

## Article

## The King of Ayutthaya's Golden Letters to the Ming Emperor and the Shogun<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** This article analyses the presentation of the ‘golden letters’ sent by the king of Ayutthaya to the Chinese Ming emperor and compares those which were sent to the Japanese Tokugawa shogunate. The differences in how the letters were wrapped and presented suggest that Ayutthaya may have held the Ming emperor in higher regard than the shogun. For example, the golden letter to the Ming Emperor was placed on the two-tiered tray. It was called *phan wean fah* in Thai, designed to be used by the king. On the other hand, the golden letter to the shogun was placed on the single-tiered tray. Furthermore, the Chinese-language letters accompanying these golden letters were also different from that of Ming and the Tokugawa shogunate. To the Ming, Ayutthaya generally used *kanhe* (勘合, tallies) and wrote the letter in the style of a *biao* (表), a ceremonial letter to the emperor from his vassal. In contrast, the Chinese-language letters to the Tokugawa shogunate were drafted as correspondence between equals. The golden letters were designed to convey the Ayutthaya king's ideas; therefore, examining how they were presented is an important means of investigating how kings represented their authority. By analyzing the presentation of the golden letters, this article concludes that Ayutthaya held the Chinese dynasty in higher regard than Japan's shogunate. Additional research into the golden letters sent to other polities can help clarify the nature of Ayutthaya's foreign relations and the international order it established for itself.

**KEYWORDS:** royal letters, Thai-China relations, Thai-Japan relations, Siam, foreign relations of Ayutthaya

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<sup>1</sup> This paper stems from an earlier Japanese-language article by Kimura Kanako, ‘Kangō to Purarāchasān: Den Seikin ‘Hō Senra koku shinkō so’ kara mita Min matsu no Shamu no kokusho [*Kanhe* and *Phrarāchasān*: Siamese diplomatic letters as seen in Tian Sheng-jin's “Memorial on the tributary envoy from Siam” in the late Ming dynasty]’, in *Kokusho ga musubu gaikō* [Correspondence between Crowns: Diplomatic practices in the China seas, 1400–1850], ed. Matsukata Fuyuko (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2019), pp. 269–296, with some additions and corrections.

## 1. Introduction

Relations between the Kingdom of Ayutthaya and Ming China date from 1370. That year, the Ming Emperor Hongwu called on the Ayutthaya king to pay tribute, and the following year the king sent an envoy. In 1377, the Hongwu Emperor presented the envoy with ‘the Seal of the King of *Xianluo*’ [暹羅國王之印, *Xianluo guowang zhi yin*],<sup>2</sup> which was to be bestowed upon the Ayutthaya king.<sup>3</sup> For the Ming, issuing this seal did not only confirm the king of Ayutthaya’s status as a vassal, but also require Ayutthaya to use the seal to stamp on diplomatic letters to the Ming.

In Ayutthaya history, the suzerain-vassal relationship between the Ming and Ayutthaya was understood in terms of trade with the Ming. Suebsaeng Proomboon pointed that “the Chinese recognition was a political formality confirming the reigning king and a prerequisite for economic privileges.”<sup>4</sup> However, through the research on Ayutthaya’s petition for the Ming to dispatch troops to Japan during the Imjin War (1592–1598), I reconsidered the political relationship between the Ming and Ayutthaya and pointed out there was cooperative relationship in military matters between them. Furthermore, I discovered that the Ming received Ayutthaya’s tributary missions though they did not carry the sealed letter, but Ayutthaya petitioned the Ming to reissue the seal since it was destroyed by Burma three times in a short period. From this incidence, I pointed that the Ming’s recognition was important for Ayutthaya during the war with Burma.<sup>5</sup> It is necessary to deepen the

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<sup>2</sup> The handle was in the shape of a camel. Later, the Qing dynasty also bestowed ‘the seal of the King of *Xianluo*’, with a similar camel-shaped handle. The Rattanakosin dynasty referred to seal as ‘Tra loto’ or literally ‘the seal of camel’.

<sup>3</sup> For English-language studies of the relationship between Ayutthaya and the Ming, see Tilemann Grimm, ‘Thailand in the light of official Chinese historiography: A chapter in the history of the Ming dynasty’, *Journal of the Siam Society*, 49, 1 (1961): 1–20; Suebsaeng Proomboon, ‘Sino-Siamese tributary relations, 1282–1853’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin, 1971); Geoff Wade, ‘The Ming shi-lu as a source for Thai history — fourteenth to seventeenth centuries’, *Journal of South East Asian Studies*, 31, 2 (2000): 249–294; Jeffery Sng & Pimpraphai Bisalputra, *A history of the Thai-Chinese* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2015), pp. 14–32.

<sup>4</sup> Proomboon, ‘Sino-Siamese tributary relations’, 156.

<sup>5</sup> Kimura Kanako, ‘Min no taigai seisaku to sakuhoukoku Senra: Banreki chyouosen no eki ni okeru shiyaku senrahei ron wo tegakari ni’ [Ming Dynasty’s Foreign Policy and Its Suzerain-Vassal Relationship with Ayutthaya: The Deployment of Siamese Troops in the Wangli Korean Campaign], *Tōyō Gakuho*, 92, 3 (2010): 281–310. This paper clarified that King Naresuan was not involved in the Ayutthaya’s petition to attack Japan, but the Minister of War, Shi Xing (石星) encouraged the Ayutthaya envoy to make such petition. For the reason of the Shi Xing’s petition, I pointed out the influence of the military cooperation between the Ming and Ayutthaya against common enemies such as pirates and Burma at this time.

analysis of how the relationship between Ayutthaya and the Ming has changed in the changing international environment surrounding them from mid-16<sup>th</sup> century to early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Therefore, as a first step in exploring the political position of the Ming for the Ayutthaya, this paper will specifically clarify royal letters the Ayutthaya sent to the Ming Dynasty. The Ayutthaya envoy presented a letter on behalf of the king, referred to as a *jinye biao*wen [金葉表文] in Ming records.<sup>6</sup> The word *biao* [表] denotes a ceremonial letter presented by a vassal to the emperor. Thus, we might translate the full phrase as ‘a letter written on a sheet of gold from a vassal to the emperor’. Needless to say, this translation of a Ming source reflects a Sinocentric worldview. Ming emperors did not regard other countries as equals and held that the kings of these countries occupied a position that was a notch below their own. For the Ming, all envoys coming to China were ‘tributary’ envoy.

