Journal of East Asian Studies 13 (2013), 337–360

Organizing Japanese and Jurchens in Tribute Systems in Early Chosŏn Korea

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In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Chosŏn Korea government designed and utilized hierarchical tribute systems for managing interactions, in particular, trade, with Japanese and Jurchen elites. Korean officials separated maritime and overland contacts, divided the contacts further into carefully delineated reception grades and diplomatic statuses, and designed detailed procedures for interaction. More specifically, diplomatic status determined the regulations by which the court provided reception and then trade to a contact. **KEYWORDS:** tribute system, reception grades, trade, piracy, diplomatic status, Board of Rites, nominal military posts

THE CHOSŎN KOREA GOVERNMENT ENGAGED IN REPEATED INTERACTION with Japanese and Jurchen elites, upon whom the king of Chosŏn had bestowed recognition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Officials organized these maritime and overland contacts into separate interaction hierarchies. These two tribute systems, or the "bureaucratic systematization of the management" of interaction (Wills 1988, 226–227), resembled Ming China government structures in the hierarchical ordering of interaction and other regulations.

To encourage, achieve, and maintain peace and security in the maritime southeast and the peninsular northeast border areas, the Chosŏn government needed to manage interaction and the trade that accompanied contact. The maritime and overland tribute systems differed in context and in organization, however. Jurchens could trade in the Korean capital only after receiving a nominal military post appointment (K. *sujik*) from the king of Chosŏn. Japanese, on the other hand, traded through a variety of procedures, including royal patents of identification, but such bestowals were not a requirement for contact and trade.

The court's organization of these southeastern and northeastern contacts followed power, administrative, or social hierarchies in their respective societies. Foreign state supervision did not contribute to the Chosŏn court's management of overland or maritime interaction (with the exception of a regulation for Japanese interaction in an uncommon context that will not be discussed here). The hierarchical ordering of Japanese contacts generally followed administrative status in that country. Significantly, however, the central government in Kyoto, the Muromachi bakufu, could not manage departure for or return from Chosŏn. Tributary relationships were established and tribute trade was conducted beyond its oversight.

Jurchens residing in the peninsular northeast and north of the Tumen (K. Tuman) River did not coalesce into one or more large communities, thus there was no centralized Jurchen government with which the Chosŏn government conducted business. Rather, the leader of each individual Jurchen community appears to have overseen participation in the missions sent to the Korean monarch. The weakness of the Muromachi bakufu in the Japanese provinces and the presence of separate Jurchen communities in the peninsular northeast underlined the importance of institutionalizing the management of interaction.

Constructing Korean Tribute Systems

The Chosŏn government organized Japanese and Jurchens contacts in respective hierarchical orders. Having achieved a stable tributary relationship with Ming China in 1402 after the death of its previous emperor, who passed away soon after recognizing King T'aejong, and with investiture by the new emperor Yongle, the Chosŏn court set its monarch's relations with the king of Japan (K. *Ilbon kugwang*), that is, the shogun, who had received investiture from the emperor of Ming China. This meant that the Korean monarch interacted with the retired shogun at times and with the shogun at times. The preceding Koryŏ government and the new Chosŏn government understood that power was found in the Ashikaga line of shoguns and not in the emperor (J. *tennō*) of Japan.

All having received investiture from the emperor of Ming China, the king of Chosŏn interacted with the "king of Japan," as the retired shogun or the shogun was recognized, and the king of Ryukyu, which was the island kingdom south of Japan, as equals in terms of diplomatic status within the Ming government's tribute system (Robinson

2000). The Chosŏn government began constructing a tribute system for overland (Jurchen) contacts and for maritime (Japanese and, later, Ryukyuan) contacts in the 1420s.[1] The court often composed regulations and guest rituals that it modeled after Chinese practices, and officials also reframed and adapted Chinese practices to meet immediate local problems. In particular, dealing with maritime piracy in the south and equestrian raids in the northeast helped to determine the size of the navy and of the army (Nakamura 1966, 102).[2] The tribute systems covered military limitations by utilizing trade to encourage peaceful interaction. The court organized access, trade, and other facets of interaction through regulations that carefully differentiated among Japanese contacts and among Jurchen contacts, and set them in respective but differing hierarchies with the king of Chosŏn and among themselves.

As a maritime trade mission traveled from Japan to Chosŏn, the Japanese contact and his representative would navigate Korean regulations that, when fulfilled properly, enabled reception in Kyŏngsang Province. From there, participation in banquets and other state-sponsored events furthered the impression of Chosŏn's royal authority and power upon the interaction. James L. Hevia has described the tribute system as a discourse of power expressed through ritual. He expands upon Catherine Bell's (1992) view that ritual activities are "themselves the very production and negotiation of power relations." In composing and enforcing regulations and rites, the Chosŏn court constructed oppositions that both differentiated and integrated participants. Bell suggests further that "ritualization as a strategic mode of practice produces nuanced relations of power, relationships characterized by acceptance and resistance, negotiated appropriation, and redemptive reinterpretations of the hegemonic order" (1992, 196). This historicization of ritual underpins Hevia's (1995, 20–25) reiteration that "older ritual forms might be appropriated to say or do new things—or might themselves be open to revision." The Chosŏn court adapted ritual forms in managing multiple layers of diplomatic inequality between king and contacts.

Bell and Hevia also emphasize the importance of bodily movement and vocalization in ritual. Seating or standing arrangements, movement through space, and sound were all important in displaying power relationships. In addition, a diplomatic rite could be a "visual feast of color" where material objects such as clothing, furniture, and banners also bespoke hierarchical relationships (Hevia 1996, 475). There the ruler bestowed gifts, "concrete manifestations of moral

practice" (Hevia 1995, 130), upon the contact as represented by his envoy.

The explanations and analyses of Bell and Hevia are valuable for examining the Chosŏn court's systematization of interaction with maritime and overland contacts. Korean officials borrowed from Chinese ritual practices, and introduced or altered rites as circumstances changed. When examined from the bottom up, as urged by Bell, attention to contacts helps to explicate patterns of Japanese and Jurchen actions in the Korean tribute systems.

