

THE EDICTS OF TOYOTOMI HIDEYOSHI:
EXCERPTS FROM LIMITATION ON THE PROPAGATION OF
CHRISTIANITY, 1587
EXCERPTS FROM EXPULSION OF MISSIONARIES, 1587

Introduction

The unification of Japan and the creation of a lasting national polity in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries required more than just military exploits. Japan's "three unifiers," especially Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), enacted a series of social, economic, and political reforms in order to pacify a population long accustomed to war and instability and create the institutions necessary for lasting central rule. Although Hideyoshi and Ieyasu placed first priority on domestic affairs — especially on establishing authority over domain lords, warriors, and agricultural villages — they also dictated sweeping changes in Japan's international relations.

The years from 1549 to 1639 are sometimes called the "Christian century" in Japan. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, Christian missionaries, especially from Spain and Portugal, were active in Japan and claimed many converts, including among the samurai elite and domain lords. The following edicts restricting the spread of Christianity and expelling European missionaries from Japan were issued by Hideyoshi in 1587.

Selected Document Excerpts with Questions

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The Edicts of Toyotomi Hideyoshi:
Excerpts from Limitation on the Propagation of Christianity, 1587

1. Whether one desires to become a follower of the padre is up to that person's own conscience.
2. If one receives a province, a district, or a village as his fief, and forces farmers in his domain who are properly registered under certain temples to become followers of the padre against their wishes, then he has committed a most unreasonable illegal act.
3. When a vassal (*kyūnin*) receives a grant of a province or a district, he must consider it as property entrusted to him on a temporary basis. A vassal may be moved from one place to another, but farmers remain in the same place. Thus if an unreasonable illegal act is committed [as described above], the vassal will be called upon to account for his culpable offense. The intent of this provision must be observed.

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4. Anyone whose fief is over 200 *chō* and who can expect two to three thousand *kan* of rice harvest each year must receive permission from the authorities before becoming a follower of the padre.

5. Anyone whose fief is smaller than the one described above may, as his conscience dictates, select for himself from between eight or nine religions.

...

8. If a *daimyō* who has a fief over a province, a district, or a village, forces his retainers to become followers of the padre, he is committing a crime worse than the followers of Honganji who assembled in their temple [to engage in the Ikkō riot]. This will have an adverse effect on [the welfare of] the nation. Anyon who cannot use good judgment in this matter will be punished. ...

*Fifteenth year of Tenshō [1587], sixth month, 18th day
Vermilion Seal*

**The Edicts of Toyotomi Hideyoshi:
Excerpts from Expulsion of Missionaries, 1587**

1. Japan is the country of gods, but has been receiving false teachings from Christian countries. This cannot be tolerated any further.

2. The [missionaries] approach people in provinces and districts to make them their followers, and let them destroy shrines and temples. This is an unheard of outrage. When a vassal receives a province, a district, a village, or another form of a fief, he must consider it as a property entrusted to him on a temporary basis. He must follow the laws of this country, and abide by their intent. However, some vassals illegally [commend part of their fiefs to the church]. This is a culpable offense.

3. The padres, by their special knowledge [in the sciences and medicine], feel that they can at will entice people to become their believers. In doing so they commit the illegal act of destroying the teachings of Buddha prevailing in Japan. These padres cannot be permitted to remain in Japan. They must prepare to leave the country within twenty days of the issuance of this notice.

4. The black [Portuguese and Spanish] ships come to Japan to engage in trade. Thus the matter is a separate one. They can continue to engage in trade.

5. Hereafter, anyone who does not hinder the teachings of the Buddha, whether he be a merchant or not, may come and go freely from Christian countries to Japan.

Fifteenth year of Tenshō [1587], sixth month, 19th day

Questions:

1. On the basis of these two edicts, how do you think Hideyoshi viewed Christian missionaries and Japanese converts?
2. Why do you think Hideyoshi felt it necessary to issue these edicts limiting the spread of Christianity and the activities of missionaries?
3. Who is Hideyoshi more concerned about becoming Christian, domain lords, samurai, or the common people?
4. Why do you think that so many Japanese embraced Christianity at this particular time?