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Envoy Exchanges between Joseon Korea and Ming China

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Abstract

Since the inauguration of the Joseon Dynasty in 1392, the Joseon kings and the Ming emperors had regularly dispatched their envoys to each other's courts to undertake diplomatic missions. The number of missions exchanged between China and Joseon Korea during this time had surpassed all previous dynasties. According to statistics, the Joseon Dynasty dispatched 1,072 missions to China, an average of 4.7 per year. Meanwhile, Ming China dispatched 186 missions to Joseon Korea, an average of 0.8 per year. The criteria for selecting envoys to the Ming Dynasty were also standardized. The diversity of the envoy's duties covered various fields such as politics, economics and culture. This indicates the inevitable consequence of mutual diplomatic activities for Joseon and the Ming Dynasty. The increase in the quantity and quality of mission exchanges profoundly deepened the traditional diplomatic relations between China and Joseon Korea and beneficially affected the two countries' relations in terms of politics, economics, and culture.

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Keywords

Ming Dynasty, Joseon Korea, envoy, envoy exchange

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Обмены посольствами между Чосоном и минским Китаем

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Аннотация

С начала правления в Корее династии Чосон в 1392 г. чосонские короли и Минские императоры направляли послов ко дворам друг друга для выполнения дипломатических миссий. Количество миссий, которыми обменивались минский Китай и чосонская Корея в этот период, превзошло все предыдущие династии. Согласно статистике, Чосон направил в Китай 1 072 миссии, в среднем 4,7 в год. В то же время минский Китай направил в Чосон 186 миссий, в среднем 0,8 в год. Критерии отбора посланников к минскому двору имели специальные стандарты. Разнообразные обязанности посланников относилось к таким сферам, как политика, экономика, культура и др. Это указывает на неизбежные последствия взаимной дипломатической деятельности для Чосона минского Китая. Увеличение количества и качества дипломатических обменов значительно

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углубило традиционные дипломатические отношения между Китаем и Чосонской Кореей и оказало благотворное влияние на отношения между двумя странами в политической, экономической и культурной сферах.

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An envoy exchange is the acceptance of envoy visits between monarchical countries in East Asia. The duties of envoy exchanges include exchanging information, enhancing communications, and promptly resolving essential issues in the two countries. Envoy exchange gains importance among diplomatic activities to maintain stability in relations between East Asian countries.

In relations between Joseon Korea and China in the Middle Ages, envoy exchange was the most paramount diplomatic activity. Since the inauguration of the Joseon Dynasty in 1392, the Joseon kings and the Ming emperors had regularly dispatched their envoys to each other's courts to undertake diplomatic missions. For Joseon Korea, an envoy exchange was indispensable in maintaining stability and ensuring the position of the Joseon Dynasty in the Ming dynasties. For Ming China, envoy exchanges significantly contributed to maintaining the relationship of “emperor–vassal,” “suzerain–vassal” and “Chinese World Order”, among others. in relations with East Asian countries in general, and Joseon Korea in particular.

This article systematically introduces the exchange of envoys between Joseon Korea and Ming China from 1392 to 1644. While presenting the envoy exchange between Joseon Korea and Ming China, it also meticulously stipulates some issues such as the number of missions, purposes of missions, standards of approved envoys, organization, journey of the missions, and the welcoming etiquette for envoys. On that basis, the impact of the exchange of envoys between Joseon Korea and Ming China on consolidating the two countries' traditional diplomatic relations regarding politics, economy, and culture would be further scrutinized.

After China witnessed the inauguration of Ming China in 1368, Ming Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang implemented a friendly diplomatic policy with neighbouring countries. He also assumed that a harmonious suzerain–vassal relationship with vassal countries would generate favourable conditions for further national construction and development of the country. In 1392, Lee Seong-gye 李成桂 ascended the throne in Joseon, founded the Joseon Dynasty, and moved the capital to Hanseong 漢城 (present-day Seoul). Later that year, he dispatched the first mission to China to ask for conferment. In deference to the Ming Taizu emperor, Lee Seong-gye proposed two national titles, namely “Joseon 朝鮮” and “Hwaryeong 和寧,” to ask for his choice. Being acknowledged that the origin of Joseon was derived from the phrase “chaori xianming 朝日鮮明” (which means “bright morning”), Ming Taizu 明太祖 then decided to choose Joseon. Although the Ming emperor only appointed Lee Seong-gye as the National tribune of Joseon, the relationship between Ming China and Joseon Korea was officially established. From this year onward, the two countries began sending each other envoys. The exchange of envoys between Joseon Korea and China was progressive throughout the reign of Ming China.