Maritime Contacts

The Chosŏn court divided maritime contacts into diplomatic statuses and assigned each diplomatic status to a reception grade. There were four reception grades in total. In the first reception grade the Chosŏn court placed the king of Japan and the king of Ryukyu. Korean guest rituals positioned other maritime contacts in hierarchical relationships below the king of Chosŏn. That is, the court distinguished central government officials, provincial governors, local officials, merchants, and other contacts from the king of Japan or the king of Ryukyu, and thus also from the king of Chosŏn. Procedures differed by reception grade and often also by diplomatic status, especially within the fourth reception grade. The court linked Japanese contacts to officials in the Board of Rites (K. *Yejo*), the Chosŏn government office that managed the details of foreign relations, by assigning status equivalencies. Such maneuvers organized the relationships with the king of Chosŏn along hierarchies that reflected government position, political status, social roles, and other signs of recognized significance in Japan. In this way, the court institutionalized differentiation among tribute contacts.

The Chosŏn government did not consider reception at the open port or audience with the monarch in the capital as automatic royal bestowals. The procedures that guided Japanese contacts into a designated open port in Kyŏngsang Province also governed the bestowal of reception. These regulations, or the access control policy, covered movement in Japan and in Chosŏn, identification documents, reception, exchange routes between the Korean ports and the capital, and other aspects of the interaction. In the capital, upon acceptable compliance with regulations and performance of guest ritual, the king bestowed opportunities for tribute trade and supplementary trade, or court-supervised trade with merchants.

Systematized interaction also had educational functions. Rehearsal and repetition of ritual instructed participants in what Korean officials considered proper or acceptable behavior (Hevia 1995, 131; *Sŏngjong sillok*, 202: 8a–b [1487.4.15]).[3] The court reiterated power relationships through state banquets in the provinces as well as in the capital. Guest ritual helped the Chosŏn court attach symbols to and legitimate a Korea-centric order (see Esherick 1998, 149).

Contacts and their representatives may not always have accepted the role of diplomatic rites in affirming hierarchies. The repetition of regulations and ritual offered astute participants other lessons, however. Japanese and Jurchens learned how to manipulate the management of access, ritual, and trade. They likely rather moved through the procedures for official, personal, familial, corporate, or other purposes.

The spectrum of participation in ritual—domination, consent, and resistance—also animated the actions and thoughts of participants in these encounters. However, a harmony of thought and feelings did not necessarily accompany the physical act of bowing before the king of Chosŏn or Korean officials. Japanese and Jurchens executed "negotiated appropriation(s)" of guest ritual. For example, in 1470, the imposter Muromachi bakufu official Hatakeyama Yoshikatsu stated in his letter (J. *shokei*; K. *sŏgye*) to the Board of Rites, "I prostrate touching my head to the floor 100 times" (J. *tonshu hyakubai*) (Bell 1992, 207–208; Robinson 2010, 30–33; *Sŏngjong sillok*, 6: 29a [1470.7.19]). Even with Japanese and Jurchen abuse through the introduction of imposter identities for trade, the tribute system benefited the Chosŏn court in promoting and sustaining peaceful relations.[4] To emphasize, the court enlisted the tribute systems for important roles in military defense.

Japanese envoys representing contacts in hierarchical relationships with the king of Chosŏn performed bodily and vocalic acts of hierarchy and obeisance in the name of the contact. Jurchens and Japanese upon whom monarchs had bestowed nominal Korean military posts were permitted to travel to the capital and to the king no more than one time each year. They observed hierarchy and performed obeisance in person. Through two venues—the tribute system relationship with the contact and the tribute system relationship formed through the appointment without duties to a Korean military post—the Chosŏn court organized power relationships that flowed down from the king.

Ordering Japanese Contacts for Diplomacy and Trade

As explained above, the Chosŏn court separated maritime contacts into four reception grades. This four-tier hierarchy was the core of the systematization of interaction with the Japanese. The king of Chosŏn treated them according to a finely calibrated complex of regulations that emphasized hierarchical engagement, with the exception of foreign rulers. The earliest known hierarchy of these contacts, which was outlined in 1449, divided Japanese into three groups: the king of Japan, the Ōuchi family, and other Japanese (*Sejong sillok*, 124: 19a [1449.6.14]). By early 1472, the court had added a fourth reception grade (*Haedong chegukki*, 111b–112a; *Sejong sillok*, 124: 19a [1449.6.14]; *Sejong sillok*, 52: 23a–b [1431.5.20]). Trade volume also differed per reception grade and among diplomatic statuses.

The four reception grades distinguished maritime contacts by their administrative status, their administrative proximity to the king of Japan, their social roles, their importance in controlling piracy and trade, and other aspects of identity and interaction. The reception grades in early 1472 were as follows:

1. The king of Japan and the king of Ryukyu (K. *kugwang*)
2. Hatakeyama, Hosokawa, Shiba, Kyōgoku, Yamana, Ōuchi, and Shōni families[5]
3. The Kyushu deputy and the governor of Tsushima when represented by his special envoy (K. *t'ŭksong*; J. *tokusō*)
4. Other Japanese, Tsushima islanders, Iki islanders, and military post recipients (K. *sujigin*) (*Haedong chegukki*, 111b–112a)

The first reception grade linked the kings of Chosŏn, Japan, and Ryukyu within the Ming government's tribute system toward states, which constituted them as status equals, as "kings" of their respective countries. However, Korean officials knew from the 1360s that the shogun rather than the emperor—that is, the emperor of the Northern Court (who was supported by the shogun) and the emperor of the Southern Court (whose support among samurai was limited)—was the Japanese leader with whom their monarch should treat. Moreover, Korean and Ryukyuan rulers continued to engage in relations with the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimochi after he withdrew from the Ming tribute system following the death of his father Yoshimitsu, the retired shogun, in 1408 (Takahashi 1982a, 72–73). The second reception grade included central government officials and provincial

governors. The former were powerful officials holding high-ranking posts in the Muromachi bakufu. The latter were the Ōuchi and the Shōni, who held provinces in western Honshu and northern Kyushu, respectively.

