

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY JAPANESE DOCUMENTS ABOUT SIAM*

by
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The Cabinet Library (*Naikaku Bunko*, 内閣文庫) in Tokyo has collections of documents called *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* (唐船風説書), "Reports and Tales from the Chinese Ships." These are subdivided into two categories, *Kaihentai* (華夷變態) and *Kikōshōsetsu* (崎港商説). The *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* papers record a great deal of varied information which was all collected from crewmen and passengers on board the "Chinese" junks (*Tosen*, 唐船) that called at Nagasaki in the mid-Tokugawa period. These documents were kept strictly secret by the Tokugawa government, and even now they are little known outside Japan. Thanks to the Oriental Library (*Tōyō Bunko*) many *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* have now been published and they await much wider use by historians.¹ The aim of this short paper is to show that they can add to our information about 17th century Siam. But before moving directly into that topic, we shall give a brief history of the earliest relations between Siam and Japan to show the background of the trade of the two countries against which the *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* can be appropriately evaluated.

Curiously, the first account of Thai-Japanese relations is found in neither a Siamese nor a Japanese source, but in a Korean one. The *Kōryō-si* (高麗史), History of Korea, states that as early as 1388, the king of Sien Lo Hok Kok (暹羅斛國, the name under which Siam was then known in the East) dispatched an envoy of eight members headed by a man called Nai Kung (奈工) to the court of Korea to pay tribute. The envoy left Siam in the year *wu-ch'en* (戊辰) under royal command, but they did not go directly to Korea. They came to stay at an unidentified place in Japan for one year before they eventually sailed for Korea.²

(*) This paper was delivered at the Siam Society on August 25th, 1970.

1) 林春勝・林信篤編，涌廉一解説「華夷變態」

上，中，下冊東京：東洋文庫 1958-59.

2) Gunji, (1938): 75-76. *Kōryō-si*, Vol. 46. pt. 1: 688-689.)

The Japanese began coming in considerable numbers to Siam at the end of the 16th century. It is well-known to students of Siamese history that in the reigns of Phrachao Songtham and his Ayutthayan successors, a sizeable Japanese settlement existed outside the city Ayutthaya at a place which is known to this day as "the Japanese quarter" (*bān jipun* บ้านญี่ปุ่น). The Japanese in Ayutthaya were actively engaged in trading hide and other local products. One Japanese source says that their number was reported to be as high as eight thousand, which is obviously an exaggeration.³ In its most prosperous days, the total population of the *bān jipun* was probably 1,000 or 1,500 at most.⁴ The prosperity of Japanese trade with Ayutthaya is also reflected in the large number of official passports, *goshuinjō* (御朱印状), that were issued to merchant ships sailing from Japan for Siam. Thirty-six junks bound for Siam received these ship-passports between 1604 and 1616. This is the highest number of *goshuinjō* that was authorized for ships going to any single country between these years, when a total of 195 of the passports were given to ships of Japanese nationality going to 19 different countries. Before 1636, when Japan finally closed her doors to foreign visitors, another twenty of these passports were granted to entrepreneurs in Japan including Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, English and Portuguese who wanted to trade with Ayutthaya.⁵

The Thais were no less active than the Japanese in this overseas trade. There are isolated accounts of the visits of Siamese junks to Japan throughout the 16th century, but during the 17th century their calls became frequent and regular.⁶

In 1606, Shogun Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa government, sent a letter to the King of Siam asking for aloes-wood (calambac or eagle-wood) and muskets in exchange for three suits of armour and ten swords. This correspondence is believed to be the first official approach ever made by the Japanese government to the court of Ayutthaya.⁷ King

3) Shinmura, (1928), Vol. 5 : 5.

4) Iwao, (1966) : 144.

5) *Ibid.* : 9-11.

6) *Ibid.* : 128.

7) Gunji, (1938) : 78-79. Satow, (1885) : 140, 144.

