Portrayals of Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate are frequently characterized by descriptions of a country which, out of fear of Christian influence, closed its doors to the world (Toby 1977:323ff). Indeed, for over two hundred years, from the 1630s until 1853, Japanese diplomatic and economic relations with the outside world were heavily regulated and restricted. Some scholars have described the shogunate’s key goals in instituting these policies as the elimination of the subversive threat of Catholicism and the enforcement of a shogunal monopoly on foreign trade. The shogunate sought to achieve these goals through the complete cessation of Japanese overseas travel, outlawing of Christianity, and restriction of Europeans to a tiny man-made island in Nagasaki Harbor, along with other measures (Toby 1984:6). However, this explanation, like those which have come before it, fails to fully account for the cessation of direct trade with China and of all direct trade and formal relations with the various polities of Southeast Asia. Thus, one comes to wonder, how did fear of Western or Christian influence, and a desire for greater shogunal wealth, translate into action being taken against direct trade and friendly relations with the polities of Southeast Asia?

Trends in scholarship over the last several decades have turned away from the Eurocentric view of Japan’s relations in this period, reviving an awareness of the importance of Asian contacts. It is now argued that the shogunate’s policies of maritime restrictions derived from keen understandings and extensive information regarding the dispositions of its various potential trading partners, rather than purely from ignorance, fear, or isolationism (Walker 2002:44). Nevertheless, most scholarly treatments of Japanese trade during this period continue to focus on relations with China, Korea, and the Dutch East India Company, virtually omitting any reference to the polities of Southeast Asia. This poses a considerable obstacle to understanding the full picture of Japan’s trade and diplomacy during this period. This work seeks to rectify this problem, through an exploration of the complex narrative of the golden age of Japanese commercial and diplomatic contact with Southeast Asia in the early 17th century, and its cessation, addressing as well as the impact of
domestic events in the region upon international relations and trade. This work focuses particularly upon Japanese trade and relations with the Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya and Vietnamese polity of Quang Nam across the span of the 17th century.

**Trade before Maritime Restrictions**

In the decades before the imposition of maritime restrictions, from roughly 1590 to 1635 Japan’s trade with Southeast Asian polities, independent Chinese traders, and agents of a number of Western powers, flourished. Extensive trade was conducted at Japanese ports, as well as by Japanese traders and adventurers at ports in the independent Ryūkyū Kingdom and Southeast Asia. Not only did Japanese merchants trade with native Ryukyuan and Southeast Asian merchants, but with Chinese merchants as well who, in trading with Japanese in these locations, were not violating the Ming maritime restrictions (haijin3) forbidding travel to Japan. The Ming court had formally severed ties with Japan some decades earlier, and banned Chinese from travelling to Japan, though many defied this proclamation, and one Ming official wrote that “the ban of the Ming government is not sufficiently effective” (Iwao 1976:3).

Japanese maritime activity at this time was primarily the work of independent adventurers and pirates, not that of organized merchants associated with given businesses or guilds in Japan. These adventurers were quite numerous, and it has been said that, “unique among Asian nationals, they proved to be at least equal to the Westerners in trading and fighting skills throughout Far Eastern waters” (Theeravit 1988:16).

Many of these Japanese adventurers who settled in Southeast Asia were Christians who faced persecution in Japan (Ribeiro 2001:53), and many were samurai who for any number of reasons sought adventure overseas and an escape from life and responsibilities at home in Japan. The majority of adventurers and others who traveled to Southeast Asia at this time were granted no special status, recognition, or protection outside Japan, by the shogunate or its predecessors, with the sole exception of those few traders who were formally licensed through the “red seals” system described below. Though many of these adventurers operated independently, on Japanese vessels, many others served on Chinese or Western ships, or earned profit through military service to local Southeast Asian governments or other factions (Ibid.).

**The Shuinsen System and the Politics of Trade**

Japanese merchant shipping was controlled by Japanese authorities under Toyotomi Hideyoshi (r. 1582-1598), and later under the Tokugawa shogunate (est. 1603), both of which issued formal documents to officially designate authorized merchants in a system aimed at combating the piracy prevalent at the time. These ships were called shuinsen, or “red seal ships” after the vermillion seals on the formal documents (shuinjo) that they carried, and agreements were reached between the shogunate and the authorities in various Southeast Asian countries regarding the recognition and enforcement of the system. In this period of over 30 years, from the issuing of the first shuinjo by the shogunate in 1604, until the abolition of the system in 1635, more than 350 officially licensed Japanese ships traveled abroad, calling at 19 ports across the region (Iwao 1976:9-10). More than half of the shuinjo were issued for trade with ports in mainland Southeast Asia, with roughly half of those being issued for central Vietnam, also known as Quang Nam, Quinam or Cochinchina.

Extensive networks of transshipping were also established between Japan and parts of the Asian mainland during this period, in addition to the direct trade. Rather than being transported on a single vessel directly from their origin to their destination, many goods would pass through several ports and the hands of a number of merchants along their journey. There were a number of ports which operated primarily in this fashion, serving as intermediaries, and not as the origin or final destination for the bulk of their goods. This was effected largely through Western merchants who traded at Japanese ports, and through Ryūkyū, a nexus of trade in the region that provided a considerable proportion of the Southeast Asian goods exchanged within Japan and to Korea and elsewhere throughout the Edo period. The Dutch traded far more in Asian goods than in Dutch or other European ones, and the majority of items offered by Ryūkyū in tribute to Japan and China, were Southeast Asian products rather than native Ryukyuan goods (Sakamaki 1964:385-386). Through these networks, Japan ex-
ported primarily precious metals and other mineral goods, along with ceramics and other craft goods, and imported silks, woods, lead, sugar, and a variety of animal materials such as skins and ivories, in exchange, from Southeast Asia (Iwao 1976:10).

Iwao Seiichi, who literally wrote the book on 16th-17th century Japanese settlements in Southeast Asia, identifies three factors as the primary causes for the expansion of trade in this period. Firstly, the lack of formal relations and trade with China encouraged traders to look elsewhere for their goods, and to initiate or expand activities in Southeast Asian ports. Secondly, the end of Japan’s long Sengoku period (1467-1600), roughly 150 years of war within the archipelago, brought peace and stability. *Daimyō* (feudal lords) were now able to increasingly focus their attentions away from martial activities and towards economic goals, thus allowing for the expansion and development of domestic industry and trade. Finally, the period saw increased movements towards internationalization in general, largely spurred by attitudes and activities of the Western powers active in the region (Iwao 1976:1).

