

Historical Relations between Korea and Thailand in the Late 14th Century

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I

In the history of the trade between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia¹ before the modern time, the 14th century should be considered as a watershed. For the century is an important turning point in the historical development of the various countries of the two regions. In about 1294, the kingdom of Majapahit in Java, Indonesia, developed to be a maritime empire with most of the insular Southeast Asia including the Malay Peninsula, Kalimantan, and the Maluku Islands under its control, and engaged in active foreign trade. In Thailand, the kingdom of Ayutthaya, founded in the mid-14th century, made overseas trade its most important business from its beginning. Ming Dynasty, which was founded in China in the same period, adopted the policy of maritime ban confining foreign trade to the tributary relation and controlling all the maritime activities of Chinese. Meanwhile, in Japan the beginning of the era of the Ashikaga shogunate formed in 1336 saw big economic growth, which in turn made its foreign trade more active than before.

Historical relations between Korea and Thailand, the subject of this study, must be seen against the background of this maritime trade between Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia in the 14th century, especially the extensive foreign trade of Thailand in the South China Sea and the East China Sea since the beginning of the Ayutthaya Dynasty. The investigation of these relations, according to my researches up to now, cannot but depend on Korean historical records. In Thai sources such as the *Phraratcha phongsawadan krung si ayutthaya* [Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya] we find no information regarding the subject. And if any, they may have got lost in 1767, when Ayutthaya was destroyed by the attack of the Burmese.²

Historical relations between Korea and Thailand have hitherto interested only a few Japanese and Korean historians. Their studies, however, are either dealing with them merely in the periphery of the relations between Japan and Thailand, or do not go

¹ In this article, the term 'Southeast Asia' is used as a concept referring to the region encompassing Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and Philippines today and the term 'Northeast Asia' China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea today.

² Jeremy Kemp, *Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century* (Bangkok: The Social Science Review, 1969), 1.

beyond partly introducing the relevant Korean records.³ The purpose of this paper is thus to view early intercourse between Korea and Thailand in its own light, and the attempt will be made to subject the relevant Korean texts to a philological analysis.

II

The first source which informs us of a contact between Korea and Thailand is the *Koryŏsa* [History of Koryŏ], the official chronicle of the Koryŏ Dynasty (918-1392) written in 1451. In its record of the seventh lunar month of 1391 in the reign of King Kongyang (1389-1392), we find the following passage⁴:

The kingdom of Xienluohu sent Nai Gong and other men, all told eight, together with its native products and a letter, where it is stated that the king of Xienluohu had made Nai Gong an envoy and ordered him to supervise a ship, load it with local products, and present them to the king of Koryŏ. [The letter] had no name and was not sealed, and it was only stamped with a small, round seal. [Its genuineness] could not be examined. The court doubted, however, its authenticity. Thus, it was discussed,

“It is impossible to believe [the letter], but it is also impossible to give no credit to it. We cannot refuse the men who came to us, so that we treat them with hospitality and according to etiquette. Nevertheless, we show that we are not confused by not accepting the letter. [This decision] is proper.”

The king gave an audience to them and comforted them. At that time they told the king,

“In 1388 we by [our king’s] order set sail and reached Japan where we stayed one year. Today we have arrived in your country. We now see Your Majesty, which makes us forget the fatigue of our travel.”

The king asked them about the distance [from their country to Koryŏ] by sea, whereupon they answered,

³ For example, Gunji Kiichi, *Tokugawa jidai no Ni-Sen kokkô* (Tokyo: Tôa Keizai Chôsakyoku, 1938), 75-76; Yi Hyŏnjong, “Namyang chegukin-ŭi naewangmuyŏk-e taehayŏ,” *Sahak yŏn’gu* 18 (1964): 255 ff.; Yoneo Ishii, “Thai-Japanese Relations in the Pre-Modern Period: A Bibliographic Essay with Special Reference to Japanese Sources,” in *Thai-Japanese Relations in Historical Perspective*, ed. Chaiwat Khamchoo and E. Bruce Reynolds, 1-3 (Bangkok: Innomedia, 1988).; Wada Hisanori, “14-5 seiki ni okeru Tônan Ajia sen no Tô Ajia raikô to Ryûkyû koku,” *Kyûyô ronsô* 12 (1986): 29-32.

⁴ *Koryŏsa* (Seoul: Institute of Korean Studies of Yonsei University, 1981), vol.3, 897.

“With the wind [in the direction] of North on the back we can arrive here in forty days.”

Among them, some were stripped to the waist, some were barefooted. Higher persons covered their hair with a white cloth. When a servant saw a venerable elder person, he took off his clothes and exposed his body. It was three times translated, and the meaning was transmitted.

