SINO-KOREAN RELATIONS AT THE END OF THE XIVTH CENTURY

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[page 35]

**SINO-KOREAN RELATIONS**

In 1905 the Hon. William W. Rockhill wrote in his interesting essay on China’s intercourse with Korea from the XVth century to 1895 that the emperor T’ai-tsu of the Ming dynasty (明太祖) announced in 1392 : “Kao-li is a small region in the Far East, and is not under the rule of the Middle Kingdom.” To this Rockhill added in a note: “China never overstepped the bounds which this admission of Korea’s right to self-government carried with it, nor in-terfered in the management of the country, until 1882.” In the light of other Chinese and Korean sources than those used by Rockhill that are more or less common property today, it is proper to ask whether T’ai-tsu himself did not interfere in the management of the country after 1392, and do so without suspicion that he was acting contrary to the spirit as well as to the letter of his own pronouncement. Professor Ku Chieh-kang (顧頡剛) of Yenching University, in an article published in The Eastern Miscellany (東方雜誌) for July 16, 19351 goes even farther, and holds, after quoting liberally from the T’ai-tsu shih lu (太祖實錄) that the first Ming emperor wanted to invade the country in the last year of his reign (1398). This perhaps is going too far. Certainly there is evidence against this view, as will be shown at the conclusion of this paper.

Let us review the events leading up to 1392 when the Yi (李) family commenced its long rule of roughly five centuries over Korea. T’ai-tsu had no sooner driven the Mongols out of China (1368) than he despatched envoys to Koryu (高麗) conveying a royal signet and a letter.2 In the following year, on September 15, 1369, he sent a gold seal and officially appointed Wang Chyen (王顓) as king. At the same time

1. Ming tai wen tzu yu huo k’ao lueh (明代文字獄禍考略) ; especially pp. 23-24. See translation by L. C. Goodrich. Harvard Jo. of Asiatic Studies 111, 254-311.

2. Ming shih (明史), lieh chuan (列傅) 1b-2a.

[page 36] he presented the king: the Chinese calendar,3 which was adopted beginning with the 8th moon of 1370.4 In the first moon of the same year (1370) Koryu delivered the Yuan or Mongol gold seal to Nanking.5

On October 27, 1374 Wang Chyen was assassinated by a eunuch and court favorite,6 and was succeeded by Sin U (辛禑), his adopted son, who reigned until 1388. The latter seems to have been very cool towards the Ming court for he entered into active relations with the Mongols and began using their reign title (that of 北元) in the second moon of his third year (1377).7 This must naturally have disturbed Ming T’ai-tsu ; so when, in the same year, a Koryu envoy came to Nanking to ask for the canonization of Wang Chyen he retorted : “Chyen was killed some time ago. Why did you not ask at once for such a title?” And on five separate occasions he refused to receive the country’s envoys, holding that Sin U had come to the throne by illegitimate means.8

In the same year an incident occurred which shows the condition of Sino-Korean relations at this time. A subordin-ate commander, P’u Chen (濮眞,) who hailed from Feng-yang, Anhui, the birthplace of the Ming emperor, and had served him loyally in the campaigns against the Mongols, was defeated in a brush with the Koreans, and taken prisoner. The king, Sin U, admired his bravery and wanted him to become his subject F’u Chen refused. This angered the king, and he was about to compel P’u to submit when P’u

3. Ming shih, pen chi (本紀) 5a. M. Tchang, Synchronismes chinois 413, has the Koreans use the Chinese calendar beginning 1369, but this is not borne out by one of his own sources, the Cho-sun sa ryak (朝鲜史略) (see Courant, Bibl. Coreene 1856) in the T’u shu chi ch’eng (圃書集成) VIII 23/2a cited on p. xii.

4. Koryu sa (高麗史) II, 87/745. A calendar for the end of the XVIth century is illustrated in Chosen shi tax kei, kin seis hi (朝鮮史大系, 近世史) by Seno, Makuma (截瀬馬熊), published by the Society lor the study of, Korean history, Seoul, 1927.

