

**EXCERPTS FROM THE SEVENTEEN-ARTICLE INJUNCTION OF ASAKURA  
TOSHIKAGE**

**Introduction**

Asakura Toshikage (1428-1481) was the daimyō of Echizen, a province on the Japan Sea coastline. Like many of the lords of the *sengoku* (warring states) period, Asakura endeavored to strengthen his domain administratively as well as militarily. Toward this end, he wrote a seventeen-article house law (a *nod*, no doubt, to the Constitution of Prince Shōtoku) for the benefit of his successor. This document, produced around 1480, suggests the extent to which the systematization of governmental structures was progressing on the level of the domain, even as the nation lacked any form of effective central authority.

**Selected Document Excerpts with Questions**

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*Excerpts from The Seventeen-Article Injunction of Asakura Toshikage*

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2. Do not give a command post or an administrative position to anyone who lacks ability, even if his family has served the Asakura family for generations.
3. Post intelligence agents (*metsuke*) in both near and distant provinces, even if the world may be at peace. In so doing you can spy on the conditions of these domains without interruption.
4. Do not excessively covet swords and daggers made by famous masters. Even if you can own a sword or dagger worth 10,000 pieces (*hiki*, equivalent of 10 *mon*), it can be overcome by 100 spears each worth 100 pieces. Therefore, use the 10,000 pieces to procure 100 spears, and arm 100 men with them. You can in this manner defend yourself in time of war.
5. Refrain from frequently bringing from Kyoto actors of the four schools of *Nō* (Komparu, Kanze, Hōshō, and Kita) for performances. Instead use the money needed for that purpose to select talented local actors of *sarugaku*, and train them in the basic elements of *Nō* (*shimai*) for the perpetual enjoyment of this province.

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13. Regrettable is the practice of selecting an auspicious day or considering a lucky direction in order to win a battle or take a castle, and even shift the time and date accordingly. No matter how auspicious the day may be, if you set sail your boat in a storm or confront a great host alone, your effort will come to naught. No matter how inauspicious the day may be, if you can discern between truth and falsehood, prepare for orthodox and surprise attacks secretly, be flexible in all situations, and depend on a good stratagem, then your victory is assured.

14. Three times a year, select men of ability and honesty, and send them on inspection tours of the province. They must listen to the views of the common people and farmers, and collect information concerning incidences of misgovernment. It will also be advisable for you yourself to go on an inspection tour, provided you wear a light disguise.

15. Do not permit any castle other than that of the Asakura to be built in this province. Move all high-ranking retainers without exception to Ichijōgatani (the Asakura castle). Permit their deputies (*daikan*) and lower officials (*gesu* or *shitazukasa*) to remain in their districts and villages [to measure their estates].

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17. When a suit is brought to you for your direct decision, do not bend an iota between reason and unreason. If you hear that an official has acted arbitrarily [for private gain], and that fact is well established, you must impose the same penalty on the offending official which was originally meted out to the losing party by him. If you can govern your own domain judiciously and compassionately, there is no need to fear whatever mischief may be committed by the lawless bands of warriors from other domains. If a rumor is spread that there exists in your domain favoritism and unfair discrimination and that rules and behavior codes are violated, other domains may intervene in your affairs. ....

**Questions:**

1. Why do you think Asakura Toshikage wrote this house law?
2. What philosophical or religious influences can you find in this text? Does Asakura draw on Confucian or Buddhist thought?
3. What is the significance of Asakura's instructions regarding Nō performers?
4. What insight does this document give you on the responsibilities (and worries) of a daimyō lord in the *sengoku* period?