

**THE EDICTS OF THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE:  
EXCERPTS FROM THE EDICT OF 1635 ORDERING THE CLOSING OF  
JAPAN: ADDRESSED TO THE JOINT BUGYŌ OF NAGASAKI**

**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.

In the 1630s, the Tokugawa shogunate took a series of steps to further restrict Japan's international contacts. By 1639, the Dutch were the only Europeans permitted to come to Japan, and the conditions under which they were allowed to trade and interact with Japanese were extremely circumscribed by the Tokugawa authorities. The following edict of 1635 was issued by the shogunate to the officials administering the busy port of Nagasaki, the site of most of Japan's foreign contacts at the time.

**Selected Document Excerpts with Questions**

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**The Edicts of the Tokugawa Shogunate:  
Excerpts from The Edict of 1635 Ordering the Closing of Japan:  
Addressed to the Joint Bugyō of Nagasaki**

1. Japanese ships are strictly forbidden to leave for foreign countries.
2. No Japanese is permitted to go abroad. If there is anyone who attempts to do so secretly, he must be executed. The ship so involved must be impounded and its owner arrested, and the matter must be reported to the higher authority.
3. If any Japanese returns from overseas after residing there, he must be put to death.
4. If there is any place where the teachings of padres (Christianity) is practiced, the two of you must order a thorough investigation.

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7. If there are any Southern Barbarians (Westerners) who propagate the teachings of padres, or otherwise commit crimes, they may be incarcerated in the prison maintained by the Ōmura domain, as was done previously.

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10. Samurai are not permitted to purchase any goods originating from foreign ships directly from Chinese merchants in Nagasaki.

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**Questions:**

1. Why did the shogunate dictate such strict policies towards Japanese traveling abroad?
2. How would you compare the tone of this text to Hideyoshi's 1587 edicts restricting the spread of Christianity and the activities of missionaries?
3. Why do you think the shogunate forbid samurai from trading directly with foreigners?
4. Why do you think the Tokugawa authorities allowed contact with the Dutch to continue?