

# *Early Modern Korea-Japan Relation Reference: Yanagawa Shigeoki Kuji Kiroku\**

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## Overview

The *Yanagawa Shigeoki Kuji Kiroku* (“The Record of the Yanagawa Shigeoki Trial”) is the record of a lawsuit between Sō Yoshinari, the lord of Tsushima, and Yanagawa Shigeoki, his feudal vassal. The Yanagawa clan was a key member of the nobility in Tsushima domain from the time of Shigeoki’s grandfather, Shigenobu. At the same time, the family held another status as a direct subject of the Tokugawa shogunate. While enjoying the unique privilege of simultaneously belonging to both Tsushima domain and the shogunate, the Yanagawa family never neglected their loyalty to either side. When Shigeoki became the head of the clan, however, he shifted the focus of his allegiance to the shogunate and worked on matters of the central government. This led to a feud with Sō Yoshinari, the lord of Tsushima, who was displeased by signs of the wavering loyalty of his vassal. The deteriorating relationship eventually culminated in a lawsuit in 1631 in which both sides accused the other in the court of the shogunate. Shigeoki wanted to officially sever his ties with Tsushima domain and become a di-

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\* The original title for this book is *Künse Han-Il kwan'gye saryojip: Yanagawa Sigeok'i Kuji kirok*.  
근세 한일관계사료집: 야나가와 시게오키 구지기록.

rect vassal of the shogunate. Sō Yoshinari charged Shigeoki with being a traitorous vassal who attempted to disrupt the established feudal order of Japan. The litigation eventually ended in favor of the lord of Tsushima in 1635. Yanagawa Shigeoki was declared a “disloyal vassal” and sentenced to banishment.

A shocking discovery was made in the process of the lawsuit, though. It was revealed that the local government of Tsushima domain had forged and tampered with the official diplomatic correspondence between Joseon and the shogunate since the Imjin War in the late 16th century. What had begun as a personal legal dispute now suddenly took on an international significance that affected the formal diplomatic relationship between the two neighboring countries. The matter promptly led to an investigation by the shogunate on the ramifications of the forgery and its impact on the diplomatic relations between Joseon and Japan. In response to the incident, the title of shogun and the reign year in the diplomatic correspondence were changed, and a series of broad-level measures were implemented to monitor the creation and the transit of diplomatic correspondence to prevent tampering. The importance of the security of the official diplomatic channel was clearly recognized by the shogunate, which led to extensive and systematic modifications to safeguard against a similar failure.

The revamping of the diplomatic communication system has attracted the majority of the scholarly interest in the Yanagawa affair while its far-reaching repercussions on the relations among Joseon, Japan, and Tsushima have tended to be overlooked. This was in part due to the difficulty of deciphering the original documents.

This book is a detailed translation of the original record of the Yanagawa affair, Yanagawa Shigeoki Kuji Kiroku, by two specialists in early modern Korean-Japanese relations, Yu-Sook Youn and Sang-Joon Kim. Youn is widely recognized for her expertise in using primary source materials written in Japanese, as displayed in her previous books, *Japanese References on Ulleungdo and Dokdo* and *Joseon-Japan Relations in the Early Modern Period and Ulleungdo*. The authors’ knowledge of early modern Japanese history is also evident in the current book, which is characterized by a vast array of well-informed footnotes explaining the inci-

dents in detail, people, and special vocabulary featured in the book. These additions will enable readers of every level to easily understand the text.

This book is composed of two parts: The first comprises the bibliographical explanation of Yanagawa Shigeoki Kuji Kiroku and its annotated translation, which is subdivided into three sections; the second is the Original Facsimile. The explanation and annotation contain a collection of relevant documents including contemporary reactions to the trial, the aftermath of the lawsuit, the sentencing statement, and other matters. The book thus facilitates a broad understanding of the international relation between Joseon and Japan at the time. This publication is expected to make a significant contribution to expanding the scope of relevant historical research.

