

AP World History

Tokugawa Japan's Act of Seclusion, 1636

Tokugawa Iemitsu

In the 1500s, European merchants and missionaries began to visit Japan. At first, the strangers were welcomed by the Japanese, who were curious about the Western ideas and products, especially the guns. By the 1600s, Christian missionaries had converted many thousands of Japanese, and the Japanese leaders began to fear and resent the European influence. The Tokugawa government launched a campaign to get rid of Christianity in Japan and closed the country to almost all foreigners, a policy that would continue for over 200 years. The following selection is a statement of this policy by the Japanese government, which was led by the shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu.

Analyzing Motives: *The port at Nagasaki (Deshima) was the only Japanese port that remained open to foreign traders. (In the Act of Seclusion, Laws 6 & 11 suggest that some foreign ships would still be allowed to come to Japan.) Why do you think that the Japanese had this “loophole” in their closed-door policy?*

1. Japanese ships shall by no means be sent abroad.
2. No Japanese shall be sent abroad. Anyone violating this prohibition shall suffer the penalty of death, and the shipowner and crew shall be held up together with the ship.
3. All Japanese residing abroad shall be put to death when they return home.
4. All Christians shall be examined by official examiners.
5. Informers against Christians shall be rewarded.
6. The arrival of foreign ships must be reported ... and watch kept over them.
7. The Namban people (Spaniards or Portuguese) and any other people with evil titles propagating Christianity shall be incarcerated in the Omura prison as before.
8. Even ships shall not be left untouched in the matter of exterminating Christians.
9. Everything shall be done in order to see that no Christian is survived by descendants, and anyone disregarding this injunction shall be put to death, while proper punishment shall be meted out to the other members of his family according to their deeds.
10. Children born of the Namban people (Spaniards or Portuguese) in Nagasaki and people adopting these Namban children into their family shall be put to death; capital punishment shall also be meted out to those Namban descendants if they return to Japan, and their relatives in Japan, who may communicate with them, shall receive suitable punishment.
11. The samurai [warrior aristocracy of Japan] shall not purchase goods on board foreign ships directly from foreigners.