

Royal Letters, Imperial Documents: A Japanese, Korean and Thai Trialogue for a Global History of Inter-State Relations

ABSTRACTS:

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Siamese-Burmese Diplomacy: a Study of the Royal Letters of the 1630s

Most studies on the early modern Thai-Burmese relations focus on the aspect of war. In 1564, the great Burmese King Bayinnaung defeated the Thais. The Burmese suzerainty was successfully challenged by the fight for Thai independence led by King Naresuan (ruled 1590-1605). Between the two large-scale Siamese-Burmese wars of the 1560s and the 1760s, with the latter raised Ayutthaya to the ground, there were series of smaller-scale wars between the two kingdoms but also periods of peace.

This presentation will explore the Siamese-Burmese relations in peacetime through another tool of conducting these relations, namely diplomacy. During the reign of King Prasatthong (ruled 1629-1656), there are secondary records of a few royal letters in exchange between the royal courts of Siam and Burma from the 1630s. Their contents were mentioned in the royal chronicles of Ayutthaya and recorded in a Dutch-VOC document. Taken as my point of departure, diplomacy is a way to allow enemies to have dialogue and preserve peace. In this presentation, I will attempt, by analyzing these royal letters, to ascertain how the Siamese and Burmese tried to find a common ground and maintain a balance in their peacetime relations.

Dhiravat na Pombejra

Chaophraya Phrakhlang's 1703 letter on behalf of King Sua to the *Hoge Regering*: trade, treaty and the royal command

This paper will discuss a letter written in 1703 by the Chaophraya Phrakhlang, minister for foreign affairs and the treasury, on behalf of King Sua of Siam (r.1703-1709) to the VOC Governor-General and Council of the Indies (*Hoge Regering*) in Batavia. At the beginning of this reign, the VOC sought a quick renewal of the Dutch-Siamese Treaty and Alliance of Peace initially concluded in August 1664 and renewed, with addenda, in 1688. The process was to prove far from smooth, as Gideon Tant the Dutch *opperhoofd* in Ayutthaya tried and failed to obtain a royal audience to discuss the treaty. The letter discussed here presents the *phrakhlang's* side of the story, and covers the connected issues of protocol, precedent and the royal command. The letter goes on to accuse the *opperhoofd* of corruption as well as ignorance of Siamese customs and trading practice, requesting that he be replaced.

KOO Bumjin

Languages of the Qing Investiture Letters for Chosŏn before the Conquest of China

The Qing rulers, just like those of the preceding empires, abided by the diplomatic convention of imperial investiture of Chosŏn's king, consort and heir apparent. The letters of investiture issued by the Manchu emperors, as is well known, had a distinct feature in terms of language: they were written not only in Chinese but also in Manchu and/or Mongol. Visually and vividly testifying to this multilingualism are the bilingual (Manchu and Chinese) letters of investiture, still extant in Seoul, that were produced in the early 18th century. It is still fair enough, however, to ask whether or not the Qing investiture letters for Chosŏn before 1644 were also multilingual, taking into account the facts that the language of correspondences between Seoul and Mukden (=Shenyang) was not Manchu but

Chinese, and that all the extant imperial letters addressed to Chosŏn's king of the pre-conquest era, in stark contrast with the bilingualism of the post-conquest imperial letters, are found to be in Chinese only. This report explores this question by a close investigation of the contemporary accounts of the investiture letters.

JUNG Donghun

Imperial Word, Spoken and Written: Two Dimensions of Sino-Korean Relations in the early 15th century

This study examines the process by which the Ming Emperor's orders were delivered to Chosŏn. Imperial orders were sometimes documented by the hands of secretaries, and sometimes delivered in the form of oral messages by the eunuchs.

The imperial edicts addressed national issues like horse trade, initiative for Jurchen. It was about the diplomacy of the public sphere. On the other hand, through oral messages emperors requested beautiful virgins, clever eunuchs, falcons for hunting, delicious seafood and even female cooks to satisfy their appetite. Compared to the former, private interest is strongly reflected.

The diplomatic agents of the Ming Dynasty can be divided into two groups. One is who are in charge of the emperor's writings, namely the civil officials. The other group who conveyed the emperor's word is mainly eunuchs. While Chosŏn was a partner of public diplomacy and a good companion of the Chinese world order for the former, for the latter, Chosŏn was an indefinite spring that would fill the emperor's private desires. Contrary to the expectations of neighboring countries, in the first half of the 15th century, the latter was an even more important issue for the individual Ming emperor.

However, the official records of the Ming Dynasty left no hidden image of the emperor. Since the literati of Ming court could not intervene in the oral message of the emperor, it may have been impossible to recognize this dark side at all. Sometimes the Ming historians conducted more aggressive manipulation. They "corrected" the emperor's "incorrect" instructions to the opposite, and tried to pass them on to posterity.