

Chapter IV

Focusing on the Overseas Chinese in Seventeenth Century Nagasaki: The Role of the *Tōtsūji* in the Light of the Early Tokugawa Foreign Policy

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The Historical Setting

In the long history of the Chinese diaspora, Japan occupies a prominent position, since for centuries the archipelago was the privileged partner of the Chinese sea-traders. In the light of the historical intercourse between China and Japan, Sino-Japanese maritime commerce and sea-trade constitutes the economic base on which relations between the two countries were founded. An uninterrupted flux of trade carried out by Chinese and Japanese merchants, adventurers, and pirates has connected the whole of the Southern and Far Eastern seas for centuries.¹ Therefore, ever since ancient times, Chinese migrants have reached the Japanese shores, and over the centuries, settled down, giving birth to many Overseas Chinese communities—the *tōjin machi*—scattered over the entire archipelago, especially in Kyūshū.²

¹ Cf. Luo Huangchao 羅晃潮, *Riben huaqiaoshi* 日本華僑史 [History of overseas Chinese in Japan] (Guangzhou 廣州: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe 廣東高等教育出版社, 1994); Kimiya Yasuhiko, *Nikka bunka kōryūshi* [History of cultural exchanges between Japan and China] (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1989); Yutani Minoru, ed. *Nichimin kangō bōeki shiryō* [Compilation of materials on the tally trade between Japan and Ming] (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1983); Tsuji Zennosuke, *Kaigai kōtsū shiwa* [Historical tales of overseas traffic] (Tokyo: Naigai Shoseki, 1942); Patrizia Carioti, “Hawaii huaren: la diaspora cinese, dall’antichità ai primi Qing,” in *Dal Zhejiang alla Campania: Alcuni aspetti della migrazione cinese*, ed. Paolo Santangelo and Valeria Varriano (Napoli: Nuova Cultura, 2006), 61–106.

² They mainly came from Guangdong, Fujian 福建, Zhejiang 浙江, etc. Yamamoto Noritsuna, *Nagasaki tōjin yashiki* [The Chinese quarter of Nagasaki] (Tokyo: Kenkōsha, 1983), 83–127. See also the important Chinese primary sources: *Ming shilu leizuan*, *Guangdong Hainan juan* 明實錄類纂: 廣東海南卷 [The veritable records of the Ming dynasty: Volume of Guangdong and Hainan] (1993), *Ming shilu leizuan*, *Fujian Taiwan juan* 明實錄類纂: 福建臺灣卷 [The

The first Portuguese arrived in Japan in 1543. On board a Chinese junk, they were forced by a storm to land on the Japanese shores of Tanegashima. The Chinese intermediary role was evident from the outset: the Portuguese were accompanied by Chinese sea-traders—more precisely, by Wang Zhi 王直, the notorious Chinese pirate—who acted as interpreters with the Japanese. When the port of Nagasaki was opened to Portuguese ships in 1571, Chinese junks, too, began landing. It appears that Chinese trade and commodities were clearly essential to Japan: the port of Nagasaki obtained its basic profits and incomes from Chinese commerce.³

Over the years, the Overseas Chinese coming to Japan were mainly sea-traders, adventurers, and merchants, almost all male. They were considered outlaws in China: in fact, although the opening up of Haicheng 海澄 in 1567 had partly rolled back the ban issued by the Ming authorities on overseas activities carried out by Chinese sea-traders, the prohibition related to Japan was still in force, and the Chinese were strictly forbidden to land on Japanese shores.⁴ In Nagasaki, however,