In contrast, the Ayutthaya Kingdom exchanged *phrarāchāsān* or ‘king’s letter’ with foreign kings or powers which Ayutthaya regarded as ‘king’. In this context, a golden letter was a kind of *phrarāchāsān*, such that sending *phrarāchāsān* suggested a relationship between equals.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, no golden letters sent from Ayutthaya to the Ming remain extant, making a detailed study of their form impossible.

However, in a 1617 memorial to the Wanli Emperor, the Touring Censor of Guangdong province, Tian Sheng-jin (田生金), described a golden letter in detail.<sup>8</sup> In this article, I

<sup>6</sup> For more on the diplomatic correspondence between Ayutthaya and the Ming, see Piyada Chonlaworn, ‘Ayutayano tai Min kankei: Gaikou monjyo kara miru [The relationship between Ayutthaya and the Ming dynasty: An analysis of official correspondence]’, *Shigaku kenkyū*, 238 (2002): 55–70.

<sup>7</sup> Kawaguchi Hiroshi, ‘Jūhachi seiki matsu kara jūkyū seiki zenhan ni okeru “Purārāchāsān”’: Ratanakōshin chō Shamu ga Shinchō oyobi Genchō Betonamu to kawashita monjo [‘Phrarāchāsān’ from the end of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century: Documents exchanged between Siam and the Qing dynasty and between Siam and the Nguyễn dynasty], in *Kokusho ga musubu gaikō* [Correspondence between crowns: Diplomatic practices in the China seas, 1400–1850], ed. Matsukata Fuyuko (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2019), pp. 269–296. In the Rattanakosin period, the golden letter was called ‘*pura supannabat pura swanna phrarāchāsān*’, or ‘*phrarāchāsān supannabat*’. ‘*supannabat*’ means sheet of gold. I wish to express my gratitude to Kawaguchi Hiroshi for helping me by sharing his knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> Tian Sheng-jin, *An yue shu gao* [按粵疏稿Memorials on Guangdong Province] (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1982), vol. 5, Bao xianluo guo jingong shu [The memorial on a Siamese envoy who came to pay tribute]. Studies on this memorial include Matsuura Akira, ‘Banreki yonjyugonen Senrakoku kenminshi: Mindai chōkō keitai no yōsō [Siamese envoy to the Ming in the forty-fifth year of Wan-li: An appearance of tribute in the Ming era]’, in *Zoutei Shi ryūkyū roku kaidai oyobi kenkyū* [Annotated bibliography and study on Chinese envoys’ records in Ryukyū: Enlarged and revised version], ed. Huma Susumu (Ginowan: Yōju shorin, 1999); Tang Kai-jian

will analyse the golden letter sent to the Ming by examining Tian's memorial.

I will also draw comparisons between this letter and the golden letters sent to Japan. Trade between Ayutthaya and Japan is estimated to have started at the end of the 16th century, during the reign of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, but it was not until the Edo period that the King of Ayutthaya sent a letter to Japan. In 1606, Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo shogunate, sent a letter to Ayutthaya requesting trade and the reply was sent in 1610. The first official Ayutthaya envoy came to Japan in 1616, followed by envoys in 1621, 1623, 1626 and 1629. But during the reign of King Prasatthorn, Japan did not accept the Ayutthaya envoys, as there were doubts about his legitimacy. Therefore, formal diplomatic relations between the Ayutthaya and Japan ceased. However, junks dispatched by the king and others from Ayutthaya continued to visit Nagasaki to trade.<sup>9</sup> Although the exchange of letters between Japan and Ayutthaya was for a short period, detailed descriptions of the letters remain in the *Ikoku nitteki*, a collection of diplomatic documents in this period.

Koizumi Junko explores Siam's inter-state relations from a broad perspective by comparing royal letters sent by Siam to Vietnam and Burma during the first Rattanakosin dynasty.<sup>10</sup> But it seems there are no studies that have analysed the royal letters of the Ayutthaya period in detail, nor have been any studies comparing royal letters sent from Ayutthaya to each country. This paper aims to explore the differences how Ayutthaya positioned the Ming and Japan by comparing Ayutthaya's letters sent to them at almost the same period and provide clues to understand their inter-state relations.

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and Tian Yu, 'Wan-li sushiwu nian tian sheng-jin bao xianluo guo jingong shu yanjiu: ming-dai zhong xian guangxishi shang da yi fen zhongyao de zhongwen wenxian [A study on Tian Sheng-jin's "Memorial on the tributary envoy from Siam" in the forty-fifth year of Wan-li: An important Chinese document about Sino-Siamese relations during the Ming Dynasty]', *Jinan xuebao*, 129 (2007): 123–134; and Shi Ya-pei, 'An yue shu gao yan-jiu [Research on An yue shu gao]' (M.A. thesis, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, 2016). These prior studies, however, did not analyse the golden letters in detail. Regarding Tian Sheng-jin, see Ling Li-chao, 'Au yue shu gao zuezhe Tian sheng-jin kao [A study on the author of petitions to the throne by the governor of Guangdong Province, Tian Sheng-jin]', *Beijing keji daxue xuebao: shehui keshue ban*, 31, 5, (2015): 74–79.

