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# CROSS-CURRENTS



## EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

### **Chosŏn-Qing Tributary Discourse: Transgression, Restoration, and Textual Performativity**

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#### **Abstract**

In 1864, a fire destroyed the Chosŏn-Qing frontier market for Qing merchants at Kyŏngwŏn on the Tumen River. Unable to supply timbers himself, the Kyŏngwŏn magistrate asked his Qing counterpart across the river in Hunchun, for permission to fell timbers in Qing territory. This request was to evolve into a series of violations of frontier protocol that eventually necessitated a Chosŏn diplomatic mission to Beijing to restore frontier order. Read uncritically, the tributary discourses that facilitated these interactions between Qing and Chosŏn suggest a timeless relationship borne of the forces of the cosmos itself. Taken as empirical accounts, the discourses reveal little of how the two states interacted along their border. Employing close readings of Qing and Chosŏn intergovernmental communications, this article argues that the most important question is not what these texts are about but rather what they do. Emerging scholarship in international relations and other fields employing models of a Chinese tributary system must be careful in using tributary discourse naïvely to reconstruct the policy and ideological commitments of its participants. To do so is to mistake the performative for the descriptive.

Keywords: tribute, discourse, Chosŏn Korea, Qing China, Kyŏngwŏn, frontier, borderlands, performative

#### **Timber, Tribute, and Performative Discourse**

In the late spring of 1864, Sin Myŏnghŭi 申明羲 was the recently appointed magistrate of Kyŏngwŏn 慶源, a settlement on the far northeast Chosŏn frontier with Qing on the Tumen River. The chief importance of Kyŏngwŏn was the role it played as one of the two periodic northern frontier markets where agents of the Qing and Chosŏn governments, as well as private merchants, engaged in a highly regulated trade. In this particular spring when the magistracy offices would have normally been busy preparing for the opening of the market, Sin was faced with a serious problem; the market facilities had been extensively damaged by fire. They had to

be rebuilt quickly if the market was to take place, and Sin was not sure that he could procure the timber necessary for the project. He sent his runners across the Tumen River to the offices of the Qing colonel of Hunchun 琿春 to request timber. Sin was wholly unaware that his expedient decision to ask for timber directly from a Qing local official was a breach of frontier protocol so great as to cause an international incident. His lapse in judgment led to his dismissal and banishment and the embarrassment of the Chosŏn court. It also precipitated a Qing imperial edict granting the timber that required a Chosŏn diplomatic mission to Beijing to offer apology, gratitude, and gifts before the rift in frontier protocol and tributary practice was finally repaired.

Over the last several years, the tributary system model, as articulated in the writings of John King Fairbank and others in the mid-twentieth century, has reemerged in the field of international relations as well as among advocates of a *tianxia* 天下 (“all under heaven”) alternative to the current Westphalian international system (see Fairbank 1968; Kang 2010; Ford 2010; Y. Wang 2011; Zhang 2015; Lee 2016; B. Wang 2017). We might opt to understand the tributary practice in the 1864 timber incident as something of a reaffirmation of the certainties of this refurbished tributary system model. A critique has arisen contemporaneously with this reanimation that reminds us of the orientalism, essentialism, Eurocentrism, and manifold empirical weaknesses of this retooled model of the tributary system.<sup>1</sup> This consideration of the timber incident of 1864 provides insights into the ways in which the Chosŏn and Qing states interacted with one another—insights that provide further contributions to current critical engagements with what David Howell calls “the tributary system’s second career” (Howell 2017, viii). This article, however, seeks further theoretical and methodological interventions addressing the workings of the discourse at the heart of tributary practice. The notion of tribute suggests from the outset that it occurs primarily, if not entirely, within the realm of the material through the submission of physical tributary goods before an imperial throne replete with the prostrations of abject obeisance by envoys who have arrived from afar with the greatest of difficulty and expense. Yet the interactions between the Chosŏn and Qing courts and the acts of submission and benevolence included therein were not limited to Chosŏn tribute, Qing gifts, and the trade at the frontier marts and along the route to Beijing. Just as integral were the textual expressions of the tributary relationship. The production and exchange of documents composed within set

rhetorical conventions, what we might identify as a tributary discourse, enabled and produced the relationship between the Qing and Chosŏn courts.

“Rhetoric” is often preceded by its familiar companion “mere” as though the rhetorical cannot be anything more than an empty flourish unworthy of consideration beyond questions of style. The urge to dismiss tributary discourse is all the more attractive because of its characteristic and repetitive hyperbole that can appear not only alien but wholly absurd. More than eighty years ago, Carl Becker suggested that in encountering such institutionally and epistemologically distant texts, readers of the present day, being unable to approach them on their own ground, had no way to respond; the texts thus became not true or false but simply irrelevant (Becker 1932, 11–12). In a similar vein, more than two hundred and fifty years of Qing-Chosŏn relations produced millions of written characters expressing the conventional joys and profundities of the tributary relationship that today, for many historians, are neither true nor false but simply irrelevant mires through which they must slog before uncovering the “actual” content of a given document. And yet this tributary discourse is no niggling nugament beloved only to the antiquarian; it framed and permeated official communications between the Qing and Chosŏn courts. It constituted the point from which texts began, the medium in which they were composed and read, and the point at which they ended. The textual production of tributary discourse was not merely the creation of statements about the tributary relationship. It was in itself an integral part of the practice. Tributary discourse was in this way performative; to produce the text was to do the act.<sup>2</sup> The production of tributary texts was not only the act of participation in a tributary relationship; it created the very relationship of which it was a part.

In addition to its performative quality, tributary discourse was reiterative. The production of tributary documents reproduced the relationship and its associated obligations. When Chosŏn-Qing relations were operating smoothly, these iterative performatives were matters of codified bureaucratic routine, but in moments of rupture they served a restorative function. Indeed, one of the Chosŏn court’s first reactions to the Kyŏngwŏn incident was to compose a letter to the Qing Emperor indicating in no uncertain terms that King Kojong and his regents were fully aware of gravity of Sin’s violations, that they intended to restore and adhere to established protocols, and that further documentation of Chosŏn loyalty and gratitude would be delivered in person. Tributary discourse was the fastest and most potent tool at their disposal to restore the relationship, indeed to again enact the relationship.

Considered in this light, there is little to gain by asking whether tributary discourse was true, whether it reflected some sort of verifiable reality. The unfolding and resolution of the timber incident of 1864–1865 shows the futility of depending on a naïve reading of tributary discourse as a portal into the policy and practice of the Chosŏn-Qing relationship; the rhetoric of inter-court communications had few points of contact with expediencies of administration in the Chosŏn-Qing borderland. This article’s close readings of the Chosŏn-Qing correspondence in the context of Sin Myŏnghŭi’s timber missteps show that we must not employ tributary discourse as something of a raw data set that will speak to us of ideological commitments, policy models, and ultimately worldviews. Conversely, we must not dismiss it as meaningless boilerplate to be discarded as chaff from the wheat of the putatively actual content of document. To those who employed this discourse, it mattered not because of its truths or fictions but because of its performative and reiterative functionality.

### **Frontier Ruptures and Court Performatives**

Sin Myŏnghŭi had only just settled into his duties when the fire broke out and he was faced with the decision that was to define his tenure as Kyŏngwŏn magistrate.<sup>3</sup> On June 4, 1864, he sent three messengers across the Tumen River to the office of Taifeiyina 臺斐音阿, colonel of Hunchun. In his message, Sin reported the fire damage and explained that because there was no timber available locally, he wanted permission to send a team of Chosŏn woodsmen across the Tumen into Qing territory to fell trees for the reconstruction project. The colonel replied that he did not have the authority to grant such permission and would have to refer the matter to his superior, the military governor of Jilin. He also suggested that in general there was no way to allow for a group of lumberjacks to cross the border to harvest trees. Upon issuing his refusal, he immediately sent the messengers back to Kyŏngwŏn with an escort. Sin sent his runners across the river once again three days later and repeated his request, suggesting that if the timbers were not sent in a timely manner the market would have to be delayed or perhaps cancelled entirely, with the implication that Taifeiyina might be held responsible. The colonel responded as before and sent the Chosŏn messengers back across the border.<sup>4</sup>

Upon receiving Taifeiyina’s report, Jing Lun 景綸, the military governor of Jilin, was at once sympathetic to the Chosŏn request. He instructed the colonel to wait while he contacted the

Board of Rites for instruction. In his report to the board, Jing pointed out that as a “country of propriety and righteousness” (禮義之邦), Chosŏn had never before demanded to cross the border to take resources. As there was no record of such an event, there was no precedent to follow. Despite the peculiarity of the demand, Jing suggested that Sin’s request be taken under consideration given that the timber was to be used for official business of both Qing and Chosŏn interests. This was not, as Jing put it, a mere matter of peasants crossing the border to hunt and gather for no particular reason. The market was at risk, and something had to be done.<sup>5</sup>

