

# A Century of Friendship between Japan and Thailand 1887-1987

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*The year 1987 marks one hundred years of formal relations between Thailand and Japan. Contacts between the peoples of the two countries goes back even further.*

## Our Relations

### Sukhothai Period (A.D. 1260-1350)

There is no confirmed record of any kind that the Japanese came to Siam during the Sukhothai Period but trade might have been undertaken with Sukhothai by the Japanese through the intermediary of the Chinese via such ports as Ayuthaya, Nakorn Srithammarat, Songkhla, Pattani and Narathivat during those days.

### Ayuthaya Period (A.D. 1350-1767)

The Japanese began coming in considerable numbers at the end of the 16th century A.D. or in the reign of Phrachao Songtham and the subsequent Ayuthaya monarchs. No resident treaty of any kind was signed. However, some correspondence was exchanged during the Ayuthaya Period and the following Siamese envoys were sent to Japan:

1. Khun Pichit Sombat (ขุนพิชิตสมบัติ) and Khun Prasert Maitri (ขุนประเสริฐไมตรี) in 1621.

2. Khun Tong Samut (ขุนทองสมุทร) and Khun Sawasdi (ขุนสวัสดิ์) in 1623.

3. Khun Raksa Sidhiphol (ขุนรักษาสีหิพนล) in 1626.

In 1636, The Shogun instituted Sakoku or a closed country policy. Japanese nationals were not allowed to go abroad and those residing in foreign countries were prohibited from returning to Japan. From then on, Japan's only contact with outside world was at Nagasaki, where Dutch ships were allowed to call annually and where Chinese vessels (Tosen) could also call. Vessels commissioned by Siam, presumably classed as Tosen or Chinese Tang, were also allowed to call at Nagasaki. Official contact with Siam came to a close and as a result, trade was almost nil.

### Rattanakosin Period (A.D. 1782 - )

Following the visit to Japan in 1853 by Black Ship under the command of Com. Mathews Perry, Japan was again opened to the world. The Treaty of Kanagawa (1854) and the Commercial Treaty with the United States (1858) were signed and in about the same period, and the Treaty of Friendship between Siam and Japan was signed in 1887 by Prince Devavongse Varoprakarn.

From the beginning, Thailand attached much importance to its relations with Japan. An attempt was made to maintain a diplomatic mission in Japan on a continuous basis. The following resident Ministers and resident Ambassadors were sent to Japan:

#### Ministers:

1. Phya Ridhirong Ronnachet (พระยาฤทธิรงค์ธรมเจต - สุข ชูโต) 1899 - 1902.
2. Phya Rajanuprabhandu (พระยาราชนูปราภณ - เปี้ย บุนนาค) 1902 - 1903.

3. Phya Visutsakondij (พระยาวิสูตรสาครดิษฐ์ - ดิษฐ์ โชติกเสถียร) 1903 - 1909.
4. Phya Maha Anuparb (พระยามหาอนุภาพ - เขียร บุนนาค) 1910 - 1910.
5. Phya Chamnongdithakarn (พระยาจันทดิษฐการ - เทพ บุนนาค) 1910 - 1928.
6. Phya Supansombati (พระยาสุพรรณสมบัติ - ดิน บุนนาค) 1928 - 1931.
7. Phya Intravichit (พระยาอินทวิชิต - รัตน์ อาวุธ) 1932 - 1934.
8. Phra Mitrakamraksa (พระมิตรกรรมรักษา - หัตถา บุรณศิริ) 1934 - 1937.
9. Phya Srisena (พระยาศรีเสนา - สะ สมบัติศิริ) 1937 - 1942.

Because of the Pacific War, Japan sent Mr. Tsubokami as Ambassador to Thailand in 1941, and subsequently Phya Srisena was promoted to the ambassadorship.

10. Mr. Direck Jayanama (คุณดิเรก ชัยนาม) 1942 - 1943.
11. Luang Vichit Vadakarn (หลวงวิจิตรวาทการ) 1943 - 1945.

The Pacific War ended in 1945; an embassy was not allowed during the Occupation, but when the Korean War broke out in 1950, Thailand sent a diplomatic mission, headed by Mr. Sanga Nilkamhaeng to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Tokyo. In 1952, Japan became an independent and sovereign state again, after the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. The Thai Diplomatic Mission to SCAP was transformed into an embassy and Mr. Sanga

Nilkamhaeng became the first post-war Thai Ambassador to Japan and Mr. Ichiro Ohta the Japanese Ambassador to Thailand.

