

# *The Zen Monks in Isolated Island Tsushima: A Study on the Early Modern History of Japan – Joseon Diplomacy\**

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## I

This book review features a text regarding of the history of Korea-Japan relations written by Ikeuchi Satoshi (池内敏), which was published in Japan in February 2017. Ikeuchi studied Japanese history at Kyoto University, specifically Japan's relations with Joseon Korea during the early modern period. He served as professor at Tottori University and now teaches at Nagoya University.

The title of the book under review is *Zekkai no sekigaku* (絶海の碩学). “*Zekkai*” literally translates as an “isolated sea,” or a body of water far off the coast. This term is also used to refer to an island Koreans call Daemado (對馬島) and the Japanese call Tsushima (對馬; 津島). The island is also called *Zekkai no kotō* (絶海の孤島) for being a remote island at the edge of the Japanese border between mainland Japan and Joseon.

The term *sekigaku* usually indicates a great scholar with profound knowledge. *Sekigaku* in the book reviewed, however, refers to Zen monks, specifically those who belonged to the five great Zen temples of Kyoto

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\* The original title for this book is *Zekkai no sekigaku: Kinsei Nitchō gaikōshi kenkyū* 絶海の碩学: 近世日朝外交史研究.

collectively known as the Kyoto Gozan. With the exception of Manjuji (萬壽寺), the other four Gozan temples Tenryūji (天龍寺), Shōkokuji (相國寺), Kenninji (建仁寺), and Tōfukuji (東福寺) took turns in sending a monk to serve at the Iteian temple (以耐庵) on Tsushima. At one point, the bakufu, or the Tokugawa shogunate, provided financial support to such Gozan monks. This stipend the bakufu offered was called *sekigaku-ryō* (碩學料), which is why the Gozan monks receiving them were referred to as *sekigaku*.

According to Ikeuchi, the beginning of *sekigaku-ryō* was when the shōgun Tokugawa Ieyasu allocated stipend funds to the Gozan temple Tōfukuji. The *sekigaku* discussed in the book therefore refers to the Kyoto Gozan monks who received stipends from the bakufu for going to Iteian in Fuchū, Tsushima to perform tasks involving diplomatic documents exchanged between Japan and Joseon. The book presents an analysis of the 126 chief monks of Iteian during a period of 230 years between 1635 and 1867. Also subjected to the same analysis are the 203 monks dispatched to Tōkōji (東向寺), a temple on the grounds of the Japan House (K. Waegwan) in Busan, between 1654 and 1870.

The book's subtitle *Kinsei Nitchō gaikōshi kenkyū* (近世日朝外交史研究) can be understood as "A Study on the Early Modern History of Japan-Joseon Diplomacy." The early modern period in Japanese history is defined as the Edo period when the Tokugawa shogunate ruled Japan. This definition generally corresponds to the latter half of the Joseon dynasty in Korean history, which is from the end of the Imjin War of 1592-98 until Joseon opened its ports. To shed further light on the diplomatic history of Joseon and Japan, the book's analysis consequently focuses on Kyoto Gozan monks dispatched to Iteian on Tsushima between 1600 and the 1860s to the 1870s.

## II

The reviewed book is composed of a prologue, fifteen chapters with two appendixes inserted in between, and an epilogue, all of which are grouped into four parts. The keywords of the book can be summarized as Iteian and

its monks (*sekigaku*), Tsushima (*zekkai*), and the bakufu. Combining those keywords thus appears to be an apropos way to come up with the title *Zekkai no sekigaku* (絶海の碩學).

The first topic to be covered in the book is the rotation system of Iteian monks. This is an indication of how central this topic is to the book. In fact, the first 150 pages of the book, amounting to thirty percent of the book including the prologue and the four chapters of Part 1, are dedicated to the temple Iteian and its monks.

Through the prologue, Ikeuchi criticizes the common historical view toward the rotation system of the Iteian monks. He raises questions regarding the existing understanding on how the rotation system became introduced and what purpose or role it served. The central issues the book deals with are as follows. As of 1635, did the bakufu intend to control Tsushima from the outset by taking part in drafting diplomatic documents exchanged with Joseon? Did the bakufu henceforth succeed in keeping an eye on or controlling Tsushima?

