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FACTS AND IDEAS OF JAPAN'S OVER-SEA
DEVELOPMENT PRIOR TO THE
MEIJI RESTORATION

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1. PREFACE

As is well-known, Japan was closed to foreign intercourse before the closing days of Tokugawa Shogunate, so that the over-sea development of the Japanese people was held completely in check. Before this seclusion policy was adopted, however, there was much activity abroad by Japanese nationals, as we can gather from historical facts in the Middle Ages of the trade activity of *bahan-sen* 八幡船 and *kango-sen* 勘合船. It is on record that up to the early period of the Tokugawa Age, *shuin-sen* 朱印船 used to visit Annam, Siam and the South Seas to carry on profitable trade, and that even Japanese towns had actually been built in Siam and elsewhere. Subsequently, however, evils attending the spread of Roman Catholicism in Japan caused the Tokugawa Shogunate to adopt the seclusion policy in

the Kwanyei era. Under this policy, the visit of foreigners to this country was prohibited, while Japanese nationals were strictly forbidden to go abroad. Thus, "seclusion" characterized the country's foreign relationship in the Tokugawa Age. As foreign relations became tense in the middle and latter periods of the Tokugawa Age, there was a wider recognition of the need of the coast defence and attention was gradually directed to the necessity of developing the resources of the Ezo district. Views urging the expansion to foreign territory even found expression. Thus, in the closing years of the Tokugawa Shogunate, many measures of policy irreconcilable with the traditional policy were adopted by the Shogunate. The seclusion policy gradually gave way to the policy of opening the country to foreign intercourse, and the ground was again prepared for the over-sea development of Japanese nationals. The history of Japan's over-sea development before the Meiji era may be dealt with in three sections, namely, the over-sea development in the age of Toyotomi-Hideyoshi and Tokugawa-Iyeyasu; the ideas of over-sea development held by Japanese scholars in the middle and latter periods of the Tokugawa Age, and the over-sea trade carried on by Japanese on the Amur and at Shanghai.

2. THE OVER-SEA DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGE OF TOYOTOMI-HIDEYOSHI AND TOKUGAWA-IYEYASU

The history of the over-sea development of the Japanese people goes back to very ancient times. Japan's conquest of Sankan (Korea) by the Empress Jingū may be cited as one notable example. In the Ocho Age also, Japan was in constant communication with the continent and trade was carried on with it. Government envoys and merchants visited the continent and while cultivating closer relations with continental countries, trade was carried on with them. The Middle Ages record the activity of *bahan-sen*—Japanese

ships, manned by people from Kyushu or Shikoku, which navigated the coasts of Korea and China and caused no small annoyance to the peoples of these countries. This was a case of the over-sea activity of private trading ships. "If the way is blocked for free commerce, merchants turn pirates, while if there is free commerce, pirates revert to the regular commercial pursuits," so it is said. This saying truthfully depicts the character of *bahan-sen*. Chinese historians denounce these Japanese ships as piratical, calling the Japanese who manned these vessels *wako* 倭寇 (Japanese pirates), but what these Japanese did simply represents one phase of activity which would develop when the way is blocked to trade. Their object was not so much to commit piratical acts as to carry on trade.

The activity of *bahan-sen* is, indeed, worthy of special note, but what is of particular interest is the advance of Japanese nationals to the South Seas which took place for a period of some 200 years from the end of the Ashikaga Age down to the beginning of the Tokugawa Age. Up to that time, Japan's foreign relations had practically been confined to those with China and Korea, but in the period under review the scope of Japanese activity was extended to the South Seas. Not only did Japanese merchant ships visit South Sea ports frequently but many Japanese settled down in those areas, building, in some cases, what were called Japanese towns.