<sup>9</sup> Nagazumi Yōko, 'Ayutthaya and Japan: Embassies and trade in the seventeenth century', in *From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya's maritime relations with Asia*, ed. Kennon Breazeale (Bangkok: Toyota Thailand Foundation, 1999), pp. 89–103.

<sup>10</sup> Koizumi Junko, 'Ratanakōshin chō ittsei ōchō Shamu no taigai kankei: Kouiki chiikizou no kentou ni muketa yobiteki kōsatu' [Siamese inter-state relations from a regional perspective: A note on the letter exchanged between Siam and her neighboring states in the first reign of Rattanakosin period], *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjyo kiyō*, 154 (2008): 71–104.

## 2. A golden letter to the Ming

In order to prevent visits by fraudulent envoys, the Ming began issuing *kanhe* (勘合), or tallies, to Ayutthaya, Champa, and Cambodia in 1383. This system subsequently spread to include other Southeast Asian countries and Japan.

Figure 1 and 2 present Japanese historian Hashimoto Yū's reconstruction of how the *kanhe* (J: *kangō*) were formatted and used.<sup>11</sup>

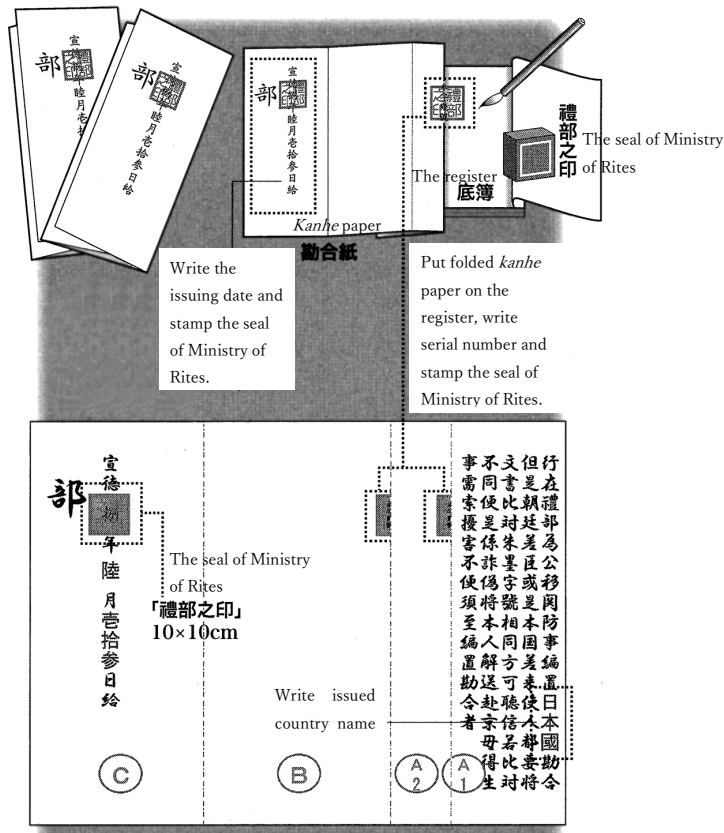


Figure 1: Issuing a *kanhe* (Hashimoto, *'Nihon kokuou' to Kangō boueki*, p. 34. Some of the modifications and English explanations are translated by author)

<sup>11</sup> Hashimoto Yū, 'Nichimin Kangō saikō' [Reconsideration of *Kanhe* which were used between Japan and the Ming], in *Kyōkai kara mita uchi to soto* [Inside and outside seen from boundaries], ed. Kyūshū Shigaku Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Iwata Shyoin, 2008), pp. 327–362; Hashimoto Yū, *'Nihon kokuou' to Kangō boueki: Naze Asikaga shōgun-ke ha chyuuka kouteini 'choukou'*

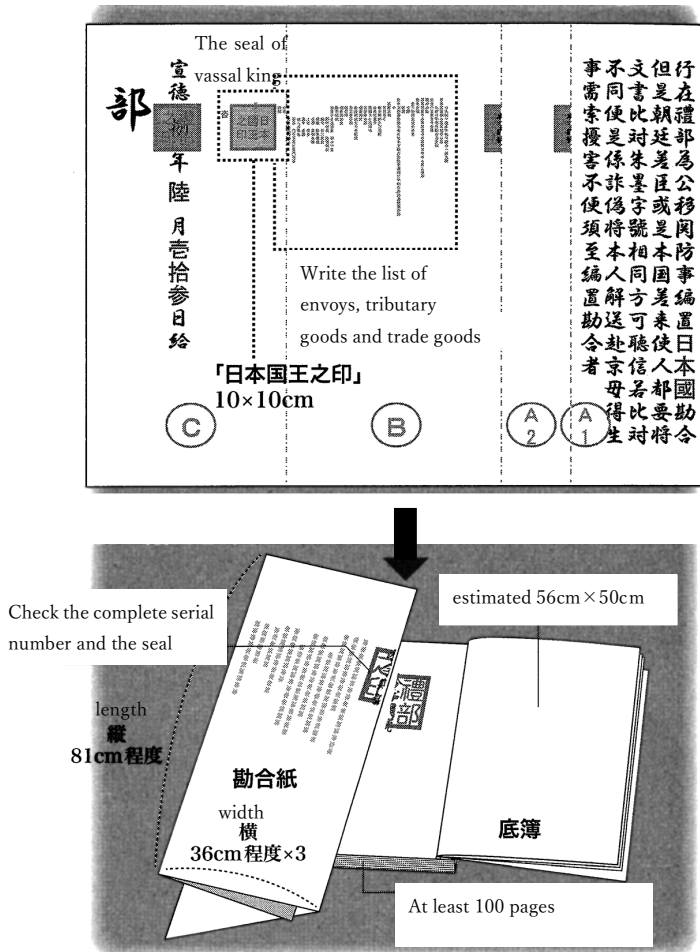


Figure 2: A description of how *kanhe* were used (Hashimoto, ‘*Nihon Kokuou*’ to *Kangō boueki*, p. 35. Some of the modifications and English explanations are translated by author)

*shitanoka* [“King of Japan” and the Kangō trade: Why did the Ashikaga shoguns paid “tribute” to the Chinese emperor?] (Tokyo: NHK Publishing, 2013), pp. 27–35; Hashimoto Yū, ‘Kangō to shibun’ [*Kanhe and Ziwen*], ed Murai Shousuke, *Nichimin kankeishi kenkyū nyūmon* [An introduction guide to research on the history of the international relationship between Japan and the Ming] (Tokyo: Bensei Publishing, 2015), pp. 483–491.