According to statistics, from the first envoy trip in 1393 to the last in 1626, Ming China dispatched a total of 186 missions, an average of 0.8 per year, to Joseon Korea. Details are as follows (Table 1).

Table 1

Number of Ming missions to Joseon Korea ¹

Табл. 1

Количество Минских посольств в Чосон

Joseon reign	Number of missions
Taejo 太祖 (1392–1398)	9
Taejong 太宗 (1400–1418)	50
Sejong 世宗 (1418–1450)	36
Munjong 文宗 (1450–1452)	2
Danjong 端宗 (1452–1455)	3
Sejo 世祖 (1455–1468)	9
Yejong 睿宗 (1468–1469)	1
Seongjong 成宗 (1469–1494)	8
Yeonsangun 燕山君 (1494–1506)	3
Jungjong 中宗 (1506–1544)	6
Injong 仁宗 (1544–1545)	2
Myeongjong 明宗 (1545–1567)	4
Seonjo 宣祖 (1567–1608)	35
Gwanghaegun 光海君 (1608–1623)	14
Injo 仁祖 (1623–1649)	4
Total	186

From the table above, the number of Ming missions dispatched to Joseon Korea under the reigns of Taejong (1400–1418), Sejong (1418–1450), and Seonjo (1567–1608) were 50, 36, and 35 times respectively. These were the three longest-reigning kings who ruled over Joseon Korea. From the perspective of Ming China, Yongle (1402–1424) and Wanli (1573–1619) were recognized as the two periods that dispatched the most envoys to Joseon Korea throughout the time. In particular, Yongle reign had dispatched 41 missions, an average of 1.9 missions per year.

Establishing tributary relations between Ming China and Joseon Korea under the Taejong reign (1400–1418) was a critical rationale for their frequent mutual exchanges. In Joseon, the Sejong reign (1418–1450), which was equivalent to the Yongle reign (1402–1424) in China, noticed the two countries' gradual stability in relations, increase in mutual exchanges and works, and witnessed their two relatively long-lasting reigns in history. Under Seonjo's reign (1567–1608), the number of Chinese missions dispatched to Joseon increased due to the Imjin War 壬辰倭亂, 임진왜란 (1592–1598). Japan attacked Joseon, and Ming China dispatched their troops to help. Therefore, the two sides interacted quite frequently. After the Imjin War, the number of Ming China envoys dispatched to Joseon Korea decreased. Due to the Manchu invasion of Joseon in 1627 丁卯胡亂, 정묘호란

¹ According to [Mingshi, 1974; Jin Songji, 1998].

under Injo reign (1623–1649), Joseon suffered from the invasions of the Qing dynasty and witnessed a gradual decrease in the number of Ming envoys.

Although the number of Ming envoys dispatched to Joseon Korea was relatively small, no matter how long their reigns lasted, all Ming emperors dispatched envoys to Joseon Korea. In comparison with previous dynasties, counting from the Western Han dynasty (206 BC) until the pre-establishment of Ming China (1368), within 1,574 years, there were 216 Chinese missions dispatched to Joseon Korea, an average of 0.13 missions/year. From this average, the number of Ming dynasty missions dispatched to Joseon Korea was more significant than in all previous Chinese dynasties. This shows the paramount importance of the Ming Dynasty in relations with Joseon Korea.

During the Ming Dynasty, Joseon missions continuously went to China; sometimes, new missions departed without waiting for others to return. According to statistics, from the first mission in 1392 to the last one in 1621, a total of 1,072 Joseon missions were dispatched to China, an average of 4.7 missions/year. Details are as follows (Table 2).

