Part 16: Late Traditional Asia

16.6 Japan Encounters the West

The Portuguese reached Japan in 1543. The Japanese were curious and eager to interact with the Westerners at first. Japanese ships already dominated an active Asian trade network centered on the East China Sea and began vigorous interaction with Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch merchants. Along with the merchants came Christian missionaries. Japan has a long history of intellectual and religious openness. In addition to native Shinto beliefs, various forms of Buddhism were well established in Japan and Confucian philosophy was influential among the educated. Christianity became very popular in the western regions of Japan in the century after contact with the West.

By 1638, however, missionaries had been expelled, foreign merchants were virtually banned, and Japanese were prohibited from leaving. There are several reasons for this abrupt turn of events. First, European explorers arrived in Japan during a time of civil war among powerful landlords called daimyo. Over time, Europeans were seen as supporting certain factions in return for the opportunity to spread Christianity in territories of those daimyo. Once Japan was unified by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and his successors, the Tokugawas, European influence became even more suspect. Japanese Christians were suspected of having loyalties to religious leaders outside Japan. After the Spanish conquered the Philippines, the Tokugawas worried that European merchants and missionaries were merely the vanguard of a conquering force. Finally, the new regime desired a monopoly on international trade. First missionaries were expelled, then Christianity was suppressed, and eventually all contact with the West was broken off, with the exception of one Dutch merchant vessel a year.

The first two documents. From, 1587, show the growing suspicion of Christian missionaries by Hideyoshi. At this point, Europeans are still allowed to trade, but not spread their religion. The second set of documents date from 1638 to 1640 and represent the final stages of the Closing of Japan, including the killing of Portuguese envoys from Macao, a trading colony on the south China coast.


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 a 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.
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 and 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 Ikko riot]. This will have an adverse effect on [the welfare of] the nation. Anyone who cannot use good judgment in this matter will be punished.

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 so doing 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. However, the vassals must not make unreasonable demands on the padres, which shall be treated as a culpable offense.

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 Buddha, whether he be a merchant or not, may come and go freely from Christian countries to Japan.

This is our wish, and so ordered.
Fifteenth year of Tenshō [1587], sixth month, 19th day.

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.
5. Any informer revealing the whereabouts of the followers of padres (Christians) must be rewarded accordingly. If anyone reveals the whereabouts of a high ranking padre, he must be given one hundred pieces of silver. For those of lower ranks, depending on the deed, the reward must be set accordingly.
6. If a foreign ship has an objection [to the measures adopted] and it becomes necessary to report the matter to Edo, you may ask the Ōmura domain to provide ships to guard the foreign ship, as was done previously.
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.
8. All incoming ships must be carefully searched for the followers of padres.
9. No single trading city [see 12 below] shall be permitted to purchase all the merchandise brought by foreign ships.
10. Samurai are not permitted to purchase any goods originating from foreign ships directly from Chinese merchants in Nagasaki.
11. After a list of merchandise brought by foreign ships is sent to Edo, as before you may order that commercial dealings may take place without waiting for a reply from Edo.
12. After settling the price, all white yarns (raw silk) brought by foreign ships shall be allocated to the five trading cities and other quarters as stipulated.
13. After settling the price of white yarns (raw silk), other merchandise [brought by foreign ships] may be traded freely between the [licensed] dealers. However, in view of the fact that Chinese ships are small and cannot bring large consignments, you may issue orders of sale at your discretion. Additionally, payment for the goods purchased must be made within twenty days after the price is set.
14. The date of departure homeward of foreign ships shall not be later than the twentieth day of the ninth month. Any ships arriving in Japan later than usual shall depart within fifty days of their arrival. As to the departure of Chinese ships, you may use your discretion to order their departure after the departure of the Portuguese galeota (galleon).
15. The goods brought by foreign ships which remained unsold may not be deposited or accepted for deposit.
16. The arrival in Nagaski of representatives of the five trading cities shall not be later that the fifth day of the seventh month. Anyone arriving later than that date shall lose the quota assigned to his city.
17. Ships arriving in Hirado must sell their raw silk at the price set in Nagasaki, and are not permitted to engage in business transactions until after the price is established in Nagasaki.