When vassal kings dispatch envoys, they use a *kanhe* which was given by Ming dynasty beforehand. The *kanhe* was also issued when Ming envoys went to vassal states.<sup>12</sup> The *kanhe* paper which visiting envoys to Ming used was about 81 × 108 cm and was paired with two registers kept by Ming authorities. Across a *kanhe* paper and registers, a serial number was written and stamped an official seal of Ministry of Rites. (See Figure 3) Viewing the complete seal and serial number thus required both the *kanhe* paper and the register. 100 *kanhe* papers were made for the duration of each emperor's reign and given to vassal kings.<sup>13</sup> When envoys from a vassal state next visited the Ming, Ming officials verified their credentials by matching their *kanhe* to the register. In many cases, the *kanhe* included written diplomatic correspondence. (See Figure 1 and 2. Diplomatic correspondence was written in the part of B)

In 1617, an Ayutthaya envoy arrived in Guangzhou without a *kanhe*, prompting Tian Sheng-jin to investigate whether the envoy was genuine and to draft a report on the matter.<sup>14</sup> In a manner that was characteristic of administrative documents of the time, the memorial to the Wanli Emperor quotes a lower official's report at some length, while providing an overall summary. Altogether, the memorial mentions the '*jinye biaowen*'—

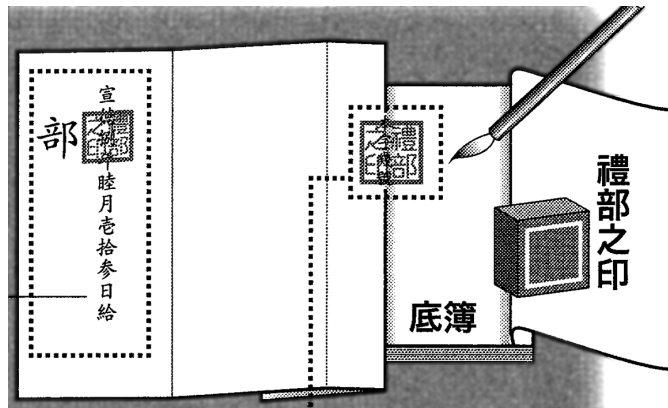


Figure 3: Writing serial number and stamping official seal of the Ministry of Rites (A part of Figure 1).

<sup>12</sup> Korea, Vietnam, and Ryukyu (the present-day Okinawa Prefecture in Japan) were also Ming's vassal states, but they were not issued *kanhe*.

<sup>13</sup> However, in Ayutthaya case, I pointed out this practice of issuing 100 *kanhe* papers by the emperor changed at the latest by Wanli period. Instead of issuing 100 papers, Ming gave one paper at a time to Ayutthaya envoy and the coming envoy used the same paper as well. See Kimura, 'Kangō to purarāchasān'.

<sup>14</sup> This is covered in more detail in Kimura, 'Kangō to purarāchasān'.

that is, the golden letter brought from Ayutthaya—three times. I translated these three descriptions of the letter as excerpts A, B, and C.

- A: They presented us with a single bamboo box. Inside was a wooden box with [shell] inlay wrapped in yellow cloth. Together [with another official] we broke the shellac seal. We saw a single *biao* written in Chinese with their country's stamp [i.e., the seal of King of *Xianluo*]. The *biao* detailed the tribute items [that the envoy had brought]. Furthermore, there was a tightly sealed golden letter (*jinye biaoowen*) to the emperor. According to what the envoy said, 'in the past, this letter was not unsealed until it arrived at the Ministry of Rites, and it should not be opened [here]'.
- B: We examined the [Chinese-language] *biao* in detail, but it made no mention of the bamboo box adorned with pictures. Also unmentioned were two trays, one large and one small [with the latter placed atop the former]. The outer tray was a circular tray, and the inner tray was octagonal and wrapped in yellow velvet. In that wrapping there was a long and flat small box with a lid containing a golden letter (*jinye biaoowen*), wrapped in golden damask. The trays and box were made of wood, gilded on the inside with mother-of-pearl inlay on the outside. We were not able to examine the foreign [i.e., Thai] text of the golden letter itself, but upon asking the envoy through the interpreter, [he said] 'It is the same [content] as the *biao* written in Chinese. The stamped seal is bestowed by the Celestial Empire [i.e., the Ming]; it is not a fake.'
- C: As they had presented us with a single bamboo box adorned with pictures, we examined it together. We found a large circular tray [and, on top of that,] an octagonal tray wrapped in yellow velvet. [In that wrapping] there was a flat and long small box with a lid containing a golden letter [*jinye biaoowen*]. The letter was wrapped in a golden damask [bag], and the bag was firmly sealed with a shellac sealing wax. We examined and confirmed that both the box and the trays were made of wood, gilded on the inside with mother-of-pearl inlay on the outside.

These descriptions differ slightly, but excerpts B and C especially are very similar. Considering excerpt B, the most detailed of the three descriptions, in conjunction with the other two passages, we can conclude the following:

1. The golden letter was wrapped in a golden damask bag, sealed with a shellac sealing wax.



2. The bag was placed in a small, 'long and flat', that is rectangular box with a lid.
3. That box was placed on an octagonal tray<sup>15</sup> together with the Chinese-language letter.
4. The octagonal tray was wrapped in yellow velvet and again sealed with shellac sealing wax.
5. The octagonal tray was placed in a circular tray.
6. All these items were kept in a bamboo-sheath box decorated with a picture.