The *Koryōsa chōryo* [The Abridged Chronicle of Koryō] which was written in 1452, a year later than the *Koryōsa*, sums up this event in a sentence⁵:

The kingdom of Xianluohu sent a mission [to Koryō] and presented native products.

“Xianluohu”, or “Sōmnagok” in Korean, in the above translated text is to be identified as Siam, the old name of Thailand. In the *Mingshi*, the Chronicle of Ming Dynasty, and the *Ming shilu* [Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty], “Xianluohu”, together with “Xianluo”, was used to denote the kingdom of Ayutthaya. A recent study has revealed that “Xianluohu” appears in the Chinese sources until before 1398, and that whereafter only “Xianluo” comes into use as the name of Siam.⁶ Also in Korea, until before the end of the fourteenth century was “Sōmnagok” used, and from the beginning of the fifteenth century did “Sōmna” come into general use. The name of the kingdom of “Xianluohu” at that time cannot have been unfamiliar to the government of Koryō, for it, through a report of its envoy to China in 1357 as recorded in the *Koryōsa*, already knew that “Xianluohu”, like “Zhancheng” (Champa), “Annan” (Vietnam), “Zhaowa” (Java), “Sanfoqi” (Srivijaya), “Zhenla” (Cambodia) etc., was one of the countries that often sent tribute mission to China.⁷

According to the above *Koryōsa* record, Nai Gong presented to the court of King Kongyang a letter, which certified him as an official envoy of Siam sent to Korea. This letter was, however, apparently not affixed with any signature of a Siamese king or, as was often the case with letters of the Siamese court to the Tokugawa government of Japan in the seventeenth century, of an important Siamese minister.⁸ It was,

⁵ *Koryōsa chōryo* (Seoul: Asea Munhwasa, 1973), 899.

⁶ Geoff Wade, “The Ming Shi-Lu as a Source for Thai History - 14th to 17th Century,” (A paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Thai Studies, 5-10 July 1993, London), 6.

⁷ *Koryōsa*, vol. 3, 857.

⁸ E. M. Satow, “Notes on the Intercourse between Japan and Siam in the Seventeenth Century,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 13 (1885): 147 ff.

furthermore, stamped only with a small, round seal which supposedly did not contain any letters, characters or symbols, and it was even not sealed, that is, it did not take the form of an official writing at all. Consequently, the government of Koryŏ doubted the genuineness of the letter and hesitated to recognize it as a missive from the kingdom of Sŏmnagok. Such a doubt of King Kongyang's government seems to have not been unfounded. If the government of Koryŏ had only known what kind of document a Siamese delegation at that time brought to the court of Ming, the doubt would have been more firm. According to the *Mingshi*, the kingdom of Ayutthaya in the second half of the fourteenth century, in dispatching a tribute mission to Peking, normally sent an official letter containing a list of tributes (*biao*), which was then accepted by the authorities of China.⁹ In this place the following passage in the *Mingshi* deserves to be noticed¹⁰:

In 1374 an envoy [from Siam], Shabila, came to present tributes and told,
“Last year, when [our] ship reached the *Wuzhu* Sea, we met with a storm which overturned the ship, and we drifted away to *Hainan*, where we relied on officials for help. From the storm are still left over *douluo* cotton, lakawood, sappanwood, and other things to be presented.”

The authorities of Guangdong Province received this statement. The emperor wondered that [the envoy from Siam] had no official writing with him, and suspected him to be only a foreign merchant, for, although he told that his ship had capsized, native products were still left over. Thus, he gave order to reject him.

If the Koryŏ government in 1391 had known the above happening seventeen years before, it would have suspected Nai Gong and his men even more.

Now we need to discuss the name of Nai Gong, who came to Korea with such a suspicious letter and claimed to be the leader of a delegation from the kingdom of Siam. First, *nai* of Nai Gong means “master, lord, leader etc.” Let me take an example of *nai kong*, which means “the commander of an indefinite unit of an old-style army” of Thailand.¹¹ It is, however, not relevant to read *nai gong* as *nai kong*.

In the bureaucratic hierarchy of the kingdom of Ayutthaya which was systematized

⁹ *Mingshi* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1977), 8396-8397. Cf. T. Grimm, “Thailand in the Light of Official Chinese Historiography: A Chapter in the History of the Ming Dynasty,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 49, no. 1 (1961): 15, n. 16.

¹⁰ *Mingshi*, 8396-8397.