The Board of Rites took the matter under consideration and on July 22 presented the matter to the emperor for his perusal. After first noting that direct communication between local officials was fundamentally at odds with established protocols, the board proposed accepting Jing Lun’s suggestion that the Chosŏn request be granted, despite its unorthodox delivery and format, on the grounds that Chosŏn had long been correct in its management of border affairs and that the fate of the market was at stake. The board further proposed that the timbers be cut at a remote site with no geomantic obstacles in such a manner as to avoid disturbance to the local population. The emperor issued an edict approving the proposal on the same day with the instructions that Kojong and his court be informed immediately.<sup>6</sup>

Jing Lun had the colonel of Hunchun inform Sin Myŏnghŭi of the decision and confirm the number and type of necessary timbers. He also dispatched his deputies Salinga 薩凌阿 and Duotuoli 多托哩 to locate a suitable stand of timber for the harvest. They soon reported that there were no stands of large timber near the Tumen River but they had found an appropriately remote and geomantically acceptable site on the banks of the Gahali River 嘎哈哩河, a tributary of the Tumen. Salinga and Duotuoli informed Jing that they would send Lieutenant Nelehe 訥勒和 with a company of soldiers to the site to fell the trees and await the arrival of a Chosŏn transport detail. At the end of their report to Jing, they noted that they had learned that Sin had not informed the Chosŏn king of the plan. When the king did find out, Salinga guessed, he might “be of an anxious countenance.”<sup>7</sup>

Salinga was correct. News of Sin Myŏnghŭi’s improvisations and the resulting imperial edict struck the Chosŏn court on September 10, 1864.<sup>8</sup> The Border Defense Command forwarded a message from the Qing Board of Rites to the Chosŏn court concerning the facts of the case and appended a proposed response. Starting in what was standard rhetorical form throughout

discussions of the timber incident at the Chosŏn court, the Border Defense Command deplored Sin's actions and declared them not only unacceptable and unprecedented but entirely incomprehensible. The Border Defense Command then proposed that the throne<sup>9</sup> dismiss Sin from his post and order an immediate investigation so that punishments could be meted out.<sup>10</sup> Once these orders were issued, the Border Defense Command continued, it would be necessary to formulate a response to the communication from the Qing Board of Rites. The Border Defense Command indicated from the outset that, despite the embarrassing circumstances there was no choice other than to accept the timber; the situation was difficult enough without having to attempt to buck an imperial edict. To this end they advised the throne to order the governor of Hamgyŏng Province to appoint an officer to meet with Qing provincial and local officials and oversee the reception of the timber.

With the policy response decided, the Border Defense Command continued, the throne should have a letter prepared immediately to thank the Qing Emperor. The proposed letter would be structured around three primary elements. The first was to be an acknowledgment of the extraordinary display of imperial grace manifest in the gift; despite the fact that Sin's request was a gross violation of established protocol, the emperor had seen fit to grant it. The second was to be a promise to send an envoy to personally express royal gratitude. Finally, the message would include assurances that those who had exceeded their stations in asking Qing to help would meet with severest of punishments. The throne approved the proposals and added that the delicacy of the situation demanded that this first reply to the Qing Board of Rites be written with extreme care so as to stabilize the situation and restore appropriate relations. The throne further insisted that the officer dispatched to receive the timber should observe established protocols as strictly as possible in meeting with Qing officials so as not to complicate the situation any further. The document was to be not only a reaffirmation of the Chosŏn commitment to the Qing court as a tributary state; it would be, in concert with the graceful reception of the timber, an enactment of that commitment.

The text of the first Chosŏn response received the approval of the throne and was sent to Beijing on September 19, nine days after word of the incident arrived in Hansŏng.<sup>11</sup> The response adhered closely to the established format and rhetorical conventions. In this case the reply was in the form of an "Expression of Gratitude for Imperial Grace," or *saŭn p'yo* 謝恩表.

To a great extent, the rhetoric and formats of the communications between the Chosŏn and Qing governments were fixed. In some cases the forms were so rigid that in the more routine documents, little changed from year to year other than the date.<sup>12</sup> The formats of Chosŏn tributary documents were established by Qing order in the early eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Although the *saŭn p'yo* were the least restrictive communication in recognition of the fact that they had to be composed in accordance with the particular instance of grace, there was still a template to be followed.<sup>14</sup> They were generally divided into four sections. The first acknowledged the receipt of the imperial edict through which the act of grace was granted. This section involved a summary of the facts of the case in question and the details of the imperial dispensation followed by a description of the joy experienced by the Chosŏn population at having received imperial attention. The template included stock phrases concerning the entirety of the country being emotionally overwhelmed by the imperial tenderness and the fear and awe with which the Chosŏn king viewed the emperor.<sup>15</sup> The third section provided a further elaboration of the case in question before launching into the fourth and final section in which the king reiterated his unworthiness and inadequacies before finally ending the document.

Although not technically a *saŭn p'yo*, the first Chosŏn reply on September 19 to the Board of Rites largely served the same function, standing in as a provisional expression of gratitude until a proper document could be formally presented to the Board of Rites by a Chosŏn envoy. From the beginning of the title, the document places the status of the Chosŏn sovereign and state in relation to the Qing throne:

The Chosŏn Head of State Affairs writes on the matter of the frightful recklessness of a local official, the unusual experience of an extraordinary embodiment of pity, and our emotional reception of Broad Imperial Grace such that we are entirely ashamed and fearful.<sup>16</sup>

The letter employs the term “Chosŏn Head of State Affairs” (朝鮮權署國事) instead of the usual “Chosŏn King” (朝鮮王) because Kojong had yet to formally receive his patent of investiture from the Qing Emperor.<sup>17</sup> Thus, from the opening words of the letter, the reign of the Chosŏn sovereign was cast in a state of flux, merely provisional and pending Qing approval. The Chosŏn state awaited word from Beijing on its very legitimacy. This phrase provides some clue as to why the Chosŏn court found the timber incident so alarming; there was some possibility,



however remote, that the border violation could complicate the royal investiture and submerge the court into political instability.

The body of the letter begins with a finely detailed summary of the Qing documentation of the case,<sup>18</sup> followed by Kojong's<sup>19</sup> comments below:

I humbly submit that border regulations and restrictions are extremely strict. There is a procedure for sending communications on official affairs. What petty local official would dare send a message slyly requesting to cross the border and fell trees? Considering his profound disrespect and shamelessness, his crime is utterly unforgivable. Now this matter has reached the point where His Imperial Sagacity has been troubled to consider a solution to the problem. I am unable to comprehend any part of such good fortune. No such thing has ever occurred before. I am frightened and ashamed, and there is no way I can be forgiven. Indeed, the Imperial Sagely Grace is broad and vast, greater than any river or sea. I never imagined I would escape blame and punishment, yet Permission has been granted to supply timber. With the command to dispatch men to receive it, I am emotionally overcome in the extreme and rendered utterly speechless. With all due reverence, I will send men to receive the timber. The subjects of our entire country exhaustively sing the praises of the Imperial Virtue of caring for the small and cherishing those from afar, surpassing all that has come before...<sup>20</sup>

Kojong first acknowledges the existence of an interstate order as invoked in the regime of frontier protocols and quickly expresses outrage over Sin's wanton violations. He continues with recognition of having undeservedly received the emperor's understanding and generosity and a declaration of reverent obedience that culminated in a nationwide state of awed appreciation for the unprecedented spectacle of imperial grace manifest in the timber shipment. Despite the seeming disrespect of Sin's direct communications and excessive demands, Kojong's letter reaffirms Chosŏn commitments and obligations and in effect reconstitutes these relations.

Kojong's letter continues with a second summary of Qing communications on the facts of the case before launching into another performative passage, this time concluding with the actions his government would take in response to the incident:

I humbly submit that in the matter of official correspondence there is a hierarchy. The violation of any of these regulations is fundamentally unacceptable. If I do not fully apply the law in this instance in which the Kyŏngwŏn magistrate Sin Myŏnghŭi sent a message with reckless demands, how will I warn the border officials and cause them to know fear? I have had the magistrate dismissed, arrested, and subjected to interrogation. I shall fully apply the law to warn the people and strictly order all border officials great and small to eliminate violations

of protocols of official correspondence. I shall reverently dispatch officers both prudent and discreet to receive the granted lumber. Moreover, I shall dispatch a tributary envoy [貢使] with a message expressing gratitude for the generosity of the abundant Imperial Grace manifest in this extraordinary display of pity.<sup>21</sup>

Kojong again acknowledges the interstate order and then moves to restore its power and dignity through the immediate punishment of those responsible as a warning to others who may so disposed as to disregard the regulatory regime. Moreover, Kojong promises to send to the frontier to receive the lumber officials who will be more respectful and fully appreciative of the grandeur of the moment. Moreover, he will send a tributary envoy to present a formal expression of gratitude to the Qing Board of Rites in Beijing and ritually enact Chosŏn submission before the Qing throne. In this way Kojong promises that in addition to the restorative textual performative of the letter, he will take further specific actions to renew Chosŏn tributary obligations to Qing.

