

## ROUTE OF THE KOREAN ENVOYS OF CHOSUN DYNASTY AND THEIR CULTURAL LEGACY IN JAPAN

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This paper will attempt to explore the significance of the Korean diplomatic envoys to Japan in 17-19C, together with some examples of cultural exchange, impact on cultural life in both countries. Through this presentation, it is hoped to identify one of rare cultural route in the northeast Asia. Various evidences indicate that what has been intended for political purpose has become venue of cultural exchange that were beneficial to both countries

Since time immemorial rulers in Korean peninsula and Japanese islets have maintained very close relations. Most of the time, the relations were peaceful and to Japan it was immensely beneficial in that Korean peninsula served a relaying role in transmitting advanced continental civilization. This trend continued until Japan opened its door to Western countries and began its modernization in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. From here, the trend reversed and western civilization was introduced to Korea via Japan.

Historic records show that rulers of the two countries exchanged various class of envoys on a fairly frequent basis. During the Muromachi period (1392-1573) in Japan, Japanese *shogun* (military ruler) sent more than 60 small missions to Korea. In most case, Japanese delegation tried to obtain Buddhist text or items related with Buddhism and or Confucian text. Korea's Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910) dispatched about equal number of small scale missions to Japan. In most case, official Korean envoy used title of *Tongsinsa* (通信使) which literally means goodwill mission. These missions also served as important venue of official trade. This goodwill missions continued until 1592 when ruler Hideyoshi Toyotomi invaded Korea. The invasion lasted seven years inflicting great loss of lives and wealth as well as major monuments and sites.

Tokugawa Shogun who toppled Hideyoshi shogunate and established the capital in Edo (now Tokyo) in 1603 instructed *Daimyo* (feudal lord) in Tsushima, to negotiate with Chosun kingdom to resume sending envoy to congratulate their new regime. *Daimyo* of Tsushima has acted as diplomatic representative and sole trader with Korean regime in the past. Tokugawa Shogunate felt that peaceful relation with neighboring country was essential for domestic stabilization, and furthermore journey of Korean diplomatic envoy through the territory of *Daimyos* (local

lord) enroute to and presence in Edo would enhance the prestige of the new regime. Korean kingdom had admonishment against Japan to resume diplomatic envoys at first. Tokugawa regime then argued that they played no role in staging Japanese invasion to Korea and their intention is to restore peaceful relation between the two countries. Korean court resumed to send its envoy in 1607. There was no reparation from Japan but important background in resuming the relation was to negotiate returning of thousands of war prisoners taken to and still being held in Japan.

During the ensuing two and half century, Korean Kingdom dispatched 12 delegations to Japan. Last delegation was sent in 1811. However, reciprocal Japanese mission were met in port city of Busan. Korean side did not allow Japanese delegation to proceed to Seoul. Significance of Korean mission is that the mission comprised of 300 to 500 members. The delegation is led by chief of delegation and a secretary. Other than the diplomatic representative, delegation was comprised of documenting officer, military band, honor guards, sailors and errand boys. Korean also included as delegation members scholars, artists, doctors and even an acrobatic group. The delegation was practically cultural mission. Korean court took this opportunity to select a highly respected Confucian scholar as head of the mission as well as its top ranking delegation. Although Korean was overruled by Japanese military power, they were proud of their cultural superiority.

The journey from Seoul to Edo is approximately 2,000 kilometers land-sea-land route and took minimum of 6 months to one year to complete the journey. Delegations took fairly the same marine and land route. After members of the delegation are appointed, member would travel in small group and assemble in Busan port in southern Korea. Here they are met and escorted by Japanese officials from Tsushima all the way to Edo. Tsushima is barely 50 kilometers away from Busan. From Busan the mission take sea voyage to Tsushima-Iki Island-Ainosima Island and after arriving in the main island Honshu, they sail by way of Seto inner sea corridor to the estuary in Osaka making stopovers along the corridor. At the Osaka estuary, the envoys land and take land route called *Tokaido* to Edo. Upon arrival in Edo, chief and his deputies pay courtesy call on the

*Shogun* and present message of goodwill from Korean King.