The bibliographical explanation covers the content of the Yanagawa affair and its historical context as well as a brief evaluation of the historical significance of the Record. The evaluation, however, is perhaps too brief to do it justice, thus I would like to explore further to supplement it and unearth more meaning and points of interest. Since this book is fundamentally a translation rather than a scholarly argument with value judgments, I would like to focus on a few keywords to illuminate and evaluate this book.

### Yanagawa Shigeoki (柳川調興) and Sō Yoshinari (宗義成)

The bibliographical explanation devotes much attention to explaining who Yanagawa Shigeoki (1603-84) was, which is quite natural, if not required, as the title of the Record and the legal case centers around the surname “Yanagawa.”

The Yanagawa family enjoyed a dual status as a local retainer of Tsushima domain and as a salaried official of the shogunate since the time of Shigeoki’s grandfather Shigenobu down to Shigeoki’s father Toshinaga. While they had authority and privilege stemming from their unique situation, such as receiving a separate fief from the shogunate and an international trade license with Joseon, the Yanagawa clan remained faithful to both Tsushima and the shogunate until the time of Shigeoki.

After becoming the leader of the clan, Shigeoki increasingly sought

to achieve independence from the lord of Tsushima domain. As written in the *Record*, it is possible to glean what Shigeoki was thinking from the testimonies of Sō Yoshinari: “Since the time of his grandfather and his father, I have placed (Shigeoki) in charge of all internal and external affairs despite his shortcomings and have treated him well. However, even last year he filed a lawsuit concerning the fiefdom.” “When the Joseon Tongsinsa (envoys) arrived, Yanagawa acted insolently and suddenly changed the ensign of his ship to a bird feather and the symbol to two heads.” “When I told Yanagawa to come down to Tsushima, he refused to heed my order.” Shigeoki himself made no attempt to attenuate his claim of independence, frequently arguing that he was an official of the Tokugawa shogunate and not a vassal of the Sō family. He was also absent from Tsushima until 1617 when he finally returned to meet the Tongsinsa. This continual aggravation of the falling out ultimately resulted in the trial of 1631.

While the *Record* is concerned with the litigation between Sō Yoshinari, the lord of Tsushima, and Yanagawa Shigeoki, his feudal vassal, as well as the use of the surname “Yanagawa” in the title, there is no record of Shigeoki’s own testimony regarding the trial. This is mainly due to the fact that, since the victor in the trial was Sō Yoshinari and the *Record* was part of his family library, “The Tsushima Sō Family Documents,” there was no need to devote much attention to what Shigeoki said and argued during the trial. This can be clearly seen from the first sentence of the *Record*, which stated, “The record of all relevant documents of the trial in which Yanagawa Buzen Shigeoki appealed to the shogunate on the alleged wrongdoings in the diplomatic relations between Japan and Joseon, but eventually lost due to his own failings.” Thus the *Record* works as propaganda material to advocate the perspective of the lord of Tsushima and to emphasize the fact that Yanagawa lost the trial due to his own faults. The *Record* also presents the questions posed by the shogun and the disputations of Sō Yoshinari against the allegation of Shigeoki. Thus it is impossible to know exactly what questions were put to Shigeoki and what his answers were. All researchers studying the material thus can only see a one-sided view of the affair. It is regrettable that there is no alternative balanced source of information that covers both sides of the trial.

## *Yanagawa Shigeoki Kuji Kiroku Section I*

Section I of the *Record* deals with the entire process of the trial initiated by Shigeoki with his petition to surrender the fiefdom (J. *chigyō*) his family had received from the lord of Tsushima domain. Prior to the main body of the trial, a brief survey of background information is given regarding the history of the Yanagawa family, how they won the trust of the shogunate, and the Tongsinsa (envoys). Once the trial started, the proceedings of the trial were collated in order, including the questions posed by the “elders” who were the senior advisers of the shogun (J. *roju*), the questions asked by the shogun himself, the final sentence, and the related documents. The related documents are thirty-five in total and include the request to temporarily cease the dispatch of the annual trade emissary from Tsushima to Joseon, the circumstances surrounding the exposure of Tsushima’s tampering with official diplomatic correspondence, and other matters.