Many reasons may be given for this extension of Japanese activity to the South Seas in those days. First, the Japanese people had a strong enterprising and venture-some spirit, a fact which may easily be inferred from the fact that *bahan-sen* frequented many places on the Chinese coast in and after the Kamakura Age. This daring and venture-some spirit, it may be presumed, was fostered in the so-called Age of Wars, in which many valiant military leaders encroached upon one another's domain. Secondly, some *daimyo*, acting in league with big merchants, engaged in over-sea trade which brought them much profit. As the era of tran-

quillity was ushered in, following the warlike days, the work of developing the mining and other industrial resources was pushed vigorously in the fiefs of many *daimyo*, with the result that there was an increase in the financial power of these *daimyo*. This led some *daimyo* to co-operate with big merchants in carrying on profitable over-sea trade. Voyages in those days were risky and, more-over, in such trade large capital funds had to be locked up for a fairly long period. Inasmuch, however, as enormous profits accrued from trade, special methods of monetary accommodation were adopted to help forward such trade. Thirdly, as peace prevailed in the country after years of domestic warfare, *samurai* who were disappointed in life sought their new field of activity abroad. It is also conceivable that the repressive measures adopted by the authorities against Roman Catholicism drove many religious adherents to settle abroad. Fourthly, the fact must be mentioned that due to the spread of medical science, astronomy, the art of navigation and maps which were introduced into Japan by Portuguese and Spanish ships, knowledge about foreign countries had been disseminated to some extent among the Japanese people. Fifthly, Tokugawa Iyeyasu adopted the policy of encouraging foreign trade. Not only did he accord special treatment and protection to foreign visitors to this country but he initiated the *shuin-sen* system. While notifying the South Sea countries of the adoption of this system, he asked these countries to extend protection to these trade ships. In this way, Iyeyasu encouraged the over-sea navigation of Japanese ships. The above-mentioned facts, it seems, were responsible for the growth of Japanese development in the South Seas.

As to the conditions abroad in those days, economic conditions and culture were still in a low state of development in the South Seas, and there was a wide margin of difference in prices between Japanese goods and those of South Sea countries. Moreover, there was little anti-foreign sentiment in those countries, and foreigners were treated liberally. Besides, as Japan's trade with China was then suspended,

it was necessary to trade with Chinese merchants in the Luchus, Formosa, Annam, Luzon and Siam or to obtain Chinese products through the intermediary of people in South Sea countries. This was presumably another reason for the growth of the South Sea trade.

Many *shuin-sen* were sent out from Japanese ports from about the 9th year of Keicho down to the Genna era, no fewer than 36 ships having been dispatched in one particular year. The number of such ships dispatched for a period of twelve years from the 9th year of Keicho to the 2nd year of Genna totalled 186—I take this figure from a public record called the *Ikoku Tokai Go-Shuin Cho* 異國渡海御朱印帳. But as more ships were, as a matter of fact, sent out, the actual total must have been larger than this. The districts to which these ships were sent were Annam (Cochin China), Tongking, Luzon, Cambodia, Siam, Borneo, Malacca, Macao, Patani, Champa, Dendang, etc., namely, the countries which are now called French Indo-China, Thailand, the Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies.

In some cases, the Japanese who went to the above-mentioned territories in those days formed their settlements or colonies, which were called Japanese towns or *machi* 町. These towns were founded in Cochin (or Hanoi, a district which is now known by the name of Annam), Siam, Cambodia, Luzon, etc. It is said that even the smallest of these colonies contained two or three hundred Japanese, while the largest had no fewer than 3,000 Japanese. It is interesting to learn that these Japanese towns had places named Pont Japonais and Rue de Pont Japonais, that one tributary of the Mecon river was called the river Japan and that one of its deltas bore the name of the Japanese delta.

Whereas in the above-mentioned areas Japanese settlers lived gregariously, in Formosa, in Macao, in the Malacca islands, in Java and in the Malay peninsula, Japanese immigrants lived among the natives at places in carrying on their respective avocations. Their activity in the Dutch East Indies was particularly noteworthy.

The *daimyo* who engaged in the South Sea trade in those days were mostly those in Kyushu such as Lords Shimadzu, Nabeshima, Arima, Hosokawa, Kato, Matsuura, Goto and Kamei. Among the big merchants in this trade were Suminokura-Ryoi and Chaya-Shirojiro, of Kyoto, Sueyoshi-Magozaemon and Tanabeya-Matazaemon, of Osaka, Kadoya-Hichirobei, of Matsuzaka in Ise province, Ruson-Sukeyemon, of Sakai, Tenjiku-Tokubei, of Takasago in Harima province, and Suetsugu-Heizo, of Nagasaki.