Except for the bamboo box, the two trays and the box had gilded interiors and mother-of-pearl inlay exteriors. In Ayutthaya, mother-of-pearl inlay crafts were used by the royal houses and Buddhist temples which had relationship with them. This record is important that proves royal golden letter for Ming was placed in mother-of-pearl inlay box and trays.

The 'small, long and flat box with a lid' is thought to be a *klak* (in contemporary Thai, *klong*), which is a relatively small box with a lid. *klak* can either be square or circular in shape. The two-tiered offering tray is called *phan wean fah* in Thai and was used by the king. The bottom tier called as *phan*, usually a circular or polygonal shaped offering tray, was used as a stand or foundation for important ceremonial items. The top tier is octagonal shaped offering tray.<sup>16</sup>

Masuda Erika discusses the presentation of golden letters to the Qing during the era of Rama I, noting that Siam monarchs used both *klak* made of gold and *chiat* (a separate type of container, discussed below) inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The two-layered tray (presumably *phan wean fah*) remained in use as well.<sup>17</sup> A *phan wean fah* with mother-of-pearl inlay is currently housed in the Bangkok National Museum (see Figure 4).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The original Chinese word of 'tray' in the description is “盤”.

<sup>16</sup> For the history of Thai mother-of-pearl inlay and craft's types, see Takata Tomohito, 'Raden to ouken: Kinsei kindai tai bijyutsu no gan'i' [Mother-of-pearl inlay and the royal authority: connotation of pre-modern and modern Thai Art], *Bijyutsu kenkyu*, 426, (2018), pp. 25–74. See also Julathusana Byachrananda, *Thai Mother-of-Pearl Inlay*, (Bangkok: River Books, 2001) gives various kinds of mother-of-pearl inlay crafts' pictures including *phan wean fah*.

<sup>17</sup> Masuda Erika, 'Jūhachi seiki kōhan ōchō kōtaiki ni okeru Shamu no tai Shin kokusho [Siam's diplomatic correspondence with the Qing in the era of dynastic change of the late eighteenth century]', in *Kokusho ga musubu gaikō* [Correspondence between crowns: Diplomatic practices in the China seas, 1400–1850], ed. Matsukata Fuyuko (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2019), pp. 269–296.

<sup>18</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to Takata Tomohito of Siam University for providing information about the mother-of-pearl inlay and crafts within the context of Thai art history and for sharing the image of the *Phan wean fah* shown here. I also wish to express my gratitude to Bunchai Tongcharoenbuagam in the Department of Cultural Promotion within Thailand's Ministry of Culture for the invaluable information on Thai art history.



Figure 4: A *phan wean fah* (Photograph by Takata Tomohito)

### 3. A golden letter to the Tokugawa shogunate of Japan

The Ayutthaya Kingdom also had diplomatic relations with the Tokugawa shogunate of Japan, with envoys and letters to Japan peaking in the 1620s.<sup>19</sup> A golden letter from 1621 was described in *Ikoku nittki*, which is a compilation of foreign correspondence dating to the early Tokugawa period.<sup>20</sup> The description reads as follows:

The letter was placed on an ornate tray resembling the *takatsuki* presented to the *rōjū* [i.e., members of the shogun's council of elders], with the tray kept inside a pouch [note in the

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<sup>19</sup> On relations between Ayutthaya and Japan in the 17th century, see Nagazumi, 'Ayutthaya and Japan'.

<sup>20</sup> The compiler of the *Ikoku nikki*, Konchiin Sūden, was a counselor to Tokugawa Ieyasu (the first shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate) and Tokugawa Hidetada (the second shogun) on domestic and foreign policy. For a brief explanation of Konchiin Sūden and the *Ikoku nikki* in English, see Nakamura Tadashi, 'The Ikoku Nikki: Konchiin Sūden's Compilation of Foreign Correspondence', trans. James Lewis, in *Eiinbon Ikoku nikki: Konchiin Sūden gaikō monjyo shūsei* [The Ikoku Nikki: Konchiin Sūden's Compilation of Foreign Correspondence: Facsimile edition], ed. Ikoku nikki kankōkai (Tokyo: Tōkyō Bijutsu, 1989), pp. 1–4.

document: ‘damask’] and sealed with wax. Opening the pouch [together with the tray], there was something similar to a box-for-letters, which is shaped like a boat that appeared to contain a letter. Opening this there was a cylinder made of ivory. The golden letter was in this cylinder. The letter was roughly five *sun* [approx. 15 cm] long and one *shaku* and five *sun* [approx. 45 cm] wide, with the gold stretched thin. The written characters had been carved using a chisel. Siamese characters resemble Sanskrit characters, and it is said they are the same as the Nanban alphabet [i.e., the Latin alphabet]. There was a Chinese translation of this letter as well [...]. This [Chinese] letter had been tightly rolled up from the bottom together with an envelope and placed in the ivory cylinder with the golden letter. It was shown to the shogun first.<sup>21</sup>

From this description, we learn the following:

1. The golden letter was placed in an ivory cylinder together with a rolled-up Chinese letter.
2. The cylinder was placed in a boat-shaped box.
3. The box was placed on a tray resembling a *takatsuki*. A *takatsuki* is a Japanese standing tray somewhat resembling the *phan* in form and function (see Figure 5).
4. All these items were kept in a damask pouch and sealed with wax.