Ekathotsarot sent no immediate reply. Two years later, the anxious Ieyasu ordered Honda Kōzukenosuke Masazumi to write on his behalf another letter to the Siamese king, reiterating the previous request for muskets and, this time, for gunpowder instead of eaglewood. Although no copy is now extant, Honda Masazumi's letter of 1608 was apparently answered by Okya Phrakhlang, because in the subsequent correspondence of 1610, Ieyasu thanked the Siamese king as follows: "I am extremely glad to learn from the letter of Okya Phrakhlang that you will graciously send me the much desired guns and powder which my servant Honda Kozukenosuke requested in his note of the year before last. These are what I desire more than gold brocade."⁹

In summer of 1612, a commercial junk from Siam arrived at Nagasaki, and her commander had an audience with the retired Shogun Ieyasu at the castle of Sumpu in present-day Shizuoka Prefecture. This was the first visit of a Siamese junk ever to be recorded in Japanese texts.¹⁰ In 1616, ten years after Ieyasu's first letter to the King of Siam and four years after the first arrival of a Siamese ship at Nagasaki, an official mission from the court of Ayutthaya came to Japan for the first time in history. The dispatch of these ambassadors was not recorded by Sir Ernest Satow in his pioneering work on Japan-Siam relations in the 17th century, but it is mentioned in a letter of Okya Phrakhlang dated the fourth month of the *ping-ch'en* year (1616), which was found by Prof. Seiichi Iwao in a little-known manuscript entitled *Kōun Zuihitsu* (江雲隨筆).¹¹ According to the letter, the Siamese Minister of Finance, under royal command, sent Wisut Sunthon (鬱 伯 亨) and Ratana Sunthon (喇 那 亨) to ask for various kinds of Japanese swords in exchange for eaglewood, bundled(?) eaglewood (of mediocre quality) and black lead. The envoy was accompanied by the head of the Japanese resident merchants in Ayutthaya under King Songtham, Kii Kyūemon (城 井 久 石 傳 門, or in Thai, Khun Sun Sattru). After this visit, Japanese sources record at

8) Gunji, *op. cit.*: 84-85. Satow, *op., cit.*: 144-145.

9) Satow, *op., cit.*: 145.

10) Gunji, *op., cit.*: 91. Satow, *op., cit.*: 147.

11) Iwao, (1935): 743-768.

least four more official missions from Siam in 1621, 1623, 1626, and 1629.¹²

In 1636, Japan started her *sakoku* (鎖国) seclusion policy. Japanese nationals were prohibited from going abroad, and Japanese residents in foreign countries were prohibited from repatriating to Japan. From then on, Japan's only contact with the outside world was at Nagasaki, where Dutch ships were allowed to call annually and where "Chinese" vessels (*Tōsen*) could also call.

King Prasatthong made several attempts to resume trade with Tokugawa Japan, but they were all in vain. According to one Japanese source, a Siamese junk and official envoys came to Nagasaki before the death of King Prasatthong. They bore a letter which denied rumors that Japanese merchants in Ayutthaya "had been expelled from the country with fire and sword" and which emphasized Siam's intention of continuing the time-honoured trade with Japan. The letter, written in "snail-like" characters, was read by Morita Chōsuke (森田長助), who was the official Thai interpreter stationed at Nagasaki. Then the question of whether to allow this trade was referred to Edo. The Siamese envoys were eventually informed of the *sakoku* edict of 1636, which had made the renewal of trade relations between the two countries impossible. The crew were allowed to land, and the captain was permitted to dispose of a small portion of his cargo to purchase supplies of food, fuel and water. The junk left Japan on October 16, 1656.¹³

Although no official ambassadors from Siam were received after 1629, commercial junks from Ayutthaya continued to visit Nagasaki. Between 1647 and 1700, no fewer than 130 vessels from Siam anchored for trade.¹⁴ A new edict of 1715 further restricted the already small trade at Nagasaki. The Shogunate stipulated, among other things, that

12) Satow, *op., cit.*: 147-175. Gunji, *op., cit.*: 99-191.

13) Satow, *op., cit.*: 179. Satow believes that the envoy was dispatched by Chao Fa Chai (*loc., cit.*). The junk, however, reached Nagasaki on July 9th, 1656 before the death of Prasatthong on August 8th. (cf. Wood, (1933): 187.) If the latter date is correct, it would not be Chao Fa Chai but Prasatthong who ordered the dispatch of the envoy. See also Gunji, *op., cit.*: 192.