Differences in the court's treatment of contacts were sharpest at the divide between the first and second reception grades and the third and fourth reception grades. The third reception grade included two types of contacts. The Kyushu deputy (J. *Kyūshū tandai*), a regional official appointed to oversee the island of Kyushu for the Muromachi bakufu (though this post had become all but powerless by the late 1420s), engaged in trade. The special envoy of the governor of Tsushima represented the governor in discussions related to Japanese interaction with court officials.

The governor of Tsushima's tribute trade ships were received at the fourth reception grade, which included other Japanese contacts, such as provincial governors, local officials, Buddhist monks, Shinto priests, merchants, and erstwhile pirates and their descendants. The king of Chosŏn issued to many of these contacts a personal seal (K. *tosŏ*). The foreign recipient affixed this official patent of identification to the letter of introduction, which he addressed to a Korean government official. These personal seals, too, functioned to set the Japanese recipients within the Chosŏn court's tribute system, which the court linked to the king of Chosŏn's participation in Ming China's tribute system (Kimura 2004). The court also placed in this lowest grade the Japanese upon whom the Korean king had bestowed nominal military post appointments.

As noted above, Korean officials separated maritime contacts assigned to the fourth reception grade into diplomatic statuses. The patent of identification bestowed by the Korean court separated personal seal recipients and nominal military post appointment recipients. The former included provincial governors and other elites. The latter were merchants, descendants of pirates, and other individuals distant from a Muromachi bakufu appointment to a government position. The Chosŏn court issued them an office warrant (K. *koshin*), or a state document that identified the nominal assignment and its recipient. Other distinctions accompanied this form of interaction. Most important, military post recipients were required to visit the capital and, wearing the official Korean government clothing provided at appointment, personally bow before the king of Chosŏn to be able to conduct trade. The office warrant and this clothing embedded the contact in an identity of status inferiority outside of his home society.

The contacts in the second, third, and fourth reception grades did not address their letters to the king of Chosŏn. Only the kings of Japan and Ryukyu, as diplomatic status equals of the Korean monarch within the Ming tribute system, did so. In another oppositional category between the Chosŏn government and Japanese contacts, one noted briefly above, the Korean government assigned Japanese contacts to communication relationships with Board of Rites officials (Takahashi 1982a, 75, 83; 1982b, 75). The court thus separated these Japanese in protocol and in guest ritual from the king of Chosŏn, and made interaction with the monarch contingent in yet another way upon the acceptance of Korean regulations and the appropriate performance of regulations and rituals. The status equivalencies and the address of letters to Board of Rites officials were a further means by which the Chosŏn government sought to obscure interaction with Japanese, other than the king of Japan, from the Ming government.

The pairings also displayed the court's knowledge of administrative hierarchy and political power in the islands in the fifteenth century. The Ōuchi, the Shimazu (a powerful family that held three provinces in southern Kyushu), and the Kyushu deputy exchanged communications with the highest official in the Board of Rites, the minister (K. *Yejo P'ansŏ*, senior second grade), during the first lunar month of 1423, when the division of Japanese contacts into three pairings with Board of Rites officials took place (*Sejong sillok* 1: 10b [1418.8.21]; *Sejong sillok* 19: 3b [1423.1.12]; *Sejong sillok* 19: 4a [1423.1.12]; *Sejong sillok* 19: 10a–b [1423.1.28]). Another record of pairings is known from the eighth lunar month of 1459. The assignments recorded at this time were as follows (*Sejo sillok* 17: 15b–18a [1459.8.23]):

- Minister: Ōuchi, Hatakeyama, Shiba
- Hosokawa, Kyōgoku
- Second Minister (*Ch'amp'an*, Jr. 2): Inō, Ōtomo
- Third Minister (*Ch'amŭi*, Sr. 3): Governor of Tsushima
- Section Chief (*Chŏngnang*, Sr. 5): Shisa, Sashi[6]

The first three pairings linked these Japanese contacts with Board of Rites officials holding posts of the highest status, that of *tangsanggwan* rank, or from the senior first grade to the senior third grade. That the governor of Tsushima was included bespeaks his importance to the Chosŏn court at this time. The second, third, and fourth equivalencies each set Japanese contacts further from the king of Chosŏn. The Board of Rites officials affixed their personal seals, not their

government seals, to their communications addressed to Japanese, but this did not reduce the viability of those documents as conveyances of official information (Takahashi 1982b, 78; Osa 1987, 279; *Sejong sillok*, 51: 4b–5a [1431.1.11]). Court officials preferred this usage of seals in part because Japanese affixed their own, personal seals to the document that initiated the response from the Korean court (*Sejong sillok* 51: 4b–5a [1431.1.11]).

Through these and other regulations the Chosŏn court also separated the king of Japan from other Japanese contacts. The king of Japan could communicate directly with the king of Chosŏn through the state letter, and his envoy received treatment while traveling between the port and the Korean capital that was not provided to the contacts in the other three reception grades. The Chosŏn court distinguished diplomatic status equality and hierarchies through guest ritual and other institutionalized expressions of interaction.

The ordering of banquets held along the routes to and from the capital shows these distinctions clearly. Focusing here on the lesser three reception grades, "powerful officials" (K. *kŏch'u*) were to attend two banquets in Kyŏngsang Province, which was the only province where Japanese ships could enter Chosŏn. All other contacts would attend one banquet in this province. The hosts of the banquets are not specified in all instances, but only powerful officials would be hosted by the provincial governor at one of the two banquets for them. The county magistrate overseeing the specific port of entry was to host all other banquets there.