This period of prolific international trade also saw the consolidation of power, and the gradual imposition of controls upon trade and interaction with foreigners by both Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa shogunate. It was of great importance for both of these authorities to take steps to ensure their legitimacy in the eyes of the *daimyō*, religious factions, and other regional powers, and their power and authority over the nation in general. Mary Elizabeth Berry, a historian of Tokugawa Japan, in her essay “Public Peace and Private Attachment,” offers an excellent, succinct overview of the methods by which the Tokugawa shogunate consolidated and enforced its control. She suggests that the shogunate achieved these goals through a combination of compromises, personal relationships between lords and retainers, and laws and policies aimed at suppressing the ability of *daimyō* and other factions to gain too much power or wealth (Berry 1986).

This consolidation and centralization of power served not only domestic purposes, but was important in the international arena, as the shogunate sought to establish its legitimacy in the eyes of foreign governments, and to extricate Japan from the Sinocentric regional order, establishing something of a Japanocentric regional order. International relations in East and Southeast Asia were for many centuries largely based on notions of Chinese cultural supremacy and a series of tributary relationships by which states would send gifts and formal missions to the Chinese imperial court in acknowledgement of the suzerainty of China, in exchange for formal recognition from China and various opportunities and freedoms in pursuing trade. The Ashikaga shoguns had entered into tributary relations with Ming China in 1405 (Sansom 1961:170), and though formal relations had been cut off since 1557 (Iwao 1976:1), Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa shoguns who came after him felt the need to more explicitly end the pretense of Japanese subordination to China.

Efforts to achieve this took many forms, and included both ritual and practical diplomatic activities as well as military and cultural expansion. Hideyoshi sought to conquer Korea, Taiwan, the Ryūkyūs, and the Philippines in order to create a network of Japanese tributaries to rival China’s. This would theoretically provide a basis for which relations could be forged on an even footing, allowing Japan to regain access to officially authorized trade with China (Arano 2005:206). In addition, Japan began to use its own imperial calendar, not China’s, in official communications with Chinese tributaries such as Korea, and employed the title *Taikun* or “Great Prince” to refer to the shogun, intentionally avoiding any title such as “King” (®) that would imply a role within the Sinocentric order, subordinate to the Chinese emperor (Toby 1984:85-8).

Though these measures showed a distancing from China, and indeed did not initially go far to encourage friendly and open relations between the two countries, they were important elements in the consolidation of the shogunate’s legitimacy and authority within Japan, and beyond its shores. In order to repair and resume formal relations with China, Japan had to show that it had a centralized authority with which the Chinese court could communicate and interact, and which could put an end to the problem of the *wakō*, pirates, raiders, and traders whose depredations caused the rift in Sino-Japanese relations in the mid-16th century that led to the imposition by Ming China of *haijin* (maritime restrictions), mentioned earlier. The samurai...
lords of Japan were at war with one another from 1467 until about 1600, and lacked any single central authority powerful enough to take any action on this front; the problem was exacerbated by the Ming ban on trade with Japan, which caused countless otherwise law-abiding and peaceful traders to become labeled as wakō, i.e., as criminals, simply on account of their continued involvement in trade despite the ban (Arano 2005:186–7). Following the fall of China’s Ming dynasty in 1644 to Manchu invasions, and the establishment of the Qing dynasty, many Ming loyalists fled to Taiwan and other parts of the region. Many became raiders and pirates, fighting for many decades under the likes of Zheng Chenggong (Coxinga), ostensibly seeking to restore the Ming to power. As a result, the ethnic composition of the wakō came to be primarily Chinese. Nevertheless, for centuries, though these traders and pirates derived from a wide variety of ethnicities and allegiances, the Chinese and Korean courts consistently insisted upon considering them wakō, or “Japanese pirates,” and primarily, if not solely, Japan’s responsibility to suppress. For this reason, many of the policies of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the early Tokugawa shogunate which related to foreign relations or trade were aimed at reducing illicit trade and other criminal activities, and at showing China that they could be trusted as responsible trading partners who looked after their own affairs (Arano 2005:190).

Certainly, many of these policies served to reinforce authority at home, and to prevent rebellions and other opposition to the central authority, but most can be seen as steps taken to control overseas travel and trade, and to prevent violence and criminal activities committed by Japanese abroad. Over the course of the 1580s–90s, Hideyoshi confiscated swords from commoners, removed rōnin (samurai with no lord) from towns and villages where they were not working as producers or in a military capacity, and enforced various other methods of strict control over the populace of Japan (Sansom 1961:332–333). He also banned Christianity and expelled missionaries from the country several times, and instituted the beginnings of the shuinsen system, perhaps the most important step towards controlling the activities of Japanese overseas (Ibid. 347ff.). The system, in effect, established the conditions under which a Japanese merchant engaged in activities overseas could be considered to be doing so legally, thereby hypothetically putting an end to the problem of legitimate merchants being taken to be criminals or pirates (Innes 1993:112).

Tokugawa Ieyasu, gaining control of the country in the years immediately following Hideyoshi’s death, likewise made extensive efforts to repair relations with China and Korea, not only through direct diplomatic missions and the repatriation of Koreans taken captive during Hideyoshi’s invasions of 1592–1598, but also through the display of tighter controls over trade and maritime activity associated with Japan. The shogunate claimed a monopoly on silk imports in 1604 (Ribeiro 2001:57), continuing a precedent set by Hideyoshi, and restricted all foreign trade, except for that of the Chinese, to only Hirado and Nagasaki as early as 1616. Numerous actions were taken against the spread of Christianity prior to the 1639 expulsion of the Portuguese, and formal proclamations against piracy were likewise issued repeatedly, beginning under Hideyoshi (Arano 2005:209). The involvement of Chinese, Europeans, and Southeast Asians, along with Japanese, in respecting the tribunals held at Nagasaki for individual cases involving trade disputes and the like, and making use of them, also represents the growth of the shogunate’s authority and legitimacy in the eyes of foreign traders and others (Arano 2005:191). All of these steps, along with the continuation of the shuinen system, were aimed in significant part at persuading the Chinese authorities to recognize the shogunate’s desires to suppress the unrestricted travel and trade which allowed for the preponderance of wakō and to address this and other related problems.

Japanese in Southeast Asia

One of the chief factors spurring extensive Chinese and Japanese trade in Southeast Asia was the revocation of a ban on trade in that region by the Ming court in 1567. Since the court still banned Japanese from entering Chinese ports, and Chinese from travelling to Japan, transactions came to be undertaken increasingly in neutral ports in Southeast Asia (Wray 2001:2). Many ports came to be host to bustling marketplaces, and to communities of Chinese and Japanese, along with Dutch and English East India Company outposts and to others involved in the region’s lucrative trade (Reid 1993:90–93, 114–116 passim).