### 1. The Sequence of Events and the Result of the Yanagawa Affair

The official beginning of the Yanagawa affair started in 1631 when Yanagawa Shigeoki petitioned to officially relinquish his license to send Sōshisen (送使船), the annual trade and diplomatic emissary to Joseon. Prior to this, Shigeoki frequently neglected his duties to his feudal lord, the lord of Tsushima, while devoting his time and service to the shogunate. With his petition, Shigeoki desired to shed his ties and duties to Tsushima domain and to become a direct officer of the shogunate based in the fief in Kyushu that he had received from the shogunate. The trial, of which we only know what the lord of Tsushima thought and said, took several years. However, in 1635 the Tokugawa shogun Iemitsu (1604-51) personally intervened and issued the final verdict in favor of the lord of Tsushima. Having been acquitted of any wrongdoing, Sō Yoshinari received back his rights to trade with Joseon and to govern the Tsushima domain. Shigeoki, on the other hand, was sentenced to exile in Tsugaru-han and died there in 1684.

## 2. Exposure of the Tampering of Diplomatic Correspondence

What had begun as a personal dispute in terms of the domestic feudal order took a serious turn in the eleventh lunar month of 1634 when Shigeoki exposed the fact that the diplomatic correspondence regarding the dispatch of the Joseon Tongsinosa between Joseon and Japan had been forged. Now an international issue, shogunate officials quickly jumped into the trial which had previously been languishing in the typically stagnant shogunate bureaucracy, as indicated by a decree dated on the second day of the twelfth lunar month of 1634, which read, “Until the end of this trial, all maritime traffic to and from Joseon will be halted.” The most interesting part of this section is the “shogun’s own questions,” as these were no doubt the critical points that decided the outcome of the trial. These questions examined only the points of contention where the allegations by Shigeoki and Yoshinari conflicted.

The interrogation of the lord of Tsushima by the shogun in the third lunar month of 1634 was primarily focused on the forgery of the diplomatic correspondence. The shogun Iemitsu asked several questions including how Yoshinari came by the forged letters and the seal, whether the allegation that Yoshinari’s father Yoshitoshi had forged the diplomatic correspondence was true, how Yoshinari could be unaware of the crimes perpetrated by his subordinates, and other issues. The interrogation was clearly aimed at clarifying the degree of knowledge and involvement of the lord of Tsushima in the forgery of the diplomatic correspondence. While the shogun Iemitsu eventually sided with the lord of Tsushima, it was the result of these questions that measured Yoshinari’s capability as the principal actor in the communication and trade with Joseon.

## 3. How the Joseon Tongsinosa was Received in Japan

In the introduction of Section I of the *Record*, there is an entry titled the “Preface on the Visit of the Joseon Tongsinosa,” which is seemingly irrelevant to the trial and makes one wonder why the “Preface” was included. However, the “Preface” is a valuable guide that shows how the shogunate

viewed the Joseon Tongsinsa and, based on that view, the significance of the diplomatic correspondence the Tongsinsa carried during that time. This understanding was the standard by which the main actors in Japanese international relations were selected.

According to the Preface, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who had unified Japan, sought to establish the legitimacy of his rule through the recognition by foreign countries as tangibly expressed by the Joseon Korea Tongsinsa. The Tongsinsa sent in 1607, 1617, and 1624 were all seen under the same light, as a tangible expression of foreign political approval that justified the hereditary rule of the leader of the Tokugawa shogunate. The allegation that the official diplomatic correspondence carried by the Tongsinsa could have been forged, therefore, raised a very serious problem that could undermine the legitimacy of the shogunate, a problem which led to the direct intervention by the shogun Iemitsu himself.