¹¹ So Sethaputra, *New Model Thai-English Dictionary* (Bangkok: Thai Watthanaphanit, 1982), 155.

in the middle of the fifteenth century and is known to us particularly through the laws *Phra aiyakan tamnaeng na phonlaruean* [Law of the Civil Hierarchy] and *Phra aiyakan tamnaeng na thahan hua mueang* [Laws of the Military and Provincial Hierarchies] in the *Kotmai tra sam duang* [Laws of the Three Seals], a collection of laws of old Thailand, *nai* was not an official rank, but just a title attached to civil servants of the lowest echelon and low officers.¹² In the official hierarchy of the *Krom Phra Khlang* [the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Affairs] we find, however, “*nai ruea pak 4 wa khuen pai*” [captain of a junk with a beam wider than 4 wa] with a *sakdina* of 400, “*nai ruea pak kwang 3 wa set*” [captain of a junk with a beam of 3 wa plus] with a *sakdina* of 200, and “*cuncu - nai samphan*” [junk captain] with a *sakdina* of 400.¹³

The fact that a captain of a junk of the Siamese government had a title of *nai* seems to give an important clue to understand our Nai Gong. Nai Gong told the Koryŏ government that he was appointed by the king of Siam to supervise a ship and that by order of the latter sailed from Siam. This strongly indicates that Nai Gong was one of the captains of trading ships belonging to the king of Siam. According to the *Ming shilu*, out of altogether eighty-four Siamese envoys that came to China from 1371 to 1612 twenty-eight bore the title of *nai*. Especially out of twenty envoys between 1396 and 1420 fifteen were called with the title of *nai*, such as Nai Polangzhishiti, Nai Bi, and Nai Jiao.¹⁴ We can presume that they were supervisors or captains of junks who traded, for example, in the South China Sea on behalf of the Siamese government.

If Nai Gong is regarded as a captain of a trading ship of the Siamese government, we can better trace the journey of Nai Gong and his companions from Siam to Korea. In the audience with King Kongyang they said that they by order of their king left Siam in 1388 and on the way stayed in Japan for one year before they arrived in Korea in the middle of 1391. According to this statement, they reached Japan about the middle of 1390. Now there are some questions arising: where they were and what they did from 1388 to the middle of 1390 and how they afterwards came to Korea. For an answer to these questions we can, based upon the above considerations, suppose as follows.

About the middle of 1388 Nai Gong and his companions, after having loaded a

¹² *Kotmai tra sam duang*, ed. Krom Sinlapakon (Bangkok: Krom Sinlapakon, 1978), 111 ff.

¹³ *Kotmai tra sam duang*, 117. Cf. Yoneo Ishii, “The Rekidai Hoan and Some Aspects of the Ayutthayan Port Polity in the Fifteenth Century,” *The Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 50 (1992): 86. On the *sakdina* system of old Thailand see Barend Jan Terwiel, *A History of Modern Thailand 1767-1942* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 12-16.

¹⁴ Geoff Wade, op.cit., A1-A2; Xu Yunqiao, “Zhong xian tongshikao,” *Nanyang Xuebao* 3, no. 1 (1946):19-20.

Siamese royal trading ship with native products, left Ayutthaya and via the Gulf of Thailand sailed northeastwards along the coast of Cambodia with the southwestern monsoon on the back, or first went downwards along the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula and then from there sailed northeastwards to the coast of Indochina or southeastern China. Accordingly, they may have first traded at a seaport on the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula such as Nakhon Si Thammarat or Pattani,¹⁵ or at some ports on the coast of Cambodia, Vietnam, or southeastern China, before they arrived in Japan in the middle of 1390. On the way they may also have dropped in the kingdom of Ryukyu in order to carry out some trade.¹⁶

We are informed by Chinese sources that the court of Siam at the end of the fourteenth century was vigorously engaging in the tributary trade with China.¹⁷ This can be supported by an account in *The Short History of the Kings of Siam*, a history of the kingdom of Ayutthata until the beginning of the seventeenth century, written by Jeremias van Vliet who was a director of the Ayutthaya office of the Dutch East India Company between 1636 and 1641. There it is stated that Siam maintained close commercial relations with China from its foundation.¹⁸ It suggests, on the other hand, that the Siamese government at that time was actively pursuing the trade in the South China Sea. The trade voyage of Nai Gong and his men who left Siam in 1388 also must be seen against the background of such a foreign trade activity of Siam.

Nai Gong and his companions arrived in Japan might have engaged in trade, and in the course they supposedly heard of the kingdom of Koryō beyond the sea in the north.¹⁹ Japanese pirates at that time often raided and plundered southern parts of Korea, which leads us to assume that there were in Japanese ports not a few people who knew about Korea.²⁰ Thus, the men from Siam, having informed themselves about the sea

¹⁵ The commercial concern of the kingdom of Ayutthaya was then stretching as far as Pattani and Singapore. See Richard O. Winstedt, *A History of Malaya* (Singapore: Marican & Sons, 1962), 45-46; A. Teeuw and D. K. Wyatt, *Hikayat Patani: The Story of Patani* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 5.