Japanese settled in a variety of cities across both maritime and mainland Southeast Asia during this
period, but the community in Ayutthaya, the Siamese capital, was perhaps the largest. One source estimates that 1500 Japanese lived in Ayutthaya during the community’s peak in the 1620s (Ishii 1998:1). The kings of Ayutthaya were quite open to foreign trade and relations, engaged in relations with the shogunate, and welcomed these Japanese adventurers (Polenghi 2009:29), making use of them from time to time in quelling rebellions and intimidating neighboring states. Some Japanese gained considerable influence in the royal court, and were bestowed titles or official positions. By the 1620s, Japan was Ayutthaya’s most major trading partner, with the ships of over twenty Japanese trading houses, along with those of many maritime adventurers, making regular journeys between Nagasaki and Ayutthaya (Theeravit 1988: 22).

Ayutthaya was among the most distant of the ports and capitals with which Japan interacted in the early modern period, and relations between the two polities were established centuries later than the diplomatic contacts of each with other East Asian and Southeast Asian principalities. The beginnings of Japanese trade in Ayutthaya, and of the Japanese community there, are believed to have occurred around 1570, over a century after Ayutthaya entered into relations with the Kingdom of Ryūkyū, located a relatively short distance south of the Japanese island of Kyushu. Ayutthaya was invaded by Burma at this time and besieged; the city fell but was soon recovered (Coedes 1966:154). In the wake of this, relations between the kingdom and Japan, which could supply it with firearms and swords, became increasingly important. The Japanese role in supplying Ayutthaya’s armies is evident from the cargo of a ship known to have been captured by the Spanish (Breazeale 1999). Ayutthaya would suffer many further invasions from Burma over the course of its history, finally falling to one such invasion in 1767 (Coedes 1966:162-5).

The shogunate took the initiative in establishing formal relations with a mission sent in 1606. The two courts exchanged a series of letters, and six Siamese embassies visited Japan from 1616-1629 (Breazeale 1999:29), bringing a variety of goods both for trade and as gifts to the shogunate, along with formal letters from the royal court, inscribed on sheets of gold and presented in exquisite ceremonial containers. The Siamese royal court, or its diplomatic officials, was perhaps aware of the importance the shogunate placed on the proper dating of formal documents⁶, and of the diplomatic difficulties created by Korean missives to Japan dated with the Chinese imperial era name rather than the Japanese one. As a result, an invented era name, “Tenun” (Nagazumi 1999:91-92), was applied to some, if not all, of the Siamese court’s communications with the shogunate over the course of many years, avoiding the potential difficulties that might have resulted from the use of the Sanskritic calendar.

Over the course of these few decades, the Japanese community in Ayutthaya grew quite large and influential. The royal court granted formal titles and official positions to a number of Japanese, the most notable of them likely being Yamada Nagamasaya, head of the Japanese community, represented both the royal court and the Japanese community of Ayutthaya in communications with the shogunate. Though shogunal officials generally only engaged in communications with their equivalent counterparts in foreign courts, Yamada was an exception, writing to the likes of Ieyasu’s foreign affairs advisor Ishin Suden, and Rōjū (Elders) Doi Toshikatsu and Honda Masazumi, and receiving formal responses (Nagazumi 1999:97). In addition to his political and diplomatic roles, he led a number of Japanese into battle against rebellions, uprisings, and Burmese invaders, and in domestic disputes over the royal succession. The shogunate’s relations with the kingdom of Ayutthaya grew quite strong in these first decades of the 17th century, and trade prospered, for a time, between the two polities (Theeravit 1988:22).

The Vietnamese polity of Quang Nam or Cochinchina was another of Japan’s chief trading partners in the 5h period, and the home of a small but influential Japanese population. Quang Nam was one of several polities at the time which controlled parts of what is today Vietnam. The Champa people and the lords of the Mac clan who controlled much of the south and the north respectively in the previous century were now restricted to small territories each equivalent in area to a single modern-day Vietnamese province. The lords⁷ of the Trinh and Nguyen clans, meanwhile, controlled the majority of the northern and central regions (Li 1998:11-17).
The Vietnamese polity of chief importance to the current study is Quang Nam, the central-southern area controlled by the Nguyen lords; the Dutch called it Quinam, while other Europeans at the time called it Cochinchina, a term coined by the Portuguese, who derived “Cochin” from the Chinese name for Vietnam, Giao Chi, and added “china” in order to distinguish it from the Cochin in India (Sud 2004:356). The polity’s primary port was Hoi An, known as Faifo to the Europeans, which has been described as the largest port in Cochinchina, and thus in all of Vietnam as well (Woodside 1993:162). Hoi An is located near the mouth of the Thu Bon River, a short distance south of Da Nang, where another small Japanese community was established in 1623 (Ribeiro 2001:71), and about three kilometers inland from the South China Sea (Wheeler 2003). The city bore a small but commercially active population of Japanese for much of the 17th century, from 1617–1696 (Ribeiro 2001:71), and even today the city is famous for its Japanese-style bridge, known as Lai Vien Kieu, or “Bridge of Friends from Afar,” built by that community. In the period of the shuinsen, that is, from 1604 to 1635, Hoi An saw ten Japanese ships per year (Li and Reid 1993:3) on average, though it is likely that not all of these ships bore shuinjo (Reid 1993:19). This constituted roughly a quarter of all Japanese trade, more than that of any other individual destination (Chen 1974:13).

The attractiveness of the port of Hoi An for Japanese traders derived from a number of factors. As a neutral port outside Japan or China, it provided the ability to trade with Chinese merchants, and to acquire Chinese goods, despite the formal Ming ban on Chinese trade with Japan. The town’s identity as an active port began as the result of this trade, and as a result of the considerable Chinese and Japanese settlements which grew up there (Chen 1974:14). For several months each year, during the period when trade winds and weather permitted Chinese and Japanese merchant ships to come to the port, an annual market was held at which Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese exchanged goods (ibid.). The Japanese residents of the city gathered goods from Chinese and Vietnamese traders in preparation for the arrival of each merchant ship (Li 1998:63), making the overall trade far easier and more efficient from the point of view of the Japanese merchants. This was, of course, not the only port where Japanese could trade with Chinese, but it was one of the closest that was not controlled by Europeans, unlike Macao and Manila. Trade duties were lower in Hoi An, and the Japanese felt a closer cultural connection to the Vietnamese than to Europeans, Arabs or Indians (Li 1998:65). Japanese suspicion of the Westerners, likely alongside conditions deriving from Western attitudes towards the Japanese, also contributed to the popularity of Quang Nam over Macao or the Philippines as a major site of Japanese trade (Innes 1980:59-62).