Regarding these issues, some Japanese scholars such as Tanaka Takeo (田中健夫), Itō Kōji (伊藤幸司), and Arano Yasunori (荒野泰典) have argued that the Tokugawa shogunate clearly took the lead in establishing the rotation system for the Iteian monks. Although the wording is slightly different, other Japanese scholars including Tashiro Kazui (田代和生) and Izumi Chōichi (泉澄一) determined that after the so-called Yanagawa Incident (柳川一件), which called for the bakufu's decision regarding the accusation of a state document forgery against Tsushima's Sō clan, the bakufu sent monks to Iteian in rotation as a follow-up measure to keep an eye on Tsushima. On the other hand, Tsuruta Kei (鶴田啓) suggested that the bakufu may not have introduced the rotation system at Iteian for the purpose of surveillance, but the system ended up indirectly limiting Tsushima domain from taking arbitrary actions. Is there empirical evidence solid enough to support these arguments and suggestions? Ikeuchi does not think so. In order to resolve this issue, he chooses to trace the process through which Iteian was introduced to a rotation system and how the Yanagawa Incident was involved in that process.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of previous studies on Iteian. The re-

search findings of eight scholars are noted from a 1919 study by Kamimura Kankō (上村觀光) to a 2002 study by Nishimura Keiko (西村圭子). Among these eight scholars, Ikeuchi takes particular interest in Kobayakawa Kingo (小早川欣吾, 1900-44), a law professor at Kyoto Imperial University. Through the research paper “Iteian rinbankō” (以酹庵輪番考) published in 1934, Kobayakawa argued that the Tsushima domain was the first to propose that diplomatic documents sent between Japan and Joseon be placed under the bakufu’s direct supervision.

Chapter 2 is devoted to how the rotation of Iteian monks has historically been viewed. The understanding so far has been that the rotation system was adopted in 1635 as the bakufu reached its conclusion regarding Tsushima domain’s forgery of state documents. To verify the accuracy of this understanding, Ikeuchi delves into the duties Iteian monks specifically performed for the Tsushima domain. Based on the analysis of such duties, an assessment is made on the historical nature of Iteian’s rotation system. Listed below are some of the specific points of criticism that Ikeuchi made against the current understanding of the system.

First, did the duties Iteian perform reflect the bakufu’s intention? Ikeuchi concludes that there is no evidence to support that they did, and criticizes the argument made by Arano Yasunori (荒野泰典), which has been widely accepted since 1988. Second, were Iteian monks in charge of the diplomatic documents exchanged between Joseon and Japan? According to Ikeuchi’s research, Tsushima domain would first draft a diplomatic document in Japanese. Iteian monks would then take the draft and translate it into Chinese characters. Tsushima domain would then review the translation before finally creating a clean copy. Among these steps to drafting diplomatic documents, Ikeuchi concludes that the role of Iteian monks was limited to the second step of translating drafts from Japanese to Chinese characters. Third, did the bakufu directly intervene in the friendly relations between Tsushima domain and Joseon? Since the publication of a research article by Kamimura Kankō (上村觀光) in 1919, the general understanding has been that the bakufu had Iteian monks surveil Tsushima domain so as to stop the domain from secretly forming its own relations with Joseon. Ikeuchi does not agree with this understanding because it is not substantiated.

ed by any historical records. Even if he were to accept that the bakufu used the monks for surveillance as per Kobayakawa Kingo's argument, Ikeuchi suspects that the attempt is unlikely to have been effective. Moreover, no evidentiary documents have been uncovered to prove that the bakufu had intended from the outset to use the monks for surveillance purposes.

Chapter 3 examines the rotation of monks at a different temple called Tōkōji (東向寺). The temple was built by the Tsushima domain within the grounds of *Choryang Waegwan* (草梁倭館), the Japan House the Joseon government had provided in Busan. Through previous studies, Tōkōji has been regarded as an independent diplomatic organ of Tsushima domain. This prompted Ikeuchi to analyze the rotation system at Tōkōji, a temple associated with Tsushima domain, and compare it to that of Iteian, a temple associated with the bakufu.

Chapter 4 covers the discussion surrounding the abolition of Iteian's rotation system. In 1780, a petition by a Kyoto Gozan monk named Baisō Kenjō (梅莊顯常, 1720-1802) was submitted to the bakufu. The petition's point was that the bakufu should not neglect the fact that, due to strenuous economic circumstances, Tsushima domain was forsaking sincerity and trust, factors that were most important in the relations between Japan and Joseon. Since the domain was in need, the petition proposed that the bakufu take direct control of Japan-Joseon diplomacy and exempt Kyoto Gozan monks from serving rotations at Iteian. However, the bakufu dismissed this petition in 1782 and refused to discontinue Iteian's rotation system.