14) Iwao, (1953): 992-993.

only one junk from Siam would annually be allowed to enter Nagasaki, and that its transactions could not exceed 300 *kan* (貫) of silver in value. The edict explains that the junks from Siam were usually larger than those from other countries and two Siamese junks had previously been coming annually.¹⁵ How was it that Siamese junks could enjoy the privilege of trading at Nagasaki in the same way as the Dutch and Chinese even after the close of diplomatic relations between Ayutthaya and Tokugawa Japan? The answer must first be sought in the meaning of *Tōsen*. The word *To* (唐), or *T'ang*, was used generally to refer to China. During the Tokugawa period, the Japanese concept of foreigners was tri-partite; there were Chinese (*To-jin*, 唐人), Catholic Europeans (i.e. Spaniards and Portuguese, *Ninban-jin*, 南蛮人) and Protestant Dutchmen (*Kōmōi jin*, 紅毛人, literally, 'red-haired people'). The term *Tōsen* covered junks coming from China, but it also included ships coming from many places in Southeast Asia categorically known as "inner ports" (*Okuminato*, 奥港). Three categories of *Tōsen* were distinguished: first, *kuchibune* (口船, literally 'mouth ships') were from ports in Kiangsu and Chekiang. Junks coming from further south, from Fukien, Kwangtung, and Kwangsi, were known as *naka-okubune* (中奥船, 'mid-inner ships'). The ships from Southeast Asian ports or *okuminato*, such as Tongking, Cambodia, Ayutthaya, Nakhon Sithammarat, Songkhla, Pattani, Malacca, and Batavia were all called *okubune* (奥船, 'inner ships.') Vessels from Siam were therefore regarded in Japan as being a kind of *Tōsen*.

There is another reason why the Nagasaki authorities treated the Siamese and other vessels from 'inner ports' as Chinese. These ships were mostly manned by Chinese crews. The non-Chinese element never exceeded ten per cent. Large Siamese junks carried as many as 118 people on board, but the Thais usually numbered between one and five, and sometimes none. Even a junk commissioned by royal command could sail without Siamese officials on board. Furthermore, the Siamese on board did not state their nationality to the Japanese port authorities. These junks were always represented officially by the Chinese crew, and business transactions were exclusively handled by the Chinese.¹⁶ A

15) Miki, (1934): 348.

16) Ura, (1958): 12-13.

Chinese captain of a junk commissioned by royal command said "the Siamese are not good at business; so even the court appoints experienced Chinese to be captain of a royal junk."¹⁷ He added that "there has never been a single junk from Siam that was manned only by Siamese crewmen." Kaempfer noticed in 1692 that these Chinese "traded at Nagasaki either on their own account, or on that of their principals," on consignment.¹⁸

The Tokugawa Shogunate, despite its seclusion policy, was not indifferent to developments in the outside world. On the contrary, it exerted all possible efforts to gather information concerning the countries that surrounded Japan. Nagasaki, with its Dutch and "Chinese" ships, was the only channel through which this information could come. The Shogunate therefore focussed its intelligence activities at this sole emporium of the *sakoku* period, and it took several specific measures toward this end. First, the directors of the Dutch Factory on Deshima (the 'Hollandish captains' or *Oranda kabitan*) were ordered to submit written reports to the Japanese authorities. These were called *Oradanda Fūsetsusho* or *Oranda Fūsetsugaki* (和蘭風説書). Second, the incoming *Tōsen* were fully exploited. The Governor of Nagasaki (*Nugasaki Bugyō*) was expected, as part of his regular duties, to cause well-informed people on board these ships to be interrogated by *Tō-tsūji* (唐通事, Chinese interpreters) for the purpose of preparing reports to the central government in Edo. These reports constitute the *Tōsen Fūsetsusho*. The *Kaihentai*, together with its supplement collection the *Kikō Shōsetsu*, contains a total of 2,465 reports, of which 63 are from Siamese ships. The entire set covers the period between 1644 and 1724. For the years after 1724, the reports become fragmentary, sporadic, and scanty. Apparently they decreased in value as sources of information to the Tokugawa government, which was more and more concerned with the emerging Western powers, and about which the *Oranda Fūsetsugaki* were in a better position to provide relevant information.¹⁹

17) *Ibid.*: 13.