### **The Secret Lives of Local Officials**

On October 13, one month after Kojong's initial response was sent to Beijing, Kim Yuyŏn 金有淵, governor of Hamgyŏng Province, presented to the Chosŏn court the results of his formal investigation of the timber.<sup>22</sup> Communications between the two states' capitals would lead one to believe that Sin Myŏnghŭi's frontier indiscretions were of a nature and degree unheard of in the annals of Chosŏn-Qing relations, but Governor Kim's report suggests that direct communications between Qing and Chosŏn local officials were routine and both Qing and Chosŏn officials themselves were crossing the border regularly.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Sin and his staff had moved so quickly that the situation had already become more complex than the Chosŏn court knew. Kojong's promise to receive the timber and send an envoy to thank the Qing Emperor would have been a simple and graceful ending to an embarrassing interlude, but the snap decisions of the Kyŏngwŏn magistracy staff and local yangban had already made so facile a closure impossible.

Sin had concealed his plan from the provincial government and the Border Defense Command; it was not until Sin learned that he was under investigation that the documents began to flow from his office. Governor Kim's examination of these materials revealed that the colonel of Hunchun had sent members of his staff to Kyŏngwŏn to confirm Sin's account of the fire

damage to the market offices. This fact was absent not only from Sin's correspondence with his superiors; it was also wholly omitted from Jing Lun's proposal to the Board of Rites wherein he had confirmed that Sin's portrayal of the situation was accurate, but he did not explain that he came to that conclusion after Qing officers had crossed the border and inspected the site.<sup>24</sup> As in Kojong's letter to Beijing, Jing depicted the Sin affair as a stunning aberration in which Colonel Taifeiyina and his staff in Hunchun had conducted themselves in strict accordance with established protocols. Governor Kim, however, found that this visit from the Hunchun officials was but one instance of a nearly constant flow of both Chosŏn and Qing officials back and forth across the border. This case, Kim concluded, was but the tip the iceberg of frontier violations.<sup>25</sup>

In a development even more troubling to the Chosŏn court, Governor Kim found that An Haeyul 安海律, an interpreter on Sin's staff, had already organized a group of twenty-seven Chosŏn men to cross the Tumen River and fetch the Qing timber. By the time the investigation had started, An and his men were already in Jilin. Hamgyŏng provincial authorities were waiting for his return whereupon they planned to arrest him. Upon first receiving word of the timber incident from the Board of Rites, the Chosŏn throne had originally considered the situation to be sufficiently delicate to stipulate on two occasions, once to the Border Defense Command and once in Kojong's letter, that the members of the mission dispatched to receive the timber be well-versed in ritual protocols for interacting with Qing officials. Kojong's letter promised officials "prudent and discreet" to oversee the delivery. This was undoubtedly a good idea, but it was too late. Despite the throne's attempts to ensure a smooth conclusion, a "scheming" interpreter and his collection of local recruits were now the official faces of Chosŏn in Jilin. These were not the fonts of prudence and discretion that the throne had envisioned.

### **The Imperial Spirit and "Logs by the Thousand": Yu Changhwan's Mission to Beijing**

Although conditions on the ground were hardly progressing according to plan, the Chosŏn government was moving ahead with preparations to send an envoy to Beijing to deliver a formal *saŭn p'yo* in recognition of the Qing timber grant. The routine solstice mission of 1864–1865 was thus additionally tasked with the presentation of the *saŭn p'yo*. The sojourn of the mission in Beijing, which was to last more than a month, was an opportunity for the Chosŏn envoy to enact anew the Chosŏn-Qing relationship through the ritual of prostration at the Board

of Rites, and before the emperor, and to reaffirm the relationship in the presentation of the text of the *saŭn p'yo*. The mission also provided the opportunity for the Qing government to respond with its own textual performatives wrought in the rhetoric of benevolent condescension. Despite growing logistical frustrations in the distant forests of Jilin and faltering communications on the Tumen frontier, Sin Myŏnghŭi's stain upon the righteousness of Serving the Great was to be cleansed and the relationship made whole again in the audience chambers and banquet halls of Beijing.

Principal Envoy Yu Changhwan and his entourage left Hansŏng on November 18, 1864, and were on the road for nearly two months before reaching Beijing on January 21, 1865.<sup>26</sup> Yu probably presented the *saŭn p'yo* to the Board of Rites the day after his arrival in Beijing.<sup>27</sup> Formally titled "Expression of Gratitude for the Bestowal of Timber," the text was composed in verse on behalf of the young Kojong by rising Chosŏn courtier Pak Ch'angsu 朴昌壽.<sup>28</sup> Much like Kojong's first letter to the board, Pak's document begins with multiple citations of Qing communications pertaining to the facts of the case and includes extensive quotations from Kojong's first letter. Having thus dispensed with the background summary, Pak begins the body of the text as follows:<sup>29</sup>

Wind and rain, frost and mist, there are none that do not govern [growing things].  
And so we cherish the garden preserves of the world.

Hill and forest, axe and blade, only in season [may the woodsman] enter.  
And so we are grateful for the market reconstruction.

With the first couplet, Pak sets the thankful tone. Here all things that grow, all agricultural resources are to be valued, for they depend upon the vagaries of the elements. Their maturity and harvest are never guaranteed, and so the produce of the earth must not be wasted. Pak further elaborates this principle in the second couplet with a reference to a passage from *Mencius* concerning the importance of environmental stewardship in good governance. In this passage, Mencius explained to King Liang of Hui that the foundation of the Way of Kings lay in ensuring that crops are planted and harvested in the proper season, in seeing that fish and turtles are caught only in numbers that allow for sustainable populations, and in managing forest resources such that trees are felled only at the proper time.<sup>30</sup> In this way, Mencius explained, there will always be more grain, fish, and turtles than can be eaten and more timber than can be used. Thus

Pak portrayed Kojong's gratitude as all the greater in the knowledge that the conservation of resources is among the most fundamental tasks of the sage ruler.

In the next section, Pak speaks to Chosŏn loyalty to the Qing throne, the shameful aberration of Sin's request, and Qing generosity in the face of Chosŏn ineptitude and insignificance:

[His] grace is great, [His] bestowal manifold. Such events are rarely recorded.  
The Earth abides, sending forth the sun. All sincerely bow to the North Star.

We have trusted in the Imperial Spirit and long has it rained down upon this pond,  
a remote corner of the sea.  
We have maintained the ways of the marquis and humbly preserved the  
sincerity of this fief.

Now the magistrate of Kyŏngwŏn has requested timbers.  
By special edict the military governor of Jilin has permitted their felling.

The frontier officer committed a crime of great transgression and our hearts were  
fearful.  
Yet the military governor made his proposal and we have met with this enactment  
of compassion.

Now we have amply witnessed the mind of impartiality.  
How could it be that we have received logs by the thousand?

In the first two couplets of this section, Pak brings into relief the enormity of the moral authority of the emperor and the obscurity of Chosŏn. So great is the emperor's generosity that the cosmos itself bows to him and indeed revolves around him like the constellations swirl about the unmoving North Star. In such rhetoric, the North Star is a common metaphor for the ruler, a stationary figure around whom all things orbit. This imagery functions in the second couplet to throw into contrast the powerlessness of Chosŏn, a mere pond at the edge of the vast ocean that is Qing. Chosŏn had bathed in the rain of the Imperial Spirit 皇靈 throughout the ages and in return Chosŏn monarchs had faithfully played their role as the recipients of Qing investiture in maintaining their fief (封) and preserving the ways of the marquis. Pak makes no reference here to the independent existence of a Chosŏn state or sovereign. There is only a fief, a political entity dependent for its existence on the grace of investiture, hardly visible in the penumbra of empire. How, then, in this state of helpless loyalty and obscurity, could an agent of the Chosŏn state stray

so far from his station? In the third couplet, Sin's request appears unbearably petty and presumptuous. Yet the military governor of Jilin, by special order of the emperor, allowed it to be granted. Sin had committed a great transgression and yet the Qing government, from the emperor down to the regional officials, bestowed a gift of great compassion upon the benighted Chosŏn. Under such circumstances, the bestowal of "logs by the thousand" is indeed miraculous.

In the final section, Pak again enumerates the powers and virtues of the emperor before concluding with a reaffirmation of the tributary relationship and its associated obligations:

[He] takes the entire world as His household.  
Fish of the ponds, beasts of the wood; all are subject to [His] Great Law.

[His] governance pervades, [His] love sustains with no distinction of near and far.  
[He] causes plants and animals to be as content as Heaven and Earth are vast.

[He] rules and rectifies the inner realms and fully protects the outer domains.  
How could we not repay, however humbly, and defend the palisades?

Across the miles of Chejam from north to south we shout out upon the hilltops.  
To the Phoenix Palace bedecked with five-colored clouds we turn and express our  
wish to pray for [His] prosperity.

