018; Rahwati, 2023) agree that Xavier's mission marked the start of Christianity's spread in Japan. Upon landing in Kagoshima, Xavier was struck by the Japanese people, whom he described as “the joy of his heart.” Within a short time, he baptized several hundred Japanese converts (Višnjić Žižović, 2024). Alongside the gospel, missionaries also brought new technologies, most

notably firearms, which were novel to the Japanese at the time. One of Christianity's prominent early Japanese adopters was Otomo Yoshihige (later Sorin, baptized as Francisco; 1530–1587), the head of the Otomo clan in Bungo Province. In 1551, Sorin converted to Christianity, leading many of his followers to do the same. This conversion was not purely spiritual; it also carried significant political and strategic motivations. According to *The Cambridge History of Japan* (McClain, 1991), Sorin sought to solidify his power and expand his influence by forging alliances with foreign powers, particularly the Portuguese. Portuguese traders had visited Bungo as early as 1544 or 1545, and Sorin leveraged these connections to strengthen his domain. Sorin's leadership transformed Bungo Province into a hub of Christian activity and foreign trade. He established hospitals and orphanages and made Funai, a major town in Bungo, the headquarters of Christian missions in Japan. His connections extended beyond Japan, as Otomo engaged in trade with Chinese merchants and even established diplomatic relations with Cambodia. In a notable exchange, the King of Cambodia sent an elephant to Funai as a diplomatic gift. However, the Shimazu clan, rivals in Kyushu, intercepted the elephant, and its fate remains unknown (Kage, 2015). Through his advocacy of Christianity and active diplomacy, Sorin's influence grew significantly, enabling him to dominate northern Kyushu after years of conflict with the Mori clan. His prominence reached the Muromachi *bakufu*, where his support for the Jesuits and his political maneuvers earned him honors and titles from the shogunate (McClain, 1991).

In *Total War: Shogun 2*, the Otomo clan offers a unique gameplay experience similar to the Ikko-Ikki clan, as both start with two provinces instead of one. Otomo's starting provinces are Bungo and Buzen, situated in northeastern Kyushu. Unlike the Ikko-Ikki, whom most clans dismiss as rebels, the Otomo are recognized as a legitimate clan, albeit one with a distinct faith and cultural identity. This distinction allows for greater flexibility in strategies, as players can choose between military expansion or leveraging diplomatic ties with foreign powers like the Portuguese. The Otomo's starting advantage lies in their possession of the *Nanban* Trade Port, a feature unavailable to other clans at the game's onset. While other clans may eventually gain access to such ports later in the campaign, Otomo's immediate access allows for early diplomatic and economic benefits. Players can use the port to maintain relations with the Portuguese, ensuring steady trade income and the possibility of acquiring firearms and other Western technologies. However, this also makes the Otomo an early target for hostile clans, necessitating a balance between economic growth and military defense, particularly in safeguarding Bungo and Buzen. Another distinguishing feature of the Otomo is their agents. Instead of Buddhist monks, Otomo recruits' Christian missionaries. These missionaries are instrumental in spreading Christianity, allowing the clan to convert provinces more rapidly. Similar to Ikko-Ikki's monks, Otomo's missionaries can instigate rebellions in enemy regions. However, these rebellions differ in that the rebels are Christian, enabling Otomo to reclaim the territory easily once the rebellion has succeeded. This tactic can effectively disrupt enemy clans without direct military confrontation, although it comes at a high cost due to the missionaries' significant action expenses. Despite these challenges, the combination of early access to *Nanban* trade and the unique abilities of missionaries provides the Otomo with a strong foundation. Players must strike a careful balance between expanding their influence diplomatically and militarily while maintaining a robust economy to fund their strategies.

The Otomo clan's military strategy in *Total War: Shogun 2* sets it apart from other clans, primarily due to its access to matchlock units right from the start of the campaign, thanks to the *Nanban* Trade Port. This advanced technology allows Otomo to recruit *Imported Matchlock Ashigaru*, which are significantly more powerful than traditional *ashigaru* armed with bows or yari (spears). Matchlocks deliver devastating firepower that can pierce through armor with ease, making them a formidable force against both infantry and cavalry. However, this comes with trade-offs, as matchlock units have shorter range compared to bow units and are highly

vulnerable in melee combat. Otomo's reliance on matchlock units also influences its unit composition in the mid to late game. The clan has access to superior matchlock troops, such as *Portuguese Tercos* and *Otomo Matchlock Samurai*, which boast enhanced accuracy, reload speed, and morale compared to similar units in other clans. These units further cement the Otomo's dominance in ranged combat, making them particularly lethal in defensive engagements or well-coordinated ambushes. A notable drawback for the Otomo clan is its inability to recruit warrior monk units, which are versatile and powerful melee troops available to other factions. This limitation forces Otomo players to rely heavily on their ranged arsenal and cavalry. The *Otomo Donderbuss Cavalry*, armed with shotgun-like matchlocks, provides a unique counterbalance to this limitation. These units are devastating in close-range combat, capable of breaking enemy formations with a single volley. While expensive, they can turn the tide of battle when used strategically. The Otomo's emphasis on gunpowder units and its lack of warrior monks reflects the clan's dedication to Christianity, both narratively and mechanically. These distinctions create a unique playstyle centered around range superiority and strategic positioning, offering a fresh tactical experience for players who choose the Otomo clan.