18) Kaempfer, (1906), vol. II.: 249.

19) *Ura, op., cit.*: 43-45.

Both Thai and Japanese sources give detailed lists of the crews aboard the ships that called at Nagasaki from Siam. The "Royal Ordinance on the Civil Hierarchy" (พระโองการตำแหน่งนาพลเรือน) in the Law of the Three Seals (กฎหมายตราสามดวง) includes a table by which we can associate the titles of crew members with their *sakdina* grades, and this gives a clear indication of the hierarchy among the crew.²⁰ Several Japanese sources, including the *Nagasaki Miyage* (長崎土産), the *Zōho Kaisūsūkō* (増補華夷通商考) and the *Tōsen Ransen Nagasaki Nyūkō Binran* (唐船蘭船長崎入港便覧) give these titles also—and add brief explanations of their respective roles on board.²¹ Twenty-odd titles listed on these Thai and Japanese sources are for the most part identical, although they show some difference in terminology probably due to the dialects utilised. The *Nagasaki Miyage* quoted above specifies the language as that of Changchou (漳州). The discrepancy, however, calls for further exploration. The Chinese interpreters did not attempt to interview everyone on board, but they selected just a few of the most important people. Normally these included the captain (*cheng ch'uan chu*, 正船主), deputy captain (*fu ch'uan chu*, 副船主), chief accountant (*ts'ai fu*, 財副) and passengers having their cargoes on board (*k'o chang*, 客長). Even though Siamese interpreters were stationed in Nagasaki, and from time to time were able to show their competence (as did Morita Chōsuke in the case we have described above), none of the *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* was written by them. All these reports are exclusively the works of *Tōtsūji*.

A typical *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* paper contains news of the countries from which the ships came, points and dates of departure, the total number and nationality of people on board (after 1687), experience of the previous visits to Japan, news of other junks bound for Japan, and itineraries. Here is an example report (cf. illustrations 1 and 2).²²

"Our ship is a royally commissioned junk with 67 people on board, of which 65 are Chinese and 2 are Siamese. On the first day of the sixth lunar month of this year, we set sail for the river mouth of Senra (= Pak Nam) to wait for a fair wind. On the eighteenth day, we left

20) Lingat, (1963), vol. 1 : 235-236.

21) Ura, *op. cit.* : 120-121. *Katjishiryō-sūsho*, (1930), vol. 13 : 6-7.

22) *Kathentai* (1958/59) : 2636-37.

the river mouth and crossed into the ocean. We saw no ships following us from Siam. We heard that there was a Siamese junk which sailed for Japan last year, but due to a headwind it drifted to Nanao in Kwangtung and could not return. This ship may be coming to Japan this year. We had no trouble at all during our voyage this time. We arrived here today without stopping at any other port of Japan. The captain Hsö Tse-kuan came here last year as a bookkeeper on junk No. 82.²³ Our ship is the same one that visited this port last year as junk No. 100. In Siam, peace prevails. Nothing unusual has been happening in any part of the Kingdom, or in the vassal states. A Dutch ship left the country ahead of ours. She may soon be arriving here. That is all we can report.

We, the undersigned, submit herewith this report as it has been heard from the Chinese.

DATED: 20th day of the 7th lunar month, the year of the ox (1709).	SIGNED: Chief Officer in Charge of Fūsetsu Interpreter—Inspector Chinese—Interpreter”
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As an historical source, the collection of the *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* is inevitably limited because of the informants' specialised interests. Chinese merchants were not always in a good position to have direct access to the news of political developments in Thailand—and it is recorded in the texts that the reporters sometimes excused themselves on this ground. Despite this drawback, the *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* still provide us with valuable data to supplement, or at least to reinforce, some historical facts that have already been established. Sometimes it also allows us to choose between conflicting versions of history.