The key factor that according to the historian Li Tana, “may have ultimately tipped the scale” (Li 1998:64) towards Hoi An was the active involvement of Nguyen Hoang (r. 1558-1613), and his successors as lord of Quang Nam, in encouraging foreign trade. Nguyen Hoang sent a number of missives to the court of Tokugawa Ieyasu regarding trade and individual traders, in an attempt to cultivate a friendly and close diplomatic relationship. A 1601 letter discussed the Japanese pirate Shirahama Kenki, who had terrorized the Vietnamese coast sixteen years earlier, and who was now in Vietnamese custody after a dispute over his legitimacy as a merchant; Nguyen used this issue as a pretext to make offerings of good will and requests for a continuation of good relations. Ieyasu’s response contained an explanation of the shuinjo system, and marked the beginnings of Tokugawa relations with the Nguyen polity (Li 1998:65). The Nguyen family gained closer ties to Japanese traders through adoptions and marriage, and many of the shuinsen to trade at Hoi An in this period were captained by Japanese relations of the Nguyen family. In addition, Nguyen Hoang and his successors frequently treated Japanese traders well when they were brought to Quang Nam by storms or other conditions while en route to a different destination (Li 1998:64). Finally, the Nguyen lords frequently engaged directly in commerce themselves, communicating with individual Japanese traders and asking that they carry certain goods abroad for sale, or that they buy and bring back certain goods, on behalf of the kingdom.

Good relations with the shogunate served political purposes as well for the Nguyen. Tensions between the Nguyen south (Quang Nam) and the Trinh north (Tonkin) developed into outright war in 1627, and petitions were sent both from Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, Hoang’s successor, and several Japanese merchants of Hoi An, asking the shogunate to sever trade with...
Tonkin. The shogunate complied, and the efforts of the Nguyen and Hoi An merchants to maintain this situation persisted successfully until the shuinsen trade was ended entirely in 1635 (Li 1998:65). Later communications reaffirmed the Nguyen lords’ delight in maintaining good relations, and their desire to continue to do so, though, of course, these may have been merely customary formalities and pleasantries. These letters also frequently discussed commercial matters, such as requests for goods or other materials, such as copper coins, which could not be obtained or produced domestically.

Anecdotal evidence of Japanese merchant families who enjoyed close contact with Vietnamese people serves as further evidence for the friendly relations between Japanese and Vietnamese in this period. Grave markers in Vietnam and Japan illustrate the intermarriage and international travel of people of both nations in this period, as do Vietnamese gifts still held today by the Japanese descendants of merchant families of that period. A sheepskin sea map depicting the route from Nagasaki to Hoi An, owned by the Kodoya family, and a Vietnamese bodhisattva statue given by the Nguyen to the Nagoya family, along with a handscroll painting of a Japanese merchant ship traveling to Da Nang, are three prominent examples that survive today (Chuong 1991:209).

Though the Japanese population of Hoi An was small, numbering only in the tens of households and far outnumbered by the several thousand Chinese inhabitants of the city, it played an important role in effecting both Japanese, and later Dutch, trade at the port. Japanese merchants came to Hoi An primarily for silks, the Japanese demand for which was so great that the comings and goings of the shuinsen had dramatic cyclical effects on market prices there (Li 1998:63). Goods were, in fact, divided into “new silk,” which had been harvested and prepared in the spring, while the Japanese ships were in port, and “old silk,” which was gathered in the winter. Though these two classes of silk were likely identical in terms of material quality, the “new silk” consistently brought higher prices at market (Ibid.).

The Imposition of Maritime Restrictions

Between 1635 and 1641, the Tokugawa shogunate put into place a number of policy changes and edicts that radically changed the patterns of Japanese trade and diplomacy. The shogunate abolished the shuinsen trade in 1635, and forbade all Japanese from leaving the country or returning to it. The construction of ocean-going vessels was banned, and Japanese living abroad, such as those in the various Nihonmachi across Southeast Asia, were essentially stranded, unable to return upon pain of death. The Portuguese were expelled from Japan in 1639, and all trade and relations with them suspended. The Dutch and Chinese were restricted to their respective settlements in Nagasaki beginning in 1641. Trade was only allowed at a handful of Japanese ports after this time, with merchants from only a very few nations, and formal relations were likewise maintained with only a few polities. Still, Japan remained quite open to cultural influences of the outside world and to knowledge of affairs in the region. Dutch and Chinese traders at Nagasaki served as significant sources of both goods from China, Southeast Asia, and around the world, and information about events and conditions, supplementing that obtained through contact with Korea, the Ryūkyū Kingdom, and the Ainu. Thus, Japan was far from completely sealed off from the world, and the shogunate’s policies of maritime restrictions were in any case hardly unusual compared to those of other nations in the region, nor were its anxieties about the negative effects of Catholic influence.

Domestic Politics

The general consensus in scholarship today is that Japanese policies in these matters were quite similar to foreign relations policies of other East Asian nations at the time, and were not excessive or unusual at all.
(Wray 2001:2). The Siamese tended not to travel overseas in this period, trading instead via Chinese merchants. Korea, meanwhile, maintained an even tighter set of maritime prohibitions than Japan, being completely closed to the West (Wray 2001:4-5), in contrast to Japan’s policies towards the Dutch in Nagasaki. In addition, it has been argued that Japanese officials of the period did not see the maritime prohibitions (海禁, kaikin) as “closing” the country (Arano 1994:97), and viewed the measures as necessary for ensuring peace and order both domestically and abroad, along with the stability and perception of legitimacy of the shogunal government (Wray 2001:2).

The logic behind this series of decisions centered on desires for domestic order and stability, and for protection and enhancement of the legitimacy of the regime. The perceived threat of Christianity to the stability of the state was but one of a number of factors; the true cause was the more general desire of the shogunate to ensure national security, domestic order, and the perception of the shogunate’s legitimacy through the centralization of controls over foreign trade and influences.

The Yanagawa affair of 1631 is frequently cited as an example of an incident in which a lack of centralized control over foreign relations brought difficulties, and which could have been a serious loss of face for the shogunate had it been unable to handle the situation satisfactorily (Toby 1984:76-80; Innes 1980:215). The affair concerned a series of letters to the Korean royal court, forged by the officials of the Tsushima domain to ostensibly represent official shogunal missives, and a conflict between the Tsushima lords and some of their retainers, which became serious enough to warrant shogunate attention. The forged letters, and their content, including the use of the previously rejected term “king” to refer to the shogun, represented a serious potential threat to perceptions of the shogunate’s legitimacy and power in that they highlighted, and revealed to the Korean Court, the lack of centralized control the shogunate had over its foreign relations. In the end the shogunate did not rescind, or drastically alter, the special privileges granted to the lords of Tsushima and Satsuma to act largely independently in handling relations with Korea and the Ryūkyū Kingdom respectively. However, those involved were strongly chastised, in such a manner as to powerfully discourage further deviations from the shogunate’s attitudes and policies. In addition, stronger attention was paid in future years to the activities of these two domains. The shogunate ended all foreign trade except at the ports of Tsushima, Satsuma, Matsumae, and Nagasaki, where extensive restrictions and controls were put into place (Toby 1984:76-80).