The symbolic significance of the Tongsinsa can also be seen at the end of the sentence issued by the shogun. When Yoshinari was acquitted, a direct command was added at the end of the sentence which stated, “(The shogun) commanded that the Tongsinsa should come from Joseon in this year or the next year.” In exchange for political absolution, the lord of Tsushima had to use all his influence to persuade Joseon to send the Tongsinsa to once again legitimize the shogunate.

## Yanagawa Shigeoki Kuji Kiroku Section II

Section II of the *Record* preserves the aftermath of the verdict, including the reorganization of the trade and diplomatic procedures with Joseon between Tsushima and the shogunate, the pledge of Tsushima domain, and other matters. The main points of interest include notifying Joseon of the conclusion of the trial, the resumption of the saikensen (歳遣船, the annual trade and diplomatic emissary from Tsushima to Joseon) rotation, the provision for recruitment of the personnel to be in charge of the composition of the diplomatic letter, the revision of the basic format of the diplomatic letter, the process of writing the pledge letter, and other documents.

The overall impression is that Tsushima domain was very cautious

and careful regarding the demands of the shogunate.

### 1. The Notification of the End of the Yanagawa Affair and the Resumption of the Shisōsen (使送船)

After the conclusion of the trial, Tsushima domain immediately notified Joseon of the conclusion of the issue. Certainly, the main interest could have been in resuming normal relations and the flow of trade traffic with Joseon in order to replenish Tsushima which had been constrained by the trade embargo during the trial. However, there seems to have been the more urgent issue of persuading Joseon to send another Tongsinsa as the shogun had commanded. In order to make a request for the Tongsinsa, the resumption of the Shisōsen was a prerequisite.

It is evident that Tsushima urgently sought to notify Joseon of the conclusion of the trial, as Tsushima even tried to employ the service of a Korean equestrian acrobat who was returning to Joseon in less than a month after the end of the trial. But Tsushima was being remarkably cautious at the same time, as it ostensibly stated that it would await orders from the shogunate.

Furthermore, the diplomatic correspondence with the details of the trial that would be sent to Joseon had to be examined and approved in Edo government first. This procedure took approximately eight months to pass through the censorship process, and the correspondence finally arrived in Joseon in the eleventh month. This also suggests that the lord of Tsushima was very restrained in his dealings with Joseon and sought approval from Edo every step of the way.

In the eleventh month of 1635, before the resumption of the Shisōsen dispatch, Tsushima temporarily returned to Joseon the trade license (*J. tosho*, *K. Toseo*) and the official attire belonging to Yanagawa Shigeoki, It-eian (以酌庵), and Ryūhōuin (流芳院), the guilty party in the trial. But in Section III of the *Record*, the lord of Tsushima again requested the restoration of the trade license and the assigned Shisōsen.

It is unfortunate that there is no record of how the trade and the diplomatic relations between Joseon Korea and Tsushima changed as a result of

the trial. For instance, the circumstances surrounding the resumption of the Shisōsen of Yanagawa Shigeoki and of Iteian are recorded in Section III of the *Record*. However, there is no mention of the reduction of the Shisōsen system after the implementation of the Gyeomdaeje system (兼帶制: one emissary from Tsushima carrying multiple diplomatic correspondence representing different parties in Japan rather than each party sending its own emissary). One must wonder whether the omission was due to a sense of embarrassment on the Tsushima side or perhaps there was simply no need to mention the Gyeomdaeje system. It is nevertheless regrettable that there is no record of Japanese reaction to the substantial changes Joseon Korea introduced on the occasion of the end of the trial in regard to the rules of diplomatic and trade relations, including the reception of the Shisōsen. It would also have been better for the book to have included a footnote on the Gyeomdaeje in order to explain the system even briefly.