¹⁶ On the then trade relations between Siam and Ryukyu see *Mingshi*, 8398; Yoneo Ishii, "Thai-Japanese Relations in the Pre-Modern Period: A Bibliographic Essay with Special Reference to Japanese Sources," 3.

¹⁷ Xu Yunqiao, *op.cit.*, 9-12.

¹⁸ Jeremias van Vliet, *The Short History of the Kings of Siam*, translated by Leonard Andaya (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1975), 59.

¹⁹ According to Wada Hisanori, *op.cit.*, 30, it seems that there is no contemporary Japanese source which has recorded the stay of Nai Gong and other men in Japan between 1390 and 1391.

²⁰ Kim Sanggi, *Sinp'yōn koryō sidaesa* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1985), 633-644.

route to Korea, came to the capital of the kingdom of Koryŏ with a letter of the king of Siam which seems to have been fabricated. In summary, Nai Gong and his companions initially did not leave Siam for Korea, and their visit to Korea is to be seen as an unintended by-product of their trade activities in the South China Sea and East China Sea.

Nai Gong claimed, as we have seen above, to be an envoy sent from the king of Siam to Koryŏ, which the government of King Kongyang seems to have not been able to ascertain. Therefore, it decided to treat the foreign guests well. The deliberation that, if they should later prove to be a real Siamese delegation to Koryŏ, it would not be able to avoid diplomatic reproach may have played a substantial role. In relation to the above mentioned doubt of the Koryŏ government as to the identity of the men from Siam and the letter they brought, we need to pay attention to the fact that the Koryŏ government in 1391 for the first time came into contact with the kingdom of Siam. Regarding this, An Chŏngbok (1712-1791), a Korean historiographer, gives the following supplementary remark in his *Tongsagangmok* [A General Outline of the History of the Eastern Country], reproducing the above paragraph of the Koryŏsa almost entirely²¹:

The kingdom of Siam sent an envoy. This country lies in the southern sea of China. It has never had intercourse with us.

As we find no reference to it in the Koryŏsa, the government of King Kongyang, after having received Nai Gong and his men, seems to have not taken any diplomatic measures towards Siam. It can be ascribed to the above discussed deliberation of the Koryŏ government as to the pretended delegation of Siam, while it can be related to the then internal and external situation of Koryŏ. In 1391 the Koryŏ government of Kongyang was dominated by the power of Yi Sŏnggye who in the following year founded the Chosŏn Dynasty, so that it was politically unstable. Besides, it concentrated its foreign policy upon the normalization of the relations with Ming China.²² Thus, aside from scarcely knowing about it, the Koryŏ government was supposedly unable to pay attention to a relation with the kingdom of Sŏmnagok.

The purpose of Nai Gong's visit to Koryŏ was undoubtedly trade. On the one hand, it was an attempt for Nai Gong, the captain of a royal trading ship, to pioneer new markets for his Thai king, and on the other hand, it was an effort for him, as a private trader as well, to expand his trading networks. In fact, these two facts can be understood

²¹ An Chŏngbok, *Tongsagangmok* (Seoul: Minjok Munhwa Ch'ujinhoe, 1982), 10.

²² Kim Sanggi, *op.cit.*, 633-644.

in the same context. The Nai Gong and his party's visit to Koryŏ in 1391 with such a background bore fruits before long, and Korea received the second company of visitors from Siam in 1394.

III

According to the *T'aejo shillok* [Veritable Records of the Reign of T'aejo] in the *Chosŏn wangjo shillok* [Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty], the official chronicle of the Chosŏn Dynasty, on the sixteenth of the sixth lunar month of 1394, two years after King T'aejo, Yi Sŏnggye (r.1392-1398), had founded the Chosŏn Dynasty,

The kingdom of Siam sent a subject, Nai Zhang Sidao, and other men, all told twenty, and presented one thousand *kŭn* of sappanwood, one thousand *kŭn* of aloeswood, and two aboriginal men. The king ordered that these two be put to guard the gate of the palace.²³

From the above translated record we first realize that this new mission from Siam is in scale much bigger than that of Nai Gong in 1391. This reflects that the Siamese government or trade circles in Siam, being informed of Korea, possibly a new market, by Nai Gong and his men who in the meanwhile may have returned to Siam, now became interested in Korea. The writer of the above quoted record explains in a footnote that *nai* of Nai Zhang Sidao is an official title of that country.²⁴ This *nai* is, however, to be read as the same *nai* of Nai Gong. Accordingly, Nai Zhang Sidao who seems to have been the leader of the new mission can be considered, as Nai Gong, a captain of one of trading ships of the Siamese government.