The tightening of controls on shipping also served to cement Tokugawa authority by eliminating opportunities for individual daimyō to gain too much power, and to therefore threaten the shogunate’s dominance. Tsushima and Satsuma were, of course, exceptions, for reasons too complex to delve into here in detail. The shogunate did, however, express its legitimacy and power in the affairs of these domains by repeatedly formally granting permissions and powers of trade and diplomacy to these domains over the course of the Edo period (Toby 1977;362n); the privileges of these domains were thus made to be not inherent, but rather derived from the shogunate and dependent upon the shogunate’s favor. The shogunate, likewise, ended the shuinsen system in order to better centralize its control over trade. The shogunate never bore any overseas presence of the kind that could enforce its laws on the high seas or in the ports of Southeast Asia, China, and Korea had the system been continued (Toby 1984:96-97); the prevention of the acquisition of power or wealth by daimyō or merchants through overseas activities would likewise have been impossible to effect. In ending the shuinsen trade, the shogunate not only eliminated the potential for rival factions within Japan to gain wealth and power, but also the potential for undesirable foreign influences to be brought back into Japan by these traders (Innes 1980:210-212).

Thus, ending the shuinsen trade in order to effect greater centralization of power domestically is of obvious importance and impact. Nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to further explore other aspects of this process, and the ways in which the shuinsen system, as it existed, was particularly decentralized in its organization, thereby preventing sufficient shogunal control over the trade and the cultural exchanges that accompanied it, and requiring its dissolution.

The decentralized character of the shuinsen system was not restricted solely to its overseas nature. In fact, it was primarily merchants, rather than bureaucrats, many of whom were not of the samurai class, and were
not directly tied to any particular daimyō or other individual authority, who ran the system. The shogunate did not even truly have full control over the issuing of the licenses. Firstly, in this as in many other aspects of shogunal governance, Tokugawa Ieyasu retained significant influence even after retiring from being shōgun; many of the chief officials in charge of trade and diplomacy, as well as in other fields, remained loyal to him over his successors, becoming fully responsible to Edo only after Ieyasu’s death in 1616. The Nagasaki magistrate (bugyō) was among these, and was, until 1633, a daimyō of the same rank as the shogunal elders to whom he was meant to be a subordinate. In addition, the Zen sect of Buddhism originally held considerable authority in maintaining trade and diplomacy, and issued shūnigō independently of the Nagasaki bugyō until 1631. In that year, a formal letter from the bugyō, called a hōsho, became required in addition to the shūnigō license issued by the Zen priests in order to engage in legal overseas activities (Innes 1980:215-6). Even after 1635, Zen temples in Tsushima and the Ryūkyū Kingdom (from 1609 a vassal state to the Japanese domain of Satsuma) continued to have influence over matters of trade and foreign relations. Thus, this system was far from being under the direct centralized control of the shogunate, and had to be radically altered or abolished in order to effect the extension of shogunal power and legitimacy which began in 1635 to form the core of Tokugawa Iemitsu’s agenda.

Foreign Factors and their Effects upon Trade and Diplomatic Relations

The imposition of maritime restrictions came largely as the result of conditions within Japan, and from factors relating to Japan’s interactions with China and various Western powers. This had a profound effect upon Japanese living and trading in the ports of Southeast Asia, and upon Japan’s diplomacy and trade in the region in a wider sense. However, it will be seen that events and conditions within Southeast Asia also influenced significantly the ways in which this dramatic diplomatic and commercial change came about.

Though the focus of this paper is on relations and trade with Southeast Asia, the role of Chinese and Dutch merchants in effecting this trade cannot be ignored. Following the imposition of maritime prohibitions, Southeast Asian trade with Japan was conducted almost exclusively through Chinese merchant shipping. This was not officially licensed by the Ming government, and essentially constituted smuggling from Beijing’s point of view; these merchants were operating in violation of the hōjin ban, though the Ming Court was fairly lax about enforcing it, and the Qing even more so (Tashiro and Videen 1982:288-304). Chinese merchant activity constituted two-thirds of the trade at Nagasaki while that of the Dutch East India Company constituted the remaining one-third (Hayashi, et al. 1912 v4:323-41). These proportions would later be solidified by limits imposed by the shogunate on the amounts imported (Innes 1980:190). The term rōsen, or “Chinese ships,” was used to encapsulate the former group, though many of these vessels in fact derived from, or were built in, Southeast Asian ports. Some were even formally authorized and commissioned by the kings of Ayutthaya and Cambodia. However, it is estimated that upwards of 98% of the crews of these ships were Chinese (Ishii 1998:3; Nagazumi 1999:96).

The fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 to Manchu invaders saw armed struggles not only within China, but on the seas as well. The resistance against the new Qing dynasty lasted into the 1680s and involved extensive acts of piracy by Chinese sailors. From roughly 1674 to 1683, thirty to forty percent of the Chinese ships which traded at Nagasaki originated from Southeast Asia (Ishii 1998:10). Most of the Chinese merchants and sailors involved in trade with Japan and with Southeast Asia at this time were loyal to the rebels, and avoided, to some extent, dealing in ports controlled by the Qing. The rebellion came to an end in 1683, and the resulting peace brought greatly expanded trade, to which the shogunate responded by imposing stricter regulations in attempts to maintain control over the country’s commercial affairs and balance of trade. Beginning around 1689, only 70 Chinese ships were allowed to trade at Nagasaki each year. Among them, only ten were allowed to be from Southeast Asia, with each ship limited to 20,000 tael worth of goods in cargo. The three ports of Patani, Tonkin, and Cambodia were only allowed one ship each per year, along with two ships from Ayutthaya, two from Batavia, and three from Cochinchina (Ishii 1998:30-1).

Chinese accounts, called rōsen-fūsetsu, or “rumors of the Chinese ships,” form a large portion of the Japa-
nese records of this trade available today. These were assembled from interviews conducted by the officially appointed Chinese translator of Nagasaki with representatives of each merchant vessel, and later (beginning in 1699) by an officially appointed specifically for this task. Three sets of volumes of these records are known to scholars today (Ishii 1998:6).

Meanwhile, the Dutch East India Company acted throughout the region to fill the lacuna left by the disappearance of the Japanese from international trade, and served the economic needs of both Japan and the various Southeast Asian states by continuing trade between them following the 1635 imposition of maritime restrictions. The Company was, in fact, asked by agents of the shogunate to make efforts to ensure that the overall volume of trade at Nagasaki did not drop after the expulsion of the Portuguese and the abolition of the shumisen trade (Tashiro and Videen 1982:292).