veritable records of the Ming dynasty: Volume of Fujian and Taiwan] (1993), *Ming jingshi wenbian* (*Huangming jingshi wenbian*) 明經世文編 (皇明經世文編) [Collected memorials and other political writings of the Ming period] (1997), Zheng Liangsheng 鄭樑生, *Mingdai wokou shiliao* 明代倭寇史料 [Compilation of extracts on “Japanese pirates” from *Ming shilu*], 5 vols. (Taipei 臺北: Wenshizhe chubanshe 文史哲出版社, 1987). Further, Lin Renchuan 林仁川, *Mingmo-Qingchu siren haishang maoyi* 明末清初私人海上貿易 [Private trade in the period of the end of Ming and the beginning of the Qing dynasty] (Shanghai 上海: Huadong shifan daxu chubanshe 華東師範大學出版社, 1987); Li Jinming 李金明 and Liao Dake 廖大珂, *Zhongguo gudai haiwai maoyishi* 中國古代海外貿易史 [History of overseas commerce in ancient China] (Nanning 南寧: Guangxi renmin chubanshe 廣西人民出版社, 1995); Deng Gang, *Chinese Maritime Activities and Socioeconomic Development, c. 2100 B.C.–1900 A.D.* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997); Deng Gang, *Maritime Sector, Institutions, and Sea Power of Premodern China* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999); Nagasaki Kenshi Hensan linkai, ed. *Nagasaki kenshi: Hanseihen* [The history of the prefecture of Nagasaki: Volume of the history of han’s political institution] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1973). Moreover, we have already dealt with this topic: Patrizia Carioti, *Cina e Giappone sui mari nei secoli 16 e 17* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane Esi, 2006).

³ Yamamoto, 30–50. More in general, see Yamawaki Teijirō, *Nagasaki no tōjin bōeki* [Chinese commercial activities in Nagasaki] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1964; repr., 1983). See also, Diego Pacheco, *A Fundação do Porto de Nagasaki e a sua cedência à Sociedade de Jesus* (Macau: Centro de Estudos Marítimos de Macau 1989), 29–45; Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey, *Kaempfer’s Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed by Engelbert Kaempfer* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999); Patrizia Carioti, “The Portuguese Settlement at Macao: The Portuguese Policy of Expansion in the Far East, in the Light of the History of Chinese and Japanese Intercourse and Maritime Activities,” *Revista de Cultura* 6 (2003): 24–39. See also: Lin, 87–92.

⁴ Around the middle of the sixteenth century, all the southern coastal regions of China suffered “years of fire” from piracy—continuous and irrepressible raids and plunder. And it is precisely around 1560 that “private” overseas trade, illegal though it was, had become so widespread as to force the central authorities to loosen, at least in part, the rigid veto

the Overseas Chinese were free to mix with the Japanese population, and they could reside in the city without any particular restriction or prohibition: several of them had Japanese women and wives. It was the very beginning of the local Chinese community, and Nagasaki was becoming one of the most important international ports of call on the South and Far East Asian sea-trade routes, both for Iberian commerce—via Macau, Manila, and Goa—and for Chinese maritime trade—the so-called triangular trade between South China, Japan, and South East Asia.⁵

But, a few years later, toward the end of the sixteenth century, the political and military situation in Japan began changing rapidly: with Toyotomi Hideyoshi's rise to power, the process of centralization of the country was underway, and control over Japanese private maritime activities was becoming increasingly severe. Gradually, the *daimyō* of the Kyūshū coasts tried to regain their lost profits by diverting their capital to the Chinese sea-traders, and hiring Chinese fleets and merchants to carry out their businesses.⁶ During these years, the influx of Chinese migrants became more consistent and many Chinese sea-traders came to Japan, reaching several places on the coasts of Kyūshū, from the North coast down to the South, especially on the West side: the Japanese historian, Arano Yasunori, has researched this subject in depth.⁷ As a result, Nagasaki, too, was inhabited by

imposed on Chinese merchants; it was the general superintendent of Fujian himself, Tu Zemin 塗澤民 (d. 1569), who proposed that Haicheng be opened up to maritime trade, in this way legalising smuggling activities and illegal trading, with the purpose of controlling them and, in so doing, taxing them. This would to a certain degree have also reduced the brutal attacks from the *wokou* 倭寇 and *haikou* 海寇. Cf. Lin, 173. See also: Zhang Zengxin 張增信, "Mingji dongnan haikou yu chaowai fengqi 明季東南海寇與巢外風氣 [Sea pirates (*haikou*) along the southeast coast of China in the Ming period and their abroad bases]," in *Zhongguo haiyang fazhanshi lunwenji* 中國海洋發展史論文集 [Essays in Chinese maritime history], vol. 3, ed. Zhang Yanxian 張炎憲 (Taipei: Center for Maritime History, Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica, 1989), 313–344.