You are hereby required to act in accordance with the provisions set above. It is so ordered.

Kaga no-kami Masamori et al., seals.
To: Sakakibara Hida no-kami, Sengoku Yamoto no-kami

376
COMPLETION OF THE EXCLUSION, 1639

1. The matter relating to the proscription of Christianity is known [to the Portuguese]. However, heretofore they have secretly transported those who are going to propagate that religion.
2. If those who believe in that religion band together in an attempt to do evil things, they must be subjected to punishment.
3. While those who believe in the preaching of padres are in hiding, there are incidents in which that country (Portugal) has sent gifts to them for their sustenance.

In view of the above, hereafter entry by the Portuguese galeota is forbidden. If they insist on coming [to Japan], the ships must be destroyed and anyone aboard those ships must be beheaded. We have received the above order and are thus transmitting it to you accordingly.

The above concerns our disposition with regard to the galeota.

Memorandum

With regard to those who believe in Christianity, you are aware that there is a proscription, and thus knowing, you are not permitted to let padres and those who believe in their preaching to come aboard your ships. If there is any violation, all of you who are aboard will be considered culpable. If there is anyone who hides the fact that he is a Christian and boards your ship, you may report it to us. A substantial reward will be given to you for this information.

This memorandum is to be given to those who come on Chinese ships. (A similar note to the Dutch ships.)

The Fate of the Embassy from Macao, 1640 by Antonio Cardim, S.J.

Because many serious crimes have been committed over a number of years by the propagation of the Christian religion in defiance of his decree, the shogun last year forbade under grave penalties all voyages from Macao to Japan, laying down that if any ship were to come to Japan despite this prohibition, the vessel would be burnt and the sailors and merchants executed. This edict was promulgated both summarily and in detail. Nevertheless, these men have blatantly violated the aforesaid decree by their voyage and are seriously at fault. Furthermore, in spite of their assertion that on no account will they send hereafter ministers of the Christian religion to Japan, the ambassadorial letters from Macao are silent on this point. Since, therefore, the shogun has prohibited such voyages on account of the Christian religion and since no mention of this matter is made in these letters, it is quite evident that the entire legation is but a pretence. For this reason, all who have come hither in this ship are to pay the extreme penalty.

It has accordingly been decided that the ship shall be consumed by flames and that the principal ambassadors shall be put to death along with their companions so that nothing may remain of this harbinger of evil. Thus the example which the shogun has made of them will be noticed abroad in Macao and the home country; as a consequence, all will learn to respect the rights of Princes and Kings. We nevertheless desire that the rabble among the crew be spared and sent back to Macao. But should any other ship come hither by force of adverse circumstances or for any other reason whatsoever, let it be known that, in whatsoever port it may call, one and all will be put to death.

Given on the 3rd day of the 6th moon of the 17th year of the Kanei era, that is, the 25th day of July in the year 1640.

At the same time they also asked what they would say about this punishment to foreign peoples in the Orient and even in Europe, if by chance they should go tither. They replied that they would tell the truth; to wit, that the shogun of Japan had put the Portuguese ambassadors to death and had set fire to their ship because they professed the Christian religion and had disobeyed his edict, and that they, to the number of thirteen, had been spared this punishment and sent back so that they could recount what had happened; but they added that the kings and all the peoples of the world would most certainly condemn what had been done as a crime against international law.
They were then taken thence to the mount of execution in order to identify the heads of the executed men, which they found affixed to boards in three groups. The heads of the ambassadors were set apart from the rest; they did not appear pale or washed out, but rather the freshness and beauty of their features well indicated their fate. Now they were set up near a large pole, from the top of which hung the Tyrant’s proclamation. Not faraway they espied a house wherein the corpses had been buried and cairns of immense stones had been set up over them; thus if at any time the Japanese should be silent about these men, the very stones would speak.