To cite the example of *sueyoshi-bune* 末吉船, ships owned by Sueyoshi-Magozaemon, to illustrate the activity of these merchants, these ships were sent to Luzon in the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th of Keicho in succession. In the 12th year of Keicho, they went to Siam and in the 14th, 15th and 16th of the same era they were again dispatched to Luzon. They were dispatched to the South Seas in subsequent years also. The larger ones of these *sueyoshi* ships were 20 *ken* in length and were capable of carrying 2,000,000 *kin* of goods, while the smaller ones were about 15 or 16 *ken* long and could carry some 1,200,000 *kin* of goods. At the Kiyomidzu temple in Kyoto, there is a big framed picture depicting the interior of a *sueyoshi-bune*—a picture which is now designated as a national treasure. It is a big *ex-voto* about 64 inches by 78 inches in size, which was offered by the Sueyoshi family to the temple during the Kwanyei era by way of praying for the safety of the voyages of *sueyoshi-bune*. In this framed picture many figures are painted. Some are playing the *samisen* 三味線, some are talking with the captain, some are playing *sugoroku* 雙六 and cards, some are beating drums, some are smoking long Japanese pipes and some are using fans. Not only does the picture show us the customs of those days but it illustrates how the crew of the ship, which was only of 100 tons or thereabouts, enjoyed their voyage, a fact which throws a side light on their adventurous and enterprising spirit.

The Japanese goods which these *shuin-sen* carried abroad for trade were silver, copper, iron, swords, copper-ware,

lacquer-ware, *makie* 蒔繪 (relief lacquer), umbrellas, fans, folding screens, camphor, sulphur, rice, etc., while the goods which they brought home consisted chiefly of raw silk, silk fabrics, cotton textiles, hide, shagreen, sappan-wood, lead, tin, sugar, coral and ceramic ware.

The Japanese towns which prospered in the South Sea regions, as already mentioned, gradually declined in consequence of the complete suspension of Japan's international intercourse by the order of closing the country issued in the Kwanyei era. Although it is said that the inhabitants of these Japanese towns continued their activity in Annam, Cambodia and the Malacca islands, their number gradually decreased as there were no fresh arrivals from Japan to fill their depleted ranks, and the second and third generations who became assimilated with natives were left to keep up what activity they could. Inasmuch, however, as there were marriages not only between Japanese residents but either with natives or with Westerners, it may be assumed that Japanese blood is still preserved in the veins of natives of the South Seas.

Formosa or *Takasagan* 高砂島 as it was then called, which venture-some Japanese traders visited in small boats in those days, passed into Japanese possession about 45 years ago, while Annam and other South Sea areas now form part of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. When we recall that our fellow countrymen were active in these regions three hundred years ago, we cannot but be struck by the great significance of historic relations between Japan and the South Seas.

3. THE IDEAS OF OVER-SEA DEVELOPMENT IN THE TOKUGAWA AGE

I have already mentioned that in the latter period of the Tokugawa Age, the eastward advance of Russian influence caused many arguments to be advanced in this country stressing the need of developing the resources of the Ezo

district*. Not only was the need of developing the Ezo district urged but there was a steady growth of progressive ideas among a section of far-seeing Japanese, and many opinions found expression in support of the extension of Japanese influence abroad. Many scholars expatiated on the ideal of Japanese development abroad, the most famous among these scholars being Honta-Toshiaki and Sato-Nobuhiro.

Honta-Toshiaki was a Dutch scholar. He was also famous as a mathematician. He was, moreover, well versed in the art of navigation. As a geographer and an economic thinker too, he held very enlightened views. He maintained that in order to meet the situation then prevailing at home and abroad, it was of vital importance that the productive power of land should be expanded and commerce and navigation should be developed so that a plentiful supply of materials would be ensured and the national wealth increased through foreign trade. If this policy were carried out successfully, he asserted, the *samurai* and agrarian classes would be relieved of their financial straits. He further contended that the development of the resources of Ezo called for urgent attention, stressing at the same time the necessity of extending Japan's influence abroad. It is, indeed, surprising that in the days of seclusion and conservatism such progressive and far-sighted views should have been set forth. To sum up his views, he evinced much interest, first, in Kamchatka, secondly, in Karafuto, Santan and Manchuria, and, thirdly, in Alaska. Trade had been going on between Kamchatka and Matsumae from ancient times. Dried salmon and other commodities were brought from Kamchatka to Matsumae to trade for rice, leaven, sake, tobacco, miscellaneous foods, edged tools and pots and pans. After Russians started trade with Kamchatka about the Kyoho era, however, Kamchatka ceased to trade with Japan. In view of such a