Opinions have been divided as to how this incident should be understood. The current view has been to regard the Kyoto Gozan monk's proposal for Iteian's rotation system to be abolished as evidence that the monks were aware of their duty to surveil Tsushima domain. Ikeuchi, on the other hand, raises the criticism that the petition fails to justify viewing Iteian or its monks as "the vanguard of bakufu diplomacy" or "the agency for surveilling Tsushima domain." Moreover, despite the fact that the proposal was made by a Kyoto Gozan monk, the bakufu took Tsushima domain's opinion into consideration and decided that Iteian's rotation system was to be maintained. At some point, the bakufu may have considered directly engaging in diplomacy with Joseon. However, in the end, the bakufu

chose to continue delegating diplomatic affairs to Tsushima domain. Based on how the petition was ultimately handled, Ikeuchi finds it difficult to agree with the existing view that regards Iteian's rotation system as a means for the bakufu to conduct surveillance upon Tsushima domain.

Part 2 considers the issues surrounding diplomatic missions that traveled between Joseon and Japan. In particular, the second part of the book focuses on how Iteian monks received diplomatic missions from Joseon. Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to a type of mission called *yakkanshi* (譯官使) in Japan and known as *munwihaeng* (問慰行) in Joseon. And the more widely known type of mission called *tongsinsa* (通信使) is covered later in Chapters 7, 8, and Appendix 1. This rather unexpected sequence is likely to show that Ikeuchi highlights the progress he made in researching *yakkanshi*, which has been studied far less than the *tongsinsa* in Japan.

Chapter 5 attempts to provide an overview of the *yakkanshi* who were dispatched nearly sixty times during the Edo period and the role Iteian monks performed on such occasions. Chapter 6 describes the spaces where the *yakkanshi* were received at the Tsushima daimyo's residence and the formalities that took place there. Chapter 7 reveals the reason why Iteian monks would accompany *Tongsinsa* missions sent from Joseon. Accounts authored by *Tongsinsa* mission members are utilized to depict in detail how they perceived Iteian monks. Chapter 8 covers the policy change that the bakufu introduced in 1811 when it went against the custom of receiving *Tongsinsa* missions in Edo and instead received a mission in Tsushima. Previous studies have determined that this policy change was led by Matsudaira Sadanobu (松平定信, 1759-1829), a senior councilor (J. *rōjū*) of the bakufu. Yet, Ikeuchi points out that Baisō Kenjō, a monk who once served at Iteian, also contributed to the policy change. Unlike earlier studies preoccupied with reading disdain toward Joseon from Matsudaira's negative perception of *Tongsinsa* missions, Ikeuchi is the first to discover the following mentioned in a book by Matsudaira: "A Gozan monk at Shōkokuji was summoned for consultation." This at least confirms that Baisō Kenjō did respond to Matsudaira's request for consultation. However, it remains uncertain as to how much Matsudaira was influenced by Baisō Kenjō, which is why Ikeuchi suggests that the monk had played a support-

ing role rather than a leading role in policy changes involving Tongsinsa missions. This further demonstrates the author's basic approach of attempting to question the common understanding that Iteian was an instrument used to scrutinize Tsushima domain's activities related to Japan-Joseon diplomacy. Appendix 1 outlines the use of certain terms related to Tongsinsa missions.

Part 3 examines the drifters who appeared in the waters between Joseon and Japan. Some readers may wonder what maritime drifters have to do with Iteian. People who drifted to Japan had to be interviewed individually because Tsushima was required to report on them to the bakufu. Iteian monks were those who conducted those interviews by communicating in writing with each drifter. Through Chapter 9, Ikeuchi provides an overview of the repatriation system for drifters in East Asian waters from the 17th to the 19th century. The chapter also describes how the system headed toward modernization after the 1870s and the 1880s. Chapter 10 reviews previous studies on drifters and accounts of their experiences. Being aware of how research interests in Japan are focused on cases of drifting to Europe or America, Ikeuchi chooses to instead outline accounts written by Japanese who drifted to Joseon. Chapter 11 introduces the account of a warrior of Tsushima domain who drifted to Joseon. The full account has been made available through a different publication by Ikeuchi and is considered a masterpiece among Japanese accounts of drifting to Joseon (Ikeuchi Satoshi, *Satsuma hanshi Chōsen hyōryū nikki* [The Diary of a Tsushima Warrior Who Drifted to Joseon], Kodansha, 2009).