Here the entire world and all things in it are subject to imperial will. The emperor's will is shot through with a universal and inescapable love for the peoples of the world. There is no choice but to submit to his benevolent rule of the inner dominions (內服), the territories under direct Qing administration, and his complete protection of the outer domains (外藩), the tributary states outside the formal boundaries of the empire. In return, those who enjoy the favor and protection of the emperor willingly man the palisades and defend the empire. The sense of joy the people of Chosŏn have in meeting with the good fortune of imperial grace elicits in them a desire to scale the hills and mountains and turn to Beijing to sing the praises of the emperor.

In the final couplet, the term "Chejam" (鯤岑) denotes Chosŏn. Chejam is derived from references in the *History of the Former Han* and the *History of the Later Han* to the Eastern Ti people (東鯤人) who were said to have lived in twenty different states beyond the sea off the east coast of China. Although it is not clear who, precisely, the Eastern Ti were, the ethnonym has been used in a variety of contexts to refer to the people and states of Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, as well as to certain islands off the coast of Taiwan.<sup>31</sup> As with the *Mencius* reference,

Pak probably employed the word “Chejam” in part to display Chosŏn familiarity with the finer points of classical texts and thereby highlight Chosŏn participation in a universal civilization. This was a dynamic frequently at work in Chosŏn tributary documents, but “Chejam” is also important in this instance in a more directly political way. The *History of the Former Han* indicates that the Eastern Yi submitted tribute to the Han court.<sup>32</sup> Pak’s use of “Chejam” to denote Chosŏn can thus be interpreted as a statement of a continual submission of successive Korean states to Chinese courts. The iteration of the tributary relationship in this *saŭn p’yo* is thus not merely an articulation of obligations suspended in the ephemeral now but rather an invocation of a relationship of ancient provenance recorded in the chronicles of dynasties past. In the concluding line of the final couplet, the people of Chejam, the ancient tributary to the Han court, continue in their loyal submission unchanged over millennia and now turn toward the Phoenix Palace, the imperial residence, and express their wish that they might pray for the well-being of the emperor.

Pak’s rhetorical flair met with the approval of the Board of Rites and the Qing throne. Once the board issued a routine approval of the tribute goods and Yu performed his prostration before the Tongzhi Emperor later in his stay,<sup>33</sup> the issue of Sin’s transgression on the frontier was effectively resolved, at least from the standpoint of the Qing and Chosŏn diplomatic corps. For the remainder of their stay in Beijing, the only tasks remaining for Yu and his embassy were to receive gifts and attend official banquets.<sup>34</sup>

### “Kija’s Eastern Land”: Performative Call and Response

More than all the others, one Qing gift bore a considerably more direct expression not only of the current obligations of the Chosŏn-Qing relationship but of an imagined history of continuous Korean tribute to Chinese states since the fall of Yin 殷 to Zhou 周 nearly two thousand years in the past. Before Yu Changwan’s departure, the Qing court gave him a plaque bearing a four-character phrase, purportedly in the emperor’s own hand, to be presented as a gift to King Kojong.<sup>35</sup> The plaque read, “Imperial command spreads across the Land of Jizi” (教敷箕壤).<sup>36</sup> Jizi 箕 was a minister to King Zhou 紂王 (r. 1154–1122 BCE), the morally depraved final ruler of the state of Yin. Jizi, along with Weizi 微子 and Bigan 比干, collectively known as the Three Benevolent Ones (*sanren* 三仁), refused to accept the sundry depravities of

King Zhou. Weizi resigned from his post at court. Bigan remonstrated with the king and was executed. Jizi too voiced his opposition and was imprisoned. King Wu of the state of Zhou soon led his forces to victory over Yin whereupon he released Jizi and, impressed by his sagacity, eventually enfeoffed him in Chosŏn. Jizi then instructed the peoples of Chosŏn in rites, music, agriculture, and crafts.<sup>37</sup>

The invocation of Jizi, read as “Kija” in Korean, had a twofold significance in Chosŏn. First, Kija was believed to be the source of culture in Chosŏn. From at least the early tenth century, elites and commoners alike understood Kija to be something of a progenitor and the first teacher of morality and propriety. This belief in the cultural and moral influence of Kija continued into the early years of the twentieth century during the Great Han Empire period (1897–1910).<sup>38</sup> Second, Kija’s reception of Zhou investiture was broadly taken as the source of the political legitimacy of the Chosŏn state. There is little to suggest that his relationships to Yin and Zhou were central to Koryŏ-period (918–1392) understandings of Kija but by the 1390s, when neo-Confucian thought began to form the core of Chosŏn statecraft, King Wu’s investiture of Kija had become a key historical moment in Korean discourses of state legitimacy. Chŏng Tojŏn 鄭道傳 (d. 1398), a key political theorist in the creation of the Chosŏn state, considered Kija Chosŏn to have been the only legitimate Korean state in history. In his *Chosŏn Administrative Code* 朝鮮經國典, composed in 1394, Chŏng dismissed all previous Korean states except Kija Chosŏn, for their lack of a mandate from China (中國之命):

The state east of the sea was not originally one. There were three called Chosŏn: Tan’gun Chosŏn, Kija Chosŏn, and Wiman Chosŏn. The Pak, Sŏk, and Kim clans continued on, one after the other, calling their state Silla. Onjo called his state Paekche in the earlier period while Kyŏn Hwŏn called his state Paekche in the later period. Ko Chumong called his state Koguryŏ and Kungnye called his state Later Koguryŏ. When Wang Kŏn replaced Kungnye, he changed the name to Koryŏ. All of them secretly took up positions in their own corners without receiving the mandate from China. They named their countries by themselves and plundered one another. Even though these states had names, how could they have been worthy of use? Only Kija received the mandate of King Wu of Zhou and was enfeoffed as the Marquis of Chosŏn. (Chŏng Tojŏn 1961, 13:2a–2b)

Historical scholarship over the course of the Chosŏn period (1392–1910) built on this notion and sought to draw a direct connection between Chosŏn and this originary Zhou



investiture by tracing the line of legitimate state succession (正統) from Chosŏn back through Koryŏ, Silla (trad. 53 BCE–935 CE), Mahan (trad. first century BCE–fourth century CE), and finally Kija Chosŏn (trad. 1120–194 BCE).<sup>39</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, Kija Chosŏn was widely accepted as the font of the propriety, morality, ethical excellence, and political legitimacy of the contemporary Chosŏn state by virtue of its connections with Yin and Zhou.

The Tongzhi Emperor's gift referencing Kija thus struck a chord in the Chosŏn court; it was an almost musical call that engendered an extensive response in the form of another *saŭn p'yo* that was sent with the next mission to Beijing in 1865–1866.<sup>40</sup> This text, written by Yi Kyohyŏn 李教鉉, most certainly establishes Chosŏn as a loyal and attentive tributary state to the Qing throne. This is the primary function of this composition as a textual performative. It does something more than this, however, in that it demonstrates that Chosŏn, as the land of Kija, lays claim to civilizational legitimacy that rivals, if not surpasses, that of the Qing Empire. Yi chose to write upon something like a razor's edge, but his text handles these contradictory currents skillfully as it oscillates in turns between submitting to the Qing court and lecturing to the Qing court. While he closely identifies Chosŏn with Kija and his teachings, he also reins in his text by reiterating Chosŏn commitment to remaining a tributary state to the Qing throne. His *saŭn p'yo* is an expression of gratitude for imperial grace, in this instance the gift of a plaque in the emperor's hand, but it is also an enactment of the Chosŏn-Qing relationship wherein Chosŏn is submissive and loyal and yet also occupies its own space of cultural and political legitimacy.

Yi begins his text with a recounting of the reception of the gift, praise for the beauty of the calligraphy, the profundity of its content, and deprecatory remarks and humble protestations of Chosŏn unworthiness. Yi then launches into an account of the significance of the emperor's gift in the context of Kija's legacy in Chosŏn. He begins with a cosmological framing:

Look to heavenly law in the constellations' embrace of the Pole Star;  
The Great Milky Way assumes its pattern.

Consider the earth offerings in the Eastern Land of Kija;  
The brilliant imperial ink spreads the imperial command.

This text from the imperial hand:  
A gift bestowed from the heart.<sup>41</sup>

Here Yi employs a direct reference to the *Analecets* wherein the pattern of the Milky Way revolving about the Pole Star stands as a metaphor for the imperial reign.<sup>42</sup> As the celestial bodies revolve about the North Star and create a great pattern in the heavens, so too do the people revolve around the ruler, thereby constituting the great enterprise of his reign. The pattern of the galaxy and the enterprise of the reign are brought into being through the force of essentially the same law, that of heaven (天路). And like this heavenly law, the moral conduct of earth offerings in Chosŏn, as denoted by “Kija’s Eastern Land,” naturally compelled the Qing emperor to respond to them by sending forth his command in the form of his calligraphy. The earth offerings (壤奠) are those the sovereign must make at the altars of earth and grain. Earth and grain were the most important elements in ensuring the continued survival of the people and thereby the state. It is for this reason that these offerings were a metaphorical reference to the conduct of the fundamental affairs of state. Yi Kyohyŏn is thus stating that the very foundations of the Chosŏn state merited the teaching/command of the Qing Emperor as embodied by his graceful hand.