Proceeding northward through space to the capital and through ritual up to the king of Chosŏn, the powerful officials received banquets in the two other provinces through which the retinues traveled, Ch'ungch'ŏng and Kyŏnggi. The Kyushu deputy, provincial governors, and other elites also were feted in Ch'ungch'ŏng Province. However, the court did not provide Tsushima islanders banquets in a province beyond Kyŏngsang and did not provide Iki islanders banquets in any province (*Haedong chegukki*, 115a–b). These distinctions for the two groups of islanders may reflect punishment for the participation of Tsushima and Iki islanders in the piracy that struck Korean coastal areas from 1350 into the early 1420s. Or these distinctions may rather suggest the court's view of the hierarchy of power among Japanese contacts. Distinctions among contacts extended to the physical placement of the Korean hosts of banquets in the provinces, the contents of meals, and utensils (*Haedong chegukki*, 115a–b, 122b–123a). The court utilized reception status, bodies, sustenance, and inanimate objects such as seats to distinguish

between royal subjects who were Korean, foreign nominal military post recipients, and other foreigners.

Limiting Tribute System Trade by Japanese

The Korean government set restrictions on trade through reception grades and diplomatic statuses. These limits underscored the court's recognition of political status in Japan and distance from the king of Chosŏn in the ordering of Japanese contacts. The closer the contact was to the king of Japan, and thus to the king of Chosŏn, the greater the quantity of goods he could send to the peninsula.

Tribute system trade for Japanese occurred in two locations: the port of entry and the capital. Details of how the Korean government supervised trade at the port and at the court in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries do not present a clear image of exchange, thus hindering discussion. However, *Haedong chegukki* (Records of Countries across the Seas to the East), a government report presented to King Sŏngjong (r. 1469–1494) by early 1472, shows the linkage of trade to status in the maritime tribute system. Contacts in the second reception grade could send two ships at each trade mission, but each year individuals placed in the fourth reception grade could send only the number of ships, typically one or two, bestowed by the monarch. On the other hand, the king of Chosŏn's diplomatic status equal in Japan could send three ships at each dispatch of an embassy. The number of ships impacted the quantity of goods that could be carried into Chosŏn at each visit.

Similarly, the court restricted the number of attendants who could accompany the envoy as he traveled from the port of entry to the capital. A total of twenty-five people traveled for the king of Japan, fifteen for powerful officials. For contacts at the third and fourth reception grades, though, no more than five, three, and two people could travel for the Kyushu deputy, contacts at the fourth reception grade, and the governor of Tsushima, respectively. However, contacts in these latter three categories could only add attendants up to the totals above by transporting additional trade goods northward (*Haedong chegukki*, 111a–b, 114a). Adding weight for travel to the capital likely enabled more trade at the supplementary trade meeting, which followed the presentation of tribute gifts to the monarch overseen by court officials. Through supplementary trade Japanese could acquire items, such as silk, that were of higher quality than those available at a port of entry. This was possible because

the court made items sent from the provinces as tribute tax available for exchange.

The Chosŏn court proscribed Japanese engagement in tribute relations with the king of Chosŏn according to hierarchies based upon administrative position in the Japanese government, local status, and recent histories of interaction. Those hierarchies were fluid for some time in the fifteenth century, but were fixed before or through the compilation of *Haedong chegukki*. Setting Jurchen elites into hierarchies before the king of Chosŏn was less complicated.

Ordering Jurchens in Korean Hierarchies

Toward the northeast, the Chosŏn government began constructing procedures from the 1420s that would bring Jurchen elites before the monarch for interaction, including exchange. Similar to Japan, the court directed Jurchens physically down to Hansŏng and up through ritual to the king of Chosŏn. Compared to what the climate and terrain of the peninsular northeast and sanctioned trade there could make available, valuable trade awaited Jurchens in the Korean capital. The preference to sustain peaceful, predictable contact through trade rather than to deter raids through constant military readiness or cultural conversion informed the court's decision to bring Jurchens to the capital. Not incidentally, this structure created opportunities for the Chosŏn court to frequently collect information from Jurchen elites.

During the reign of King Sejong (r. 1418–1450), the court began issuing to Jurchen elites nominal appointments to Korean military positions. This bestowal, presented in part through the office warrant, did not impose military service upon the recipient. Rather, it placed him in a hierarchy of diplomatic and contact status with other Jurchens based upon the Chosŏn government's evaluation of the importance or strength of his community, his own and his father's positions in that community, and other considerations. Individuals could be raised to a higher-ranking Korean military post over the course of their interaction careers. That is, Korean administrative hierarchies, Korean evaluations of the power of Jurchen communities, and hierarchies within a Jurchen community informed the organization of interaction.

Ming China reconstituted numerous Jurchen communities northeast of Nanjing and Beijing and north of Chosŏn as guards (C. *wei*) and set those guards within the Chinese military system during the

reign of the Yongle emperor (1403–1425). The Chosŏn court, however, did not attempt to reshape Jurchen communities south of the Yalu (K. Amnok) and Tumen rivers as military administration units and set them in the Korean bureaucracy. Like the Chinese issuances of commandery posts to Jurchens, though, the Korean military post expressed an external ascription of status and the recipient's interaction status within the Chosŏn court's system for managing overland contact.

According to an incomplete count, Korean monarchs distributed at least twenty-two different positions to 675 Jurchens between the twelfth lunar month of 1395 and the fifth lunar month 1554 (Yu 1973, 93). From the 1420s, many grants went to elites in the Odoli and Uryangkhad communities that lived near Hoeryŏng, one of the six Korean garrisons (K. *yukchin*) constructed in Hamgyŏng Province in the 1430s and early 1440s. Korean officials measured these men and their communities as the strongest militarily among the Jurchen elites and villages in the province and north of the Tumen River. The office warrant became the key to repeated access to the overland tribute system and its opportunities for sanctioned and illicit trade (Yi 1954, 40–48; Robinson 1992, 99–100; *Sŏngjong sillok* 52: 20b [1475.2.17]).