Inscribed on a pole which emerged from the midst of these stones was the name of the legation and the reason for the executions; it was indeed their monument for posterity and an everlasting trophy of their glory. With unfeeling barbarity the Tyrant had added this inscription: *A similar penalty will be suffered by all those who henceforward come to these shores from Portugal, whether they be sailors, whether they come by error or whether they be driven hither by storm. Even more, if the King of Portugal, or Shaka, or even the GOD of the Christians were to come, they would all pay the very same penalty.*

**Questions:**

1. Why do Hideyoshi and the Tokugawas want to suppress Christianity?
2. How do the documents generally depict Europeans?
Part 16: Late Traditional Asia

16.7 The Laws for the Military House (Buke Shohatto), 1615
(Tokugawa “Hostage” System)

For almost seven centuries, since General Minamoto Yoritomo assumed the title of shogun in 1192, a dualistic political tradition evolved in Japan. At the apex of the political hierarchy, two authorities shared leadership and maintained a symbiotic relationship. Theoretically, the shogun was recognized as the emperor’s delegated military authority, but in practice, the shogun ruled the country as a virtual military dictator whereas the emperor merely reigned as a semi-divine monarch.


As to the rule that the Daimyos shall come (to the Shogun’s Court at Edo) to do service.

In the Shoku Nihon ki (i.e., the Continuation of the Chronicles of Japan) it is recorded amongst the enactments:-
“Except when entrusted with some official duty no one (dignitary) is allowed at his own pleasure to assemble his whole tribe within the limits of the capital, no one is to go about attended by more than twenty horsemen, etc.” Hence it is not permissible to lead about a large force of soldiers. For Daimyos whose revenues range from 1,000,000 koku1 down to 200,000 koku, the number of twenty horsemen is not to be exceeded. For those whose revenues are 100,000 koku and under the number is to be in the same proportion.

On occasions of official service, however (i.e., in time of warfare), the number of followers is to be in proportion to the social standing of each Daimyo.

Laws for the Barons (The Buke Shohatto) of Kwan-ei 22
(5th August, 1635).

[Promulgated by Iyemitsu.]

1. The taste for the Way of literature, arms, archery and horsemanship is to be the chief object of cultivation.

2. It is now settled that the Daimyos and Shomyos (i.e., the greater and lesser Barons) are to do service by turns at Edo. They shall proceed hither on service every year in summer during the course of the fourth month. Latterly the numbers of their followers have become excessive. This is at once a cause of wastefulness to the provinces and districts and of hardship to the people. Henceforward suitable reductions in this respect must be made. On the occasions of going up to Kyoto, however, the directions given may be followed. On occasions of government service (i.e., military service) the full complement of each Baron must be in attendance.

3. The erection or repairing of new castles is strictly forbidden. When the moats or ramparts of the present residential castles are to be repaired, whether as regards the stonework, plaster, or earth-work, a report must be made to the Bugyosho (i.e., the Magistracy at Edo) and its direction taken. As regards the (Yagura, hei and mon) armories, fences and gates, repairs may be made to restore them to their previous conditions.

4. Whether at Edo or in any of the provinces whatsoever, if an occurrence of any sort whatsoever should take place, those (Barons and their retainers) who are there at the time are to stay where they are and to await the Shogun’s orders (from Edo).

5. Whenever capital punishment is to be inflicted, no matter where, nobody except the functionaries in charge is to be present. But the coroner’s directions are to be followed.

6. The scheming of innovations, the forming of parties and the taking of oaths is strictly forbidden.

7. There must be no private quarrels whether amongst the (Kokushu) greater Barons or (Ryoshu) the other Feudatories. Ordinary circumspection and carefulness must be exercised. If matters involving a lengthy arrangement should arise they must be reported to the Magistracy and its pleasure ascertained.

8. Daimyos of over 10,000 koku income, whether they be lords of provinces (domains) or lords of castles, and the heads of departments (monogashira) in personal attendance on them are not to form matrimonial alliances (between members of their families) at their private convenience (i.e., they must apply for the Shogun’s permission before doing so).