5. Ming shih, lieh chuan lb 2a. A seal for a much later period (1623 49) is pictured in Seno, Makuma, op. cit.

6. Tong kouk tong kam (東國通鑑) (Courant, Bibl. Cor. #1851) 49/22.

7. Koryu sa, idem.

8. Ming shih, pen chi 14b; Ming shih kao (明史稿), lieh chuan 3a.

[page 37] uttered a tremendous oath, saying, “Today you have offend-ed me and my emperor will surely extinguish your kingdom.” Whereupon with a boast he drew his sword, cut out his heart, and expired. This awakened the king to the gravity of his offense ; so he sent an envoy to Nanking to ask for pardon. The emperor showed his appreciation for P’u Chen by posthumously creating him Lo-lang kung (樂浪公), or duke of Lo-lang, and making his son. P’u Yu (璵), then a babe in his cradle, a marquis.9 The chronicles are silent as to his treatment of the envoy, but we are informed again and again that Koryu envoys were not received during the next few years. Korea in its turn, however, played the part of wisdom by adopting the Ming calendar in the 9th moon of 1378.10 About the same time (1379) a number of Koreans asked to be permitted to settle in China. The emperor made his feelings clear in his message to the Chinese officer at the Liaotung border : “Koreans are dwellers by the sea. They are accustomed to deceive the people. They do not know how to colonize new territory ; so how can they leave their native villages to go to a strange land. Those who wish to submit (to us) are not permitted to remain.”11

During the following years Korea seems to have become aroused to the necessity of making contact with China. In the 4th moon of 138212 the prime minister Chyeng Mong-ju (鄭夢周)13 started for Nanking, but was turned back at the

9. Chung Hsing (鍾煋) (fl. 1610-1C15), T’ung chien hui ts’uan (通鑑會篡) 2/lb; T’u shu chi ch’eng VIII 23/7a quoting the Ming T’ung chi (明通記) and ibid., XIV 506/2b quoting the Wan hsing t’ung p’u (萬姓通譜). The same story is given in Fu Wei-lin (傅維鱗) (d. 1667)： Ming shu (明書) 94/9b 10b but under a year corresponding to 1387; possibly a slip in one of the cyclical characters (丁卯 for 丁已). In the Ming shih 105/34a-b and in Chu Yun-ming’s (祝允明) (1460-1526): Yeh chi (野記) 1/a somewhat similar story is related, but the proper names are much changed. There may be some confusion here.

10. Tong kouk tong kam 51/3; Koryu sa 87/745.

11. Chung Hsing, op. cit. 2/2-

12. Tong kouk tong kam 51/1

13. Koryu sa III, 117/442-450. Renowned as one of the greatest Korean sages, according to Courant, Bibl. Cor.

[page 38] Yalu. In the 11th moon he started again, this time with the poet, calligrapher, and soldier Cho Ban (趙胖)14 who claimed direct descent from the first Sung emperor, and who had known the Ming sovereign personally during the Mongol campaigns of thirty years previously, as we shall see. The border official was polite, but firm. He accepted the tribute the Koreans were carrying, out reminded them of the assassination of their former king, nearly ten years before.

In 1383/4 two envoys seem to have reached Nanking, but were promptly packed off to Yunnan in exile, and a third, for having presented tribute to the Liaotung officials, which they reported as a bribe, was likewise sent the same route, but died on the way.15 In the 7th moon (1384) Chyeng Mong-ju tried for the third time, the ostensible purpose being to congratulate the emperor on his birthday in the 9th moon,16 and this time was granted an audience. He found T’ai-tsu relenting. Chyeng was able to carry word back to his king in the 4th moon of 1385 that the emperor would recognize Koryu and condescend to receive tribute. On August 20, 1385, recognition followed, and Koryu presented tribute along with the Liu-ch’iu Is., Annam, etc.17

The years 1391-1392 saw the collapse of the Wang dynasty in Korea, and the establishment of Yi Dan (李旦) 18 on