Various aspects of the Chosŏn court's treatment of these Jurchens followed policies designed for Koreans, whether based ultimately upon government practices in China or in Koryŏ and Chosŏn. Other examples will be introduced below, but in the context under discussion here, the Chosŏn court issued office warrants to Korean officials appointed to civil administration and military administration posts. The office warrant confirmed the Korean, the Japanese, and the Jurchen recipient in the appointment and reconstituted him as eligible for privileges attached to the bestowal and, in particular, to the post. Whether being issued to Koreans, Japanese, or Jurchens, if the post was of the junior fourth grade or higher, the king of Chosŏn bestowed the office warrant. That document bore the imprint of the royal seal. If the post was of the senior fifth grade or lower, the Board of Military Affairs (K. *Pyŏngjo*) presented the office warrant upon royal approval (*T'aejo sillok* 2: 10b [1393.10.25]; *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 3: 52b–53a). This division in the issuance of office warrants fell at the division between the *tanghagwan* posts and the *ch'amsanggwan* posts, or at the break between posts of the senior third grade, lower to the junior fourth grade, and between posts of the senior fifth grade and the junior sixth grade.[7]

Still more specifically, this break reflected the Chosŏn government's military command structure. Within the Korean military, this division separated the deputy commander series of posts and the military officer series of posts, both of which were in the Five Military Commands (K. *Owi*). Stated differently, among the military posts that the Chosŏn court opened for nominal appointments to Jurchens and Japanese, the king of Chosŏn issued the office warrants for the deputy commander posts and the Board of Military Affairs issued those for the military officer posts. At the same time, the court extended to these military post recipients perquisites that were attached to assignments for Koreans. On the other hand, the court also extended privileges, in particular transit to the capital and trade there, which were not available to Korean military men.

The official seal that monarchs applied to the office warrants issued to Jurchens and Japanese changed over time. That seal often reflected consideration of the king of Chosŏn's diplomatic relationship with the emperor of Ming China. In the second half of 1493 King Sŏngjong and his officials discussed a seal reform proposed by the monarch. The debate focused on whether a new Seal of Execution (K. *Chimyŏng chi po*) would be manufactured to replace the jade Seal of Execution that King Sejo (r. 1455–1468) had introduced, whether that new seal should be of a different size than the jade seal, which, significantly, was larger than the Seal of Investiture (C. *Zhaoxian guowang zhi yin*) that the emperor of Ming China had bestowed upon King T'aejong, and which seal—the Seal of Execution or the Seal of Investiture—the king of Chosŏn would affix to office warrants issued to Jurchens and Japanese.

King Sŏngjong sent the question of which seals should be utilized for what purposes to his ministers and high-ranking officials in the seventh lunar month of 1493 (*Sŏngjong sillok*, 280: 2a-b [1493. 7.3]). In the tenth lunar month of 1443, in a joint memorial to King Sejong, the State Council (K. *Ŭijŏngbu*) and the Board of Rites had stated that the Seal of Investiture "should not be used for domestic matters" (*Sejong silloki*, 102:1a-b [1443.10.2]). The replies of ministers to King Sŏngjong echoed this earlier recommendation. First Royal Secretary Kim Ŭnggi, in the Royal Secretariat (K. *Sŭngjŏngwŏn Tosŭngji*, senior third grade, upper), commented that the Seal of Execution should be used on all documents except for royal communications to the emperor of Ming China (K. *sadae munsŏ*). But in the case of office warrants issued to Japanese and Jurchens, the Seal of Investiture must be used, for if the Ming court were to learn of a con-

trary practice, the Chosŏn court would not be able to defend that practice (*Sŏngjong sillok*, 280: 11a–12a [1493.7.4]).

King Sŏngjong's reply did not focus on the proprieties of relations with the emperor of Ming China. Rather, he targeted the sensibilities of his ministers and other high-ranking officials. "If I affix the Seal of Investiture to the office warrants for Jurchens and the Seal of Execution to the office warrants for high-ranking [Korean] officials, is this not degrading to the high-ranking officials?" Kim Ŭnggi and other officials were not moved. Moreover, six other officials agreed with Kim's view that the Seal of Investiture must be used on Jurchen office warrants. King Sŏngjong announced the new policy nearly three months later: office warrants for Japanese and Jurchens were to be stamped with a new, gold Seal of Execution, which was to be the same size as the Seal of Investiture (*Sŏngjong sillok* 280: 11a–12a [1493.7.6]; *Sŏngjong sillok* 282: 21a [1493.9.30]). Three extant Japanese office warrants issued in 1594, 1613, and 1615 for posts of the junior fourth grade or higher bear the imprint of the Seal of Execution (Nakamura 1965, 1: 604–605). The court limited the Seal of Investiture to documents for diplomatic relations with the emperor of Ming China (Nakamura 1965, 1: 588).

Kim Ŭnggi and other officials argued that the Seal of Investiture demonstrated that the king of Chosŏn and his government did not seek to conceal interaction with these Jurchen and Japanese contacts from the Chinese emperor and his court. To utilize a seal intended for domestic administration on the office warrants would remove their issuance from the Sino-centric ordering of relations and expose the Chosŏn court to criticism for obscuring those relations from Chinese view. Having prevailed, King Sŏngjong instituted the Seal of Execution for these documents to be held by individuals beyond the monarch's full jurisdictional authority, and removed a potential source of criticism by reducing the seal's size to that of the Seal of Investiture. Interestingly, at least in the debate as summarized in the Korean veritable records (K. *sillok*), no comparison was made to the use of a lesser Korean government seal on office warrants issued to Jurchens and Japanese for posts of the senior fifth grade and lower.

The Korean court linked interaction with these post recipients to the monarch's tributary relationship with the emperor of Ming China. In selecting a local seal, the Chosŏn court altered the context of bestowal, reduced the significance of the tributary relationship with Ming China to the interactions with these Jurchens and Japanese, and simplified the setting for relations with post recipients. The bestowal

no longer represented visually the *sadae*, or "serving the great," contextualization of relations with Ming China. Like King Sejo's earlier manufacture of a Seal of Execution made from jade, a material chosen for Chinese imperial seals, King Sŏngjong removed the military post bestowals to Jurchens and Japanese symbolically and procedurally from an ordering of foreign relations centered in Ming China.

