

Persecution (1587–)

The Expulsion of Christianity from Japan

Painting of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan (Oura Church)

Fumie (Sotome Museum of History and Folklore)

Christianity was initially embraced by Japan's unifier, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598). However, this favorable treatment did not continue for long. For example, in 1597, twenty-six Japanese and foreign Christians were taken from Kyoto and crucified at Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki.

Under the succeeding Tokugawa shogunate Christian persecutions occurred only sporadically at first. A law forbidding Christianity was decreed in 1614, and the practice of *fumi-e* (in which suspected Christians were forced to step on Christian icons to show they were non-followers) was implemented in 1629. If a suspected Christian refused to step on the icon, he would be tortured until he renounced his faith.

Christianity in Japan received its final blow in 1637 when 37,000 peasants, including many Christians, started an uprising in Shimabara. The uprising convinced the Tokugawa regime that Christianity was a subversive faith, and the event led to the complete expulsion of all Europeans. However, the Dutch East India Company was allowed to continue to operate from a small island named Dejima in Nagasaki port for trade purposes.