Formal relations and direct trade between Ayutthaya and Japan became quite strong in the opening decades of the 17th century, but these were only to last for a short period. The shogunate severed relations in 1636, after Yamada Nagamasu was poisoned and killed (Iwao 1963:2). Yamada had led a number of samurai in battle during succession disputes following the death of the Thai King Song Than in 1629, and certain elements at court saw him as a threat to the reign of the new king, Prasat Thong (Coedes 1966:157). The king feared retribution from the Japanese community (Theeravit 1988:33), and so their quarter in the city was burnt down. The Japanese who were not expelled or killed fled to Cambodia or elsewhere, though many returned a few years later upon offers of amnesty from the king (Iwao 1963:2-4).

Hearing of these events, and the succession dispute which preceded them, the shogunate decided to sever formal ties with the Siamese kingdom. Though this was the initial impetus for the breaking of diplomatic relations, these conditions persisted primarily because of other factors. The foul treatment of Japanese in Ayutthaya by the authorities there was not of primary concern; the shogunate, for the most part, saw Japanese communities in Ayutthaya, Vietnam, and elsewhere as undesirables, pirates and ruffians, and had little interest in protecting them. Rather, it was the way in which Prasat Thong violently gained power which irked the shogunate, a sentiment enhanced by extensive scheming on the part of agents of the Dutch East India Company to maintain the absence of competition in trade between Ayutthaya and Japan (Theeravit 1988:34). The agents of the Company were among the chief sources of information on European affairs to the shogunate; it was not uncommon for Dutch reports on these matters to place extra emphasis on the associations of English, Chinese, or Siamese authorities with Catholic missionaries or governments in order to discourage shogunal involvement with the Company’s competition.

Over the course of Prasat Thong’s 26-year reign, Ayutthaya sent at least six envoys to Nagasaki to request the resumption of friendly relations and trade (Iwao 1963:48). Along with formal gilded letters from the king, they carried goods for trade and gifts to the shogunate, including aromatic woods, ivory, silk, tin, lead, and pepper (Iwao 1963:14). Those sent in 1640 and 1644 succumbed to typhoons and inclement weather that prevented them from reaching their destination. Four other missions, sent in 1634, 1635-36, 1653, and 1655-56, saw their proposals rejected on the basis of the shogunate’s position that Prasat Thong was a usurper and that his rule was illegitimate.

Translation issues contributed as well, at times, to the inability of Ayutthaya’s authorities to understand the shogunate’s reasons for rejecting envoys and attempts to restore relations. At least once, in 1636 or 1639, Japanese translators in Ayutthaya intentionally mistranslated into Thai a shogunal missive to the royal court, originally written in Chinese, in order to hide the directness of its meaning, and protect the king from insult. The original message read, “As I [the Nagasaki magistrate] have written already, we were told that a subordinate killed the king to usurp the throne. Therefore, our authorities were ordered not to correspond with a king without legitimacy... Only after Japan lawfully recognizes the legitimacy of the king will the route to Japan be open.” This came on the heels of another message from Japan several years earlier, which accused the Siamese envoy of being “worse than, and [knowing] less about the incident than, the previous ambassador,” and explained that “therefore, he was not received and was likewise sent away” (Nagazumi 1999:94). The Japanese translators in service to King Prasat Thong, fearing the dishonor which would be brought to the Court by an accurate translation of such direct language, reported that “the shogun asked for an upright envoy to calm the unrest on both sides
and for each side to placate the other” (Nagazumi 1999:95). Thus, in this instance at least, if not on other occasions, the true reasons behind the shogunate’s refusal to engage in relations with Prasat Thong’s court were obscured, and possibilities for rapprochement diminished.

That issues of legitimacy were of great importance to the shogunate is made even clearer by this example. In rejecting relations with a ruler perceived to be illegitimate, the shogunate gained some degree of honor and legitimacy for itself. It may seem odd that the Tokugawa, who essentially gained power through military force in the wake of succession disputes, and who used similar methods of trickery to achieve its goals, should reject so strongly the idea that a king should gain his throne in such a manner. Tokugawa Ieyasu, after all, only became shogun after violating an oath sworn to Toyotomi Hideyoshi that he would protect Hideyoshi’s heir, Toyotomi Hideyori, and ensure the latter’s rise to power (Sansom 1961:386-7, 397-8 passim). But it must be remembered that there was in Japan a stark difference between the Imperial institution and the shogunate, and that no secular military leader had ever, or would ever, seek to overthrow the Imperial lineage and replace it with his own dynasty. The notion that Prasat Thong should even think of violently overthrowing his king was, arguably, repugnant in the eyes of the shogunate (Theeravit 1988:35).

After the shuinsen system came to an end, trade continued between Japan and Ayutthaya, despite the absence of Japanese trading ships and of formal relations between the two governments, through Chinese and Dutch traders. In fact, the Dutch East India Company, which maintained outposts in Siam and Nagasaki, enjoyed great profits from the lack of competition in shipping goods between these countries. According to Breazeale, “they promptly launched a drive with all their facilities to alienate the two countries and to prevent reopening of commercial relations” (Iwao 1963:7; Theeravit 1988:35-7).

An envoy mission of 1656 was the final attempt by Ayutthaya to seek rapprochement with the shogunate, and relations were never restored (Iwao 1963:17-19, 30). It is important to note that the difficulties experienced by the royal court in this matter stemmed from diplomatic and political problems relating to the legitimacy of Prasat Thong’s rule, and not from practical concerns over trade or other matters. The shogunate was considerably more conservative in this period in its foreign relations, and remained so until the 1850s, but it was not fundamentally opposed to trade with its independent, non-Christian neighbors (Iwao 1963:19). The shogunate took a hard stance against the rule of Prasat Thong, who it designated an illegitimate king, considering him a subordinate who usurped the throne (Nagazumi 1999:94-95). Missives to the Siamese court were quite open about the shogunate’s position, however. One letter to the Siamese authorities, composed by officials under the Japanese governor of Nagasaki in 1636, relates the shogunate’s views towards the Siamese king, and requests further explanation of the situation regarding the king’s succession and his legitimacy from future envoys. The letter states that “if we [the Nagasaki officials and/or the central shogunal authorities] are convinced that we can settle the whole matter... we have no doubts that the doors of Japan will be open to your country in the future” (Iwao 1963:11).