The Korean military "careers" of Jurchens followed general patterns from the 1420s. Most initial grants placed recipients in the Five Military Commands. Eligibility for the first appointment could derive from the father's participation in this interaction. The court raised recipients to higher-ranking posts in the Five Military Commands or into the next highest office, the Manho series, but in only a few circumstances into the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio. First appointment into the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio seems to have been uncommon. Eligibility for appointment as the son of a post recipient and elevation to higher posts or into higher offices are thought to have been adopted from the Ming court's management of relations with Jurchens in the commanderies (Kawachi 1992, 442, 448).

The lowest office in the context of diplomatic status was the Five Military Commands. After several additions and subtractions in the early fifteenth century, from 1451 the government maintained five commands. In revisions to the civil and military bureaucracies in the first lunar month of 1466, the court elevated two of its posts to higher grades and added four new posts at the sixth grade and the eighth grade. This opened more posts for assignment, stretched the diplomatic status hierarchy further, and sharpened distinctions among recipients (Ch'ŏn 1962, 541). Of the five commands, the Central Command included Kyŏnggi Province, where the capital was located, and the three provinces that bordered Kyŏnggi (Ch'ungch'ŏng, Kangwŏn, and Hwanghae). The remaining four commands each covered single provinces. In their order of appearance in *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, the state administrative code, these were Kyŏngsang Province, P'yŏngan Province, Chŏlla Province, and Hamgyŏng Province (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, 4: 2a–3b). The court assigned several Japanese post recipients to nominal service in the P'yŏngan Province command.

Posts in the second set that the Chosŏn court opened to Jurchens were assigned to army bases in the peninsular northeast. The posts of Pumanho, Manho, and Tomanho, in ascending order, to which monarchs nominally assigned only Jurchens, originated in the military garrison system introduced by the Yuan China government. In Koryŏ,

Mongols filled the higher-ranking posts and Koreans the lower-ranking posts (*Koryŏ sa* 30: 29a [1291.9.5]; *Koryŏ sa* 32: 7b [1301.5.11]; *Koryŏ sa* 77: 23b). The Koryŏ court maintained these posts after the Mongols withdrew from the peninsula in the 1360s. The Chosŏn government continued to utilize them for appointments of Koreans to military positions at army and navy bases, but seems to have eliminated Tomanho and Pumanho as assignments for Koreans by the first lunar month of 1466, when it announced the broad-ranging military administration reform noted above. The court seems to have subsequently limited Tomanho and Pumanho bestowals to non-Koreans. The separation of these three appointments from the military bureaucracy further highlighted the distinction between defense and diplomacy.

The third office opened to Jurchens, and the second to Japanese, was the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio (K. *Chungch'ubu*, *Chungch'uwŏn*). Of ministerial rank, these posts were the most prestigious made available in these contexts of foreign relations. The progenitor of the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio had performed a central role in the planning and conduct of military policy in the Koryŏ government. The Chosŏn court combined that office with the Three Army Command (K. *Ŭihŭng Samgunbu*) in 1400. Reestablished as the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio in 1432, the court assigned it policing, palace guard duties, and other responsibilities removed from policymaking (*Chŏngjong sillok*, 4: 5a–6a [1400.4.3]; *Chŏngjong sillok*, 4: 5b [1400.4.4]; *Sejong sillok*, 55: 24a [1432.3.16]; *Sejong sillok*, 55: 25a [1432.3.18]; *Sejong sillok*, 56: 17a [1432.5.4]). King Sejo later reshaped the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio to his own ends, using its posts as temporary billets for political allies and as the military half of concurrent appointments for provincial governors. The assignment of Jurchens or Japanese to a post of ministerial rank was uncommon. In the case of Jurchens, this "promotion" underlined the recipient's political status in his home community, the court's recognition of that political status, and his known or potential importance to the Chosŏn government.

Granting practices were consistent across Jurchen communities, though the frequency of bestowal varied. Kings issued the highest number of posts to men in Odoli and Uryangkhad communities near Hoeryŏng. This stemmed from factors that included the population surge occasioned by the return of Tong Mongke Temur and his Uryangkhad community to the peninsular northeast in 1423, the increase in contact that followed, and the concern for violence by

Odoli and Uryangkhad people. The return of Mongke Temur and the application of the military post as a means for organizing interaction and sanctioned trade from the mid-1420s were almost certainly connected. Men in the Odoli and Uryangkhad communities received the most posts in the Five Military Commands of the senior fourth grade and higher and more than one-half of the appointments as Tomanho, the highest Manho series post for Jurchens.

The Chosŏn court emphasized different divisions among Jurchen contacts in the register for royal gifts introduced in 1446.[8] The gifting regime organized Jurchens into three grades based upon their Korean or Ming Chinese military posts. The grade determined the court clothing, shoes, and other items to be handed down to the individual. Grade 1 encompassed Jurchens holding the Tomanho post or any of the three posts comprising the Ming government's Regional Military Commissions, which were of the senior second, junior second, and senior third grades, respectively. Grade 2 included Jurchens of the deputy commander series—first deputy commander (K. *Sanghogun*, senior third grade, lower), second deputy commander (K. *Taehogun*, junior third grade), and third deputy commander (K. *Hogun*, senior fourth grade)—and the next two posts in the Manho series, Manho and Pumanho. Grade 3 included Jurchens with posts of fifth rank military officer, sixth rank military officer, seventh rank military officer, and eighth rank military officer (K. *Sajik*, *Pusajik*, *Sajŏng*, and *Pusajŏng*) posts and men without posts (*Sejong sillok*, 111: 3a [1446.1.10]).[9]

This gifting regime is instructive. First, the organization of contacts displays the court's hierarchical arrangement of Jurchens through the Korean military posts. That Tomanho was the highest military post made available to Jurchen elites at this time may be confirmed. The break between deputy commanders and military officers occurred in the Five Military Commands between grade 2 and grade 3. Similarly, the court placed the second and third Manho posts together in grade 2; the separation of Tomanho from those two Manho posts further emphasized the investment of distinction and diplomatic status in the former. More finely, at the break between grade 2 and grade 3 the court distinguished diplomatic status and the treatment of contacts at *tanghagwan* (junior third grade to junior fourth grade) and *ch'amsanggwan* (senior fifth grade to junior sixth grade) statuses.[10] The court determined and ordered these groupings by the four levels of government ranks, by military office, and by the grade of the post.

