

Development (1571–)

The Explosive Growth of Christianity in Nagasaki

Portrait of the Tensho Embassy (Kyoto University Library)

The first local ruler who converted to Christianity was Omura Sumitada (1533–1587), who controlled the Western part of what is now Nagasaki prefecture. Sumitada knew of the significant influence of the Jesuits on Portuguese-Japanese trade and so assigned the port of Yokoseura to the Jesuits. After that, the port of trade with Portugal was switched to Fukuda in 1565, and then in 1571 to the prosperous port of Nagasaki itself. As a result of Sumitada's offer of the port of Nagasaki to the Jesuits, it eventually became the most important harbor in Japan for international trade.

Around 60,000 Christians lived in Nagasaki during Sumitada's reign. There were so many churches constructed that it was referred to as Little Rome. In 1582, Sumitada and other Christian rulers sponsored the first Japanese embassy to Europe under which four young men were sent to Rome to meet the Pope and King Philip II of Spain.