Table 2

Number of Joseon missions to Ming China ²

Табл. 2

Посольства Чосона в Минский Китай

Reign	Number of missions
Hongwu 洪武 (1392–1398)	59
Jianwen 建文 (1399–1402)	18
Yongle 永乐 (1403–1424)	227
Hongxi 洪熙 (1425)	10
Xuande 宣德 (1426–1435)	86
Yingzong 英宗 (1436–1449)	67
Jingtai 景泰 (1450–1456)	44
Tianshun 天順 (1457–1464)	60
Chenghua 成化 (1465–1487)	105
Hongzhi 弘治 (1488–1505)	55
Zhengde 正德 (1506–1521)	47
Jiajing 嘉靖 (1522–1566)	130
Longqing 隆庆 (1567–1572)	20
Wanli 万历 (1573–1619)	144
Taichang 泰昌 (1620)	2
Tianqi 天啟 (1621)	5
	1,072

From the table above, Yongle reign (1403–1424), Chenghua reign (1465–1487), Jiajing reign (1522–1566), and Wanli reign (1573–1619) were the periods when China welcomed the most Joseon missions; all were over 100 missions.

Compared with other Chinese dynasties, Joseon missions dispatched under Ming China reached an average of 4.7 missions/year. Counting from the Western Han dynasty (206 BC) until the pre-

² According to [Chaoxian tongshi, 1975; Jin Songji, 1998].

establishment of Ming China (1368), within 1,574 years, there were 1,013 Joseon missions dispatched to Ming China, an average of 0.7 missions/year. Within 432 years since the Goryeo dynasty unified the Korean peninsula to the end of the Yuan dynasty, 453 Joseon missions visited China³, an average of more than one mission/year. The 25-year existence of Goryeo by the Ming dynasty had recorded 105 missions that were dispatched to China, an average of 4.2 missions/year.

From the above evidence, the number of Joseon envoys dispatched to China was greater than that of all previous Joseon dynasties. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the reign of the Ming Dynasty was a crucial period in the history of relations between China and Joseon. The two countries' political, economic, and cultural relationship had surpassed all previous periods and dynasties.

The Ming Dynasty missions dispatched to Joseon Korea bore many different tasks but mainly related to three main tasks: promulgating edicts, granting objects, and requesting people and objects. Promulgating edicts include announcing the Chinese emperor's accession to the throne, acceptance of the Joseon kings, confirmation of the examination results and the Crown Prince, land conferment, and others. Granting objects include gold seals, religious orations, flags, deeds, and other objects. Requesting for people and objects includes requests for tributing chefs, virgins, falcons and horses. Besides, the Ming missions also had to learn about the politics, economy and culture, of Joseon Korea [Ming Taizu, 1983].

Before the Ming Dynasty, the primary duty of Joseon missions dispatched to China was to pay tribute. However, the Ming Dynasty fulfilled more diverse tasks, mentioning many fields such as politics, economics and culture. The Joseon missions can be divided into two types: periodical and non-periodical missions. Periodical envoys include 4 types: Chongjosa 正朝使, Tongjisa 冬至使, Songjolsa 聖節使, Chonchusa 千秋使. Chongjosa was dispatched on the first day of January to celebrate a new lunar year. Tongjisa was dispatched around the winter solstice. Songjolsa was sent to celebrate the birthdays of the emperor. Chonchusa was dispatched to celebrate the birthdays of a Crown Prince. Non-periodical envoys include Saun (Thanksgiving envoy) 謝恩使, Chumun (Visiting and congratulating envoy) 奏請使, Chinha 進賀使, Worshipping envoy 進香使, Consulting envoy 奏聞使, and so on. The most significant number of missions was those with the Chumun task (visiting and congratulating missions – 637, followed by the thanksgiving missions – 223, and then the tribute missions – 155). Despite their primary duties, the Joseon envoys would always be accompanied by tributes. In addition to Jinling 金陵 (present-day Nanjing 南京), Beijing 北京, there was also a mission visiting the office of Liaodong Commander-in-chief to handle local diplomatic affairs [Li Taizu, 1953].

As envoys performed a significant role in diplomatic relations between countries, their biography and status requirements were relatively high; only high-ranking people were eligible to become envoys. The Ming envoys dispatched to Joseon Korea were called Messenger 行人, along with high-ranking mandarins from Hanlin Academy 翰林, Supervising Secretary 給事中 and Eunuch 宦官. The Ming envoys visiting Joseon Korea were utterly disparate from the Joseon envoys. The Ming envoys were quite complicated, related to the personal preferences of the Ming emperors and the diplomatic situation at that time.