This sentiment was borne out as royal vessels from Ayutthaya began in the 1660s-70s to be regularly received at Nagasaki and to be successful in doing trade. Some of these ships were junks, some sail-ships built in the Dutch style, and all bearing formal documents from the Dutch East India Company; Japanese authorities at Nagasaki considered these Siamese ships to be either tōsen (Chinese ships) or, on account of their Company documentation, Dutch, and therefore allowed them to make port and to trade without considering it a breach of the existing trade restrictions. As experienced and skilled Siamese navigators were rare, and Chinese were banned from working on Siamese ships in this capacity at this time, many of these ships likely had partial Dutch crews as well. No efforts were made to hide the origin or identity of these royal Siamese ships; on the contrary, these ships were far larger than any other junks calling at Nagasaki (Nagazumi 1999:99), openly identified themselves as royal junks from Ayutthaya, and each bore two or three Siamese representatives of the royal court (Breazeale 1999:29). Some of these were the king’s own junks, while others were owned or commissioned by princes or other members of the royal family and the extended aristocracy. In total, these royal vessels constituted more than half of the ships traveling to Japan in this period from Ayutthaya, and a far greater proportion by volume of goods. By this time, it is supposed, the threat from Spain and Portugal was perceived to have diminished signifi-
cantly, and such a relaxation in the maritime restrictions was condoned (Nagazumi 1999:102). Japanese officials sometimes recorded the Siamese ships as such in formal Nagasaki port records, but always considered them within the categories of Chinese or Dutch ships. Their reception and commercial activity was therefore not seen to be in violation of the restrictions.

These factors, combined with the end of Prasat Thong’s reign and the policies and attitudes of his successor, King Narai, allowed formal royal trade to be resumed quite smoothly and quickly following Narai’s accession to the throne. King Narai’s succession in 1657 was backed by the Japanese community in Ayutthaya (Iwao 1963:20), and he sent missions to Japan soon afterwards, seeking to restore relations and trade to what they had been before the reign of his predecessor. Though formal relations were not resumed, trade with Japan prospered during Narai’s reign, to such an extent that when there was an interruption, a letter to the British East India Company stated that “the want of shipping from Japan this year hath put a stop to all trade in this town [Ayutthaya].”

A total of 43 ships are recorded as having journeyed from Ayutthaya to Japan during Narai’s reign, thirty of which were successful in trading and returning home, bringing back copper, lacquerware, ceramics, fruits, silks (Iwao 1963:28-9), and other goods. Most of the remaining thirteen were blocked or destroyed by storms, or were refused trade at Nagasaki for one reason or another.

Under Prasat Thong, the Dutch East India Company enjoyed very little competition in its endeavors as middlemen trading between Ayutthaya and Japan. As mentioned above, Dutch agents actually took measures to ensure that relations between the two countries remained sour, thereby suppressing trade as well. These activities continued a generation later, under Narai, as the Dutch sought to regain the prominence and profits they lost to formal royal shipping. Dutch reports on foreign events to Nagasaki officials, called fitetsu-gaki in Japanese, began to include references to Christian missionary activities in Ayutthaya and to embassies sent by King Narai to France, Britain, and Portugal (Iwao 1963:30). These intimations of Siamese association with the Catholic factions so distrusted and hated by the shogunate did damage to the royal trade, which was fully brought to a halt in 1688, following the death of Narai. Petracha became king after executing a successful coup against Narai’s government, and reversed the foreign policies of his predecessor, severing relations with the West and putting an end to embassies to distant lands. Japanese trade with Siam would be conducted solely through Dutch and Chinese merchants for the remainder of the Edo period, and no formal communications would be exchanged between the royal court and the shogunate.

Hoi An, meanwhile, saw extensive Chinese trade throughout the century, and the Japanese merchant ships which landed there in the early decades of the period were replaced by Dutch ones after the shogunal imposition of maritime restrictions in 1635. A Dutch factory operated in Hoi An from 1633-41 and 1651-54 (Reid 1993:305), bringing in Japanese silver and copper in exchange for Vietnamese silks which would then be sold at Nagasaki. Lacking new immigration to support it, the Japanese community in the port gradually shrank and all but disappeared by the end of the 17th century. However, communications between the Nguyen lords and the shogunate continued until as late as 1688 if not later (Vu 1991:136), relating primarily to commercial matters.

Only two examples of polities with which Japan enjoyed trade relations have been described in much detail here, but this should by no means be taken to mean that Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate did not trade or formally communicate with other nations in Southeast Asia. On the contrary, the Japanese shuinsen, along with the Dutch and Chinese ships which replaced them, represented contacts with over twenty different ports across the region and effected not only commercial contacts but diplomatic and political communications as well, to varying degrees of formality. It was quite common for Japanese merchant captains, and later, Chinese and Dutch captains, to carry formal letters across the seas to be delivered to the appropriate authorities in each country. In addition, official reports made by “Chinese” merchant captains to the magistrates of Nagasaki represent, if not true communications between national governments, something vaguely approximating them, providing the Tokugawa authorities information on the events and prevailing conditions in a number of ports and polities across the region.

Those polities such as Tonkin in northern Vietnam, with which the Japanese had little formal contact and relatively little shuinsen trade, are as crucial a part of
the overall picture of Japan’s relations in this period as those such as Ayutthaya and Quang Nam with which trade was prosperous. The request by the Nguyen lords that the shogunate sever relations and trade with the Trinh lords of Tonkin was obviously the deciding factor in causing these actions to be taken, the request coming within the context of a friendly and close relationship between the Nguyen lords and both Japanese authorities and powerful Japanese merchant families. However, Trinh attitudes towards the Japanese, possibly shaped by their relationships with the Dutch and with the Nguyen, played an important role as well. Trade and settlement by foreigners in the ports of northern Vietnam were heavily restricted by the Trinh authorities in the final decades of the 16th century, and into the 17th. The Trinh authorities discouraged and restricted settlement due to fears on their part of the importation of weaponry by Japanese mercenaries (Wray 2001:9), but there nevertheless existed a small community of Japanese, mainly Christians, some of whom regularly sailed on trading ships to Japan, under Chinese captains. The community established a Japanese Christian mission in Tonkin in 1626, and remained in regular contact with the Japanese Christian communities in Macao and elsewhere for many decades (Ribeiro 2001:67-70).

Cambodian relations with Japan date at least as far back as 1566, when a Cambodian ship landed on Kyushu. Formal diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the Kyushu daimu Otomo Yoshihisa and Shimazu Yoshihisa began ten years later (Ribeiro 2001:73-4), and with the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603 (Polenghi 2009:15). Japanese residents in Phnom Penh and Pinalu, in Nihonmachi established in the 1610s and remaining in regular contact with the Japanese Christian communities in Macao and elsewhere for many decades (Ribeiro 2001:67-70).