⁵ Yamamoto, 128–138.

⁶ Patrizia Carioti, "The International Role of the Overseas Chinese in Hirado (Nagasaki), during the First Decades of the 17th Century," in *New Studies on Chinese Overseas and China*, ed. Cen Huang, Zhuang Guotu, and Tanaka Kyōko (Leiden: International Institute for Asian Studies, 2000), 31–45.

⁷ Cf. Arano Yasunori, *Edo bakufu to Higashi Ajia* [The Tokugawa *bakufu* and East Asia] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003); Kishi Toshihiko, Arano Yasunori, and Kokaze Hidemasa, eds., *Higashi Ajia no jidaisei* [The age of East Asia] (Hiroshima: Keisuisha, 2005); Arano Yasunori, Ishii Masatoshi, and Murai Shōsuke, eds., *Ajia no naka no Nihonshi* [Japanese history in Asia], 6 vols. (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1992–1993); Arano Yasunori, *Kinsei Nihon to Higashi Ajia* [Early modern Japan and East Asia] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1988); Arano Yasunori, "Nihongata kai chitsujo no keisei [The formation of a Japanese-style international order]," in *Retto naigai no kōtsū to kokka* [Communications and states inside and outside the Japanese archipelago], ed. Amino Yoshihiko, Asao Naohiro, et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988), 195–213.

the Overseas Chinese: in these years, Chinese ships came from many places on the coastal regions of mainland China. Gradually, the Overseas Chinese who had become residents of Nagasaki started to diversify their work and their life-styles, becoming a part of Japanese society.

In 1587, Hideyoshi completed the military campaign of pacification in Kyūshū. The Christian-*daimyō* Ōmura Sumitada and Ōtomo Sōrin died that same year: a new balance of power was to be found in the city of Nagasaki. The immediate step for Hideyoshi was to take over the city of Nagasaki from Portuguese hands: between the years 1587–1588, the *Taikō* requisitioned Nagasaki (given to the Jesuits by Ōmura Sumitada in 1580). The first *kinkyōrei* (laws against Christianity) were promulgated in 1587 and again that same year Hideyoshi prohibited piracy as well (*wakō kinshirei*).⁸

As soon as he had confiscated Nagasaki, Hideyoshi moved to reorganize the administrative structure of the city. The control exercised by the Japanese authorities on the city of Nagasaki became progressively stricter, and the Overseas Chinese had to imbibe significant changes to their lives.⁹ In both the military expeditions against Korea in 1592 and 1598, keeping in mind, too, the final goal of conquering China, Hideyoshi utilized the Overseas Chinese with their knowledge of languages as interpreters, as secret agents, and as an intelligence service.¹⁰ During these years,

⁸ Mitsui Rokurō, Doi Shin'ichirō, and Yoshimura Kunio, eds., *Shin Nagasaki nenpyō* [A new chronicle of Nagasaki], vol. 1 (Nagasaki: Nagasaki Bunkensha, 1974), 186–188.

