

THE QING DYNASTY "SACRED EDICT"

Introduction

The "Sacred Edict" was a set of moral and governmental instructions promulgated by imperial authority for use in local rituals conducted throughout the Qing empire. The Edict was promulgated by the Kangxi emperor (r. 1662-1722) and revised to its current form of Sixteen Maxims by his son, the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723-1735). The Edict would be recited regularly at village lectures, which were a form of moral instruction initiated by the Ming emperor Hongwu but more systematically carried out by the Qing than by the Ming imperial government.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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The Qing Dynasty "Sacred Edict"

1. Esteem most highly filial piety and brotherly submission, in order to give due importance to human moral relations.
2. Behave with generosity toward your kindred, in order to illustrate harmony and benignity.
3. Cultivate peace and concord in your neighborhoods, in order to prevent quarrels and litigations.
4. Give importance to agriculture and sericulture, in order to ensure a sufficiency of clothing and food.
5. Show that you prize moderation and economy, in order to prevent the lavish waste of your means.
6. Foster colleges and schools, in order to give the training of scholars a proper start.
7. Do away with errant teachings, in order to exalt the correct doctrine.
8. Expound on the laws, in order to warn the ignorant and obstinate.

Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on THE QING DYNASTY “SACRED EDICT”

9. Explain ritual decorum and deference, in order to enrich manners and customs.
10. Attend to proper callings, in order to stabilize the people’s sense of dedication [to their work].
11. Instruct sons and younger brothers, in order to prevent them from doing what is wrong.
12. Put a stop to false accusations, in order to protect the honest and good.
13. Warn against sheltering deserters, in order to avoid being involved in their punishment.
14. Promptly remit your taxes, in order to avoid being pressed for payment.
15. Combine in collective security groups (*baojia*), in order to put an end to theft and robbery.
16. Eschew enmity and anger, in order to show respect for the person and life.

Questions:

1. What are the three major themes in the “Sacred Edict”? In other words, what seem to be the government’s major interests as regards the behavior of the subjects of the realm?
2. How might the reading of this Edict assist in governing the empire?
3. If your national leader (president or prime minister, for example) were to issue a similar edict of moral and governmental instructions in sixteen points, what might they be? How would the concerns of your leader differ from or coincide with those of the Qing emperors?