## 2. The Iteian (以耐庵) Monks on Rotation and the “Secretary for Writing Letters” (書翰役人)

Because the forgery of the diplomatic correspondence was uncovered during the trial, writing the diplomatic correspondence to Joseon became a great concern for Tsushima. The concern was also compounded by the shogun’s stern command at the end of the trial to solicit the visit of the Joseon Tongsinsa as soon as possible. Since Tsushima could not afford to fail again the expectations and the trust of the shogunate, on the fourth month of 1635, soon after the conclusion of the trial, Tsushima resorted to requesting the shogunate to establish a clerical secretariat and to appoint a shogunate official to oversee the drafting of the diplomatic correspondence.

The officials in the shogunate, however, were again at their usual ease and slow to react. The first response from Edo government read, “It would be well to invite a knowledgeable Buddhist monk from among the Gozan monks to serve as the elder on (Tsushima’s) salary (the fourth month of 1635).” The second reply from Edo to Tsushima’s request for the members of the secretariat only stated, “The shogunate will issue an order (the seventh month of 1635).” The full guideline from Edo regarding the

secretariat finally arrived in the 8th month of 1635, four months after the persistent requests from the lord of Tsushima.

The Buddhist monks called “Iteian” were to receive a salary of 100 koku (石) and there were to be three members in the office taking turns serving on a duty rotation. Every letter they wrote had to be approved by the shogunate. Each letter also had to be copied and the duplicate had to be preserved at their office. Through this new system, the shogunate became deeply involved in the process of the trade and diplomacy between Joseon and Tsushima that had previously been mainly managed by Tsushima before.

Section II of the *Record* has a considerable amount of detail on the Iteian system. In the Tongsinza embassy of 1636, for instance, the diplomatic correspondence from Japan was written by the Iteian monk in a different format, which is also recorded in Section II. Some of the main points of change included the title of the shogun being changed to “Taikun” (大君) and the letter goes on to elaborate the achievements of the shogunate for a considerable length. Furthermore, in Section III of the *Record*, the new version of the diplomatic correspondence format is featured in detail, which serves as the main reference for the reform of the diplomatic process with Joseon after the trial.

### Yanagawa Shigeoki Kuji Kiroku Section III

In Section III of the *Record*, nineteen documents relevant to the trial were collected, such as briefs on the relations with Joseon Korea before and after the trial, supporting evidence for and elaborations on the arguments put forward by the lord of Tsushima, and other matters.

Most of the information supplements the documents in Section I and II, thus it helps to improve the overall understanding of the trial and its result.

#### 1. Additional Data for the Yanagawa Affair

More than one-half of Section III of the *Record* is filled with supplementa-

ry information regarding the trial. Section III begins with a collection of letters exchanged between the lord of Tsushima and the elder of the shogunate (*roju*) in the form of questions and answers on the relationship between the Yanagawa clan and the lord of Tsushima, the background on Yanagawa Shigeoki's relocation to Sunpu, the lawsuit on fiefdoms filed in 1626, what led to the trial of 1631, and other issues.

The second supplement is titled, "The beginning of the trial of 1631." This supplement records in detail how Shigeoki disrupted the feudal order of the lord and vassal relationship and the eleven crimes Shigeoki allegedly committed. These crimes included, to name a few, how Shigeoki stayed in Sunpu and attempted to build a patron relationship with the shogunate; how Shigeoki acted as if he was an equal peer of the lord of Tsushima after having received an official title from Joseon together with his lord; how the underlings of Shigeoki ignored the lord of Tsushima and spread many innuendos against him; how Shigeoki appointed unauthorized Jaepan (裁判, court trials), the diplomatic emissary between Joseon and Tsushima, and other matters.