9. In social observances of the present day, such as visits of ceremony, sending and return of presents, the formalities of giving and receiving in marriage, the giving of banquets and the construction of residences, the striving after elegance is carried to very great lengths.

1 One koku is equivalent to 4/96 bushels (of rice).
Henceforth there must be much greater simplicity in these respects. And in all other matters there must be a
greater regard for economy.

10. There must be no indiscriminate intermingling (of ranks) as regards the materials of dress. Undyed silk with
woven patterns (Shiro-aya) is only to be worn by Court Nobles (Kuge) and others of the highest ranks. Wadded coats of
undyed silk may be worn by Daimyos and others of higher rank. Lined coats of purple silk; silk coats with the lining of
purple; white gloss silk, coloured silk coats without the badge are not to be worn at random.

Coming down to retainers, henchmen, and men-at-arms, the wearing by such persons of ornamental dresses such
as silks, damask, brocade or embroideries was quite unknown to the ancient laws, and a stop must be put to it.

11. Those who may ride in palaquins² are all persons of distinction who are connections of the Tokugawa clan;
lords of domains (Kuni) and lords of castles having 10,000 koku and upwards; the sons of provincial Daimyo (beneficia-
ries), lords of castles; chamber lains and higher functionaries, and the legitimate sons of such (i.e., sons by their wives; but
not sons by their concubines); persons (of any rank) above fifty years of age; of the two professions of doctors of medi-
cine and soothsayers (astrologers, onyoshi) and invalids and sick persons. Apart from the above named, irregularities must
be prohibited; but those who have applied for and received official permission to ride are not included in the prohibition.

As regard the feudal retainers in the provinces, those who may ride are to be
definitely specified in each fief. Court Nobles, Abbots of royal or noble birth, and ecclesiastics of distinction are
not to be included in this regulation.

12. Retainers who have had a disagreement with their original lord are not to be taken into employment by other
Daimyos. If any such are reported as having been guilty of rebellion or homicide they are to be sent back (to their former
lord). Any who manifest a refractory disposition must either be sent back or expelled.

13. When the hostages given by subvassals to their mesne lords have committed an offence requiring punishment
by banishment or death, a report in writing of the circumstances must be made to the Magistrates’ office and their decision
awaited. In case the circumstances were such as to necessitate or justify the instant cutting down of the offender, a personal
account of the matter must be given to the Magistrate.

14. The lesser beneficiaries must honestly discharge the duties of their position and refrain from giving unlawful
or arbitrary orders (to the people of their benefices): they must take care not to impair the resources or well-being of the
province or district in which they are.

15. The roads, relays of post horses, boats, ferries and bridges must be carefully attended to, so as to ensure that
there shall be no delays or impediments to quick communication.

16. No private toll-bars may be erected, nor may any existing ferry be discontinued.

17. No vessels of over 500 koku burden are to be built.

18. The glebelands of shrines and temples scattered throughout the provinces (domains) having been attached to
them from ancient times to the present day, are not to be taken from them.

19. The Christian sect is to be strictly prohibited in all the provinces and in all places.

20. In case of any unfilial conduct the offender will be dealt with under the penal law.

21. In all matters the example set by the laws of Yedo is to be followed in all the provinces and places.

All the foregoing provisions, being in conformity with the previous enactments
of this (Tokugawa) House, are hereby reimposed and definitely established and must be carefully observed.

The “Buke Shohatto” were again promulgated by the 4th Shogun Iyetsuna in 1663 (June 28th): only
alterations made on this occasion are noted below, the body of the code remaining as before.

In Art. 2—As regards the taking of turns of duty, the Daimyos and Shomyos shall come to Yedo on service every year at
the time when the Shogun fixes the posts which they are to guard....

Questions:
1. How would you compare the alternate attendance system of Tokugawa Japan with a similar system
   of political control in European history?
2. Can Tokugawa Japan be called “a premodern police state”? Why? Why not?

² A type of vehicle.