⁹ In 1587, Hideyoshi appointed Takagi, Takashima, Gotō, and Machida as Nagasaki-*tōjin*; in other words, the four were the “head supervisors” of the city; in 1588, the *Taikō* designated Asano and Toda as the two governors responsible for Nagasaki, confiscating Mogi. That same year, Hideyoshi ordered the Sō family, *daimyō* of Tsushima, to send an envoy to Korea in order to force the Koreans to let the Japanese troops pass through the country and proceed to invade China, but the Koreans refused: Toyotomi Hideyoshi was preparing for an attack on Korea and mainland China. See Mitsui et al., vol. 1, 188–190; Yamamoto, 51–68; Nakamura Tadashi, *Kinsei Nagasaki bōekishi no kenkyū* [Studies on the history of trade at early modern Nagasaki] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1988), 61–83; Fujiki Hisashi, *Toyotomi heiwarei to sengoku shakai* [Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Sengoku period] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1986). In 1592, Terazawa Shimamori Hiroataka of Karatsu was appointed *bugyō* of Nagasaki, and the office of the magistrate was situated in Motohakatamachi; as the *bugyō* was generally situated in Karatsu, his ministers and officials had to take care of his duties; in addition, Murayama Tōan was appointed *daikan* (a sort of “high official”) of Nagasaki. That same year, the four supervisors, the Nagasaki-*tōjin*, were transformed into the *machidoshiyori*: Takagi, Takashima, Gotō, and Machida were still in charge. In 1592, Hideyoshi inaugurated the *sankasho shōnin* system, authorizing only the merchants from Sakai, Osaka, and Kyoto to sail overseas. Mitsui et al., vol. 1, 193–194; Yamamoto, 51–58; Fujiki, 12–38. See also: Nakamura, *Kinsei Nagasaki bōekishi no kenkyū*, 84–146.

¹⁰ Toyotomi Hideyoshi's interest in maritime trade and the international scene was evident. In the conditions sent to the Ming court during the occupation of Korea in 1592, he asked

the Chinese sea-traders were still scattered among the Japanese population, and mixed marriages were allowed; yet, the Japanese authorities were beginning to interfere with the private commerce between the Japanese and the Chinese.¹¹

In October 1600, Ieyasu overcame all opposition, defeating his enemies in the notorious battle of Sekigahara; in 1603 he founded the Tokugawa *bakufu* and became the first *shōgun*. The Japanese authorities of the time did not want to stop or slow down the flow of import–export carried out by Chinese traders in Japan; on the contrary, they intended to protect and develop commercial relations with China. Moreover, the income from international trade, which until then had been in the hands of the coastal *daimyō*, had to be channeled into the national budget; the system of the *shuinsen* (*goshuinsen*) was one of the means of doing so.¹²

It was not by chance, then, that as soon as Ieyasu rose to power, he designated Feng Liuguan 馮六官 (Hyō Roku or Hō Roku in Japanese, d. 1624) official interpreter of the *bakufu*: in 1603 or 1604—as Japanese sources do not agree—Fang Liu became the first *tōtsūji* of Japan, giving rise to what a few decades later, by the middle of the seventeenth century, would become the *Tōtsūji kaisho*, “the office of Chinese interpreters” of Nagasaki. Through this office, the Japanese authorities could exercise wider control over the Chinese settlers.¹³ Japan pursued a very careful and balanced policy: Hirado, with its important Chinese community, housed the Dutch and the English; Nagasaki continued to deal with the Iberians. During the first decades of the seventeenth century, the two ports played a very significant commercial role for Japan, as international sea-trade ports of call. Very often, the Chinese acted as interpreters between the Europeans and the Japanese authorities, and this gave them significant political power. In Hirado and Nagasaki, the Chinese

for the re-adoption of the *kangō bōeki* system. Cf. Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Hideyoshi* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 1989), 214.

¹¹ Nakamura, *Kinsei Nagasaki bōekishi no kenkyū*, 61–83; Yamamoto, 51–58; Fujiki, 12–38.

¹² On the *shuinsen* system, see: Nagazumi Yōko, *Shuinsen* [Vermillion seal licensed ships] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2001); Iwao Seiichi, *Shuinsen bōekishi no kenkyū* [Studies on history of *shuinsen*] (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1958).