For example, W.A.R. Wood remarks that there is a conflict of opinion regarding the date of the death of King Phetracha.²⁴ The *Phung-sawadan* gives the date as 1697, while Turpin says the king died in 1700. According to *The Statement of Khun Luang Ha Wat*, the date was 1701. Wood himself adopted the year 1703 as that of the usurper's death, based

23) Each *Tōsen* entering Nagasaki was numbered in sequence of the date of arrival.

24) Wood, (1933): 223 n.

on Prince Damrong's Chronological Table. In the *Kaihentai*, we find the following report, dated on the eighth day of the seventh lunar month in the year of the monkey (August 20th, 1703):²⁵

"...and in Siam a new king succeeded to the crown this spring. Peace prevails throughout the kingdom, as well as in the vassal states." The informants' ship was a royally commissioned junk. It left Ayutthaya on the nineteenth day of the fifth lunar month (July 2nd); and after having suffered bad weather at sea, it entered Nagasaki on the eighth day of the seventh month (August 20th). The reporters, therefore, should have been quite familiar with events which took place "in the spring" of the same year (1703)—probably not long before the day of their departure. This is especially true of court politics, since their ship was a royally commissioned junk, which was presumably dispatched by the newly-crowned King Prachao Sua. The *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* endorsed the validity of Prince Damrong's Chronological Table.

The crew of a later "royal" junk reported King Phrachao Sua's death and the immediate succession of King Thai Sa to the throne. The *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* contains an entry dated the sixteenth day of the seventh lunar month in the year of the tiger (August 10th, 1710), which reports that²⁶

"...since the [former] king passed away, people have been enjoying the peaceful reign of the new king, who has shown his extreme mercy to his subjects in the kingdom as well as in the vassal states."

The Ayutthayan court revolution of 1688 which finally brought the adventurous Constantine Phaulcon to a tragic death is reported by all of the seven junks coming from Ayutthaya in the years 1688, 1689 and 1690. The event was also noticed by three ships from Pattani that entered Nagasaki between 1689 and 1690.

In addition to political news, the *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* also give us glimpses of the Siamese economy in the Ayutthayan period. Three ships in 1680 reported a flood that caused the price of raw sugar to rise. A bad

25) *Kaihentai* (1958/59): 2332.

26) *Ibid.*: 2667.

27) *Ibid.*: 1280-1281.

sugar harvest was mentioned in 1690; and in 1682, famine and smallpox killed large number of people, "both young and old." In 1723, a good harvest of rice pleased the Siamese. There is an especially interesting passage about agriculture in Siam at the end of the 17th century, which is dated the eighth day of the seventh lunar month in the year of the horse (August 12th, 1690).

"In Siam people could grow rice from olden times without worrying about rain. From beyond the border of the great Ch'ing flows a large stream called the Yellow River (黃河), of which one branch goes into the Great Ch'ing, one runs into Siam, and one flows into Cambodia. From the fifth month of every year, the river-water rises gradually until the whole kingdom is flooded. At the end of the eighth month, the water recedes. In Siam and Cambodia, therefore, all people live on the upstairs of houses, no matter whether they are of high or low status. The flood water rises to a height of one *jō* (丈), but from ancient times it has seldom caused damage to the land. Thus people can grow rice without worrying about rain. If they plant seeds before the coming of the water, then the sprouts will grow as the water rises; and finally they reach as high as one *jō* to catch up with the rise of the water. Since rice is grown so easily there, the price is much lower than in other countries. There is little danger of famine. Siam is also a great producer of raw sugar. Sugar cannot be grown in water; so hillsides are used for sugar cultivation. This year we have had a poor harvest of raw sugar. Junks coming from Siam this year will bring less sugar than usual. Our ship has brought several hundred thousand *kin* (斤) of sugar each year, but in the present shipment we have only seventy or eighty thousand *kin*. Furthermore, a quota system has been introduced here in Japan for several years; and this measure has prevented from disposing of all of our sugar cargo. The undisposed lot of sugar is prone to dissolve away because of the moisture of the sea; so we will be unable to cover costs. Junks, therefore, tend to bring less sugar. This situation, combined with the especially poor harvest this year, explains the decreased amount of sugar in our cargo."