In the early years of Hongwu (1392–1398), Ming Taizu Zhou Yuanzhang imposed a strict regime on Eunuchs, stipulating their exclusions from foreign affairs. Emperors temporarily assigned most envoy duties to low-ranking courtiers and sometimes Eunuchs. Messengers were chosen many times from the Messenger's Office 行人司 to go on missions. In the 20th year of Hongwu (1380), Ming Taizu founded the Messenger's Office, and Messengers then became the prior selection to go on missions. Thus, there was an emerging phenomenon of “not allowing invasions by other yamens, if there was a temporary lack of candidates, other mandarins could be sent” [Shen Shixing, 2001,

³ The statistics of the missions were synthesized according to [Ming Taizu, 1983; Chaoxian tongshi, 1975; Wu Han, 1980a; 1980b; 1980c; Li Taizu, 1953].

p. 180]. Due to the increasing importance of Messengers, their characteristic requirements were also enhanced. However, it took them nine years to reach the sixth-rank position, so many people still needed to become Messengers. In fact, during the Hongwu reign, sometimes eunuchs or civil mandarins were sent to Joseon Korea as envoys, but from the 25th year of Hongwu (1392) onward, the court regularly dispatched eunuchs to Joseon Korea every year. The court could even send eunuchs to go on missions a number of times during a year.

Under the reign of Jianwen (1398–1402), Ming China dispatched envoys who were civil mandarins and mandarins under Hanlin Academy to Joseon Korea numerous times. As a result, the Messenger's Office was abolished and placed under the control of the Court of State Ceremonial 鴻臚寺 [Mingshi, 1974, p. 1810]. Under the reign of Yongle (1403–1424), the relationship between Ming China and Joseon Korea was gradually stabilized. During this period, Ming Chengzu trusted eunuchs and often sent them on missions to Joseon Korea. Even though Ming Chengzu reinstated the Messenger's Office, the number of Messengers significantly decreased compared to the early Ming dynasty. Throughout the reign of Ming Chengzu, the most famous envoys were eunuchs. These eunuchs were so violent and greedy that their missions to Joseon Korea caused great harm to China–Joseon relations.

From the Yingzong reign (1435–1464) onward, Ming China dispatched mandarins, mostly civil mandarins, to go on missions to other countries, but those who had their missions in Joseon Korea were still eunuchs. Under Chenghua's reign (1464–1487), the recruitment of civil mandarins to go on missions was enhanced, and most of them were dispatched to Joseon Korea. The critical rationale was the adverse influence and arousal of anger from the Joseon court caused by eunuchs who went on missions and had considerable disagreements over their missions. From the 4th year of Chenghua (1468) onward, the envoys dispatched for Joseon conferment were all civil mandarins.

Joseon Korea attached particular importance to its diplomatic relations with China. Envoys dispatched to China should be selected from people of high status and prestige to show a sincere attitude toward Ming China. In the early years of Joseon Korea, the envoys sent by Joseon Korea to Ming China would be Tang Shangguan 堂上官 or Tang Shangguan concurrently. Most envoys were directly appointed by the kings and came to Ming China to submit forms and documents on their behalf. From the reign of King Taejong (1400–1418) onward, the scale of sending envoys was broadened, the number of necessary envoys increased, and the procedures for appointing envoys also began to be standardized due to the normalization of sending envoys to Joseon Korea. The *National Code* (經國大典) stipulated: “The highest mandarins of Royal Judicial Office, Six Ministries, Royal Secretariat was appointed as the Chief and Deputy envoy”⁴. The envoy candidates were high-ranking mandarins from the Six Ministries 六曹, Royal Secretariat 議政府, royal family, and so on. The Joseon kings personally selected the envoys.