b. Contact Zone and Conflict Interactions

As Pratt (Pratt, 1991) describes, the contact zone is a space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with one another, often resulting in negotiation and transformation. This concept is reflected in *Total War: Shogun 2*, where various cultural and political dynamics interact within the game's design. The gameplay simulates interconnected spaces that facilitate alliances, trade, and conflicts, showcasing how clans navigate relationships shaped by their distinct identities and regional control. In the Sengoku era, clans that break away from central authority construct their own identities within their territories while also encountering and shaping the identities of others. Players must strategically decide whether these clans serve as allies or obstacles. This dynamic is particularly evident in the interactions between the Ikko-Ikki and Otomo clans, whose differences in culture and religion further complicate the contact zones, reflecting both historical tensions and opportunities for engagement.

1) Ikko-Ikki

In the context of the Ikko-Ikki clan, their adherence to a distinct religious belief, divergent from that of most other clans in the game, positions them as a religious rebellion, challenging the established authority of samurai rule. This dynamic aligns with historical interpretations of the Ikko-Ikki as a militant Buddhist sect driven by religious fervor and mass uprisings, which attracted followers to their cause (Paramore, 2017; Turnbull, 2003). From a gameplay perspective, while the Ikko-Ikki campaign begins without immediate enemies, their radical Buddhist ideology eventually provokes conflict with numerous clans. This represents the “clash” element inherent in contact zones, as players must inevitably confront these adversaries. To navigate this, players can capitalize on the Ikko-Ikki's unique military strengths, such as their robust *ashigaru* units and the strategic use of Ikko monks, who can incite revolts in enemy territories, weakening opponents before direct combat ensues. This friction reflects the historical tension between the Ikko-Ikki's deep-rooted faith in *Jodo Shinshu* Buddhism and the territorial ambitions of neighboring clans. The Ikko-Ikki's rejection of samurai rule and their efforts to spread their religious influence, when “meet”, foster widespread distrust and hostility from other clans, creating significant diplomatic challenges for players. Consequently, the campaign forces players to confront the isolation imposed by the Ikko-Ikki's ideological stance while leveraging their unique mechanics to sustain and expand their domain. This also represents the “grapple” element in contact zone, as players have to endure with themselves.

2) Otomo

The Otomo clan's alignment with Christianity situates them within a distinct cultural and religious contact zone, offering a unique gameplay experience that parallels the Ikko-Ikki clan but with a markedly different approach. Unlike the Ikko-Ikki, who isolate themselves from other clans due to their radical Buddhist ideology, the Otomo clan actively leverages their alliance with Portuguese traders to secure firearms and wealth. This partnership represents the "meeting" aspect of the contact zone, showcasing the interaction between Christianity and traditional Japanese culture. Through trade with the Portuguese, players can utilize *Nanban Trade Ports* early in the campaign to access advanced weaponry, such as matchlock units, which provide a significant tactical advantage in combat. This demonstrates how the Otomo clan "grapples" with the dynamics of the contact zone, balancing traditional Japanese political strategies with the influence of foreign religion and technology. Similar to the Ikko-Ikki's use of monks, the Otomo clan can deploy Christian missionaries to spread their faith, reshaping the cultural and religious identity of provinces. This action, however, leads to inevitable "clashes" with other clans that maintain their devotion to Shinto-Buddhism, highlighting the tension between Otomo's embrace of foreign ideology and the prevailing cultural norms of Sengoku-era Japan. This dynamic compels players to navigate both military and cultural conflicts while leveraging the unique advantages of the Otomo clan's faith and foreign alliances.

c. The Difference with the Dominant History

The Sengoku era is referred to as the "glorious dark age," marked by relentless conflicts among warlords vying for supremacy across Japan (Tsunoda, 2020). This era revolved around military and political maneuvers aimed at consolidating power, expanding territorial control, and asserting dominance. Prominent figures like Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) exemplified this drive for unification, culminating in Tokugawa's successful establishment of peace and the subsequent Edo period, which lasted for 265 years (Sansom, 1961). While military and political strategies dominate historical narratives of the Sengoku era, other aspects, such as religious conflict and cultural diversity, are often overlooked or briefly mentioned. For instance, the Ikko-Ikki's Buddhist uprisings are frequently framed as obstacles to Nobunaga's unification efforts rather than as independent movements rooted in religious and social reform (Remington, 2021). Similarly, the Otomo clan's embrace of Christianity and its influence on Kyushu Island remain peripheral in broader Sengoku-era studies, largely due to the clan's geographical distance from Kyoto, the era's political and cultural center. The Christian influence initiated by Otomo Sorin faded after his death, with Christian movements eventually being suppressed, underscoring their limited historical footprint (Sansom, 1961).