The ‘boat-shaped box’ may have been a *chiat*. *Chiat* were lidded boxes with legs bestowed to members of the aristocracy by Siam kings. Differences in the material used to create the boxes and in the way they were decorated indicated to their rank. The higher the member’s rank is, the *chiat* would be costly. From this source, it appears that *chiat* were also used by Ayutthaya kings for the purpose of sending golden letters.<sup>22</sup> In this case, however, Ayutthaya sent a single-tiered *phan* instead of the two-tiered *phan wen fah* that was dispatched to the Ming. The material of the tray was not mentioned, but it was noted that the tray resembled those presented to high-ranking members of the

<sup>21</sup> Ikoku nikki kankōkai (ed.), *Eiinbon ikoku nittki: Konchiin Sūden gaikō monjyo shūsei* [The Ikoku Nikki: Konchiin Sūden’s Compilation of Foreign Correspondence: Facsimile edition]. (Tokyo: Tōkyō Bijutsu, 1989), p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> The box that contained the golden letter sent by King Rama II to the Daoguang Emperor in 1822 is preserved in the National Palace Museum in Taiwan. This box is also classified as a *chiat*. For details, see Masuda Erika, ‘Phrarāthasān čhāruk phæn suphannabat phrarāthathān čhakraphat čhīn [A royal golden missive sent to the Chinese emperor]’, *Sinlapawatthanatham*, 29, 10 (2008): 46–49, and Masuda, ‘Jūhachi seiki kōhan ōchō kōtaiki ni okeru Shamu no tai Shin kokusho’, p. 211. Since Masuda’s ‘Phrarāthasān čhāruk phæn suphannabat’ is written in Thai, I know only the outline of the work. In Kimura, ‘Kangō to Purarāthasān’, I stated that the ‘boat-shaped box’ would be differed in shape from the box held at the National Palace Museum, but after a productive discussion with Takata Tomohito, I have now revised this opinion.

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Figure 5: A *takatsuki* (Photograph by author)

shogunate. Some other details of the description are also distinct from those given by the Ming.

These two examples allow us to conclude that the presentation styles employed by Ayutthaya differed from country to country. Given that the Ming received a more ornate tray, we may also conclude that Ayutthaya likely held the Ming in higher regard than Japan.

#### 4. Accompanying letters in Chinese

Unfortunately, the content of the original Thai-language letters sent to the Ming and the Tokugawa shogunate is unknown. However, classical Chinese operated as the lingua franca of East Asia at this time, and the Chinese-language letters' text accompanying the Thai originals remain. I now turn to a consideration of the form and content of these letters.

##### **Chinese-language letter sent to the Ming**

The Ming expected foreign envoys to draft Chinese-language letters on the *kanhe* the empire provided. However, the 1617 envoy from Ayutthaya did not do so, explaining that all the *kanhe* previously received had been lost in a fire. A prior envoy had issued new *kanhe*, but his ship had sunk after departing Guangzhou, and the new *kanhe* were

therefore lost. As a result, the current envoy had brought a Chinese letter drafted on different paper.

The letter was written in the style of a *biao* (表)—that is to say, as a ceremonial letter to the Ming emperor from his ‘vassal’, the king of Ayutthaya. Additionally, the letter bore the seal of the ‘King of *Xianluo*’, a title granted by the Ming. Thus, the letter was written and presented in a manner that accorded with Ming notions of Ayutthaya’s vassal status. Unable to read Thai, Guangzhou officials asked the envoy to explain the contents of the golden letter. The envoy replied that the contents were the same as those of the Chinese-language *biao*.

Was the Chinese letter a faithful translation of its golden counterpart? Masuda Erika has pointed out that the later Thonburi and Rattanakosin dynasties adapted the Chinese translations of their golden letters to accommodate Qing expectations, refashioning their letters into communications from a vassal to the emperor.<sup>23</sup> Here, we can draw no firm conclusions because the golden letters are not extant, but we must consider the possibility that the Ayutthaya Kingdom also translated its letters into a style more palatable to the Ming.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the Thonburi and Rattanakosin dynasties referred to their Chinese-language letters as *phrarāchāsān kham hap*. ‘Kham hap’ is thought to be a rendering of *kanhe*,<sup>25</sup> but as the Qing dynasty did not use *kanhe* to receive or send envoys, neither the Tonbury nor Rattanakosin had any reason or opportunity to use *kanhe* in their correspondence. We can infer that, because Ayutthaya did use *kanhe* in its Chinese-language letters to the Ming, in time, all letters from Siam kings—or *phrarāchāsān*—written in

<sup>23</sup> Masuda Erika, ‘Rāma issei no tai Shin gaikō [Rama I’s diplomacy towards Qing China]’. *Tōnan ajia: Rekishi to bunka*, 24 (1995): 25–48; Masuda, ‘Jūhachi seiki kōhan ōchō kōtaiki Shamu no tai Shin kokusho’, p. 213.

<sup>24</sup> Piyada Chonlaworn briefly analysed one of Thai letters from Ayutthaya’s king to the Ming Emperor, and the Chinese translation of that letter is contained in *Xianluoguan yiyu* [暹羅館訳語; The Sino-Siamese glossary]. See ‘Ayutayano tai min kankei’, pp. 61–63. *Xianluoguan yiyu* is one volume of the *Huayi yiyu* [華夷訳語; Chinese-Barbarian glossaries] used in *Siyiguan* [四夷館; the Bureau of Translators] as a textbook. But Kawaguchi Hiroshi has pointed out that we need to investigate further the status of these Thai letters in *Xianluoguan yiyu*, because it was revealed that Persian letters in *Huihuiguan yiyu* [回回館訳語, The Sino-Persian glossary], another volume of the *Huayi yiyu*, are not original Persian letters but rather letters translated into Persian from a Chinese original. See Kawaguchi, ‘Jūhachi sekimatu kara jūkyū seiki zenhan ni okeru “Purarāchāsān”’, p. 135. In addition, because no date is recorded for these letters, it is necessary to be prudent about using this material to analyse the Ayutthaya king’s letter.