¹³ Egawa Kunpei, “Yakushi tōfu [The record of the appointments of Chinese interpreters],” in *Nagasaki kenshi: Shiryōhen* [The history of the prefecture of Nagasaki: Volumes of historical sources], ed. Nagasaki Kenshi Hensan Inkai, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1965), 589–766; The Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo, ed., *Tōtsūji kaisho nichiroku* [Official diary of Chinese interpreters at Nagasaki], 7 vols. (Tokyo: The Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo, 1959). See further, Matsumoto Isao, “Tōtsūji no kenkyū [Studies on Chinese interpreters in Nagasaki],” *Hōsei shigaku* 10 (1952): 111–117; Nakamura Tadashi, “Sakoku jidai no zainichi kakyō: Tōtsūji no kenkyū [Chinese in Japan under the *sakoku* period: Studies on Chinese interpreters],” *Shigaku kenkyū* 30 (1952): 1–20; Aloysius Chang, “The Nagasaki Office of the Chinese Interpreters in the Seventeenth Century,” *Chinese Culture* 8, no. 3 (1972): 3–19.

traders were commercial mediators in the service of both the Europeans and the Japanese *daimyō*.¹⁴ They were also granted the official license of *shuinsen* by the Tokugawa *shōgun*. With regard to this, we cannot omit a mention of Li Dan 李旦 or “Captain China,” head of the Chinese community of Hirado, and his group, who virtually “monopolised” the shogunal licences awarded to the Chinese merchants.¹⁵

Tokugawa Ieyasu, after coming to power, proceeded to organize the centralization of the archipelago. In addition, Ieyasu maintained a welcoming policy toward the Overseas Chinese, albeit, with the precise aim of channeling the international commerce of the archipelago, irrespective of whether it was being conducted by the Japanese or Chinese, under governmental management. Moreover, with regard to Nagasaki, the first *shōgun* continued to adopt a careful policy of protection and control over the Chinese. After he instituted the first *tōtsūji*, it was almost immediately necessary to add more interpreters such as, for instance, certain Hirano family members, who were relatives and descendents of Fang Liu, and later, Bata, Kiyokawa, and so forth.¹⁶ After its formal institution, the *Tōtsūji kaisho* attended to many fundamental functions of the government, becoming fully developed by the second half of the seventeenth century.

¹⁴ Cf. Iwao Seiichi, “Li Tan, Chief of the Chinese Residents at Hirado, Japan in the Last Days of the Ming Dynasty,” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 17 (1958): 27–83; Iwao Seiichi, “Minmatsu Nihon kyojū Shinajin kapitan Li Tan-kō [Li Tan, chief of the Chinese residents at Hirado, Japan in the last days of the Ming dynasty],” *Tōyō gaku* 23, no. 3 (1936): 63–119; Leonard Blussé, “Minnan-jen or Cosmopolitan? The Rise of Cheng Chih-lung alias Nicolas Iquan,” in *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, ed. E. B. Vermeer (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990), 245–264; Leonard Blussé, “The VOC as a Sorcerer’s Apprentice: Stereotypes and Social Engineering on the China Coast,” in *Leiden Studies in Sinology*, ed., W. E. Idema (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 87–105; Carioti, “Hawaii huaren,” 1–32.

¹⁵ In the years between 1614 (the nineteenth Keichō year) and 1624 (the first Kan’ei year), covering the whole of the Genna period (1615–1623), nearly all the *shuinjō* (*shōgun* licences) which the Tokugawa *bakufu* assigned from time to time were awarded to Li Dan, Li Huayu 李華宇, and Niguan 二官; there were only three other *tōjin* who received the mandate of the *bakufu*. Li Dan personally obtained *shuinjō* in the years 1617, 1618, 1621, 1622, 1623, and 1624; Li Huayu, in 1614, 1615, 1616, 1617, and 1618; and Niguan, in 1617, 1618, and 1620. Moreover, one of Li Dan’s brothers, Li Huayu, was in Nagasaki, acting as a connection with the *bugyō* (the “magistrate”) of Nagasaki, Hasegawa Gonrokurō Morinao. This also means that the links among the Overseas Chinese in Kyūshū were clearly well-established. See: Iwao, *Shuinsen bōekishi no kenkyū*, 184–185 and the related table. See also, Iwao “Li Tan, Chief of the Chinese Residents at Hirado,” 27–83; Iwao, “Minmatsu Nihon kyojū Shinajin kapitan Li Tan-kō,” 63–119.