The journey of this diplomatic mission was a big event in Japan as the hosting country treated them as very important national guest. The maritime voyage became a big fleet as Korean fleet is escorted by more than 50 Japanese escort and transport ships. After arriving in the Japanese territory, the delegation made stopover in ten ports until they land at Osaka. From here they would travel on land. Until they arrive in Edo, they made stopover in ten towns. The Tokugawa shogunate ordered local feudal lords to guide and accommodate them as the national guest. They were accommodated in temple, shrine and some improvised guest house. So the logistics involved in sending a delegation was quite a burden to the sender as well as the local host *Daimyos* not to speak of Edo host.

Receiving of the mission in Japan produced unusual cultural event. Korean envoys took pride in showing off their literary talent and skills. At guesthouse, envoys are crowded with Japanese visitors who wish to obtain a poem, calligraphy or painting. Some local hosts have exchanged ideas in writing. Some exchanged poems and Chinese calligraphy. Along the stopover town, local Japanese doctors crammed to meet doctor from Korea. When the envoys parade through a town, it provided unusual occasion for common people to watch exotic foreign military honor guard in full uniform parade through their street. These stopovers at ports and lodging towns as well as stay in Edo have become a natural venue for cultural exchange. According to "Record of the visit and return of Tongsinsa" which describe about the 8<sup>th</sup> mission in 1711, 4,567 men in 655 ships were involved in order to meet and escort the delegation. We can also find this in artist drawing.

In many local towns where the delegation passed through, there remain many legacies now. Paintings that depict procession of Korean envoy, calligraphies and poems that have left by Korean diplomats are found in many places. Some times, due to adverse weather condition, the journey was unexpectedly delayed while making stopovers. To the entertaining local *Daimyo* it was extra expenditure, but at the other hand this extra stay provided opportunity to exchange ideas, compose and chanting of poems. There are abundant archeological and documentary evidences that speak of its magnitude and impacts of this exchange. Effect of the Korean envoys can still be found in many towns and villages in such form as local festival, dance, costumes, and dolls.

Envoys costumes and musical instruments draw interest and not only the residents but also spectators from neighboring towns and villages. They rushed to the scene to

watch the procession despite the banning. Many writings including poems given by Korean envoys, paintings of the procession, costumes, acrobatic game are created out of this visit. In some of towns, music and dance supposed to have influenced by Korean mission are adopted in their local festival. Dolls named "*Tojin ningyo*" meaning Korean doll are found in many different local towns. Following is few examples.

In Takeshima cho in Gifu Prefecture near Nagoya, town's wagon parade festival originated from imitating the Tongsinsa procession. This festival instrument is now displayed in Takeshima Museum.

In Tsu city in Mie Prefecture, city's autumn festival that takes places in Yahata Shrine for the past 300 years, *Tojin* (Korean) parade the high light of the festival.

In Ushimado port town in Okayama Prefecture, "*karako odori*" (dance of Korean children) still highlights in their October festival.

In Kaminoseki Museum, there remains dinner menu and drawing served to Tongsinsa. According to the menu, the envoys were treated specially which testify cuisinary culture of Japan during 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In Shimokamagari in Hiroshima Prefecture, we can witness stair-style berth which let adjustment of berthing according to tidal movement. This is specially built for Korean envoys that called on this port village 22 times.

In Tomonoura port town, Taichoryu the guesthouse was built for the Korean envoys. A calligraphic signboard written by a Korean envoy that says "Ildong Jeil Kyungseung" (The best scene in Japan) is being preserved and treasure of Fukusenji Temple.

In Omi area in Shiga Prefecture, there remains "Chosenjin Kaido" (Korean Envoys Road) that spans about 40 kilometers. According to history, this road was built solely for Shoguns' exclusive use. Japanese authority allowed Korean envoys to pass through. The name of road was derived from such use.