* See, Economic thought in the latter period of the Tokugawa Era, in this Review Vol. XV. No. 4. pp. 17-20.

situation, he urged the necessity of occupying Kamchatka and ruling the natives there. He further insisted that a big fortress should be built in Karafuto and trade be opened with Santan and Manchuria to supply each other's wants. There were in Karafuto what was called *unjoya* 運上屋 or wholesale houses whose business it was to make purchases of various kinds of products. He contended that Japan should take possession of Karafuto through the instrumentality of these wholesale houses. If big cities sprang up in Kamchatka and in Karafuto, he argued, many islands south of Kamchatka would become prosperous and Japan's influence would increase correspondingly, with the result that islands belonging to America would even pass under Japanese sway. He concluded that if in this way the development of these islands was achieved, Japan would become the richest and strongest country in the East just as England was in the West. The idea underlying his argument was to advance trade and help forward the development of resources and assimilation. His theory was, in effect, to expand territory so as to achieve economic development.

Sato-Nobuhiro was a scholar whose ideas were influenced both by Dutch learning and by Japanese classical literature. He was a well-known scholar who directed earnest attention to the fundamental reform of the social organization of his day. In one of his books entitled the *Kondo Hisaku*, he contends that Japan forms the basis of all countries of the world. Japan's work of developing other countries must begin with China, he says. With all her greatness, China cannot hold her own against Japan; much less are other barbarous countries any match for Japan. Once China is brought under Japan's sway, Japanese influence can be extended to Siam, India and other western countries. It will be no difficult task for Japan to assimilate all nations of the world, he contends. After reviewing the history of the unification of China by the Ching dynasty, which extended its influence southwards from Tartary and Manchuria, Sato-Nobuhiro suggests that a Japanese expedition should be sent

southwards from the north. Troops from Ōu and Hokuriku should be sent into Tartary and Manchuria from Karafuto and the Amur and then be advanced on Peking from Liaoyang, on the one hand, and picked troops from Kyushu should be sent into Kiangnan and Chekiang, on the other. Against these Japanese forces, he declares, the Chinese troops would find it impossible to defend their country. In another book entitled the *Bokaisaku* 防海策, he stresses the necessity of developing the resources of Ezo and occupying Kamchatka. He further discusses the importance of extending Japanese influence to the Southern countries. After describing how Britain despoiled Spain, Portugal and France of their colonial possessions and how she advanced into the East by annexing India and the Philippines, he suggests that in order to deal with this formidable foe, Japan should first go southwards from the seven islands of Idzu to Hachijojima and then, going further southward, she should exploit the resources of the Philippines. With the products of these islands Japan should trade with China, Annam and Siam, and then with Luzon and Goa as her bases of operation, Japan should bring islands south of Java and Borneo under her sway. If Japan succeeded in these measures, he concludes, Britain's ambitious designs on the East could be held in check. In short, his plan for northward development was his policy towards Russia and his plan for southward advance embodied his policy towards Britain.

Later, in the closing days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, various arguments were set forth by different scholars for Japan's development abroad. For instance, Yoshida-Shoin advocated the course of developing the resources of Ezo, bringing Kamchatka and Okhotsk under Japanese influence, causing the Luchus to vow allegiance to Japan and reducing Korea to a tributary state. He further insisted that Manchuria in the north and Formosa and Luzon in the south should be brought under Japanese sway.

Hashimoto-Sanai took the line that Japan should form an alliance with Russia to make herself great, reform her

domestic administration and increase her navy and army. He held that whereas Britain and Russia were countries which could not brook each other, Japan and Russia could form a relationship of interdependence. As a matter of fact, the need of promoting trade with Russia had long been urged by many scholars. Especially after the Kaei era there prevailed the theory in favour of an alliance being formed with Russia to defend Japan against Britain, America and other countries. The same view was held by some of the Shogunate authorities. Hashimoto-Sanai was most definite in his advocacy of an alliance with Russia. Besides the scholars whose views have been cited, Yamada-Hōkoku, Magi-Yasuomi and Hirano-Kuniomi advocated the extension of Japanese influence over Korea, Manchuria and China.