Starting in 1392, Joseon Korea officially began periodically or non-periodically dispatching envoys to Ming China. Sending envoys to Ming China was conducted annually at the beginning of January or on the birthdays of the emperors and the Crown princes. Regarding the biography of the envoy go on missions to Ming China, within 685 envoys mentioned by Kim Song Hee's statistics [Jin Songji 1998], it seems apparent that:

First, there were 30 first-rank mandarins 一品官, including 16 Senior first-rank mandarins 正一品, 14 Junior first-rank mandarins 从一品. There were 365 second-rank mandarins, including 97 Senior second-rank mandarins 正二品, 268 Junior second-rank mandarins 从二品. There were also 41 Senior third-rank Dangsangwan 正三品, 5 Senior third-rank Danghagwan 正三品堂下, 83 mandarins belonging to other places, 65 courtiers and meritorious mandarins, 96 people came from the Three Armies Command 三軍府 without any titles. From the reign of King Taejo to King Yejong, all envoys dispatched for missions seemed to be people holding high positions. Most of

⁴ Xu Juzheng. *Jingguo dadian* [徐居正. 經國大典]. *Nation Code*, vol. 3. Seoul, Seoul University Gyujanggak Collection Photocopy.

them were Dangsangwan 堂上官. Otherwise, envoys were appointed to high positions before their missions.

Second, most envoys dispatched to Ming China in the early Joseon Dynasty came from important government agencies or were courtiers and meritorious mandarins. The mandarins from the Royal Secretariat 議政府 were 53 people, and the Office of Royal Relatives 敦寧府 along with other government offices and palaces amounted to 52 people. Courtiers or meritorious mandarins had 65 people. The total number of mandarins from the Six Ministries 六曹 was 143 people, which the Ministry of Personnel 吏曹 had 24 people, the Ministry of Taxation 戶曹 had 34 people, the Ministry of Rites 禮曹 had 24 people, Ministry of Military Affairs 兵曹 had 7 people, Ministry of Justice 刑曹 had 21 people, Ministry of Public Works 工曹 had 33 people. Military Affairs Commission 中樞府 accounted for 131 people, and Three Armies Command 三軍府 accounted for 96 people. In addition, the Office of the Inspector-General 司憲府 had 2 people, Royal Secretariat 承政院 had 1 person, Sapyeong-bu 司平府 had 10 people, Hanseong-bu 漢城府 had 12 people, Gaeseong-bu 開城府 had one person, Office of Royal Decrees 藝文館 had 17 people.

Third, the Chief and Deputy envoys were all mandarins from the Royal Secretariat and Six Ministries. Even though courtiers and meritorious mandarins did not hold any positions, they were part of the royal family and were highly regarded. Fourth, in the early years of the Joseon Dynasty, an Archivist 典書 from the Six Ministries was appointed as Senior third-rank Songjolsa 聖節使. This fact happened twice under the reign of King Taejo and three times under the reign of King Sejong. Presumably, it only emerged during the envoy selection system's imperfect period at the Joseon Dynasty's beginning. After determining the envoys' biographies, the selection of the envoys was based on specific criteria. The standards of Joseon envoys stemmed from criteria such as extensive and erudite knowledge, Chinese proficiency, and Tang Shangguan.

As going on missions was an important task that greatly affected the country's diplomatic relations, selecting envoys was carefully and strictly carried out. Most selected envoys were knowledgeable and had excellent diplomatic skills. Generally, missions dispatched to Ming China consisted of chief envoy 正使, deputy envoy 副使, interpreter 通官, and orderlies 跟役. Orderlies were mission staff responsible for transporting objects and managing horses and objects, royal physicians, scribes, cooks, and so on.

According to the tasks and organizational structure, the number of participants of the Joseon envoys dispatched to China was different. Historical records demonstrated that a typical mission often consisted of Chief envoy 正使書通事, Military attaché 武官, Medical mandarin 郎中 and entourage. In particular, the Chief envoy, Deputy envoy, and Censor-secretary were called "Three envoys" 三使. The entourage were those who served the "Three envoys" including medical mandarins, painters and chefs.