Japanese artist Hokusai Katsushika is famous for drawing 53 sceneries of Tokaido. His sceneries includes Korean envoys pass through Seikenji Temple pass in 17<sup>th</sup> scene.

Perhaps highlight of the arrival of Korean envoys in Edo would be procession through street of Tokyo as depicted in a painting in downtown Tokyo with Fuji Mountain in the back where spectator fill main street.

Harbour city Busan in the southeastern tip is 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Korea and one of the ten largest harbors in the world. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was a small fishing village and contact point with Japan. The port city has grown to bustling international metropolis thanks to expansion of imperial Japan to Korea that begun in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because of natural setting and geographic proximity to Japan, Japanese built harbour in Busan and railroad in 1905 in Korea reaching to northeastern part (Manchuria) of China for advancement to Asian mainland.

People of Tsushima traditionally lived on trade with Korea. However, in time of unstable situation in Japan or in period of famine, they often become pirate, invade and loot towns and villages in southern coastal area. Chosun court felt it necessary that economic stabilization is essential for peace in coastal area and for this purpose gave exclusive trade right to ruler of Tsushima. Daimyo of Tsushima thus was allowed to establish its legation (called *wagwan*) and was given right to trade throughout Chosun Dynasty period except during the Hideyoshi invasion. They served as messenger between Korean court and Japan shogunate. Tsushima post was located at sea front in Choryang area. At times Japanese population in this post numbered 1,000 and trading took place every five days (like traditional open market).

In Busan, there is a place near the costal tip called *Yunggadae* where Korean mission prayed for tailwind for the sailing ship and safe voyage. We can find ample record and painting of *Wagwan* and its vicinity.

This exchange of mission discontinued because both countries found too expensive to pay the huge expenses involved in sending and receiving the mission. Another reason is that Tokugawa Shogunate has become weak and eventually collapsed in 1868. After Meiji revolution, Japan took the path of imperialism and colonized Korea in 1910. The route is no longer used for any similar purpose. The mode of transportation has changed.

There are number of accounts and diaries by Korean envoys. *Hae Heng Chong Jae* (海行 Collection of Sea Voyages) is most comprehensive collection of diaries and observation on Japan as seen by Korean delegates. Written in classic Chinese individual writings are put together and published as collection in 1914 by Korean Classics Publication Society. In 1977 this collection was translated into Korean language in 11 volumes (6,000 pages). The collection spanning the last 600 years is most comprehensive and detailed diplomats' memoirs solely on Japan written by foreigners. By studying these memoirs we could better

understand relations between Korea and Japan as well as history of diplomacy in north Asia.

The missions played not only the role of diplomatic mission but also trader as they brought to Japan as gift some rare product from Korea and even Chinese commodities Korean obtained from China. The dispatches of Tongsinsa also had impact in Korean culture. The Korean mission introduced from Japan such food item as tobacco, sweet potato and hot pepper that did not grow in Korea. Hot pepper has become essential dietary food without which Korean *kimchi* (Korean pickled vegetable) is hardly conceivable. They also brought few western goods which Japanese obtained from trade with Dutch and Portuguese in Nagasaki.

It is only after the Japanese defeat in the World War II that any attempt to engage in academic research on Tongsinsa ever began. In Japan, there are plenty of documentation of these trips, paintings of the envoys, calligraphies and related materials. At first there was only sporadic study until 1960s, but after several academic researches have been published public attention and interest gained momentum. During the past two decades, there have been number of attempts to shed spotlight this unique cultural exchange. Following is some of the identifiable movements that have been initiated in both countries as of summer 2005.