12. Mr. Sanga Nilkamhaeng  
(คุณสง่า นิลกำแหง) 1952 - 1954.
13. Luang Phinit Aksorn  
(หลวงพินิจอักษร) 1954 - 1958.
14. Lt. General Prince Jitchanok Kritakara  
(พลโท หม่อมเจ้า จิตชนก กฤดากร)  
1958 - 1964.
15. General Vitoon Hongsaves  
(พลเอกวิฑูรย์ หงษ์เวช) 1964 - 1966.
16. Mr. Obeboon Vanikkul  
(คุณโอบบุญ วณิกกุล) 1966 - 1972.
17. Mr. Suphot Piansunthorn  
(คุณสุพจน์ เพียรสุนทร) 1972 - 1973.
18. Mr. Sompong Sucharitakul  
(คุณสมปอง สุจริตกุล) 1973 - 1977.
19. Mr. Payong Chutikul  
(คุณพยอง ชุตติกุล) 1977 - 1979.
20. Mr. Wichian Wathanakun  
(คุณวิเชียร วัฒนคุณ) 1980 -

But apart from the formal contacts, the history of relations between Thailand and Japan has been characterized by growing person-to-person interchanges.

I, for example, went to Japan as a student, arriving at Kobe on July 7, 1937 which also happens to be the day that the China Incident broke out at the Marco Polo Bridge near Peking. After travelling to Tokyo, I was sent to Kokusai Gakuyu Kaikan in Shinjuku where I stayed and studied the Japanese language for nearly two years. In 1939, I entered Yokohama Kosho, which is now called Yokohama National University, where I graduated in 1941, being the year the Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbour and the War spread throughout Asia and the Pacific.

Due to the War, I could not return home and therefore continued my education at the Kyushu Imperial University in Fukuoka until 1943 where I graduated with a Master's degree, and

was later awarded a Ph.D. During the war years, after my graduation from Kyushu University, I joined the Royal Thai Embassy in Tokyo as Private Secretary to the Ambassador. I served at the Embassy until the War ended in 1945 and the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers was kind enough to provide a hospital ship, "Hikawa Maru", for our return to Thailand in 1946.

During the Pacific War (1941-1945), the house which I shared with my senior, Minister-Counsellor Sanga Nilkamhaeng, at Miyakesaka was burnt down. And again at Fudomae. The Royal Thai Embassy was also partly destroyed by fire as a result of the War. Whereupon, the Embassy was moved to the Fujiya Hotel in Hakone for nearly a year. We experienced considerable hardship from the bombs, fires and the shortage of food. But together with all the other Thai residents living in Japan, numbering about 500, we managed to survive.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, I was sent to Japan again, as a member of the Diplomatic Mission to SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers), and constantly travelled back and forth between Korea and Japan taking care of the Thai troops on R and R leave from Korea, and sending the wounded back to Thailand.

Thailand had, during that period, one thousand fighting men in Korea and a number of nurses and doctors as well as air force and naval units operating in the Korean War. However, after the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1952), our diplomatic mission to SCAP was transformed into an Embassy, and I was a member of the Ambassador's suit in presenting his credentials to His Majesty the Emperor. In 1953, the Korean War ended and I was transferred home to Thailand.

Throughout my diplomatic career, I have worked in such posts as New York, London, Singapore, Washington, D.C., Seoul, but I am proud to have served, for the third stay in Japan,

from 1977 to 1979, as the first Thai Ambassador to Japan with Japanese University education, after our diplomatic relations had been established for nearly a century. My tenure of ambassadorship was a time for renewing old friendships, making new ones, and trying to forge closer ties between Japan and Thailand. I have witnessed, with gratification, Japan's efforts towards closer co-operation with the Southeast Asian countries. There have been countless numbers of official and private visits, seminars, meetings and other forms of dialogues between both countries during my short three-year stay in Japan. I was the recipient of two Honorary Doctorate Degrees kindly awarded by the Kyushu University and the Tokyo University as well as the Golden Order of Merit from the Japanese Red Cross. Upon the termination of my term of duty in 1979, I was also bestowed the First Class of the Order of the Rising Sun, which is the highest honour for me and my family.

After having stayed in Japan for 15 years altogether, I feel that Japan is my second home. Parting from good friends and a good country is such a sad sorrow. I am sure this feeling is shared

by many thousands of Thai people.

On the occasion of the 100 years anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation in 1887 and the subsequent establishment of diplomatic relations between Thailand and Japan, we are able to look back on a record of rapid links between the two countries in the many-interlacing ties of political, commercial and technical co-operation. These have grown to mutual satisfaction, with a new impetus of give-and-take, which has reinforced the warm feelings that have joined our two peoples for the past century. On this occasion, we can also look forward to continuing to march side by side in the future. Since Japan is an economic superpower, its assistance to the developing countries in Asia will undoubtedly help those countries in their national development and enhance their national resilience. With its contribution to economic prosperity in Asia, Japan will be looked upon as a far-sighted and benevolent nation, befitting the honour of a Century of Friendship between our two countries.