Second, the organization of contacts indicates concerns for Korean relations with Ming China as well as with individual Jurchens' relations with Ming China. At this time, not merely the Korean gifting regime but also the Chosŏn court's relations with individual Jurchens and the bestowal of military posts were linked to the court's subordinate position via investiture and conceptions of *sadae* toward Ming China. Interestingly, Jurchens bearing other Chinese military posts were not arrayed among the three gift grades.

Korean officials guided Jurchen retinues along a set route that moved the guests through royal space down to the capital and through ritual up to the king of Chosŏn.[11] The Jurchens first went to the Hoeryŏng garrison (K. *chin*) or the Puryŏng garrison in Hamgyŏng Province, depending upon the location of their community. From either garrison they were guided to the Kyŏngsŏng garrison. From there a local interpreter (K. *hyang t'ongsa*) escorted them along post station routes (K. *yŏngno*) through Hamgyŏng, Kangwŏn, and Kyŏnggi provinces and into the capital.

Similar to Japanese contacts traveling up to the capital and the king, Jurchens were entertained in official settings. Explicit regulations regarding the location and other features of the gathering do not seem to be extant, but available information suggests that they were hosted in counties (K. *tohobu*, *kun*, and *hyŏn*) in these three provinces. The first meetings occurred at a facility called the Barbarian Hall (K. *Yaingwan*), which was constructed outside the administrative center's walls. When the provincial governor (K. *Togwanch'alsa*) or the army deputy commander (K. *Tochŏljesa*) was present and sitting "facing south," the Jurchen Tomanho, who as of this example from 1442 was the highest of the Jurchen post recipients, sat at west facing east. When the presiding Korean official, such as a county magistrate, held a post of lower rank than the Jurchen Tomanho, he would sit at a lower position than the ranking guest.

In the third lunar month of 1472, or soon after the presentation of *Haedong chegukki* to King Sŏngjong, the court introduced new seating regulations that responded to changes in the nominal post bestowals. The court had added posts of senior third grade and higher in the Office of Ministers-without-Portfolio (K. *Chungch'uwŏn*) to those available for Jurchen elites. The new regulations for seating arrangements set these recipients and removed Jurchens holding Ming government military posts (nominal or otherwise). The court carefully arrayed these Jurchens into eight different mappings of the overlapping statuses of Jurchen elites and their Korean nominal military posts.

Government position in the Chosŏn administration and status in one's community as expressed through the nominal military post appointment were reflected in the direction one faced, in the type of object upon which one sat, and in the row in which one sat. In the first of the eight settings, the Army Commander (K. [*Pyŏngma*] *Chŏltosa*, junior second grade) sat at the north facing south (K. *puk-byŏk*) in the most prestigious chair, the *kyoŭi*, which here was reserved for officials of *tangsanggwan* rank. Other Korean officials of *tangsanggwan* rank who were present also sat in that style of chair, but at west facing east (K. *sŏbyŏk*). Jurchens holding a nominal military post of *tangsanggwan* rank sat at west facing east behind these Korean officials on a *sŭngsang*, which was a single-person chair (or perhaps a multiperson furnishing that resembled a couch) of lesser prestige. Korean officials not of *tangsanggwan* rank sat beyond the building's east pillars and to the south (K. *tongyŏng oe nam*) in the second row on a *sŭngsang*. Jurchens holding nominal posts of the fourth grade or lower (K. *tanghagwan*) sat beyond the west pillars and to the south facing north (K. *sŏyŏng oe nam*). And Jurchens holding nominal posts of the fifth grade or lower (K. *ch'amsanggwan*) sat at south facing north next to each other in a second row.

In the third of the eight seatings, at provincial banquets hosted by a county magistrate of the senior third grade or higher, that official sat at north facing south in the *kyoŭi* chair. Jurchens holding a nominal military post of *tangsanggwan* rank sat at west facing east on a, or the, *sŭngsang*. Any Jurchens holding a nominal military post of the fourth grade or higher also sat at west facing east. At the fourth of the eight seatings, at a provincial banquet hosted by a county magistrate who was not of *tangsanggwan* rank, the magistrate sat at east facing west. Any Jurchens holding a military post of *tangsanggwan* rank sat at west facing east. Both the host and these Jurchens sat on a, or the, *sŭngsang*. Any Jurchens holding a military post of the fourth grade or higher sat at south facing north on this same furnishing (*Sŏngjong sillok*, 16: 5a-b [1472.3.10]). In this fourth seating, the host holding a post of a lower grade than the guest sat at a superior, and at the highest, direction.

The Chosŏn court expressed hierarchy through government posts, seating arrangements, furnishings upon which guests sat, whether he sat inside the pavilion or outside beyond the pillars, and other decisions. Ethnicity was not the sole marker of distinction in the arrayal of bodies. The seating hierarchies embedded the Jurchen participants holding nominal military posts within the Chosŏn court's

administrative hierarchy. That is, the arrayals emphasized the nominal appointment over ethnicity without recognizing those Jurchens as officials serving the king.

Exchange in the Korean capital is less visible, however. The court limited contact and exchange in different ways at different times, and it is difficult to confirm how long a particular policy remained in effect. In 1445, King Sejong's court set ceilings on the number of groups (K. *haeng*) that a Jurchen community (for example, ten for the Uryangkhad) or an individual could send in a year. Elites were divided into three ranks (K. *tŭng*) for gifting in the tribute-bestowal exchange (K. *chinsang sukpae, kong muyŏk*) in 1455, and into four ranks in 1457 with different numbers of recipients provided in the later order (Yi 1954, 33–39). Hierarchy as imposed by Korean officials upon a Jurchen community informed access to gifting and the gifts presented, the Jurchens having proceeded appropriately through the rites up to the king and through space down to the Korean capital.

