

## Sakoku (Closure of Country)

Sakoku (鎖国) is a policy of controlled and very limited external contact, for business or otherwise, imposed by the Edo Bakufu. It consisted of monopoly of external trade by the Bakufu, prohibition of Christianity and the ban on Japanese travel to/from abroad. However, the term sakoku, which implies closing the country with chains, became popular only toward the end of the Edo period. Since then, it has been used widely to illustrate the foreign policy of the Edo period, often with a negative connotation, but some historians propose not to use this term any more. Here is some time lines of sakoku.

### <Closing the country>

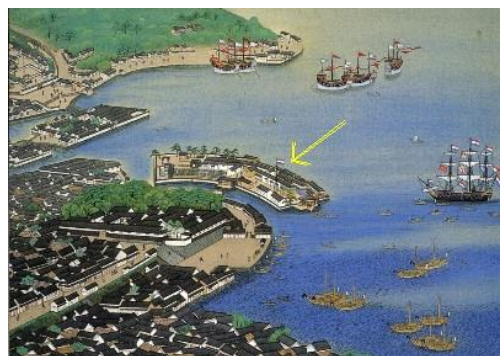
- 1612 Christianity banned in Bakufu territories
- 1616 Nagasaki and Hirado are specified for Western ships
- 1623 UK drops out of trade with Japan
- 1624 Japan terminates diplomatic and trade relations with Spain
- 1633 Only ships with bakufu documents are allowed. Japanese living abroad for five years or more are not allowed to come home
- 1634 Only Nagasaki Port was allowed for foreign trade. Japanese travel to Southeast Asia and return of Japanese from abroad are prohibited
- 1637 Christian farmers rise against Bakufu in Shimabara, Kyushu, which is suppressed
- 1639 Japan terminates trade relations with Portugal. Only China & Netherlands are allowed to trade.

### <Re-opening>

- Mid 18c- mid 19c Russian, British, French & American ships approach Japan but Bakufu rejects them
- 1825 Bakufu orders hans to repel foreign ships by military means
- 1842 China is defeated by UK and forced to cede Hong Kong, which shocks Bakufu
- 1853-54 US Black Ships loaded with cannons negotiate and sign a Friendship Treaty with Japan
- 1858 US demands and signs a commercial treaty with Japan (implemented in 1859)
- 1866 Japanese overseas travel for business and study is allowed
- 1873 Christianity is permitted

Historians still debate why this policy was adopted. The main explanation points to the Bakufu's intention to control and monopolize trade and ban Christianity. During the sakoku years, foreign trade was officially permitted only at a tiny artificial island at Nagasaki under authority's strict control, and only with China and the Netherlands.

However, there was also other permitted and unpermitted trade. Tsushima Han was allowed to trade with Korea. Satsuma Han traded with Okinawa and China after it invaded and occupied Okinawa. Matsumae Han, in Hokkaido, was permitted to trade with Ainu people, a native minority people of Northern Japan (who were regarded as foreigners by the Bakufu). These hans often traded illegally by exceeding permitted limits. There were other hans engaged in illegal trade. Such illegal trade was very profitable for violating hans. The Bakufu tried to police and crack down on them, but only unsuccessfully.



A painting of Dejima Island in Nagasaki, about 220m x 70m