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The Cambodian kingdom was wracked in the 17th century by conflicts between factions loyal to Ayutthaya and ones loyal to Quang Nam, each of which exaggerated the political turmoil by involving foreign powers such as the Dutch East India Company and Chinese Ming loyalists. Nevertheless, Cambodia surpassed even Ayutthaya at times in the number of junks it sent to Japan. Cambodian trade with Japan, through Chinese merchants and royal Cambodian vessels manned by Chinese sailors, peaked around 1641-1663, and again in the 1690s (Ishii 1998:153). Through the kingdom’s considerable influences from both Ayuthaya and Quang Nam, its trading centers were able to offer a wide variety of both Siamese and Vietnamese goods and products, including sappanwood, deer hides, and Vietnamese silks (Ishii 1998:154-5).

Only towards the very end of the century did the overall volume of trade with Southeast Asia decline. Precious metals, particularly silver, had been Japan’s primary exports in the 17th century, and by the end of that period, the country’s mines were drying up. This combined with the inflation of the Genroku period (1688-1709), itself the result of a myriad of economic factors, to create a huge domestic demand for specie, particularly for the minting of new coins. This, in turn, led to the imposition of strict limits on the export of silver in 1685 and on copper in 1715 (Momoki 1994:45), and thus to the overall decline of trade.

The official Japanese records often obscure the origins of ships, counting nearly all Asian trade under the umbrella of the term nōsen, and in many cases Southeast Asian records are sparse or non-existent. I do not believe, however, that there is reason to think that formal communications or other forms of official relations between the shogunate and Southeast Asian polities were restricted to the examples given above. Further research, and closer examination of primary documents, could provide further accounts of interesting episodes along with further insights into the world of Japanese-Southeast Asian trade and diplomacy in this period.

**Conclusion**

To claim that the late 1630s represent a watershed in the history of Japanese foreign involvement is no exaggeration. Patterns of formal relations, trade, and overseas travel changed dramatically over a period of only a few years, setting in place conditions which would last for over two hundred years. However, it is important to realize that the policies instituted at this time did not result solely from shogunal politics, Chinese domestic affairs, and attitudes towards Western influence. It is clear from the evidence that these concerns were not the only causes of a blanket policy applied across Japan’s relations with all of East and Southeast Asia. Rather, domestic events within the individual polities
of Southeast Asia, and diplomatic incidents between these polities and Japan, had great impact as well, the chief example being seen in the aftermath of the 1629-1630 succession disputes in Ayutthaya.

Japanese living and working in the Nihonmachi of Southeast Asia also played important roles in the diplomatic and economic relations of their host nations with Japan and other powers, and local politics likewise had incredible impacts upon these developments, completely divorced from wider concerns of a Sinocentric or Japanocentric East Asian regional order. Succession disputes in Ayutthaya, wars between the Nguyen and the Trinh, between the Nguyen and Cambodia, and between Ayutthaya and Burma, were complex events which all brought significant change to the region and, by extension, to relations and trade with Japan; in addition, in many cases, the Japanese role in such events is far from negligible.

Shogunal policymakers rarely, if ever, conflated the affairs and conditions of foreign polities into a single matter as many scholars of the East Asian regional order and maritime trade networks do today. Though the records at Nagasaki refer to all Southeast Asian vessels under the general category of tōsen, or “Chinese ships”, officials, bureaucrats, and merchants were not blind to the important differences between the polities and peoples with which they interacted. In order to gain a truer understanding of the complexity and extent of Japanese trade and foreign relations in this period, we too must consider all the actors involved: the Siamese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Ryukyuans, and others, not solely the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, and Dutch.

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End Notes


2 The Chinese term haijin (海禁), called kaikin in Japanese, is translated as “maritime restrictions.”


4 Though the activities of the wakō incorporated aspects of raiding, privateering, adventuring and peaceful trade, and many were purely peaceful traders, the term “pirate” is quite frequently applied to them in scholarship. It shall therefore be used here as well for the sake of convenience and simplicity.

5 Details of pre-1630 missions to be found in Theeravit. pp26-27.

6 The issue of era names as it relates to issues of shogunal legitimacy and foreign relations is described in detail in Toby. State and Diplomacy. pp90-97.

7 Though frequently referred to as “kings” in both contemporary and modern Western sources, Nguyen Hoang and his successors are more properly called “Lords”. Their Vietnamese title chúa more accurate translates to this, as they did not style themselves kings or emperors, accusing their rivals to the north, the Trinh, of usurping rule from the rightful royal lineage, the Lê dynasty. The term “kingdom” is thus likewise inaccurate, but used quite frequently as well. (Reid, Anthony. Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce. Vol 2: Expansion and Crisis. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. p211.)

8 Note that the area further south, later commonly known as Cochin China following the colonization of the area by France, was under the control of Cambodia at this time. Quang Nam was thus the southern portion of what was then Vietnam, and might be better described as the central area, not including the far south, of the territory covered today by Vietnam.


Chinese and Vietnamese fears, and the anti-Christian policies which developed as a result, are described briefly in Tarling, Nicholas (ed.) The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia. vol 1, part 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. pp199-201.

The limits were set in 1685 at 6000 kanme worth of imports for the Chinese merchants, 3000 kanme worth for the Dutch East India Company, and 400 kanme worth of trade on the part of Company employees acting privately.

“2 A Chinese unit of weight that, when applied to silver, was long used as a unit of currency. Most taels were equivalent to 1.3 ounces of silver.” Encyclopedia Britannica. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9070890/tael> Accessed 11 July 2007.


The conflicts between the Imperial Court and the Ashikaga clan in the 14th century may be something of an exception, though the Ashikaga did bear blood-ties to the Imperial line.

Though the maritime restrictions were relaxed in some small ways at various points during the Edo period, it was not until the 1850s that the restrictions were abolished entirely and relations resumed or begun with a number of nations both of the West and the Far East.

18 Dagregister des Comptoir Firand, 6 Nov. 1638. Quoted in Iwao. “Relations between Japan and Siam...” p11.

Breazeale quotes the statistic that “Thai crown cargoes [constituted] twenty-four of forty-two cargoes from Ayutthaya during the period 1687-1719, or 57 percent of the total.” in Breazeale (ed.). p29.

20 Also known as Narayana (r. 1657-1688).


22 A great number of these reports can be found in English translation in Ishii, Yoneo. The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia.

23 The new coinage was itself one of the key causes of the inflation, as the shogunate, faced with a dwindling supply of precious metals, debased the currency. Genroku koban of 1695 were composed of 56.41% gold, as compared to 85.69% in 1601, and the silver coins of 1695 were only 64% silver, as compared to 80% in 1603. see Sakai, Robert. “The Satsuma-Ryūkyū Trade and the Tokugawa Seclusion Policy.” The Journal of Asian Studies 23:3 (May, 1964). p397.

24 The presumably great number and variety of official royal Siamese records lost in the extensive destruction wreaked upon Ayutthaya in repeated Burmese invasions and occupations serves as a solid example of the dearth of native Southeast Asian sources on the period.