Yi turns to the *Book of Odes* in the third couplet when he declares that the plaque is “a gift bestowed from the heart” (賜由中心). This is a reference to an ode in which the son of heaven bestows red bows upon his lords in recognition of their meritorious military service, declaring the bows “a gift from the heart.”<sup>43</sup> A gift from the heart is given as an expression not only of simple affection but also as a sign of deep admiration. The Tongzhi Emperor’s plaque, and the teaching so critical to the fundamental operations of the state contained therein, was a red bow bestowed on King Kojong in recognition of Chosŏn excellence in conducting the rites that form the foundation of the moral and ethical order Kija established and in loyally defending the palisades of empire.

In the following three couplets, Yi tightly binds Kija and Chosŏn across the ages:

Keeping azure hills for generations, [Kija] spread perfect rites and classics,  
Reaching everywhere to the wild frontiers.

How fortunate! Carts of like gauge, texts of like script, and ethical order,  
Just as illumined in the Great Plan and its Nine Divisions.

[And yet with the vagaries of] inferior understanding:  
The ethical order first collapsed, then thrived.<sup>44</sup>

Here Yi establishes the long relationship between Kija and Chosŏn, during which Kija maintained the azure hills (清邱), a reference to the Chosŏn landscape, while establishing rites and learning in every corner of the realm. Among the material benefits enjoyed by those who submit to imperial rule is the standardization of transportation, communication, and ethical order. There is a passage in *The Doctrine of the Mean* in which Confucius states that only the Son of Heaven has the authority and ability to unify the weights, measures, script, and customs of the realm.<sup>45</sup> This is the order Chosŏn has long enjoyed as the fruit of Kija's sagely influence.

And yet this ethical order (彝倫) upon which these benefits are founded could rise and fall on the basis of inferior understanding. Here Yi is alluding to the meeting between King Wu and Kija in the *Book of Documents*. When King Wu of Zhou finally defeated King Zhou of Yin, he released Kija and restored to him his previous titles. In the course of reordering the realm, King Wu called upon Kija to ask him for guidance in the principles of governance. Although he had no intention of serving a new lord, no matter how bad the old one had been, Kija felt obligated to transmit the way and so lectured King Wu on the Great Plan and its Nine Divisions. The Great Plan is an exposition on the core concepts of statecraft as centered on an understanding of the interstices of the forces of the cosmos and the principles of human relations. When the sovereign well mediated well, these forces and principles were in order but when he did not they fell into ruin. Though beautiful, the Great Plan is fragile and always in need of proper implementation and maintenance.<sup>46</sup> Not just anyone can implement it, but here Yi suggests that Chosŏn does.

Yi turns momentarily turns his narrative around from the intimate Chosŏn-Kija connections in the following section with something of a plea for mercy and recognition of the lengths to which Chosŏn goes to meet its tributary obligations:

Now with the regular receipt of bound reeds in tribute,  
There is the great declaration: four characters from the imperial brush.

With the thought of the nine classics and cherishing those from afar,  
We overcome our anxiety and with multiple translators come to submit [tribute].

In this land so transformed by the Eight Injunctions,  
[Kija] exerted a special effort to teach the great principles and honoring guests.<sup>47</sup>

The first couplet suggests that Qing has rewarded Chosŏn for its regular submission of tribute with the gift of the plaque but the choice of the phrase “bound reeds” (包茅) is an interesting one. Bound reeds were not a part of Chosŏn tribute to Qing; the phrase rather invokes a narrative from the Zuo commentary to the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in which the state of Qi led an army against the state of Chu. A Chu envoy met them to parley, asking why they had to come. Guan Zhong 管仲 responded that Chu had failed to submit tribute of bound reeds needed for the production and offering of sacrificial wine and so the duke of Qi had not been able to properly conduct rites. This ended up being a pretext for a Qi invasion of Chu territory.<sup>48</sup> Yi makes clear that Chosŏn has been regular in its submission of bound reeds, suggesting that there need not be another invasion. Although it is unlikely that the Chosŏn court actually feared military action, Yi’s choice remains striking for its invocation of the unthinkable, of the most extreme of disasters.<sup>49</sup>

Yi continued to turn Chosŏn toward the Qing court as he wrote of the lengths to which Chosŏn has gone to ensure that its envoys got to the Qing court. Knowing the Qing throne, in its righteousness, would welcome Chosŏn envoys from afar, in Yi’s telling, Chosŏn overcame its alleged anxiety and sent envoys on their arduous journeys. “Multiple translators” (重三譯) is a reference to the arrival of a Yuechang 越裳 envoy at the Zhou court. Yuechang was a Southeast Asian state at considerable a distance from Zhou, so when the envoy arrived he reportedly stated, “The road has been long, the mountains steep, and the rivers deep. Fearing that I would not be understood, I come to the [Zhou] court with multiple translators.”<sup>50</sup> Yi draws a parallel between the Yuechang and Chosŏn envoys in that both traveled long physical distances as well as cultural-linguistic differences so that they may pay their respects at court. Yi makes sure to express to the Qing court that Chosŏn does not merely send proper tribute in a regular fashion to avoid conflict; it does so with great difficulty, humility, and ultimately, devotion.

In the final couplet of this section, however, Yi resumes his identification of Chosŏn with Kija and his sagely teachings. Kija began his transformation of Chosŏn through the implementation of his Eight Injunctions as a basic legal code.<sup>51</sup> He went further, in Yi’s telling, by teaching the principles of government and “honoring guests” (賓興). This was a Zhou practice of recruiting and interviewing candidates for government service by inviting them to banquets.<sup>52</sup> By noting that Kija educated ancient Chosŏn in Zhou practice, Yi is making

something of a proclamation that Chosŏn has been steeped in the ways of the Zhou state for thousands of years. This is hardly a claim the Qing Empire could have made. As such, it functioned both as a reminder of the place Chosŏn claimed in the greater cosmopolitan culture and as a point of resistance at the end of a statement of submission.

Yi returns to praise of Kija's legacy in Chosŏn in the following section with a particular attention to the qualities of the sage king:

Should we assay [this grace] precisely, it is like the great hem of the imperial gown.  
The words of this bestowal of grace, how they are like a great cord as they go forth!

With the spread of order throughout the Great Xia, a springtime for all things;  
[The king] rests in benevolence and rests in compassion.<sup>53</sup>

In the *Book of Rites*, Confucius describes the words of a king as akin to a silken thread, but once they go forth into the world, they are like a cord. If they begin as a cord, then they go forth into the world as a great rope. Yi here uses this allusion to indicate that Kija was in possession of royal qualities as set out by Confucius.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the second couplet ascribes to him the ability to bring order to all the land and to conduct itself properly as both sovereign and father to all. The spreading of order throughout the Great Xia is a reference Yi takes from the *Book of Odes* to indicate the ability of the sovereign to bring peace impartially to all lands without regard to boundaries and frontiers.<sup>55</sup> In so doing, the sovereign brings the world into prosperity, into a spring that all things experience. To rest in benevolence and compassion are the traits of a lord and father, respectively, as indicated in the "Great Learning" chapter of the *Book of Odes*. When King Wen of Zhou acted in his capacity as a lord, he did so with a natural benevolence. When he acted in the capacity of father, he did so with a natural compassion.<sup>56</sup> Kija was thus royal in his pronouncements and benevolent and compassionate in his role as lord and father to all. This was the nature of his Chosŏn rule and bequest. Although Chosŏn was fearful and devoted in the previous section, Yi reiterated the Chosŏn connection with the sagely statecraft of Kija. The teachings of Kija here are a Chosŏn patrimony.

Moving the text toward its conclusion, Yi draws deeply from the Kija's discussion of "royal perfection," the fifth of the Nine Divisions of the Great Plan. Here again he tightly binds Chosŏn to Kija, citing him as the very source of the moral transformation through scholarship that is at the heart of the Ru Tradition:

As the very perfection human ethics, the kingly way has neither bias nor faction.  
The royal perfection is finally achieved in this unchanging principle.

This distant land is the very end [of the earth]; transformation cannot but come from the  
lessons of the Lord on High;  
[The king] considers the people, [keeping close] those of ability.<sup>57</sup>

The perfection of human ethics (人倫之至) at the foundation of Kija's Great Plan is to be found in the impartiality of the king.<sup>58</sup> It is this impartiality that enables him to take into consideration the people and welfare of such remotes places as Chosŏn. Yi places Chosŏn at the very edges of the world, normally a locale that would not benefit from moral transformation through scholarship. This transformation, Yi maintains, comes only from the lessons of the Lord on High (上帝). Yi takes Chosŏn and the very advent of its culture within its bounds to another genealogical track at this point. It does not come from a relationship with Qing or any other suzerain; it could only have come from the Great Plan as transmitted to Kija from the Lord on High.<sup>59</sup> In citing Kija's advice that a king should look among his people for those of ability and keep them close,<sup>60</sup> Yi suggests that Kija noticed in Chosŏn people of ability whom he kept close. This again is a special relationship and status that Chosŏn alone could claim in this conversation between the two courts.