Three envoys refer to the Chief envoy, Deputy envoy and Censor-secretary. In particular, the Chief envoy and Deputy envoy held third-rank Dangsangwan or higher positions. Otherwise, the court would promote lower-rank mandarins before their missions. The rank of Censor-secretary was usually lower than that of Chief envoy and Deputy envoy. The Censor-secretary was responsible for supervising the bringing of prohibited items to the Ming Dynasty for trading by the mission staff. Under normal circumstances, periodic missions required the presence of "Three envoys" to show respect for Ming China. However, some missions only included a Chief Envoy and Censor-secretary or only a Chief Envoy and Deputy Envoy. A chief envoy is sometimes withdrawn on non-periodic missions, such as obituaries and welcoming missions. This case was called "Solitary envoy" 单使.

According to the forms of missions, the Chief envoy and Deputy envoy were sent differently. For instance, when sending envoys to congratulate the enthronement ceremony, the Chief envoy was usually a first-rank mandarin 一品官. Periodic missions usually had a second-rank Dangsangwan 二品堂上官 or higher positions. In the case of appointing a third-rank Dangsangwan

三品堂上官, he should be temporarily promoted, creating a situation of “title borrowing” 借官出使. In other cases, the Chief and Deputy envoys were sometimes chosen from the royal family.

Censor-secretary were usually a fifth-rank Mandarin 五品官, who was generally regarded as the Supervisor of the Office of the Inspector-General 司憲府. The censor-secretary often carried along the Secretarial entourage from the Office of the Inspector-General. These people were responsible for monitoring and inspecting goods to prevent trading prohibited goods during the missions. In addition, the Chief envoy, Deputy envoy, and Censor-secretary also had the specific task of recording all events observed on the road and inside the Ming court. After returning to the country, they were required to report to the king verbally or in writing.

The Interpreter 通事, mostly taken over by the Bureau of Interpreters 司譯院, was in charge of the mission's interpretation. Usually, he was mainly in charge of general merchandise trade or transportation, the management of items (old money, items, etc.), and interpretation when entering China. Military attachés 軍官 ranged from three to more than a dozen people. They were primarily responsible for protecting and guiding the mission.

No direct documents examine the composition and number of personnel of the Joseon envoys dispatched to China. This can be roughly understood through records of the Joseon envoys' journeys to Ming China. For example, in January 1407, the Joseon mission dispatched to China consisted of 110 people, including the Crown Prince Ly De Sung, 1 Deputy envoy, 6 Censor-secretaries, 12 retainers, 6 Horse escorts, Director of the Bureau, and so on, amounting to a total of 110 people. From the first year of Xuande (1426) onward, Joseon missions usually consisted of about 30 people [Liu Jieli, 2012, p. 28].

Under the reign of King Kwanghaegun 光海君 (1608–1623), Jeong Sasin 鄭士信 (1558–1619) was appointed as Deputy envoy to visit Ming China. The mission included Chief envoy, Deputy envoy, Censor-secretary and 1 Chief advisor, 7 Military attaché, 10 Interpreters, 2 Medical mandarins, two people breaking the battle, 1 Horse guard, 1 Justice commissioner, one horse protector, one horse raiser, two chefs, five escorts; a total of 36 people [Zheng Shixin, 2001, p. 385].

If the mission went by road, its personnel was assumed to range from 20 to 100 people. This excluded the escort troops, as the Joseon Dynasty would send their troops to escort the missions from Yizhou 義州 to Liaodong 遼東 Office. When the missions returned to their country, escort troops would be travelling with them. If the missions went by sea, its personnel would be around 160 people. “Three envoys” would each sit on a single boat to avoid unforeseen events. Each boat could only carry 4–6 people. When returning home, Ming China would send 3–4 boats to escort Joseon missions.

Under Ming China, Chinese envoys mainly reached Joseon Korea by road and sea. Sea travel was relatively favourable at the beginning of Ming China when the court settled in Nanjing and Liaodong at the end of Ming China. Otherwise, they mostly went by road. In the early Ming dynasty, Ming envoys went to Joseon Korea by sea, roughly as follows: Nanjing – Taicang – Shandong peninsula – Liaodong peninsula – Joseon sea gate [Lin Jizhong, 2001].

