

THE BEGINNINGS OF OUR GLOBAL AGE: EUROPE, AFRICA, AND ASIA

Viewpoints

European traders met with different receptions in different parts of Asia. Japan, under the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate, welcomed Europeans at first, then chose isolation. In the excerpts below, two experts on Japanese history describe the shoguns' decision to close Japan to Western influence. ♦ *As you read, compare the different explanations for the shogun's decision. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Japan's Shoguns Reject the West**John Whitney Hall**

The final element in the Tokugawa intellectual environment was, then, the factor of isolation. . . . Tokugawa Ieyasu showed himself anxious to develop foreign trade and for some time remained friendly to the Christian missionaries. But his efforts to obtain full control of the destinies of the country and to assure complete loyalty to his regime led step by step in the direction of closure. . . .

There can be no denying that the adoption of the seclusion policy was a major turning point for Japan. The contrast between a Europe about to embark upon an era of important economic and scientific development and a Japan voluntarily closing its doors to the outside world, is quite dramatic. Moreover, fear of Christianity in Japan was such that within a few decades the authorities imposed a severe censorship on the importation of books from the West. . . . We do know, however, that closure insured peace, and that in peace Tokugawa Japan had the opportunity to develop its political institutions and its economic and cultural resources.

Source: *Japan: From Prehistory to Modern Times*, by John Whitney Hall (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1991)

Donald Keene

[F]or almost a hundred years from the time of the first Portuguese visitors, the Japanese engaged in trade and other relations with Europeans, including Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch and English. Converts to Christianity were made even among important members of the military aristocracy, and some Japanese dignitaries went on embassies to Europe and America, chiefly in connection with religious matters. But increasingly repressive measures against Christianity were adopted by the government, beginning in the late sixteenth century, in an effort to wipe out what was considered to be a threat to the security of the country. The government feared that Christian converts might divide political loyalties, and might even facilitate the invasion of the country by a European power. The example of the Philippines, conquered by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century after intense missionary activity, served as a warning to the Japanese, and by 1639 both the Spaniards and Portuguese had been forbidden to visit the country.

Source: *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, ed. Donald Keene (Grove Press, Inc., 1955).

Questions to Think About

1. According to both writers, what were the main fears prompting the shogun to close Japan to the West?
2. What example does Keene suggest for the shogun's fear of an invasion?
3. **Recognize Cause and Effect** How did Spain's activities in the Philippines serve as a warning to the Japanese? What effect did these activities have on Japanese policy?