



[Japan Society-New York: Documents Project. (1800-1890, politics)]

Document 1: “No Second Thought Decree”

Because there has been an increase in the number of ships [coming to our shores], a new decree is needed. . . . A British ship carried out violent acts in Nagasaki several years ago; more recently they have been using rowboats to approach shore in several places, asking for firewood, water, and provisions. Last year, they landed without permission and attacked cargo vessels, then stole rice, grain, and livestock. They also have engaged in the unacceptable behavior of encouraging their evil religion. Nor are the English alone responsible. The Southern Barbarians and other Westerners all come, despite our prohibitions on their evil religion, landing at whatever port village they desire. We will send men to those areas and expel them. . . . If they insist on landing and trying to push us aside, we have no choice but to destroy them. . . . Chinese, Korean, and Okinawan vessels are easy to recognize. Dutch ships, which are harder to recognize, must be inspected and checked carefully. Boats from anywhere else should be sent away without a second thought.

Source. Waka Rintarō. *Shiryō Nihon shi* (Documents from Japanese History). Tokyo: Tokyo Hōrei, 1976, 230. Translation by James L. Huffman

Context. Despite a two-centuries-old regulation barring foreign ships from entering any Japanese port except Nagasaki, vessels from Great Britain, the United States, and Russia began making occasional calls in Japanese ports after the 1790s seeking trade and diplomatic relations, and in 1808, the British ship *Phaeton* stirred up anger and alarm by sailing into Nagasaki harbor and



make menacing threats. After British sailors committed several violent acts off Japan's southern shores in subsequent years, the government issued this no-nonsense 1825 decree, barring all foreign ships. The decree stayed into effect until the 1840s.

Questions. 1. What developments in both Western and Japanese history might account for the appearance of increasing numbers of ships after the late eighteenth century?

2. Does the sternness of the warning suggest any changes in domestic affairs? If so, what?

3. Why is the foreigners' religion (Christianity) referred to as "evil"? Why might it have drawn special attention in this decree?

Terms.

Southern barbarians: the Westerners. All foreigners were seen as "barbarian," and most Westerners were labeled "southern" because they arrived on ships that came from their trading centers in China and southeastern Asia.

Okinawa: the main island in the Ryūkyū archipelago south of Japan, which maintained ties in these years to both China and Japan's southern domain of Satsuma; Japan took the Ryūkyūs over in the 1870s.