Part 4 deals with the goods the people of Joseon and Japan exchanged and their means of communicating with one another. Chapter 12 looks into the conversations Joseon people had with Japanese during the Edo period. Descriptions of such conversations in accounts by Tongsinsa members are presented, featuring instances of communicating in writing with Chinese characters or through gesticulations. In Chapter 13, the author reveals, on the basis of a diary written by the monk Baisō Kenjō of Shōkokuji, how the people of Joseon and Japan communicated with each other. In Chapter 14, cases involving *yakkanshi* are analyzed to illustrate the cultural exchange that occurred between Joseon and Tsushima during

the 18th century. What is notable about this chapter's analysis is that it compares records from both Joseon and Tsushima. Chapter 15 discusses the gifts and items Joseon and Japan exchanged with or ordered from each other. Ikeuchi substantiates in detail how Iteian monks would sometimes receive requests to acquire items produced in Joseon or the monks themselves would request that certain items be procured from Joseon. Appendix 2 offers a comparison between the perception bakufu officials had of Joseon without having any direct contact with Joseon people and the perception Iteian monks had of Joseon as they frequently interacted with Joseon people and became well informed about Joseon's domestic affairs.

### III

At the beginning of each chapter, Ikeuchi reviews common understandings of the diplomatic history between Joseon and Japan and discusses controversial points in those understandings. He then consults an extensive range of materials to verify those controversial points. Based on such substantiation, Ikeuchi shares his opinions regarding common historical understandings to conclude each chapter. This narrative style seems to be what stands out most from this book.

As its subtitle indicates, the author's ultimate purpose for the book is to critically examine the diplomatic history between early modern Korea and Japan. For that purpose, in-depth analysis has been carried out on monks referred to as great scholars (*J. sekigaku*) who served in rotations at the Iteian temple on a remote island called Tsushima. This constitutes Part I of the book that focuses on Joseon diplomatic offices and Iteian.

Ikeuchi's analysis reveals that in the fifth month of 1635, the daimyo of Tsushima Sō Yoshinari (宗義成) met a senior councilor of the bakufu named Sakai Tadakatsu (酒井忠勝, 1587-1662) and proposed for the bakufu to appoint an observer to henceforth inspect Tsushima domain. However, Sakai rejected the proposal on the spot, saying that there was no separate need for an observer since Tsushima was in charge of affairs with Joseon. Ikeuchi considers this incident as a reason to contradict the common understanding that the bakufu took the lead in installing the rotation system of

the Kyoto Gozan monks at Iteian in order to keep an eye on Tsushima.

According to Ikeuchi's argument, the bakufu had Confucian scholars draft state documents to be exchanged through Tongsin missions. Iteian monks were therefore not directly involved in drafting such state documents known as *kokusho* (國書). What the Tsushima domain oversaw instead of the bakufu was the drafting of informal letters called *shokei* (書契) exchanged between Joseon and Japan. In Ikeuchi's opinion, the bakufu had no intention of intervening in the drafting of *shokei*, nor was it capable of doing so. His explanation is that Tsushima domain brought Iteian monks in on purpose as an excuse to receive financial assistance from the bakufu. Hence, when authoring informal diplomatic letters, Tsushima domain received assistance from learned monks who could read and write in Chinese characters. Unless the bakufu was willing to directly take charge of its diplomatic relations with Joseon, it had no reason not to follow the custom of entrusting Tsushima domain with drafting informal letters. Maintaining the rotation system at Iteian was beneficial for Tsushima as well. The island actively took advantage of opportunities to interact with great Kyoto Gozan scholars in Fuchū, Tsushima. As introduced above, Iteian monks would translate drafts of informal diplomatic letters into Chinese characters, which Tsushima domain would thereafter review before creating a clean copy. Meanwhile, the monks Tsushima domain sent to Tōkōji on the premises of the Japan House in Busan were supposed to review informal diplomatic letters from Joseon in advance and report about them to Tsushima domain. Ikeuchi argues that mutual connections between the bakufu (Iteian) and Tsushima domain were at work when handling diplomatic documents exchanged with Joseon.