In the final section, Yi once more wrangles the text back a submissive stance with a portrait of a Chosŏn chastened and obedient, prudent and fearful:

There are those who hear but do not act:  
The result of the deserted scholarship in daily decline.

Considering the small serving the great,  
How could we imagine a severed flow of envoys to court?<sup>61</sup>

Those who lose interest in scholarship, who let their efforts slide more and more with each passing day until they have neither the interest nor the ability to study, will find that they do not act upon what they have managed to learn and retain. Naturally, this is not the case with Chosŏn, where people are aware of their good fortune in having access to the culture and learning that Kija, resting in benevolence, has seen fit to bestow. The final line of this last couplet is a pledge of continued Chosŏn loyalty in the form of uninterrupted tributary relations. The infelicities of

the timber incident were thus no more than an anomalous annoyance not to be taken as a prelude to ending the dispatch of envoys to the Qing court. Chosŏn was not a state to hear but not act upon what it had learned.

The imagery of this final line is that of a flow interrupted, a “severed flow of envoys to court” (折流之朝宗). The last phrase 朝宗 refers on one level to envoy visits to court but can also express the flow of rivers to the sea, as though they were returning to their origin.<sup>62</sup> Here Yi signals that by their nature, rivers seek the ocean, just like Chosŏn envoys, in accordance with their nature, seek the Qing court. Yi’s invocation of rivers, their flow, and their nature serves again to associate the text with Kija’s pronouncements in the *Book of Documents* by tying the conclusion with the opening text of the Great Plan. Kija explained therein that the Lord on High had initially refused to impart the Great Plan and its Nine Divisions to humanity. In the final years of the reign of the legendary sage-emperor Yao 堯, Yao entrusted the duties of flood control to Gun 鯀, who built a system of dikes to block the flow of the surging rivers. The dikes could not withstand the onslaught of the waters and burst, wreaking devastation upon the land. Kija explained to King Wu that the Lord on High was angered by Gun’s blocking the river and thus withheld from humanity the Great Plan. Human relations accordingly fell into disarray. Gun was imprisoned while his son, the future emperor Yu 禹, was appointed in his stead. The Lord on High favored Yu and bestowed upon him the Great Plan. Yu thus understood the dynamics of the five elements, and so instead of building dikes, he oversaw the construction of a series of channels that redirected the flow of the rivers in accordance with their nature. Human relations then came to be properly ordered and eventually the emperor Shun 舜, Yao’s successor, abdicated in favor of Yu who ascended the throne as the first emperor of Xia 夏. Yi Kyohyŏn thus employs this imagery of a flow interrupted not simply to state a promise of future Chosŏn compliance but rather to cast Chosŏn loyalty as a matter of cosmic law, the transgression of which, like Gun blocking the floodwaters, would have disastrous consequences for both the human and natural worlds.<sup>63</sup>

Such was the call of the four characters of the Tongzhi Emperor’s plaque that it prompted this exposition in response. Kija/Jizi was a figure, if not a force, that removed the relationship between Qing and Chosŏn beyond the political concerns of inter-governmental relations and located it in a timeless space wherein Chosŏn was in its own right a source of culture, ethics, and

statecraft by virtue of its unique relationship with Kija. And yet, it was the moral order of Kija itself that informed Chosŏn submission to the Qing court, for it is a matter of natural order, the nature of things, that the constellations should revolve around the pole star and that lesser states should likewise revolve around the imperial court. It is not a text without tension as Yi navigated between autonomy and submission, both based upon the Chosŏn relationship with Kija. And yet, by the final couplets, Yi managed to pilot the narrative to the conclusion that there was a shared understanding of cosmic forces, ethical statecraft, moral order, and the place Chosŏn occupied within this matrix and thus in relationship to the Qing throne. In this text, the relationship with all its attending tensions was once more launched.

### **Logistical Problems and the Coarse Discourse of the Frontier**

Even as these exchanges were taking place and the transgressed relationship was restored, there was little evidence of loyalty and benevolence, trust and guidance, and the timeless action of the moral force of the cosmos so carefully illumined in tributary discourse at work among the Chosŏn and Qing laborers, lumberjacks, soldiers, and frontier officials as they toiled on the frontier to complete the timber transfer. On November 22, four days after Yu Changwan departed Hansŏng for Beijing, the Chosŏn court received word that there had been some misunderstanding in Jilin. The officer in command of the Chosŏn transport detail had returned to Chosŏn and made his report to Kim Yuyŏn, governor of Hamgyŏng Province. Kim in turn reported to the Border Defense Command that the Chosŏn contingent had received the larger timbers in the agreed-upon amount, but Qing officials refused to allow the felling of the smaller timbers slated for use as rafters and purlins. When the Chosŏn detail pointed out that the smaller timbers had not yet been cut, the Qing officers told them to come back later to fetch them in a second batch. In his report on the matter, the Chosŏn transport officer raised three issues that needed consideration before responding. First, Qing officials did not provide the Chosŏn mission with any documentation or invitation that would enable a second border crossing into Qing territory. Second, An Haeyul, the Chosŏn interpreter from Kyŏngwŏn who initially led the group into Jilin, had fled into Manchuria upon hearing of Governor Kim's investigation. It was An who apparently knew the details of the timber deal as the Chosŏn mission did not understand that the timber was to be delivered in phases. Third, even if the Chosŏn government decided to send a second mission into Jilin to fetch the smaller timbers, it was a journey of more than 500 *li*



beyond the Qing frontier into the wilderness. One trip had been difficult enough. With the onset of the Manchurian winter, a second trip was hardly desirable. Moreover, Kim Yuyŏn had already had timbers cut from the forests near Musan 茂山 on the Chosŏn side of the border,<sup>64</sup> so another journey into the woods was pointless. Rather than make another trip into Jilin for unneeded timber, Kim proposed dropping the whole affair. In place of sending dozens of men back into the wilds of Jilin, a message could be delivered to Qing officials at the opening of the next border market. This message would express gratitude for the timber with no mention of the rafters and purlins. Governor Kim apparently felt that the whole problem would simply go away if ignored. The Chosŏn throne agreed and approved the plan.<sup>65</sup>

The problem, however, did not go away. Lieutenant Nelehe, the Qing officer dispatched to oversee the transfer of timber to the Chosŏn transport detail, was waiting in vain on the banks of the Gahali River for the second Chosŏn mission. In explaining the delay of his return from the wilderness, Nelehe reported that he had overseen the transport of more than four hundred logs downriver to Chosŏn but was still waiting for the Chosŏn detail to return for the second batch of smaller timbers. He was concerned that transport was only going to get more difficult as the water levels receded with the season. The Board of Rites forwarded the report to the Zongli Yamen for its perusal on December 25.<sup>66</sup> The Zongli Yamen replied two days later and instructed the Board of Rites to first order Chosŏn to receive the timber. The grant was a matter of imperial grace specifically mandated by an edict, the Yamen explained, and thus the transaction could not simply be left incomplete. The Yamen further instructed the Board of Rites that once Chosŏn had received the final timber installment the Qing throne and the military governor of Jilin should be informed and then the case closed.<sup>67</sup>

The Board of Rites sent the command to Chosŏn on January 23. The message wended its way through the offices of the military governor of Jilin, the colonel of Hunchun, and the magistrate of Kyŏngwŏn before it finally arrived in Hansŏng on March 9, 1865, more than six weeks later.<sup>68</sup> Arriving in Hansŏng four days after that, a report from Chŏng Wanmuk, the new Kyŏngwŏn magistrate, stated that the market offices had been completely rebuilt. The report also said that the colonel of Hunchun claimed he was in receipt of an order from the Board of Rites that Chosŏn receive the rafter and purlin timbers. This was the very order that had just been received in Hansŏng. In stark contrast to the time-honored traditions of loyalty and trust

suggested by the lofty rhetoric of the tributary documents traveling between Hansǒng and Beijing, Chǒng seems to have initially suspected that the colonel of Hunchun was lying about the order from the Board of Rites, but after repeated communications from his counterpart across the river, he finally came to the conclusion that the order was real. Chǒng explained that he had already informed Hunchun that the small timbers had been harvested in Chosǒn territory and the reconstruction was complete, but because the order from the Board of Rites was backed by an imperial edict, the Chosǒn government would have to move carefully and fashion a response. The Chosǒn throne authorized Chǒng to reply and also sent a reply of its own to the Board of Rites one week later.<sup>69</sup>

Although neither the Chosǒn court nor the Kyǒngwǒn magistracy could have composed an artful refusal of a grant requested by a Chosǒn official and mandated by imperial edict, both institutions made an attempt. The reply written on behalf of King Kojong was a brief and awkward communication with a subject line that read, “We are grateful for the smaller timbers, but we will not use them.” The text again covered the most recent particulars of the case with the usual, but this time much abridged, expressions of regret, submission, and gratitude before pleading with the Board of Rites to rescind the order that a second transport detail be sent into Jilin on the grounds that the people of the Tumen border region were so severely impoverished that they could not bear another mobilization.<sup>70</sup> Although the Chosǒn court was in effect asking for permission to disregard an order from the Board of Rites and reject imperial grace as manifest in the timber grant, the request was still formulated within the parameters of tributary discourse by suggesting that Qing consideration of the travails of Chosǒn subjects of the frontier region would in itself be a form of imperial compassion for a lesser state and its people.