4. THE OVER-SEA TRADE IN THE CLOSING DAYS OF THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE

The visit of Commodore Perry of America to Uraga with his squadron in the sixth year of Kaei led to marked changes in Japan's domestic and foreign relations. In those days, Western countries pressed Japan for the opening of her ports by the display of armed force. At Shimonoseki fighting actually took place. The situation then prevailing was really critical. Kido-Koin aptly described this situation when he said: "The present situation confronting Japan reminds one of a round stone placed precariously at the top of a precipice. Once it is set in motion, it will roll down with such force that nobody can hope to stop it." For tiding over this crisis, it was necessary to adopt a positive policy to promote the national progress by discarding the old conservative and temporizing policy. After the middle period of the Tokugawa Age, revolutionary changes came over political, social and economic conditions due to the development of the money economy and the consequent rise of the *chonin* class. The visit of Commodore Perry to these shores accentuated these political, social and economic

changes. In order to cope with this situation, the Shogunate adopted many new measures running counter to its traditional policy. Views in support of the abolition of the feudal system even found expression. It appears that reforms effected by the Shogunate several times—especially the one which was carried out in the Keio era—aroused considerable interest in many quarters. Kido-Koin commented: "Radical reforms have now been effected in the Bakufu administration and the new army system has certainly much to commend it." Unlike many of previous reforms, these were not simply meant to meet domestic requirements. They were not only stimulated by foreign relations but were designed to compass the country's progress through the introduction of Eastern civilized systems.

One big change in foreign relations in the closing days of the Tokugawa Shogunate was, needless to say, caused by the change of policy from seclusion to the opening of the country. Japan who had up to that time closed the country to foreign intercourse, concluded treaties with Western countries and opened trade with them. President Fillmore's credentials which Commodore Perry presented to the Shogunate in June, of the sixth year of Kaei, was shown by the Shogunate authorities to the various feudal lords on July 1st, for an unreserved expression of opinion on it. Most of the feudal lords who submitted their replies to the Shogunate in response were against the idea of trading with foreign countries, very few lords supporting the opening of the country to foreign trade. When later, in the fourth year of Ansei, Harris, the American Consul-General, paid a visit to the Shogunate and proposed the conclusion of a commercial treaty, however, the majority opinion of feudal lords were in favour of trading with foreign countries. Some advocates of foreign trade even suggested that Japanese ships should be sent to foreign countries to trade. They were in favour of the revival of the *shuin-sen* system which was in operation in the early period of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In the first year of Bunkyu, the Kameda Maru,

a ship belonging to the *bugyo* (magistrate) of Hakodate, went to Nikolayevsk on the Amur for trade. For the same purpose, the Senzai Maru of the Shogunate went to Shanghai in the second year of Bunkyu and the Kenjun Maru visited Shanghai in the third year of the same era. I had occasion to deal with the views in favour of the opening of the country to trade and the ideas relative to the over-sea trade and many facts there anent in a previous article*, and therefore I shall not describe them here again. At any rate, it is noteworthy that the country became awakened from the dream of seclusion and began to show the spirit of over-sea development by sending Japanese ships abroad for trade.

5. CONCLUSION

As will be seen from what I have so far described, the Japanese nation had achieved considerable development before the Tokugawa Age. Although the tendency of development was temporarily checked by the policy of seclusion adopted by the Shogunate, a series of events bearing on foreign relationships in the middle of the Tokugawa Age had the effect of reviving this spirit of over-sea development. In the closing days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, venture-some voyages were undertaken both northwards and southwards, which heralded the directions towards which the future national development should be sought. Since the Meiji Restoration, these efforts have been continued with increasing vigour, resulting in the expansion of Japanese territory and in the development of the country's foreign trade. The important changes from seclusion to the opening of the country and from Japan of Asia to Japan of the world are illustrative of Japan's ceaseless development.

* Japan's overseas trade in the closing days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Vol. XIV. No. 2, in this Review.