¹⁶ Miyata Yasushi, *Tōtsūji kakei ronkō* [Studies on genealogy of Chinese interpreters at Nagasaki] (Nagasaki: Nagasaki Bunkensha, 1979), 1–4; Chang, 1–16.

The *Tōtsūji*

The first and most basic function of the *tōtsūji*, as is evident, was the translation from and into Chinese, Dutch, and Japanese (Portuguese, too, was used until the first decades of the seventeenth century): This function allowed the *tōtsūji* to play the fundamental role of intermediaries between the Europeans and the Japanese authorities, and obtain enormous influence.

Checking the written texts for all expressions referring to Christianity was an important task, after the decree of 1614 prohibiting the Catholic religion.

Keeping peace and order within the Chinese community, and among the Chinese settlers and the Japanese people, was another very important and delicate role assigned to the *tōtsūji*.

The control and the supervision of commercial transactions upon the arrival of Chinese merchant ships were fundamental functions as well, and from the viewpoint of the *tōtsūji*, the most important, for these gave them remarkable economic power.

In other words, it can be said that the *tōtsūji* acted as a direct intermediary for the Japanese authorities, both in their relations with the Europeans and even more so in all respects of their interaction with the Overseas Chinese community of Nagasaki.¹⁷

The Japanese authorities, therefore, selected their Chinese interpreters very carefully, since the *tōtsūji* represented the Japanese law within the Chinese community. We shall mention here some of the basic criteria for their selection.

The first generation of the Chinese interpreters, who were in charge during the first decades of the seventeenth century, was chosen from among the upper class of Chinese residents in Nagasaki. To a certain extent, we can consider them to have been the local *gentry* among the Overseas Chinese. In fact, as we have mentioned previously, a significant number of the *tōjin* coming to Japan were refugees escaping from the Manchu conquest of China and the consequent civil war: many among the intellectuals and the literati had refused to submit to the rising Qing Dynasty and had preferred to escape to Japan. They were highly educated people, lettered in the traditional Confucian educational system, and therefore, respected and appreciated as privileged interlocutors by the Japanese upper classes and authorities, who admired the Chinese civilization and knowledge. In this respect, the social position of the Chinese interpreters was very different from that of the common Overseas Chinese residents of Nagasaki.¹⁸ The former had Japanese wives and took Japanese surnames, often that of their wives; in Nagasaki, they could freely reside among

¹⁷ With regard to this, see The Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo, *Tōtsūji kaisho nichiroku*; Miyata, *Tōtsūji kakei ronkō*; Chang, 1–16.

¹⁸ Luo, *Riben huaqiaoshi*.

the Japanese population, even after the decree of 1635 that prohibited mixed marriages and forced the Chinese to live together, separately, on a small hill, gradually isolating the Chinese residents and gathering them into a Chinese quarter. Later on, in 1689, that quarter would officially become the Nagasaki-*Tōjin yashiki*.¹⁹

The privileged position of the Chinese interpreters was an advantage, too, for the Chinese residents. The interpreters were respected for their position and prestige, and accepted as *leaders* of the Chinese community: with their authority virtually unanimously recognized, they were consulted on disputes among the Chinese residents and approached for solutions. The system, in fact, was very close to the traditional system of mutual responsibility that had been instated in Imperial China, with the influential families of the *gentry* being responsible for the village communities. Moreover, the *tōtsūji*, being the elites, were the natural interlocutors for the Chinese Buddhist temples clergy: their role, again, was essential to keep under control the Chinese residents whose activities were directly connected with the temples. Through their mediation, the Japanese authorities could effectively exert control over the entire Chinese community of Nagasaki.²⁰

There was another factor that was considered essential in the selection of the Chinese interpreters: it was their geographical background. Since the Chinese residents of Nagasaki had come from such diverse regions as Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi 江西, and Jiangnan 江南 (Jiangsu 江蘇 and Anhui 安徽), it was crucial that every group was represented by the interpreters, because of the great differences in dialects and cultures among them: each Chinese temple in Nagasaki was representative of a different group. In such circumstances, we may appreciate the delicate nature of the role of the Chinese interpreters, entrusted as they were with preserving the balance between the different ethnic groups within the Chinese community.