In *Shogun 2*, clans and their own identities—particularly religion and culture—are positioned as integral elements, emphasizing a reinterpretation of historical dynamics where these factors are essential to political and military strategies. This is particularly evident in the cases of the Ikko-Ikki and Otomo clans, which centralize themselves as champions of their respective beliefs, spreading influences that diverge from the Shinto-Buddhism majority. Unlike other clans, which are primarily focused on asserting dominance and leveraging their military prowess to unite Japan, Ikko-Ikki and Otomo bring a unique approach that intertwines faith and culture into their strategies. The game's broader emphasis on samurai warfare highlights the distinct strengths and weaknesses of each playable clan. However, relying solely on military strategies often proves insufficient. *Shogun 2* incorporates elements like religion, trade, and the strategic deployment of agents, allowing players to explore alternative paths to victory. The Ikko-Ikki and Otomo clans, with their unique strengths in religion and cultural influence, demonstrate that successful conflicts can be achieved through these means. Religious movements, such as the Ikko monk-led uprisings and the Otomo's Christian

missionary efforts, show that expanding influence and destabilizing enemies can lead to victory without necessarily engaging in bloodshed.

d. Role of the Game's Narrative

Within the narrative framework of *Shogun 2*, the game reflects and reimagines historical events, actively engaging players with history by providing opportunities to recreate or alter historical events to their advantage. This dynamic approach allows players to explore alternate religious narratives or reinterpret historical scenarios through different strategies. In doing so, *Shogun 2* frames religion not as a peripheral element but as a central conflict, mirroring the challenges faced by the Ikko-Ikki and Otomo clans. The religious narratives of both clans are integral to their identities, influencing alliances, trade, and military strategies. For instance, the Ikko-Ikki's militant Buddhist sect emphasizes mass uprisings, while the Otomo clan's Christian alignment highlights diplomatic and trade advantages through their connection with Portuguese traders. These distinct religious affiliations shape their gameplay strategies, with Ikko-Ikki using monk-led revolts and Otomo leveraging missionaries and firearms. Such dynamics contrast sharply with dominant historical narratives of the Sengoku era, which tend to focus primarily on militaristic and political dimensions. Religion's role in *Shogun 2* is especially significant for players engaging with the Ikko-Ikki and Otomo clans. Their respective goals—to spread Christianity or promote a Buddhist rebellion opposing Shinto-Buddhism teachings—align with their historical counterparts. These religious missions go beyond territorial conquests, embedding faith as a key factor in the power struggles of the era. The game's narrative thus enriches players' understanding of the Sengoku period, emphasizing the intersection of political and religious affairs in shaping the era's history.

As previously mentioned, *Shogun 2* offers players the opportunity to recreate or alter historical events to their advantage, providing a wealth of choices and potential paths to either win the game or rewrite historical outcomes. For example, players who choose to play as the Otomo clan can aim to dominate Japan using the influence of Christianity, making it a prominent religion. This diverges from historical narratives where Christianity was eventually suppressed during the Edo period (Rahwati, 2023). Similarly, playing as the Ikko-Ikki clan, which was historically defeated by Oda Nobunaga (Remington, 2021), allows players to rise and unify Japan under a hypothetical Jodo Shinshu Buddhist state. These opportunities to alter historical events are supported by the game's mechanics, where players can actively engage in religious strategies such as converting regions to Christianity or inciting revolts led by the Ikko faith. This allows players to spread chaos and explore how religious ideologies could have reshaped the Sengoku era had the historical conditions been different. By employing the unique religious strategies of the Ikko-Ikki and Otomo clans, *Shogun 2* reflects how the gamification of religion simplifies the historical realities for players who wish to learn about it. The game provides a clear portrayal of the impact of religion during the Sengoku era, making it more accessible yet still engaging. Despite simplifying certain aspects, *Shogun 2* maintains historical accuracy in demonstrating the difficulty of spreading religious beliefs in a land dominated by Shinto-Buddhism, offering players a deeper understanding of the role religion played in shaping the political and military dynamics of the era.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Total War: Shogun 2* effectively presents an alternate history of the Sengoku era, particularly by exploring the roles of religious minorities such as the Otomo and Ikko-Ikki clans. Through the lens of social identity and contact zone theory, this analysis highlights how these minorities shaped the conflict, offering alternative perspectives that are often overlooked by historians. For players seeking to learn about the era, the game's portrayal

of political and religious dynamics creates a complex strategic experience. Players are encouraged to adapt to diverse strategies, whether through military conquest or trade, with each choice carrying its own distinctiveness. This enriches the narrative, providing insights into a historical context that many may not have fully understood before.

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