Unlike the *Koryŏsa*, the above record of the *T'aejo shillok* has a detailed list of gifts which the Siamese delegation in 1394 brought to Korea. Among other things, sappanwood and aloeswood, which Yi Kŭngik (1736-1806) in his *Yŏllyŏsilgisul* [A Narrative of Yŏllyŏsil] designates as native products sent from the king of Siam through an envoy,²⁵ are found in the list of tributes that Siam sent to the Ming court of China at the end of the fourteenth century, too.²⁶ The sappanwood (*Caesalpinia sappan*), a wood very common in Thailand, was at that time used to produce a red or violet dye. The

²³ *Chosŏn wangjo shillok* (Seoul: The National History Compilation Committee, 1986), vol. 1, 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁵ Yi Kŭngik, *Yŏllyŏsilgisul* (Seoul: Minjok Munhwa Ch'ujinhoe, 1976), 610.

²⁶ *Mingshi*, 8397.

aloeswood (*Aquilaria agallocha*), also called eaglewood or agilawood, is a kind of aromatic wood. The wood itself was used for incense and its resin for producing perfumes and medicine.²⁷

The amount of sappanwood and aloeswood which Zhang Sidao brought was one thousand *kūn* (Chinese *jin*), about 600 kg, each. In comparison with the amount of tributes sent from Siam to China at that time, which is to be ascertained in the *Mingshi* - for example - ten thousand *jin* of pepper and ten thousand *jin* of sappanwood in 1387, and one-hundred-seventy thousand *jin* of sappanwood, pepper, and aloeswood all together in 1390,²⁸ the above quantity is just not so much. Besides, there is no mention of an official letter carried by the “envoy” of the kingdom of Siam, Zhang Sidao, in the above record.

These two facts suggest the following two points regarding the character of the journey of Zhang Sidao and his companions from Siam to Korea. First, they only came to Korea to sound out the Korean market and to confirm the possibility of trade there, not to set about trade in earnest. That is why they did not bring much freight. Compared with this, it is to be noted that Siamese tribute missions to China and accompanying merchants who at that time presented a great amount of tributes to the Chinese court expected to receive Chinese goods, above all silk and porcelain then much desired in Siam, as gifts in return, and to make a good profit in the additional dealings in Chinese markets.²⁹ Secondly, although Zhang Sidao was a captain of a Thai royal trading ship like Nai Gong, he must have visited Korea at a level of a private trading activity. In this regard it deserves to be noted that Zhang Sidao, judging by name, seems to have been a Chinese who had his home or the base of activities in Siam. But Nai Gong’s true national identity - a Chinese, or a Thai or another countryman - cannot be established.³⁰

As to the two aboriginal men who were presented to the king of Chosŏn, we do not know where they came from and how they came aboard the ship of Zhang Sidao to be taken to Korea. We can only guess that they were Malay natives living in the southern areas of the Malay Peninsula or on one of the Indonesian islands, who were captured or sold as slaves and taken aboard the Siamese trading ship. The basis of this guess is a travel account of the Portuguese Tomé Pires who stayed in Malacca from 1512 to 1515. According to it, among the chief merchandise which Siamese merchants at that time

²⁷ George Vinal Smith, *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand* (Northern Illinois University: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1977), 149-150.

²⁸ *Mingshi*, 8397.

²⁹ *Mingshi*, 8397; Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Chinese Trade, 1652-1853* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 34-35.

³⁰ Cf. Wada Hisanori, *op.cit.*, 32.

took from Malacca to Siam, there were male and female slaves in great numbers.³¹ A study of Anthony Reid has revealed that an extensive slave trade was carried out in most Southeast Asian maritime cities, not least on the South China Sea in the pre-modern times. Slaves were acquired, however, not only through the trade, but as a result of the conquest of an area, many of whose inhabitants were then often taken captive and enslaved, and the Thai seem to have also taken part in this method of acquiring manpower since earlier times.³²

The visit of Zhang Sidao and other men from the kingdom of Siam with such gifts shortly after the foundation of the new dynasty may have satisfied King T'aejo, Yi Sŏnggye, not a little. As I have discussed above, the party of Zhang Sidao came to Korea apparently for a commercial purpose. The court of Chosŏn which received the guests from Siam in 1394 seems, on its part, to have been considerably interested in establishing a relation with a country that was producing exotic, precious plants.

IV

The responses of the government of Yi Sŏnggye toward Zhang Sidao and his party's "unofficial" visit can be seen in the following record of the *T'aejo shillok* dated the fifth of the seventh lunar month of 1395, which says,³³

The Siamese envoy Zhang Sidao and other men returned [to Chosŏn] and told, "In the twelfth lunar month of the last year we, together with the return envoy [of Chosŏn], Paehu, arrived in Japan, where we were robbed by bandits, in which all gifts and traveling outfits were burnt so that nothing is left over with us. Therefore, we ask to equip our ship once again and beg leave to wait here for the coming winter to return to our country."