Magistrate Chǒng, however, did not have room for such maneuvers. While the Chosǒn court was deciding what to do about the command from the Board of Rites, Chǒng initially declined to respond to communications from Hunchun. When the colonel of Hunchun pressed him for an explanation, he said that it was not within his purview as a local official to open letters bound for Hansǒng, so he had no detailed knowledge of the case. Frightened by the banishment of his predecessor Sin Myǒnghŭi to Chǒlla Province,<sup>71</sup> Chǒng did not wish to take any step in the case not specifically authorized by royal command. As evidenced, however, by his recommendations to the Hamgyǒng governor and to the Chosǒn court on how respond in this

matter, Chǒng had indeed read the communications, but the colonel of Hunchun appears to have believed the tale and took it as evidence of chastened Chosŏn bureaucracy.<sup>72</sup>

Having finally received royal approval, Chǒng sent his refusal to Hunchun on April 17, 1865. Though fully aware of the importance of a well-written response, Chǒng could not tap the epistolary talent available to the court in Hansŏng. The result, as evidenced by the following two excerpts, was a far blunter document:

Now the market offices have been rebuilt. We cut the small timbers near the construction site. We have received your message asking if we are going to use [your] timbers and we reply now that we will not...

Having experienced extraordinary grace, we are emotionally overcome and fearful. We will not be using any of the small timbers stored at your offices.<sup>73</sup>

The message is undoubtedly to the point, but it is nearly devoid of the tributary discourse brimming with classical allusion and invocation of timeless submission that characterized the *saŭn p'yo* coming out of Hansŏng. When Chǒng does employ the stock phrase “we are emotionally overcome...” it not only seems out of place, it is utterly nullified by the following sentence; he could not have been so emotionally overwhelmed by extraordinary imperial grace if he was so easily able to refuse an imperial gift. Despite its coarseness, the message was forwarded on to Beijing. Having received the communications from Hansŏng and Kyŏngwŏn, the Board of Rites obtained imperial approval to allow the Jilin government to keep the abandoned timbers and then finally declared the case closed on June 11, 1865, more than one year after Sin Myŏnghŭi first sent his runners across the Tumen River.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

The gulf between the discourse of tribute and the operations of the relationship it purports to describe present a problem. One may take it as a literal belief system in which the Qing and Chosŏn governments understand themselves and their relationship in a direct and almost tactile relationship with the sagely exemplars of antiquity such that all their thoughts and actions are molded and propelled by the ancients. The particulars of this timber case quickly reveal that the improvisational expedients of the frontier and the documentary slights of hand in Sin Myŏnghŭi's offices could not be any more distant from the regular submission of bound reeds in

tribute. The expressions of gratitude for imperial grace produced in the midst of the timber incident are intertextual choreographies, and as such we cannot coerce them into a congress with more easily digestible empirical realities; their only fleeting contacts with the material are to appropriate it into the realm of the intertextual, to integrate it as another thread in the tight weave of allusion and citation.

We may, then, understand tributary discourse as a system of reference in search of referents, but such a conclusion does not address the importance of this discourse. Despite the deeply conventional nature of these documents, the discourse mattered. Among the very first steps the court took were to compose texts in which the throne acknowledged the transgression and then, through the deployment of the tropes of tributary discourse, to restore the relationship. Indeed, from the perspective of the Chosŏn court, the text itself modulates the seriousness of the violations and missteps. Here the text does not describe a condition external to the text; it is the text and its production that are the condition. The text produces a space in which the states interact, the places from which the states interact, and, by so doing, creates and defines the interaction. It is of less interest to ask these texts to speak *about* the Chosŏn-Qing relationship, for their production *is* the relationship. Once the central governments intervened, the machinations of their local officials and their myriad shortcuts gone awry—however remote they may have been from Chejam, Kija, and the Great Plan—became suspended in the discursive matrix wrought with tributary documents. In approaching these materials, then, the central question is less a matter of what they are *about* and more urgently about how and what they *do*.

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## Notes

- 1 The earliest critiques come from essays within Fairbank's volume: (Fletcher 1968, 206–224; Wills 1968, 225–256); Mancall 1968, 63); Schwartz 1968, 287–288). For more recent critical engagements, see Hevia (1995), Van Lieu (2009; 2014; 2017); Callahan (2012); Perdue (2015); S. Kim (2017); Howell (2017); Park (2017); Spruyt (2017); Krishna (2017).

- 2 Here I take the work of J. L. Austin from its original linguistic context in which a performative is specifically a speech act and extend it to the textual practices of tributary discourse. See Austin (1962, 4–6).
- 3 Kuksa P’yŏnch’an Wiwŏnhoe (1978a [hereafter, *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi*], *tongch’i* 3.3.13). Although the sources do not mention the date of the fire, word of the conclusion of that year’s market was received in Hansŏng on April 18, 1864, around the time of Sin’s arrival in Kyŏngwŏn. Since Sin sent his messengers to Hunchun on June 4, the fire must have occurred sometime during the last two weeks of April or very early June at the latest.
- 4 Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo (1972 [hereafter, *Guanxi shiliao*], 2:5, document 2).
- 5 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:5, document 2); Kuksa P’yŏnch’an Wiwŏnhoe (1978b [hereafter, *Tongmun hwigo*], *wŏnp’yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:33b–34b).
- 6 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:5, document 2).
- 7 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:1, document 1).
- 8 *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi* (*tongch’i* 3.8.10); Sŏul Taehakkyo Kojŏn Kanhaenghoe (1966 [hereafter, *Ilŏngnok*], *tongch’i* 3.8.10); *Tongmun hwigo* (*wŏnp’yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:34b–35b, 35b–36a); Kim Chinam (2006 [hereafter, *Tongmun’gwan chi*], 11:68b–69a); Kuksa P’yŏnch’an Wiwŏnhoe (1970 [hereafter, *Kojong sillok*], 1:71a).
- 9 At this point King Kojong was a child. Queen Dowager Cho and his father, the Taewŏn’gun, ruled jointly in his stead. Because the king had not yet reached majority, I use the term “throne” rather than king.
- 10 Chŏng Wanmuk 鄭完默 was appointed to replace Sin as Kyŏngwŏn magistrate later that day. On the following day, with his predecessor already under arrest and facing the possible end of his career, if not his life, Chŏng set out from Hansŏng to assume his post. See *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi* (*tongch’i* 3.8.10, 11) and *Ilŏngnok* (*tongch’i* 3.8.10).
- 11 *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi* (*tongch’i* 3.8.19); *Ilŏngnok* (*tongch’i* 3.8.19). The Board of Rites forwarded the reply to the Zongli Yamen on November 23 with no indication of when the document arrived from Chosŏn. See *Guanxi shiliao* 2:5, document 2.
- 12 Many of the routine documents submitted by the mission led by Principal Envoy Yu Changhwan in 1864–1865 were not even copied into the *Tongmun hwigo*. The reader is instead directed to the records of earlier missions where documents of the same type and format were first submitted. See *Tongmun hwigo* (*wŏnp’yŏn sok, chŏlsa* 10:45a–46b).
- 13 For the development of tributary document formats and records during the eighteenth century, see Kim Kyŏngnok (2005a; 2005b; 2006).
- 14 The following summary of the template is drawn from *Tongmun’gwan chi* (3:14a, 17a–17b).
- 15 An especially common phrase included in the template is “All subjects throughout the country are overcome with emotion.” See *Tongmun’gwan chi* (3:17a).
- 16 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:5, document 2).
- 17 See Tan’guk Taehakkyo Tongyang Yŏn’guso (1997, 2:1134). In his dictionary of Korean bureaucratic institutions and officials, O Hŭibok maintains that the term “Chosŏn Head of State Affairs” refers to a crown prince temporarily granted authority to preside over state affairs, but in the autumn of 1864 Kojong had already been enthroned. Moreover, the term is replaced by “king” (王) in Qing documents after the Qing patent of investiture