<sup>25</sup> Hsu Yun-Tsiao, ‘Zheng zhao rugong qingting kao [A study of Zheng Zhao’s tribute to the Qing]’. *Nanyang xuebao*, 7, 1 (1951): 12; Masuda, ‘Rāma issei no tai Shin gaikō’, pp. 42–43.

Chinese became known as *phrarāthasān kham hap*, even when sent to countries other than China.<sup>26</sup>

### Chinese-language letter sent to Japan

In contrast to its letters to the Ming, Ayutthaya's Chinese-language letters to the Tokugawa Shogunate were drafted as correspondence between equals. Relations between Ayutthaya and Tokugawa Shogunate were not subject to the restrictions and protocols characterising relations with the Ming, enabling Ayutthaya to adopt a style of its own choosing. A description of the Chinese letter sent to the Tokugawa in 1621 follows. It is, once again, excerpted from *Ikoku nittki*, the compilation of foreign correspondence cited previously.

[The letter consists of] one sheet of white Chinese paper, roughly 1 *shyaku* [approx. 30 cm] long and folded like a sutra book, with four lines of writing per side. [Note in the document: 'This letter does not have a stamp. I [the compiler, Konchiin Süden] cannot determine whether this has been done out of respect'.] The letter has been folded in the style of a sutra book, and, on its front, 'with respect' (肅啓) has been written. The envelope is made of white Chinese paper in the usual manner. However, the seam of the envelope is on the back, and on the seam, the following is written in 11 characters: 'Sealed on the eighth day of the fourth month in the year of Xin You of *Ten-un*'<sup>27</sup> (天運辛酉年四月初八日封). On the front side, written at the centre and towards the top, the following is written in six characters: 'His Majesty, the King of Japan' (日本國王殿下). On the bottom right, six characters read: 'Respectfully, The King of Siam' (暹羅國王肅啓). Finally, on the left side, two characters say: 'Please Read' (賜覽).<sup>28</sup>

As stated previously, the letter resembled a sutra and was placed in an envelope. This had been rolled up and put in an ivory cylinder together with the golden letter.

It is interesting that, in this case, the Chinese-language letter bore no stamp.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in the Rattanakosin period, a Chinese letter to Vietnam was called 'phrarāthasān kamhap'. See Koizumi, 'Ratanakōshin chō ittsei ōchō Shamu no taigai kankei', p. 133.

<sup>27</sup> '天運' is not a Ming or Japanese name for this era. I therefore only tentatively use its Japanese pronunciation ('Ten-un') here. Since Ayutthaya used the Buddhist calendar, they did not make their original era name. When Ayutthaya sent the Chinese letter to the Ming, the Ming era name was used because vassal states were obliged to use the Chinese calendar. The Japanese had an original name for the era, and it functioned as a symbol of Japan's sovereignty. Nagazumi Yōko suggests that Ayutthaya invented this era name in order to accommodate the Japanese viewpoint on sovereignty, acting on Japanese merchants' advice. See Nagazumi, 'Ayutthaya and Japan', pp. 91–92.

<sup>28</sup> *Ikoku nikki kankōkai* (ed.), *Eiinbon ikoku nittki*, p. 42.

Konchiin Sūden, who dealt with diplomatic correspondence, stated that ‘I cannot determine whether this has been done out of respect’; here, the lack of stamp which was usually required for diplomatic correspondence in Chinese left him confused. It is likely that this absence was intentional. Kiichi Gunji has examined the diplomatic letters exchanged between Ayutthaya and the Tokugawa, argued that because the Chinese letter was merely a translation of the original golden letter, it did not need a stamp of its own.<sup>29</sup> I agree with this assessment. In contrast, Ayutthaya’s Chinese-language letters to the Ming had to be written on the *kanhe* given to envoys and stamped with the seal of the King of *Xianluo*. No such protocol was required by Japan, Ayutthaya styled its correspondence as it preferred. The accompanying Chinese-language letter was simply a translation of the original letter, for the benefit of Japanese people who did not understand the Thai language.

### 5. The Ayutthaya king’s varying titles

During the period under discussion, Songtham ruled as the King of Ayutthaya (r. 1611–1628). In this section, I examine how he referred to himself in the Chinese-language letters sent to the Ming and Japan.

In his letter to the Ming, the king referred to himself using the following Chinese name, which I present here together with a transcription in Hanyu pinyin<sup>30</sup> and a corresponding reconstruction in Thai.<sup>31</sup>

Chinese characters: 森烈怕臘照果倫怕臘陸恁西啞卒替鴉菩埃

Hanyu pinyin: sen lie pa ra zhao guo lun pa la lu kun xi ya cu ti ya pu ai

Thai: somdet phraçhao krung phranakhōn sī’ayutthayā phūyai

This phrasing may equate to either ‘His Majesty, the King of phranakhōn sī ayutthayā, great man’, or, alternatively, ‘His Majesty, the King of krung phranakhōn sī ayutthayā, great man’. ‘Krung phranakhōn sī ayutthayā’ forms part of the official name of the Ayutthaya

<sup>29</sup> See Gunji Kiichi, *Jūnana seiki ni okeru nichisen kankei* [Japanese-Siamese relations in the seventeenth century] (Tokyo: Gaimushō chōsakyoku, 1934), p. 368, and Gunji Kiichi, *Tokugawa jidai no nichisen kokkō* [Japanese-Siamese diplomatic relations in the Tokugawa era] (Tokyo: Tōa keizai chōsakyoku, 1938), p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> In the Ayutthaya period, most of the Chinese people lived in Ayutthaya came from Fujien or Guangdong. It may therefore be assumed that these Chinese transcriptions were written by Chinese who lived in Ayutthaya, based on Fukien or Cantonese pronunciation. As the Fukien and Cantonese pronunciations of the time may differ from the current pronunciations, pinyin is used for convenience in this article.