This is some of the information which we find in *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* about Siam. In addition to the 63 reports from Siamese junks, the *Tōyō Bunko* edition of the *Kaihentai* contains 18 reports from Pattani junks, 11 from Ligor, 7 from Songkhla, 8 from Malacca, and 34 from Cambodia. (See Appendix.) These sources may shed light on the relationship between Ayutthaya and her vassal states at the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th.

Tōsen Fūsetsusho is, as pointed out above, a product of the intelligence activities of the Tokugawa government which endeavored to gather information concerning overseas countries surrounding Japan secluded during the *sakoku* period. The majority of them are reports of *Tōsen* coming from Chinese ports and, therefore, are better employed by Chinese historians. They contain, however, some valuable information worthy or being fully exploited by Thai historians who suffer from a shortage of contemporary Siamese sources of the Ayutthayan period. The direct knowledge about Siam which can be extracted from the *Tōsen Fūsetsusho* is rather limited in quantity but the merit of its contemporaneity is worth bearing in mind.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATED CITATION

- Gunji, (1938): 郡司喜一, 徳川時代の日暹国交 (Tokyo, 1938)
- Iwao, (1933): 岩生成一, 「1616年暹羅国日本遣使考」 in 史学雑誌 Vol. 44, No. 6.
- do-, (1953): -do-「近世日支貿易に関する数量的考察」 in 史学雑誌 Vol. 62, No. 11.
- do-, (1966): -do-, 南洋日本人町の研究 (Tokyo, 1966)
- Kaempfer, (1906): *The history of Japan*, Vol. II. (Glasgow, 1906)
- Kaihentai, (1958/59): Tōyō Bunko edition. See note 1.
- Kaijishiryō-sōsho, (1930): 住田正一 (編), 海軍史料叢書, Vol. 13, (Tokyo, 1930)
- Kōryō-si, (1908): 高麗史 (国書刊行会本) (Tokyo, 1908)
- Lingat, (1963): R. Lingat (ed.) กฎหมายโบราณคดี Vol. 1 (Bangkok, 1963)
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- Satow, (1885): E.M. Satow, "Notes on the intercourse between Japan and Siam in the seventeen century," in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Vol. XIII, Pt. II.
- Shinmura, (1928): 「暹羅国風土軍記」 in 新村 出 (編) 海表叢書, (Kyoto, 1928)
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- Wood, (1933): *A history of Siam*, (revised ed.) (Bangkok, 1933)

Appendix: *Tosen Fusetsu-Sho* concerning Siam and her vassal states recorded in *Kai Hentai* and *Kiko Shosetsu*. (1646-1724).

year	<i>Ayutthaya</i>	<i>Pattani</i>	<i>Ligor</i>	<i>Songkhla</i>	<i>Malacca</i>	<i>Cambodia</i>
1646-1674	0	0	0	0	0	0
1675	0	1	0	0	0	0
1676	0	0	0	0	0	0
1677	0	0	0	0	0	0
1678	0	0	0	0	0	0
1679	1	0	0	0	0	1
1680	3	0	0	0	0	1*
1681	1	0	0	0	0	1
1682	2	0	0	0	0	1
1683	6	1	0	0	0	0
1684	3	1	1	0	0	0
1685	0	0	0	0	1	0
1686	3	1	0	1	2	1
1687	1	2	0	0	1	1
1688	2	0	0	0	2	0
1689	2	1	1	0	0	2
1690	3	2	1	0	0	1
1691	3	0	1	0	1	2
1692	4	0	1	0	0	2
1693	1	1	1	1	0	1
1694	2	2	1	2	1	1
1695	1	1	0	1	0	3
1696	2	1	2	1	0	3
1697	3	2	2	1	0	4
1698	1	0	0	0	0	3
1699	2	0	0	0	0	2
1700	0	0	0	0	0	0
1701	1	1	0	0	0	0
1702	0	0	0	0	0	0
1703	3	0	0	0	0	0

(*) Recorded only in *Kai Hentai* of Matsudaira family MS.