- was delivered to Hansǒng, further suggesting that the term indicates the provisional status of the Chosǒn king pending Qing investiture (see O Hūibok 1999, 62).
- 18 This is the source of the narrative above concerning Sin's letters to Hunchun, Qing deliberations, and the decision to grant the timber. See *Guanxi shiliao* (2:5–6, document 2).
- 19 Kojong did not write the letter personally, but here I adhere to the conventions of the letter and identify the comments as his own. It is interesting to note that this is a letter purportedly written by a twelve-year-old king for the perusal of an eight-year-old emperor. In reality, neither had any say in this matter.
- 20 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:6–7, document 2).
- 21 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:7–8, document 2).
- 22 For the full text of Kim's report, see *Sǔngjǒngwǒn ilgi* (*tongch'i* 3.9.13); *Ilǒngnok* (*tongch'i* 3.9.13); *Kojong sillok* (1:77b). *Sǔngjǒngwǒn ilgi* indicates that Kim's report was presented by the Border Defense Command, but *Ilǒngnok* indicates that it was presented by the State Tribunal.
- 23 Seonmin Kim (2017, 39–46, 77–78, 88–97, 138–140) has shown that the Chosǒn-Qing border was at best a porous boundary for the entirety of the history of the two states.
- 24 *Guanxi shiliao* (1:5, document 2).
- 25 Kim wrote, "There is no attempt to stop or limit the abundance of violations of the border by both their people and ours." Kim also commented, "This single case reflects the remaining three corners" (推此一事可反三隅), meaning that the Sin incident was but one case that came to light out of numerous systemic violations of frontier protocol that remained hidden. See *Sǔngjǒngwǒn ilgi* (*tongch'i* 3.9.13); *Ilǒngnok* (*tongch'i* 3.9.13; *KS* 1:77b).
- 26 *Sǔngjǒngwǒn ilgi* (*tongch'i* 3.7.23, 8.21, 9.27, 10.20); *Ilǒngnok* (*tongch'i* 3.9.27); *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yǒn sok, chǒlsa* 10:48a–49a, *pop'yǒn sahaengnok* 83a). This passage is to be found in facsimile form in Sǒnggyun'gwan Taehakkyo (1962, 2:1324) and *Tongmun'gwan chi* (11:69b).
- 27 For a summary of the typical activities of Chosǒn envoys in Beijing, see Chun (1968, 98).
- 28 For a sampling of Pak's official appointments in 1864–1865, see *Sǔngjǒngwǒn ilgi* (*tongch'i* 3.1.1, 3.2, 5.25, 6.7, 6.15, 7.9, 7.28, 7.29, 7.30, 8.1, 9.15, 9.16, 9.21; *tongch'i* 4.3.8, 6.10).
- 29 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yǒn sok sǒngnae* 5:36a–37b).
- 30 In the annotation to his translation of *Mencius*, James Legge remarks that Zhu Xi identified autumn as the optimum time for felling trees when the summer growing season had come to an end, but Legge points out that *Rites of Zhou* contains a variety of regulations for harvesting timber depending on both the season and the location of the stand (Legge 2001, "The Works of Mencius," 130–131).
- 31 See Tan'guk Taehakkyo Tongyang Yǒn'guso (1997, 4:967) and Morohashi (1989–1990, 6:191).
- 32 Ban (1998, *juan* 28 *xia, zhi* 8 *xia, dilizhi xia*); Fan (1998, *juan* 85, *liechuan* 75, *tongyi*).
- 33 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yǒn sok, chǒlsa* 10:48a–48b).
- 34 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yǒn sok, chǒlsa* 10:48a–48b).
- 35 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yǒn sok, sǒngnae* 5:41b); *T'ongmun'gwan chi* (11:69b).

- 36 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:43b).
- 37 論語, 微子. See Min (1965, 413a). For a critical reassessment of the Kija/Jizi legends, see Shim (2002). See also 書經, 周書, 洪範, in Sŏng (2001, 2:51–52).
- 38 For perceptions of Kija in Koryŏ and Chosŏn, see Pak (1980), YW Han (1985), Van Lieu (2007; 2014), and S. Wang (2015).
- 39 For the progression from Kija Chosŏn as state peripheral to the dynamics of Korean history to the source of Chosŏn legitimacy, see Sŏ Kŏjŏng (1974, *oegi, Kija Chosŏn*); Han C (1974, *kwŏn* 1, *segi* 1, *tongi ch'onggi; kwŏn* 2, *segi* 2, *Kija Chosŏn*), and An (1970, *pŏmye, kwŏn* 1 *sang, Chosŏn, Tongsa kangmok to, sang, Tongguk yŏktae chŏnsu chi to*).
- 40 For the complete text, see *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:43a–44a).
- 41 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:43a).
- 42 論語, 爲政. See Min (1965, 75a).
- 43 詩經, 小雅, 南有嘉魚之什, 彤弓, “彤弓昭兮受言藏之我有嘉賓中心貺之.” See Sŏng (1993, 1:400). See also Li (1998, 2:624–626).
- 44 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:43b).
- 45 中庸, 27.3, “今天下車同軌書同文行同倫.” See Min (1965, 825a). Min identifies this passage as chapter 27, verse 3, but Chang Kigŭn identifies it as chapter 28 (see Chang 2005, 594). The Chinese Text Project identifies it as chapter 29 (see <https://ctext.org/liji/zhong-yong>).
- 46 書經, 周書, 洪範. See Sŏng (2001, 2:52–55).
- 47 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:43b).
- 48 春秋左氏傳, 僖公四年, “爾貢包茅不入王祭不供無以縮酒.” See Mun (2009, 1:337–339).
- 49 The author wishes to thank Zhijun Ren for his insights on Chosŏn concerns about Qing invasion.
- 50 說苑, 辨物篇, 成王時有三苗貫桑而生, “道路悠遠山川阻深恐一使之不通故重三譯而來朝也.” See Yu (2013, 5:2129–2131).
- 51 漢書, 地理志下; 後漢書, 東夷列傳.
- 52 Minjung Sŏrim P'yŏnjipguk (2014, 2199)
- 53 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:43b–44a).
- 54 禮記, 緇衣, “子曰王言如絲其出如綸王言如綸其出如紼.” See Kim Y. (1986, 2:353).
- 55 詩經, 頌, 周頌, 清廟之什, 思文, “無此疆爾界陳常于時夏.” See Yi (2016, 694).
- 56 禮記, 大學, “為人君止於仁 為人臣止於敬 為人子止於孝 為人父止於慈 與國人交止於信.”
- 57 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:44a).
- 58 書經, 周書, 洪範, “無偏無黨, 王道蕩蕩. 無黨無偏, 王道平平.” See Yi (2015, 404).
- 59 書經, 周書, 洪範, “曰皇極之敷言是彝是訓于帝其訓.” See Yi (2015, 405).
- 60 書經, 周書, 洪範, “凡厥民有猷有爲有守汝則念之.” See Yi (2015, 401).
- 61 *Tongmun hwigo* (*wǒnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae* 5:44a).
- 62 Minjung Sŏrim P'yŏnjipguk (2014, 971).
- 63 書經, 周書, 洪範. See Sŏng (2001, 2:53).
- 64 *Sŏngjŏngwŏn ilgi* (*tongch'i* 3.9.13); *Ilŏngnok* (*tongch'i* 3.9.13).

- 65 *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi (tongch'i 3.10.22); Ilsŏngnok (tongch'i 3.10.22).*
- 66 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:16, document 6). It seems unusual for the Zongli Yamen to have been involved at all in Chosŏn relations at this time. This is the only instance of the Yamen's involvement in this case. It was not until the early 1880s that Li Hongzhang, in his capacity as the Commissioner for Northern Ports, became officially in charge of Chosŏn policy, so it is puzzling to see the Yamen's involvement this early. For an account of the institutional changes in Qing Chosŏn policy in the early 1880s, see Van Lieu (2010, chap. 3).
- 67 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:17, document 7; 2:18, document 8).
- 68 *Tongmun hwigo (wŏnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae 5:38a–39a); Guanxi shiliao* (2:18, document 8).
- 69 *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi (tongch'i 4.2.16); Ilsŏngnok (tongch'i 4.2.16); Tongmun hwigo (wŏnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae 5:38a–39a).*
- 70 *Tongmun hwigo (wŏnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae 5:38a–39a).* The refusal was sent again some weeks later when the Chosŏn court received yet another command to receive the timber, this time from the Shenyang Board of Rites. It appears that the military governor of Jilin and the Beijing Board of Rites did not always keep Shenyang informed of the developments of the case. See *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi (tongch'i 4.4.28); Ilsŏngnok (tongch'i 4.4.28); Tongmun hwigo (wŏnp'yŏn sok, sŏngnae 5:39a–40b).*
- 71 For the development and conclusion of Sin's case, see *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi (tongch'i 3.10.20, 21, 23, 24); Ilsŏngnok (tongch'i 3.10.20, 21, 24); Kojong sillok* (1:83b).
- 72 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:19, document 9).
- 73 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:20, document 10).
- 74 *Guanxi shiliao* (2:21–22, documents 11, 12).

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