

The Prussian East Asia Expedition of 1861-1862 in Siam

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Abstract

In 1859, the expansion of Prussian trade led to the search for commercial partners in South-Eastern

Asia, and Graf zu Eulenburg was chosen to head an extensive trade mission. He set out for Japan, China, and Siam. He concluded a Japanese-Prussian Treaty of Amity and Commerce with Muragaki Norimasa of the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo on 24 January 1861, later, in the same year, he negotiated a commercial treaty with the Qing Empire, which was modelled after the Treaty of Tianjin that Britain and France had brokered with China three years earlier. Afterwards, during the reign of King Mongkut (1851-1868), Eulenburg travelled to Siam to conclude the Eulenburg treaty signed on 7 February 1862. This treaty is still influencing the official relationship between Thailand and Germany and 2022 is 160 years Thai and German relations.

King Mongkut as the King of Siam received this mission team at first in a private audience on 24 December 1861. The reception of the Prussian diplomatic mission differed in this regard from missions of other European countries. The records of the participants of the expedition help to understand the cultural diversity of Siam by conveying the impressions of zu Eulenburg and other members of the mission.

The arrival of the Prussian East Asia expedition according to Thai documents which the original documents are in form of paper leporello manuscript written with white chalk. There are orders of King Mongkut for the reception of the Prussian ambassador. The orders show that the king was invested in welcoming the expedition, as he assured that everything was prepared and he organized several events. The king gave the present to show his hospitality which would be easy to store for the Prussian mission team during stay in Siam. Partly represented seasonal foods and were typical for the climate, location, and economic conditions.

The description of certain cultural differences in the recordings might be exacerbated, as the underlying reasons of certain actions or ceremonies might be misinterpreted from a non-Siamese point of view. This is emphasized in certain cases by the reaction of members of the mission towards a welcoming gesture, as the meaning of specific gestures vary in different cultures.

Therefore, it is a necessary to consider varying explanations of particular acts and not come to a premature conclusion in these cases. The findings are supplemented by studying the Siamese attitude towards the Prussian diplomatic mission and its treatment of the members of the mission.

Keywords: Siam, cultural, Prussian, expedition