Afterwards they presented a sword, a suit of armor, copper utensils, and two black slaves. The king who was at that moment attending to government affairs ordered the minister of the Ceremonies Board to lead the Siamese to appear in the ranks of

³¹ Luís de Matos, "The First Portuguese Documents on Siam," in *Thailand and Portugal: 400 Years of Friendship*, ed. The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation on the Occasion of the Celebrations of the Second Centenary of the City of Bangkok, 36 (Lisbon, 1982).

³² Anthony Reid, "Introduction: Slavery and Bondage in Southeast Asian History," in *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid, 27-32 (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983); A. Teeuw and D. K. Wyatt, op.cit., 6-7.

³³ *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, vol. 1, 65-66.

court officials.

We are informed by this record that the court of Chosŏn, in return for the Siamese mission, sent a delegation led by Paehu together with the party of Zhang Sidao to Siam at the end of 1394, in which result above all commercial interest of the government of King T'aejo must have played an important role. The envoy Paehu had already had a diplomatic career in the government of Koryŏ. He had been sent to the kingdom of North Yuan as an envoy at the end of the Koryŏ Dynasty, when the then powerful general Choe Yŏng had decided to enter into an alliance with North Yuan in order to make a combined attack on Liao-dong of the empire of Ming.³⁴

Zhang Sidao and his men, who had presumably loaded their junk with various goods and set on the return voyage to Siam with the Korean mission, first stopped off in Japan, where they were probably attacked by a band of pirates and lost not only their cargo, but also the gifts of the court of Chosŏn for the king of Siam. Thus, they were forced to return to Korea, and it seems that by this time the Korean mission led by Paehu came back, too. It means that the first attempt of Korea to send a diplomatic mission to Thailand failed. On returning to Korea, Zhang Sidao presented to the court of Chosŏn, as one year ago, two Negroid slaves as well as a sword, a suit of armor, and copperwares which they may have acquired in Japan.

In Korea the guests from Siam had to wait for the coming winter when the seasonal wind from the north necessary for the voyage southeastwards would be blowing. During the inevitable stay in Korea they seem to have been treated quite well by the government of Yi Sŏnggye, who may have regarded the kingdom of Siam as a future trade partner of Chosŏn. This follows above all from a passage in the *T'aejo shillok* dated the eighth lunar month of 1395, according to which the court of Chosŏn made Zhang Sidao a *yebin'gyŏng*, the highest official of the *yebinsa*, the board for reception of state guests.³⁵

V

Although it is not mentioned in the chronicle of the Chosŏn Dynasty, the party of Zhang Sidao seems to have once again left Korea for Siam together with the Korean delegation led by Paehu during the winter between the late 1395 and the early 1396. And that delegation had an official interpreter called Yi Chayŏng who apparently was

³⁴ Kim Sanggi, *op.cit.*, 649.

³⁵ On the *yebinsa* and the *yebin'gyŏng* see *ibid.*, 883.

able to speak Chinese. These points can be ascertained in the following record of the *T'aejo shillok* dated the eleventh of the seventh lunar month of 1397³⁶:

Yi Chayŏng came from Japan. He had originally as the official interpreter gone to Siam together with the Yebinsogyŏng Paehu in a return mission. On the way back [to Korea] with the Siamese envoy Lin Dezhang, they reached the sea of Naju. There they were all captured and killed by a band of Japanese pirates but Chayŏng who alone was captured alive and taken back [to Japan] and now returned home.

At a glance, envoy Paehu and interpreter Yi Chayŏng seem to have visited Thailand for the first time for Koreans. But the record above does not tell what they did in the country. Nor do Thai historical records tell of the envoy's visit from Chosŏn. Above all, if the two Koreans really visited Siam and then returned, there is no reason that it was not recorded in Korean literatures. I feel convinced that the Korean envoy and interpreter did not visit the kingdom of Ayutthaya at all. This argument is not so far-fetched, considering Zhang Sidao came to Chosŏn as a private trader. Then where did the Koreans go? This question has yet to be solved. Either Paehu and Yi Chayŏng may have passed away keeping the secret to themselves, or they may have died without knowing where they had been.

We can also gather from the above record that the Korean delegation left home by the trading ship of the "Siamese envoy" Lin Dezhang from the "mysterious" destination. They might have sailed in the summer of 1396 when the southeastern monsoon was blowing.³⁷ The trading ship which seems to have reached the sea near Naju, now in the province of Chŏllanamdo, Korea, was, however, unfortunately attacked by a band of Japanese pirates. According to the above quoted report of Yi Chayŏng, all but this man died, who was then taken to Japan and was not able to return to Korea until the middle of the following year. But this report later proved to be partly not true. Thus, it is stated in another passage of the *T'aejo shillok* dated the twenty-third of the fourth lunar month of 1398³⁸:

³⁶ *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, vol. 1, 94.