Politically, the exchange of envoys significantly influenced the relations between the two countries. In a particular aspect, the more missions there are, the more progressive the mutual relations will be. When ascending the throne, Joseon kings all dispatched envoys to China to ask the Ming emperor for his title conferment. After receiving the Joseon proposal, Ming China would send an envoy to Joseon Korea to read the edict of conferment and grant the new king gifts such as hats, clothes, gold, silver and silk. From the country's inauguration under the reign of Yi Seong-gye (1392–1398) to King Sejong (1418–1450), many diplomatic difficulties between the two countries were resolved by envoy exchanges, for instance, after Yi Seong-gye carried out a coup to overthrow the Goryeo dynasty and established the Joseon Dynasty. The domestic political situation was immensely complicated; the factions fought fiercely. If Yi Seong-gye were recognized and conferred by Ming China, it would be highly beneficial for him to purge opposing forces and enhance

political supremacy for the new dynasty. Therefore, after ascending the throne in July 1392, Yi Seong-gye dispatched an envoy to China to report on the Joseon court's events, which Zhu Yuanzhang tacitly accepted. Later, Yi Seong-gye continued to send Trieu Phan on a mission to China, asking Zhu Yuanzhang for his opinion on national title, and finally named the country Joseon with the consent of Ming China. Although Zhu Yuanzhang implicitly acknowledged Yi Seong-gye as the king of Joseon, relations between the two countries had not gained much achievements [Zheng Hongying, 2001, p. 67–71].

The role of envoys was also clearly demonstrated in acting as a bridge for communication between the two countries during wartime or turmoil due to pirates or foreign invaders. Their cooperation in fighting against piracy can be mentioned as an example. Typically, in 1419, thanks to intelligence provided by the Joseon envoy, the Ming army ambushed the Wokou 倭寇 army and won a complete victory at Liaodong, destroying more than 2000 Wokou pirates [Zhang Qin, 2011, p. 91]. Due to this close political relationship, in 1592, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉) from Japan launched a war to invade Joseon Korea, China even dispatched troops to rescue its vassal country. The war lasted for seven years, with the final victory being achieved by the China-Joseon coalition forces. This war provided concrete evidence for the extreme closeness in political relations between China and Joseon Korea during Wanli's reign (1573–1620). In particular, there was a significant contribution to mutual missions.

Economically, envoy exchange promoted the exchange of goods and trade between the two countries. The primary commodities traded between China and Joseon Korea were horses and cloth. During the Ming dynasty, there were 11 such trades; in total, China used 60,372 silks, 274,356 cloths, 131,000 embroidered paintings, and one large amount of medicine in exchange for 67,128 horses and 11,000 cows from Joseon Korea. In addition, when going on missions in Joseon Korea, Chinese envoys also brought some items to exchange, but the quantity was insignificant [Ming Taizu, 1983].

The trade and exchange of goods by Joseon envoys was divided into three main categories, namely the exchange on the orders of the Joseon king, personal exchange by carrying other items, and exchange of prohibited goods, i.e., the envoys bought items that China forbade to sell to foreign countries. Many historical records showed that the number of items Joseon envoys traded with China increased gradually. For instance, during the first three years (1494–1496) when Yeonsan Gun 燕山君 claimed his power, he had ordered 14 missions to go to China with 43,000 cotton cloths to conduct exchanges, so on average, each mission had to bring more than 3,070 pieces [Yanshan Jun, 1953b]. Personal exchanges also expanded rapidly, mainly purchasing specific items that Joseon Korea was lacking, such as silk, thread, iron and silver [Yanshan Jun, 1953a]. The envoys also sought to buy prohibited items, most of which were bows, gunpowder, and several other forbidden bibliographies, from Ming China [Liu Jieli, 2012, p. 158].

Culturally, the envoy exchange promoted the development of economic and political relations between the two countries and upgraded cultural exchanges between the two countries. Through envoy exchanges, Chinese culture strongly influenced Joseon Korea. For instance, in 1449, Chinese envoy Ni Qian 倪謙 went on a mission to Joseon Korea, and simultaneously, the book “Rime of Eastern Countries 東國音韻” was composed. Little did they know whether the contents were appropriate with Chinese rime or not; Joseon scholars invited Nghe Kiem to be this book's editor [Wu Han, 1980c]. “The Proper Sounds for the Instruction of the People” (訓民正音, *Hunmin Jeongeum*) – the first text using an independent script of Joseon was also the product of cultural cooperation between China and Joseon Korea. When the book was under edition, Joseon authors went to Liaodong, Shandong many times to study, research, and absorb the characteristics of Chinese phonology with the help of scholars from the Hanlin Academy 翰林院 of Ming China [Wang Xuexia, 2013].