Conclusion

The Chosŏn government constructed tribute systems for interaction with Japanese in that island country and with Jurchens living in the peninsular northeast. These guests proceeded up through ritual to the king of Chosŏn as they physically moved through space northward or southward toward the Korean capital. But inappropriate performance or behavior could result in the halt of movement up through ritual to the monarch, and thus also in the halt of travel.

In systematizing interaction from the maritime southeast and the peninsular northeast, the Chosŏn court adopted and adapted approaches used in Ming China. However, the Ming government's practices did not offer a model for maintaining diplomatic relations within the Sino-centric tribute system with another ruler while also maintaining another form of diplomatic relations with subjects of that ruler. The Korean tribute system for interaction with Japanese elites ordered those contacts into a clearly articulated and defined hierarchy for recognition of local status, management of movement, and oversight of trade. The Chosŏn court did not seek to displace the diplomatic relationship with the king of Japan, but it recognized that elites in western Japan could achieve and sustain what the central government in Kyoto could not—peaceful maritime interaction.

The Chosŏn court responded to the differing geographical locations of administrative power among Jurchen and Japanese elites.

The court modeled systematized interaction after the Ming government's management of Jurchen trade in the Chinese capital, with modifications. Fitting Jurchens into the Korean hierarchy through nominal appointments to military posts presumably enhanced the position of the recipients in their home communities. In the peninsular northeast, the court could require Jurchen contacts to meet with the community leader before heading toward an administrative center where state procedures, including guest ritual, greeted the non-Koreans. The court eventually constricted overland access to Jurchens through a single system of identification, but chose among several forms of court-issued identification for Japanese. The overland tribute system for the Jurchens differed variously from that designed for Japanese maritime contacts.

Across the water, although the king of Chosŏn engaged the shogun or the retired shogun in relations of diplomatic status equality based upon participation in Ming China's tribute system, the Korean government could not expect the central government in Kyoto to supervise Japanese departure for Chosŏn from Kyoto. Instead, the Chosŏn court, in essence, replaced the Muromachi bakufu as the manager of Japanese maritime departure, and forced Japanese contacts to proceed through Tsushima and that island's governor. The Ming government's model for diplomatic relations with foreign states did not offer the Chosŏn court ready solutions to the complexities of contact with island officials and other elites whose maritime activities their own central government could not oversee.

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Notes

1. Before discussing the management of maritime and overland interactions, an issue of terminology should perhaps be considered. The English-language literature on premodern East Asian interactions offers numerous discussions of the Chinese "tributary system" and the Chinese "tribute system." Whether referencing Chinese sources or scholarship on Chinese history, especially the writings of John K. Fairbank, these publications discuss

the same theme. However, Fairbank came to prefer "tribute" over "tributary." Between the first edition of his *The United States and China*, published in 1948, and the revised edition published in 1958, Fairbank changed "tributary system" to "tribute system" (Fairbank 1948, 130–135; 1958, 109, 115–120; Hevia 1995, 10). Nevertheless, the former term continues to appear in English-language scholarship. Following standard usage, "tribute system" will be used here.

2. However, Nakamura did not write of a Korean tribute system for Japanese contacts or for Jurchen contacts.

3. Please note that the dating system in brackets here and below is not fully accurate. The year identifies that in the Western calendar for the reader's convenience, but the month and day come from the calendar used in Ming China and Chosŏn Korea. However, Japanese used the earlier calendar calculated in Tang China, thus the months and days in Japanese documents do not always match those in sources from Ming China and Chosŏn Korea.

4. For one variety of Japanese imposter contacts see Kenneth R. Robinson 1999, and for Jurchen imposter contacts and trade with the Chosŏn court see Kenesu R. Robinson 1999.

5. Although *Haedong chegukki*, a Chosŏn court report on relations with Japan and Ryukyu, includes a Chinese character that may be translated as "others" or "*et cetera*," these seven families were the only families confirmed as eligible for the second reception grade at the time of this report's presentation to King Sŏngjong in 1472. The Chosŏn court added the Ōtomo family in 1509 (*Chungjong sillok* 64: 2b–3b [1528 Intercalary 10.5]).

6. For a fuller discussion see Takahashi 1982a, 73–77.

7. *Tangsanggwan* posts were those of the senior first grade through the senior third grade, upper, and *tanghagwan* posts were those of the senior third grade, lower through the junior fourth grade. *Ch'amsanggwan* posts were those of the senior fifth grade through the junior sixth grade, and *ch'amhagwan* posts were those of the senior seventh grade through the junior ninth grade.

8. Portions of the discussion that follows may be found in Robinson 2010, 22–30.

9. The names for the military officer posts are from Ch'ŏn (1962, 541) and are those prior to the revision in the first lunar month of 1466. The Ming court, presumably at an earlier date, divided Jurchens into five grades for gifting purposes. Grade 1 included senior first grade and junior first grade posts in the highest military office. Grade 2 included senior second grade posts in the Five Chief Military Commissions and the Regional Military Commissions. Grade 3 included posts from junior second grade through senior fourth grade in the Regional Military Commissions and the guards. Grade 4 included the lowest-ranking post, at junior fifth grade, in the guards and the brigades. The lowest grade included guests without a military appointment (*Da Ming huidian* 111: 16b.) The Chinese and Korean orders reflected the respective hierarchies of military offices and placed posts of the same grade but different offices in the same grade. The Korean chart also similarly mentioned men not (yet?) bearing an assignment.

10. Extant Korean sources do not identify the grades of the three posts of Tomanho, Manho, and Pumanho in the Chosŏn government. The inclusion of Manho and Pumanho in grade 2, or with *tanghagwan* posts, suggests that one or both of these posts were at the fourth grade. The inclusion of Tomanho raises the possibility that this post was at the senior third grade, upper, the senior third grade, lower, or the junior third grade. If the third of these grades is appropriate, then Manho was at the senior fourth grade and Pumanho at the junior fourth grade (Kim 1995, 353; Robinson 1997, 202).

11. Portions of the following discussion are from Kenneth R. Robinson 1999, 35–37.

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