14. Kouk cho in mul ki (國朝人物志), l/22b-23.

15. Tong kouk tong kam 52/6, 52/9-10.

16. He was born, according to official records, on the day (丁丑), 9th moon, of 1328, i. e. Oct. 21, between 1 and 3 p. m.

17. Tong kouk tong ham 52/16. The Ming shih, pen chi 3/4a, records the occurrence under the day chia-ch’en (甲辰) of the 7th moon. But, as Hsia Hsieh (夏夑) (chu-jen in 1821) pointed out many decades ago in his Ming t’unq chien (明通鑑) 8/6b； there is no chia-ch’en in this moon. He accepts chia-hsu (甲戌) as given in Chien-an shih kao (潜菴史稿) (probably by Tang Pin (湯斌) [H. 潜菴], (史稿) 1027-1087) .

18.For biographical material on Yi Dan, see G. H. Jones ;”Historical notes on the reigning dynasty.” Korean Repository III, 344-5, and “Sketches of a hero (Yi Tai-jo),” ibid., V, 319-327. Briefly, Yi was born in 1335, reigned until 1398 when he abdicated—it is said—on account of weariness over the troubles involving the succession of one of his sons, and died in 1408 (on the day (壬申) of the 5th moon). See Tai tong sa kang, (大東史綱 9/2b-4b. Jones incorrectly gives the date of death as 1409 and Tchang, Syn Chin 416, as 1418.

[page 39]

the throne. Of this there is no need to write as Rockhill has recited the main events presented in the Ming shih 320. Other sources offer one or two illuminating sidelights, however. For example: The foreign minister, Kim Chu (金澍) was in Nanking on a mission at the time of Yi’s usurpation, and only heard of the shocking turn of affairs when he reached the Yalu. He behaved in characteristic Confucian fashion, writing to his wife : “As a loyal minister I cannot serve two masters. Even if I should cross the river there would be no place for me.” Then he doffed his clothes and shoes, despatched them to the new king as a message, and returned to the Ming capital19 It seems possible, judging by this event, that Ming T’ai-tsu may have had at court a number of such Koreans as interpreters ana hangers-on who were unsympathetic with the regime under Yi Dan. Another point not mentioned by Rockhill is that China’s appointment of Yi Dan as king of Chosun (朝鮮) was withheld throughout his life, and only given posthumously, in 1408. The Ming court, furthermore, found fault with part of the tribute of 1393, complaining that over 9,800 horses were old and broken down (駑) and could not be used in battle.20

Yi Dan acted with great care in selecting his first envoys to Nanking. Cho Ban, of whom we have already read, headed the mission. T’ai-tsu had no sooner received him in audience than he began to scold him. Cho pointedly replied, in Chinese, “In all dynastic changes the founder of a new dynasty brings about an overturn in accordance with the will of heaven. We are no exception to the general rule.” The emperor felt the point of this thrust; he descended from his throne, and taking hold of Cho’s hand said, “If T’o-t’o21 had been successful, I would never have become emperor.

19. Tai tong sa kam 9/lb ; Tai long ki ryun (大東紀年) 1/2.

20. Seno, Makuma, op. cit. 10,23 25 The first statement is confirmed in Kuo ch’u shih chi (國初史蹟), quoted in Kuo ch’au tien ku (國朝典故)

21. Giles, Biographical Dictionary #1944.

[page 40] You are indeed an old friend,” and treated Cho Ban as an honored guest.22

This was an excellent beginning of Sino-Korean intercourse. In the 8th moon of the following year (1393), another emissary, Sul Chang-soo (偰長壽)23, had a similarly friendly reception. The emperor received him informally, conversed with him for a long while, explaining to Sul what had taken place in China. Then Tai-tsu added : “The king of your country came to power in the same fashion. It heaven does not favor one and the people do not hold one in respect, one may not seize the country by force.”