- 1) National museums in Japan and Korea staged special exhibition on "Korean Envoys to Japan" in 1980s.
- 2) In Japanese towns where Korean envoys passed through, local authority began to realize that the legacy of Chosun Tongsinsa could be utilized as resource for sustainable tourism. In Many town museums and permanent galleries dedicated to Korean envoys were established. Some of the sites are designated as historic landmark.
- 3) Several years ago, a Korean television company staged for youth a field learning expedition taking historic sea route from Busan to Osaka.
- 4) Several years ago, a special project team was established among teachers in Korea and Japan to study jointly. They published joint reference book called "Chosun Tongsinsa" in 2005.
- 5) This author recently identified about hundred titles devoted in study of Korean Tongsinsa. In Busan an academic society was formed early this year.
- 6) In Busan, "Action Committee for Promotion of Chosun Tongsinsa" was formed in 2004 and reconstructed the procession of Chosun Tongsinsa in Tokyo Street for the first time in two hundred years.

So far I have tried to explain its historic framework and

cultural impact on both countries. As seen above, this is truly a historic route that served as venue and occasion where interaction, adoption and incorporation enriched each other. This heritage route is composed of tangible and intangible elements that come from exchange and multi-dimensional dialog across the two countries. This cultural route which form an international belt, testifies spatio-temporal factor in which legacies of the past are well survived. I believe it is now the time for ICOMOS professionals in both countries to start engage in research on this rare route so that universality of this heritage could be identified as well as conservation efforts for mutual benefit is launched.

### Abstract

Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910) of Korea, which maintained closed-door policy except with Qing, China, has maintained a diplomatic relations with Edo Bakufu of Japan from early 17<sup>th</sup> century till the Meiji restoration (of emperor) in 1868. It was interesting in that Japan, which was also in the period of national isolation, had formal relations with Korean Kingdom. Two states exchanged diplomatic envoys on a fairly routine basis. Korean side allowed a Japanese legation to station in Busan port.

Records show that during two and half century Korean Kingdom dispatched 12 missions to Japan. The mission comprised of 300 to 500 members took minimum of 6 months to one year to complete the journey. The route the mission took was the same. They would travel by land from Hanyang (now Seoul) to Dongrae (now Busan) and met by Japanese escort to start sea route to Osaka via Korea Strait to Tsushima, Shimoneseki and Seto inner islets corridor. At the Osaka estuary, the envoys land and took the Japanese *Tokaido* route to Edo (now Tokyo).

This diplomatic mission was a big event in Japan. When the envoys arrive in Japan, local feudal rulers along the route were obliged to entertain and to escort them to Edo. Korean envoys played the role of transmitter of Korean culture and material objects to Japan. When the envoys pass through a town, to common people, it provided unusual occasion to watch foreign military honor guard in full uniform parade through their street. At the guesthouse, envoys and the local hosts have exchanged poems and views in handwriting in Chinese characters. Sending and receiving of this mission produced unusual cultural event, very unique kind of cultural exchange.

This exchange of mission discontinued because both countries found too expensive to pay the huge expenses to send and receive the mission. Although the route is no longer used for any similar purpose, there are abundant archeological and documentary evidences that speak of its magnitude and impacts of this exchange. There are number of accounts and diaries by Korean envoys most of which

were collected and published as *Hae Heng Chong Jae* (Collections of Sea Fares). In Japan, there are plenty of documentation of these trips, paintings of the envoys, calligraphies and related materials. In number of local sites where the envoys stayed, numeral monuments are still to be found.

During the past two decades, there have been number of attempts to shed spotlight this unique cultural exchange in the form of museum exhibitions, symposia and publications in both countries. A Korean media company staged the reenactment of the past voyage a few years ago.

This paper will attempt to explore the significance of the Korean diplomatic envoys to Japan in 17-19C, together with some examples of exchange of value, impact on cultural life in both countries. This would identify a unique cultural route in the northeast Asia.

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kim-Korean Tonsinsa pass through street in Japan



kim-collection of memoirs



kim-Japanese Legation in Choryang, Busan



kim-Korean Tongsinsa anchored at a port in Japan



kim-Land route to Tokyo from Osaka



kim-Tonsinsa arrives Edo



kim-Sea route from Busan to Osaka



kim-tonsinsa in carriage