Finally, the scholastic background of these interpreters was significant too: the perfect knowledge of both languages, Chinese and Japanese, was mandatory; in addition, knowledge of other languages was valued and welcomed. On several occasions, the Chinese interpreters were invited by the Japanese authorities to take part in meetings with Europeans. In the course of time, hand-in-hand with the expansion of the office of the Chinese interpreters, other languages and tasks became essential: for example, the Siam-*tsūji* or the Tonkin-*tsūji*, the Mogul-*tsūji*, and so on.²¹ We have to remember, too, the fact that one of the main tasks of the Chinese interpreters was to check the Chinese cargo and merchandise of the Chinese junks entering the port of Nagasaki.

Considering the complex functions they attended to, the Chinese interpreters

¹⁹ Yamamoto, *Nagasaki tōjin yashiki*.

²⁰ On the important role of the Chinese Temples, see Louis Jacques Willem Berger, "The Overseas Chinese in Seventeenth Century Nagasaki" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2003).

²¹ Chang, 1–16.

had to know about the trades, the quality of merchandise, their prices, as well as nuances concerning the Japanese laws that regulated international commerce and the inner markets. They had to please the Chinese traders and provide commensurate responses to their economic expectations, and at the same time, attend to their tasks as supervisors on behalf of the Nagasaki authorities. After all, the Chinese interpreters were the direct interlocutors of the *machidoshiyori*, and more generally, of the Japanese government.

Bakufu's Political Stances

Despite the severe reorganization of Nagasaki and the strict decrees that the Tokugawa *bakufu* was bringing into force, the Chinese community, as a result of many new arrivals from China, was growing in numbers. By the first decades of the seventeenth century, the Japanese authorities had already adopted a careful policy toward the Chinese, beginning with the segregation of the residential Chinese population from the non-residential Chinese: the latter were not allowed to mix with the Japanese people, nor have Japanese women or wives. Gradually, even the warehouses and the houses rented by the Chinese were placed under the control of the Japanese authorities. Trade, which until then had been based on private transactions, was regulated as well, and uniform taxation was imposed. During the first decades, due to the increasing number of Chinese residents, three Chinese Buddhist temples were built: the Overseas community of Nagasaki was slowly taking on a more precise shape.²²

The Japanese government had to take decisions on issues regarding its foreign affairs and, more specifically, the increasing number of Overseas Chinese residing in Nagasaki. In 1616, the Tokugawa *bakufu* restricted international commerce solely to the port cities of Hirado and Nagasaki: the first was open to the Dutch and the English, the second to Portugal and Spain, and, in both cases, to the Chinese communities. It was in 1616, too, that the *bakufu* established the Ginza ("silver mint") in Nagasaki. These decisions were the first steps toward a more severe control of the maritime commerce carried out by the Chinese. A few years back, in 1612, the *bakufu* had issued the first formal veto on the Christian religion. In 1623, England withdrew; in 1624, Spain was expelled. Japan had embarked on a defense policy to protect her economy. The year 1633 witnessed the first promulgation of the so-called *sakokurei* (*sakoku* ordinances).²³

²² Yamamoto, 146–193; Berger, "The Overseas Chinese in Seventeenth Century Nagasaki."