After Yi Seong-gye founded the Joseon Dynasty, taking Confucianism as the national ideology, it gradually became the central ideology among Joseon intellectuals. Chinese bibliographies were

brought into Joseon Korea in large numbers, mainly in three ways: they were granted by the Chinese emperor to the king of Joseon, Chinese envoys brought them to the Joseon Dynasty as a gift, and Joseon envoys bought them from China. According to Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty, in 1435, King Sejong ordered his envoys to go on missions to China to buy books, such as Commentary to the Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid in Government 資治通鑑音注, Comprehensive Mirror to previous events 通鑑前編, The note novels of the history 歷代筆記, The History of Song 宋史, General outline of Calligraphy 綱目書法, National language 國語, and others. In 1451, King Munjong also ordered the envoys to purchase Comprehensive Explanations of the Text and Commentaries 經傳通解, Stories of Rituals 續儀禮集傳, Comprehensive Records 通志, Comprehensive Mirror for Chronicle 紀本 Wengong 朱文公集, Memorials of Illustrious Ministers of the Song court 宋朝名臣奏.

According to Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty 明朝實錄, in 1369, Ming Taizu granted the Goryeo envoys with bibliographies such as Four Books 四書, Commentary to the Comprehensive Mirror for the Aid in Government Book 資格通鑑, Imperial court's calendar 大統歷. In 1403, Ming Chengzu granted the Joseon envoy Confucian classics such as: Four Books 四書, Five Classics 五經, Essentials of A Complete Theory of Change 性理大全, Complete Commentaries on the Five Classics and Four Books 五經四書大全, Outline and Details of the Comprehensive Mirror Aid 通鑑綱目, among others. In 1454, Emperor Yingzong of Ming also granted the king of Joseon 宋史 (The History of Song) ⁵.

In addition, Joseon envoys were always eager to learn Chinese techniques and production methods when reaching China. In 1415, the Joseon envoy presented a petition to the Ministry of Rites under Ming China, asking for a bronze statue with the shape of acupuncture points (Acupuncture on the bronze statue). Ming Chengzu immediately agreed after hearing this request. When the “Acupuncture on bronze statue” technique was brought back to Joseon Korea, King Sejong ordered the dissemination of Chinese acupuncture techniques on a national scale [Wu Han, 1980a]. In 1423 and 1430, Joseon envoys brought some herbs to the Imperial Medical Office under Ming China to ask for their effects [Wu Han, 1980a]. In 1464, the Joseon court experimented with the paper-making process under the guidance of the Chinese envoys. In 1475, Joseon Korea dispatched paper workers and the envoy missions to China to learn how to make paper. After learning the method at the paper mills in Beijing, Liaodong, Joseon paper workers learned how to make some commonly used paper [Wu Han, 1980b]. In addition, metallurgical and gunpowder manufacturing techniques, along with knowledge of astronomy, geography, and laws from China were also brought back to the home country by Joseon envoys [Li Zhongzong, 1954].

During the reign of Ming China, the number of exchanged missions between China and Joseon Korea leaped ahead of all previous periods. Continuous envoy exchanges had upgraded the two countries' relations to a new level, and simultaneously, this was also an essential period in the history of China-Joseon relations. The importance of this period was reflected in the fact that, regardless of their economic, political, or socio-cultural situations, the relations between the two countries transcended all previous periods. This had great merits for the envoys. The envoy exchange also made the relationship between the two countries contribute to improving and strengthening the relationship between the two countries, creating the situation of political “unification”; economically, goods exchange was promoted between the two countries, making Joseon's dependence on the Chinese market greater than before; culturally, this had promoted the spread and exchange of culture and civilization between the two countries, making traditional Chinese culture and ideology profoundly influence Joseon Korea and Confucian ideology become the dominant ideology of this peninsula since then. This was an essential feature in the history of China-Joseon relations, which needs further study and consolidation.

⁵ [Ming Taizu, 1983].

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