<sup>31</sup> Since I am not specialized in Thai, all reconstructions here are by Kawaguchi Hiroshi. I wish to express my best gratitude to him for identifying the Thai names corresponding to the Chinese-language materials discussed here. More detail, see Kimura, ‘Kangō to Purarāchasān.’

Kingdom. ‘Krung’ means both capital and country. It is clear that the phrasing here does not record the king’s name but rather the Chinese transcription of his title. This ‘somdet phraçhao (krung)...phūyai’ which first appeared in Tian Shengjin’s memorial became the ruler’s ‘name’ in the Chinese transcription,<sup>32</sup> and it remained as such in the Chinese documentary record until the end of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing dynasty.<sup>33</sup>

Now, what did the king call himself in the letters sent to Japan? The following are the titles used in the Chinese-language letters dating from 1621, 1623, and 1629. Again, I give the Chinese characters followed by transcriptions in Hanyu Pinyin for each. I then discuss the Thai transcriptions for all three letters.

1621

Chinese characters: 来舜烈摩倫摩匹浮臘烈照果倫怕臘馬噶陸閩妥尾臘瓦离西卒皮耶馬噶离洛縛樂喇納日他尼無离倫<sup>34</sup>

Hanyu pinyin: lai shun lie ma lun ma pi fu la lie zhao guo lun pa la ma hu lu kun tuo wei la wa li xi zu pi ye ma hu li luo fu le la na ri ta ni mo li lun

1623

Chinese characters: 來舜烈摩倫摩匹浮臘浮烈照哥郎帕臘馬噶陸閩妥瓦离西卒耶馬噶离祿縛祿喇納臘日他尼舞离倫<sup>35</sup>

Hanyu pinyin: lai shun lie ma lun ma pi fu la fu lie zhao ge lang pa la ma hu liu kun tuo wa li xi zu ye ma hu li lu fu lu la na la ri ta ni wu li lun

<sup>32</sup> On the king’s name before 1617, especially in *Ming shilu* [Veritable records of the Ming dynasty], see Wade, ‘The Ming shi-lu as a Source for Thai History’. Wade pointed out that these ‘names’ were not actually the king’s name but, rather, a transcription of parts of his title or the name of the ruler’s country.

<sup>33</sup> At times, phonetically similar Chinese characters or abbreviations were also used. Some differences may have resulted from the changing name of Ayutthaya. In contrast, Thonburi and Rattanakosin kings used Chinese names, taking Zhong (鄭) as their family name.

<sup>34</sup> Ikoku nikki kankōkai (ed.), *Eiinbon ikoku nittki*, p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ikoku nikki kankōkai (ed.), *Eiinbon ikoku nittki*, p. 46.



1629

Chinese characters: 柰舜烈摩倫摩匹浮臘照果朗帕臘馬訶陸恹妥瓦納瓦離西毘耶摩訶離祿  
普樂喇納臘日他尼務離倫<sup>36</sup>

Hanyu pinyin: nai shun lie ma lun ma pi fu la zhao guo lang pa la ma he liu kun tuo wa na wa li  
xi pi ye ma he li lu pu le la na la ri ta ni wu li lun

The Thai equivalent of these three titles reads as follows:

Nai somdet bōrommabōphit phraçhao krung phramahānakhōn thawārawadī sī'ayutthayā  
mahādilokphop noppharattanaṛāthathānī burīrom<sup>37</sup>

This phrasing equates to either 'His Majesty, the King of phramahānakhōn thawārawadī sī'ayutthayā mahādilokphop noppharattanaṛāthathānī burīrom's', or, alternatively, 'His Majesty, the King of krung phramahānakhōn thawārawadī sī'ayutthayā mahādilokphop noppharattanaṛāthathānī burīrom's'. 'Krung phramahānakhōn thawārawadī sī'ayutthayā mahādilokphop noppharattanaṛāthathānī burīrom' closely corresponds to the formal name for the Ayutthaya Kingdom. 'Somdet bōrommabōphit phraçhao krung' also means 'His Majesty, the King'. 'Nai' here requires additional explanation. Grammatically, it is the honorific genitive case; and in Kawaguchi Hiroshi's opinion, the original letter read 'phrarāthasān nai somedet...' (i.e., His Majesty's letter), but the translator misunderstood 'Nai' as part of the ruler's honorific title.

Clearly, the King of Ayutthaya adopted different titles in his correspondence with the Ming versus the Tokugawa. Since the reason why Ayutthaya rulers adopted different Chinese 'names' or titles for themselves when addressing different countries is unclear, I believe collaborative research between East Asian historians and Thai historians will lead to a new understanding of the region.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the form and presentation of the Ayutthaya king's golden letters to the Ming emperor as well as the shogun in Tokugawa period. It is clear that the presentation of golden letters differed, as did the styles employed in the

<sup>36</sup> Ikoku nikki kankōkai (ed.), *Eiinbon ikoku nitki*, p. 64.

<sup>37</sup> The 1623 letter may also be read not as phraçhao but as phraphutthaçhao (literally, Buddha King).

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accompanying Chinese-language versions of the letters and the titles used by the king of Ayutthaya.

The golden letters were designed to convey the Ayutthaya king's ideas, and examining how they were presented is an important means for investigating the ways in which kings represented their authority. Furthermore, the differences in presentation—differences that manifested themselves in the format of the accompanying Chinese-language letters, and also in the king's stated title depending on the recipient—suggest that Ayutthaya had established different relationships with these recipients. Focusing on how these contrasting relations between Ayutthaya and the Ming versus the Tokugawa Shogunate surfaced in the presentational differences in question, especially the more ornate offering tray sent to the Ming, the present article concludes that Ayutthaya held the Chinese dynasty in higher regard than Japan's shogunate. Further study of the ceremony and arts of the Ayutthaya court is necessary to verify this conclusion. More generally, additional research into the golden letters sent to other polities can help clarify the nature of Ayutthaya's foreign relations and the international order it established for itself.

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