Another controversial point that Ikeuchi discusses regarding common historical views is the idea of an East Asian international order. When attempting to reveal the characteristics of Japan's relationship to the early modern East Asian international order, previous studies did not perform a positive analysis on individual developments such as the Yanagawa Incident or the rotation system's adoption at Iteian. They would instead form conclusions based on the international awareness or the world view of officials who were part of the central government.

Such conclusions included Taikun diplomacy suggested by the historian Nakamura Hidetaka (中村榮孝) and the Japanese perception of the Hua-Yi distinction suggested by Asao Naohiro (朝尾直弘). Literally meaning “great prince,” *taikun* (大君) was used as a diplomatic title for the Japanese shōgun. Taikun diplomacy was a term that Nakamura used to describe early modern Japan’s diplomacy that had diverged from the Sinocentric international order. Asao further developed Nakamura’s argument by concluding that Edo Japan broke away from the Sinocentric world and conceived an East Asian international order that revolved around Japan, primarily around its relations with Joseon and secondarily around its relations with the Ryukyu Kingdom. That conception is what Asao referred to as the Japanese perception of the Hua-Yi distinction. Meanwhile, Tashiro Kazui (田代和生) believed that, although the friendly relationship between Japan and Joseon were asymmetrical, it was professed to be equal only because Tsushima served as a buffer between Japan and Joseon. Based on a painting showing the Sō clan bowing deeply to the Joseon king, Tashiro took note of how the Sō clan constantly made tributary gestures to the Joseon king. She pointed out that such diplomatic efforts behind the scenes were the reason a nominally equal diplomacy could be carried out between the Tokugawa shōgun and the Joseon king.

Ikeuchi, however, rejects all of the aforementioned interpretations. He finds that the Japanese perception of the Hua-Yi distinction has not been substantiated in detail because it was derived solely from analyzing the world view of officials. Tashiro may have helped supplement Asao’s argument, but Ikeuchi offers the criticism that there is still no solid evidence to claim that Tsushima’s role as a cushion made equal diplomacy possible for the Tokugawa shōgun and the Joseon king.

Ikeuchi instead suspects that equal diplomacy between the Joseon king and the Japanese shōgun would have been possible without Tsushima acting as a buffer. Once *taikun* became established as a diplomatic title for the shōgun, it was no longer necessary for Tsushima to tamper with state documents issued in the shōgun’s name by purposefully adding the Chinese character for king (王). If *taikun* included the meaning of king, there was no need to have Iteian monks involved to prevent tampering with dip-

lomatic documents. This in turn, according to Ikeuchi, also makes it unnecessary to struggle to glean Japan-centrism from the title *taikun*.

As an expert in research on drifters, Ikeuchi highlights the repatriation of drifters as a system that brought Joseon, Japan, and the Ming and Qing dynasties of China under a single East Asian international order between the 17th and the 19th centuries. Regardless of how Joseon and Japan perceived one another, Ikeuchi claims that the repeated free repatriation of drifters between East Asian countries allowed them to take pride in the fact that they contributed to establishing a peaceful and stable international order, which is a claim the reviewer of this book can accept as well.

Despite being focused on the diplomatic history of early modern Korea and Japan, the book barely mentions anything regarding the two countries' dispute over the island of Ulleungdo, which was referred to as the Takeshima Ikken (竹島一件) in Japan. For instance, the book briefly mentions that among diplomatic documents the 37th monk to serve at Iteian drafted between 1692 and 1694, there was a document related to negotiations on the Genroku Takeshima Incident. This is bound to leave readers wondering how the Iteian monk perceived the issue surrounding Ulleungdo, the island the Japanese used to call Takeshima. However, the book does not indicate whether that Iteian monk left any separate descriptions regarding the issue nor does it attempt to explain why the monk failed to leave any record of such a major diplomatic issue at the time. Perhaps the reason Ikeuchi chose not to further cover the Ulleungdo issue was because doing so would create an overlap with another book he published in October of the same year. The only way to determine whether this speculation is accurate is to read *Nihonjin no Chōsen-kan wa ikani shite keisei sareta ka* [How the Japanese Perception of Joseon Was Formed] (Kodansha, 2017).