

## **Korean Missions to Tokugawa Japan**

Strong political and commercial ties have linked the Korean Peninsula and Japan since ancient times, but it was during the Joseon period of Korean history (1392–1897) that these relations were formalized. To cultivate amity and trade, the king of Joseon regularly sent official embassies to the warrior-led regimes of Japan, and interacted even more frequently with the So family, who governed Tsushima. All these ties were severed by the Japanese invasions of Korea in the 1590s, which were directed by the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), and in which the So were also forced to take part.

Tsushima's economy has always been heavily dependent on foreign trade, and the cessation of relations with the Korean Peninsula had a devastating impact on the island. Immediately after Hideyoshi's invasions ended in failure, the So family sought to restore ties with Joseon. After Hideyoshi died and the Tokugawa shogunate was established in 1603, they even forged official correspondence and seals to smooth over differences of opinion between the Joseon court and the new warrior-led regime.

The So efforts were rewarded, and in 1607 Joseon reinstated regular missions to Japan. The Korean kingdom dispatched a total of 12 embassies to the Tokugawa, usually on the occasion of shogunal succession. These delegations all traveled via Tsushima, and the So family was charged with the practical arrangements. As a cost-saving measure, the final mission in 1811 conducted all official business on the island instead of making the journey to Edo (present-day Tokyo). Joseon was the only foreign power with which the Tokugawa shogunate maintained regular diplomatic relations.

The splendor of the embassies, some of which consisted of nearly 500 participants, was recorded in two picture scrolls produced by the So family painters. The older of the pair, thought to date to the seventeenth century, depicts a Korean mission on its way to Edo, accompanied by dignitaries and guards from the Tsushima domain. The other scroll illustrates the embassy of 1811 parading down the main street in the So castle town of Izuhara. Reproductions and digital versions of the artworks are on display at the Tsushima Museum and the nearby Tsushima Chosen Tsushinshi History Museum. A reenactment of a Korean mission to the Tokugawa is held in Izuhara every August during the Minato Matsuri festival.