³⁷ According to the Japanese source *Kaihentai* (Tokyo: Tôyôbunko, 1958), vol. 1, 307-309, trading ships sailing from Siam to Japan, around 1680, normally left Ayutthaya at the end of the fifth lunar month, i.e. between the end of June and July, and the voyage lasted for nearly two months. This situation does not seem to have been much different from that at the end of the fourteenth century. Cf. George Vinal Smith, op.cit., 79.

³⁸ *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, vol. 1, 105.

The Siamese envoy Lin Dezhang and other men, all told six, who had been captured by Japanese, fled and came [to Korea]. [The king] gave Dezhang and three of his men a suit of clothes each, and gave the servants, too.

Accordingly, the “Siamese envoy” Lin Dezhang together with five other men was caught off the coast of Naju on his way to Chosŏn and taken alive to Japan by Japanese pirates. It was in the spring of 1398 that he fled and came to Korea. Like Zhang Sidao, Lin Dezhang must have been a Siam-based Chinese merchant and captain of a Thai royal trading ship, rather than an “envoy.” Finally, the above examined records of the *T’aejo shillok* do not speak of the Korean envoy Paehu. Judging from the fact that he does not appear in later records of the *Chosŏn wangjo shillok* any more, he seems to have died between 1396 and 1397.

VI

With the above record of 1398 the last, the chronicle of the Chosŏn Dynasty does not tell us about the visit of a Siamese mission to Korea or the sending of a Korean mission to Siam but in a memorandum submitted by the *Saganwon* [The Board of Remonstrations] to King T’aejong (r. 1400-1418) on the fourteenth of the eleventh lunar month of 1409, recorded in the *T’aejong shillok* in the *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, where it is stated:³⁹

Since Your Majesty had ascended the throne, you have so much enhanced the literature and set such a high value on the military arts that the literati are industrious and the soldiers are strong. Thus, the dignity of Your Majesty has reached both [our] neighboring and enemy countries so that peoples from Ryukyu, Siam, and Japan have not failed to come to submit themselves [to you].

We find, however, no record in the *T’aejong shillok* that between 1400 and 1409 any people from Siam really came and paid homage to the court of Chosŏn. Therefore, the above passage of the memorandum cannot be taken literally, but is to be considered only a hackneyed and meaningless compliment.

It can be assumed that the relation between Korea and Thailand did not continue any longer after 1398-1399 when Lin Dezhang left Korea. There seems to be some reasons for it. The direct, most important one is the threat from Japanese pirates. The merchants

³⁹ *T’aejong kongjŏng taewang shillok* (Seoul, 1974), vol.18, 21.

from Siam and the Korean government that had experienced their attack between the late 1394 and the early 1395 and in 1397, are very likely to have realized acutely how dangerous the voyage between the two countries was. It was in the reign of King Kongmin (1352-1374) of Koryŏ Dynasty that the Japanese pirates, who had a considerable impact on the trade among East Asian countries, began to seriously operate on the Korean coasts.⁴⁰ Their piracy was so threatening that it became one of the main reasons that the Ming government employed the policy of maritime ban in the second half of the 16th century and that merchant ships hesitated to sail to China.⁴¹ Another reason seems to be that the governments of the two countries or Chinese merchants did not feel that the bilateral trade was important enough to be carried on at all risks. Thus, the two countries increasingly lost the interest in each other and did not make an attempt to resume the contact.

VII

The contacts between Korea and Thailand at the end of the fourteenth century, hitherto surveyed, must be understood in a broader context of the interest of the Thai government and, more importantly, Siam-based Chinese merchants in the trade in the China Seas, on the one hand, and of the interest of Korea in countries in the *Nanyang* or *Nanhai*, the Southern Seas, on the other hand. The Chosŏn government's policy in the early years of the dynasty of attaching importance to foreign trade and establishing the trade relation with Southeast Asia was taken over by King T'aejong.

According to the record of the eighth lunar month of 1395 in the *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, the court of T'aejo appointed a Chen Yanxiang a *sŏnbujŏng*, in that year when it granted Zhang Sidao the official title of *yebin'gyŏng*.⁴² *Sŏnbujŏng* was the title of an acting director of the Sŏn'gwan, which then took charge of astronomy, calendar, geomancy, divination, etc.⁴³ Chen Yanxiang who makes his first appearance in the Korean historical sources is considered to be a vice-envoy of Siam accompanying

⁴⁰ Tanaka Takeo, "Wakô to Tô Ajia tsûkôken," in *Retto naigai no kôtsû to kokka - Nihon no shakai shi*, ed. Amino Yoshihiko et al., vol. 1, 140-145 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987).