²³ These ordinances were issued five times between the years 1633 and 1639 (in the years 1633, 1634, 1635, 1636, and 1639), remaining essentially unchanged, with some exceptions. These ordinances were related to the following points: from the first to the

From 1633, Japanese merchants were prohibited from going abroad, and the Overseas Japanese were ordered to come back to Japan: it was the end of the *shuinsen* system. That same year, the Japanese government fixed the *kōsen*, the commission on the *funayado* (shipping agents), at fifty percent, and imposed the *bakufu* monopoly. In 1635, the Tokugawa *bakufu* restricted the arrival of Chinese fleets to the sole port of Nagasaki: this was a significant decision, aimed at inducing the concentration of the Chinese settlers of Kyūshū at Nagasaki. Moreover, from the year 1635, the *tōjin* were prohibited from marrying Japanese women and living among the Japanese people: this marked the beginning of the “Chinese quarter.” The Japanese authorities issued only temporary permissions to live in the city, and refused, in most cases, permanent licenses to reside on the archipelago: this highly restrictive measure was aimed at stopping, or at least checking, the influx of Overseas Chinese into Japan—a phenomenon that had recently escalated owing to the crescent disorders in China (the Manchu, as is widely known, were on the point of invading China). Six Overseas Chinese were appointed *tōnengyōji*—a sort of “Chinese elderly supervisors”—by the Tokugawa authorities in order to control the Chinese residents of Nagasaki and to preserve a modicum of law and order among them: they were Yang Yuntai 陽雲台, He Sanguan 何三官, Jiang Qiguan 江七官, Zhang Sanguan 張三官, He Baguan 何八官, and Chen Yishan 陳奕山.²⁴

Another restriction was enforced on the Japanese merchants: only those from Sakai, Kyoto, Osaka, Nagasaki and Edo (present day Tokyo) who had been granted the official licenses (*gokasho shōnin*) were allowed to buy Chinese merchandise according to the fixed prices established by the authorities following the *itowappu* system (*pancado*). After the Shimabara revolt (*Shimabara no ran*) of 1637–1638, and partly because of it, Portugal was expelled in 1639, and two years later, in 1641, the Dutch East India Company was forced to move from Hirado to Deshima (Nagasaki): with the third *shōgun*, Tokugawa Iemitsu, Japan entrained on a careful defensive policy in order to protect its finances and its integrity. In Nagasaki, there were only two foreign settlements: the Chinese community, and the Dutch East India Company, isolated in Deshima, the small artificial island in the bay of Nagasaki.²⁵

third article, they prohibited the Japanese from going abroad; from the fourth to the eighth article, they prohibited the Christian religion; from the ninth to the seventeenth article, they established in detail the rules on overseas trade. As can be seen, articles related to the Christian religion formed only five of a total of seventeen articles; the rest were all concerned with regulations on overseas trade, including rules governing the sale of imported commodities in the national market. The economic aspect of the Tokugawa policy of defence, therefore, appears to have been extensive: It was not by chance that from the 1640s onwards only the Chinese and the Dutch were admitted into Japanese territory.

²⁴ Mitsui et al., 1974, vol. 1, 232; Yamamoto, *Nagasaki tōjin yashiki*.

²⁵ It has to be said that many Korean artisans—especially ceramists—were in Nagasaki too, taken prisoners by the Japanese army during Hideyoshi’s invasions of Korea.

In this context, the role of the Chinese interpreters became essential since they were the true inter-mediators between the Japanese authorities and the Chinese community of Nagasaki—a bridge for the Sino-Japanese trades. Moreover, the Chinese community of Nagasaki was an important element, needed to balance the Dutch East India Company in Deshima.

As we can see, the Chinese presence in Japan, and, in particular, the Chinese presence in Kyūshū, played a fundamental role in influencing the Tokugawa decisions. The influence of the Overseas Chinese had significant manifestations on the economic, military, and political positions taken by the *bakufu*; at the same time, the Japanese decisions were deeply concerned with the Overseas Chinese in Kyūshū and the rest of Japan. This, in itself, reveals the importance of the role played by the Chinese in Japan: the *tōtsūji* and, later on, the Nagasaki-*Tōtsūji kaisho* were indeed pivotal elements in the foreign policy of the early Tokugawa period.

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