There are also some additional details regarding Shigeoki's crimes as reported by the diplomat monk Genpō (玄方), such as how Shigeoki tried to raise the status of Ryūhōuin (流芳院) Songsasun without permission, and how Shigeoki misappropriated the folding screen sent from the shogun to the Tongsinsa by switching it with a fake. In addition to these, every minute detail that could undermine and incriminate Shigeoki is also copied and collected, such as how Shigeoki divorced his wife who was the sister of the lord of Tsushima.

Why was it necessary to collect all these compromising documents against Shigeoki even after the trial had ended with a victory for the lord of Tsushima? The most important reason would have been to buttress the claim of legitimacy for the lord of Tsushima. Another reason was to use the information as an example for any possible future challenges against the received feudal order of lord and vassal. Coupled with a copy of the pledge of loyalty the lord of Tsushima sent to the Tokugawa shogun, these documents were expected to serve as a stern warning against any would-be rebelling vassal to safeguard the status quo of the Japanese feudalism.

## The Value of the Record as a Historical Reference

The *Yanagawa Shigeoki Kuji Kiroku* (柳川調興公事記録: “Record of the Yanagawa Shigeoki Trial”) is a primary historical source that shows the formation of rules that governed the trade and diplomatic relations between Joseon Korea and Tokugawa Japan after the Imjin War. In 1609, the Giyu Treaty (己酉約條) laid the foundation for the resumption of the trade and diplomatic relations between Joseon and Japan through Tsushima. However, the shogunate did not become actively involved in the process. But when the forgery of diplomatic correspondence was exposed during the Yanagawa affair, it became necessary for the shogunate to intervene and take control of the Japanese system of trade and diplomatic relations established by the Giyu Treaty. The documents contained in this book help to improve our understanding of the circumstances surrounding the reform the shogunate made as a result of the trial.

Research on the Yanagawa affair has been led by Japanese scholars such as “*Nitchō tsukō bōekishi no kenkyū*” [Study on the history of Japan–Joseon trade] 日朝通交貿易史の研究 by Tashiho Kazui (1981), “*Kinsei Nitchō kankeishi no kenkyū*” [Study on the history of Japan–Joseon relations in the early modern period] 近世日朝關係史の研究 by Miyake Hidetoshi (1986), “*Kinsei Nihon to Higashi Ajia*” [Japan and East Asia in the early modern period] 近世日本と東アジア by Arano Yasunori (1988). While research on the *Record* has been conducted in Korea, scholars have tended to focus on how the contents of the diplomatic correspondence were changed due to the forgery and the tampering rather than on trying to understand the history and the context of the trial as a whole. This is mainly because of the level of difficulty involved in deciphering the old Japanese cursive script in which the *Record* was written. The publication of the current book, therefore, is welcome news for the researchers studying this material.

The exposure of the forgery of the diplomatic correspondence between Japan and Korea not only brought about the reorganization of the Joseon Tongsinosa and the format of the diplomatic correspondence, it also fundamentally changed how the trade and the diplomatic relations between

the two countries were conducted. Joseon also reformed the customs and the rules for how the emissaries from Tsushima were to be received; the implementation of Gyeomdaeje system (兼帶制) and Chawae (差倭, temporary emissary from Tsushima) are two of the notable examples. On the Japanese side, the most important change was the direct intervention and oversight by the Tokugawa shogunate including the establishment of the It-eian rotation. As this *Record* serves as the primary source of these changes, this book will prove useful for all interested researchers.

Regarding the study of Japanese local history, the *Record* is sometimes used as an example of a legal dispute that occurred within the samurai class. In the case of a dispute between lord and vassal, the shogunate would often also penalize the lord for the failure to properly control his vassals, thus largely resulting in the reduction of the *chigyō*. However, in the Yanagawa affair, the lord of Tsushima was acquitted of any wrongdoing on his part and was never penalized, which was a rare case.

But there are also regrettable limitations to the *Record* in that it contains no mention of any defense or an argument made by Yanagawa Shigeoki or the implementation of Gyeomdaeje.