⁴¹ Yen Ching-hwang, *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period (1851-1911)* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), 8; Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia and Australia* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 114-116.

⁴² *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, vol. 1, 68.

⁴³ Kim Sanggi, op.cit., 715, 885.

Zhang Sidao by some Japanese scholars.⁴⁴ The ground for such an assumption seems to be the record of the eighth lunar month of 1406 in the *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, which says that “Chen Yanxiang came to [Chosŏn] in 1394, accompanying the envoy.”⁴⁵ That assumption is, however, not grounded. The just mentioned record introduces him as “an envoy of Java, a barbarian country in the Southern Seas.”⁴⁶

Chen Yanxiang, however, should be understood on a level with a Chinese merchant engaging in trade in the China Seas, like the Siamese “envoys” Zhang Sidao or Lin Dezhang. In 1412 when he sent a letter to the Chosŏn government, he also called himself “Chen Yanxiang, the *arya* of the kingdom in Java.”⁴⁷ *Arya* was the highest title of Javanese envoys at that time. It is seen from this that he sometimes performed a duty of an official envoy for the royal trade of the kingdom of Majapahit (1292-1527) in Java. However, in case of his second visit to Chosŏn in 1406, there is no telling how official the self-alleged envoy was, particularly because the chronicle of the Chosŏn Dynasty does not contain any mention of a letter of Majapahit government. Instead his visit supposedly was intended to do a serious trade with Chosŏn, based on the existing friendly relation with the Korean authority.

After Chen Yanxiang left Korea in the autumn of 1406, the trade relation between Korea and Java did not continue any longer. The main reason seems to have been both the danger of Japanese pirates which Chen Yanxiang personally experienced on his way to and from Korea in 1406 and low profitability expected of the trade, as in Korea-Thai relation.

VIII

There were contacts between Korea and Southeast Asia from earlier times. The record of the year 642 in the *Nihon shoki* [Annals of Japan] says, for example, that an envoy of the kingdom of Paekje (B.C.18-A.D.660) who visited Japan pushed an envoy of *kunlun* into the sea, with the result that he was drowned.⁴⁸ *Kunlun* is a geographical concept referring to the Southeast Asian region at large. In the thirteenth century, a Vietnamese prince visited Korea. Li Long-tuong, uncle of Hue-tong (r. 1211-1224) of Li Dynasty (1009-1225) of Vietnam, sought refuge in Koryŏ circa 1226, settled down at

⁴⁴ A. Kobata and M. Matsuda, *Ryukyuan Relations with Korea and South Sea Countries* (Kyoto, 1969), 149; Wada Hisanori, *op.cit.*, 31.

⁴⁵ *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, vol. 1, 369.

⁴⁶ *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, vol. 1, 369.

⁴⁷ *Chosŏn wangjo shillok*, vol. 1, 632.

⁴⁸ *Wanyŏk ilbonsŏgi*, translated by Chŏn Yongshin (Seoul: Iljisa, 1989), 417.

Ongjin County, Hwanghae Province, and founded a Hwasan Yi family, after the dynasty was overthrown with the outbreak of a civil war.⁴⁹

The just mentioned contacts between Korea and Southeast until the 13th century and those between Korea and Thailand and between Korea and Java from the late 14th to the early 15th century above surveyed were, as a whole, sporadic accidents. They can be classified into the “cultural contact” in terms of the division of the cultural relations by Swiss historian Urs Bitterli.⁵⁰ They did not develop into a continual and extensive relationship such as between China and Southeast Asia in the pre-modern times, which was made on the basis of vigorous interests between both parties.

In the contacts between Korea and Southeast Asia here discussed there were no Koreans who played the same role of middlemen as Chinese merchants in the Sino-Southeast Asian trade.⁵¹ It is probably because the governments of Koryŏ or Chosŏn were not in active pursuit of overseas trade, and Korean merchants themselves did not have much interest in the trade in the South China Sea. Another reason, as stated above, may be that the Chinese merchants, who often functioned as mediators over the South China Sea and the East China Sea, made no contribution to the development of the Korea-Southeast Asian relation.

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⁴⁹ Kim Yŏnggŏn, *Indoshina to Nihon tonō kansei* (Tokyo: Husanbō, 1943), 293-309.

⁵⁰ Urs Bitterli, *Alte Welt – neue Welt: Formen des europäisch-überseeischen Kulturkontaktes vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (München: DTV, 1992), 17-54.

⁵¹ According to Urs Bitterli, a middleman is indispensable in order that the “cultural relation” through trade may develop in a smooth way. See *ibid.*

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