In fifteen months (11th moon of 1394), however, the situation changed. Someone accused Korea of trying to entice the Ju-chen into an invasion of China. T’ai tsu demanded an explanation of this from the king24, who sent a piao (表)25 in explanation. The emperor found expressions therein which he considered insulting, and issued orders forbidding the passage of envoys at the Liaotung border. The king again sent an ambassador to explain, but on

22. See biography cited in note 14 above ; also Ming shih 320 5b Ching po mun hon pi ko (增浦文獻備考) 174/1. The statement that the Ming emperor, then a simple monk turned soldier, and Cho Ban had both campaigned under the great Mongol general is one which I cannot find confirmed in Chinese sources

23 Kouk cho in mul ki 18b-19 After 1397, on the conclusion of his second mission he had the misfortune to offend an important official, was found guilty and cued in exile. But he was granted the posthumous title of (文眞).

24. Tai tong sa kam 9/lb-2a. Not noted in Chinese sources, not even in Professor Meng Sen (孟森) : Ming yuan Ch’ing hsi tung chi (明元淸系通紀), publ. 1934.

25. These despatches or letters of homage (piao and chien 赛) submitted reverentially to the court, often on trial matters, were supposed to be couched in special phraseology. Professor K’u Chieh kang’s article, referred to above, lists scores of examples of letters by Chinese scholars and officials of this time who paid the extreme penalty for failing to follow the formulae required by T’ai tsu. He had developed into a highly sensitive monarch, finding insults in every homonym that reminded him of his humble origin, his life in the priesthood, and his later free-booting days. Mr. Ku seems to think that the piao from Korea were of a similar character. Unfortunately he does not quote from the piao themselves. Perhaps there is none now extant, although Mr. Hsu Chung-shu (徐中舒) recently reported 72 Korean piao (dates not given in the archives of the Nei Ko in Peiping.

[page 41] arriving at the Liaotung line he found it closed. Whereupon the king sent by sea the following mission : his son, Prince Bang-wun (芳遠), who was to become king in 1401, together with Cho Ban, Nam Chai (南在), then Grand Councillor, and Kwun Keun (權近,) an elderly scholar.26 They were given an audience, the emperor was affected by their plea, and ordered the opening of the Liao roads.

On January 30, 1396 Yi Dan appointed Ryu Ku (柳玽)27 and others as envoys to China to present a piao and tribute, and congratulate the emperor on the first day of his 29th reign year. When T’ai-tsu saw that the phraseology of the letter was not humble he said to the officials of the board of ceremonies: “In relations between a country which is small and one which is large, the most important element in etiquette is the wording of its messages. On several previous occasions the king of Chosun. Yi Dan, has been offensive,—a matter which we have already had to call in question. Hardly had an envoy sent in order to seek our pardon returned than he has again used words of disrespect. It is not because I cannot punish him, but men of ancient times have said : ‘A military expedition in a distant land is not a good thing.’ Consequently I shall not despatch an army on this account. For the present I shall hold this envoy here, and transmit a message to Yi Dan telling him to send the writer of his piao here before I let the envoy return. Then we shall know what has caused this annoyance.” Ku stated that the message had been written by his countryman

26. Biographies in Kouk cho in mul ki 1/4 and 11-12 Kwun first served the house of Wang and only came to the court of Yi Dan after his son had been given the hand of the granddaughter of the king in marriage. He was one of the compilers of the Tong kouk sa ryak (東國史略) (Courant, Bibl. Cor. # 1847.)

27. This writing of his given name corresponds with that given in Seno, Makuma, op. cit., 24, where be is called (大學士) grand secretary. But I can find no biography of him. In the Ming shih 320/6 and Ming shih kao, lieh chuan 294/6, the name is written Ryu Sun (玽). In the Tong kouk tong kam 56/22 a Ryu Ku is mentioned who, in 1391, outranked Chyeng To-chen (vide infra), being (藝文館大提學) president of the National Academy, while Chyeng was (平壤府尹) governor of Pyengyang. ...The account which follows is a translation of the Tai tsu shih lu quoted by Ku Chieh-kang.

[page 42] Chyeng To-chen (鄭道傳)28. Accordingly To-chen was sent for by name. Soon afterwards, Ku was set free and allowed to return home.

On October 3 of the same year, Yi Dan sent Cho Ban and others bearing tribute of gold and silver ornaments, cloth mats, etc., to congratulate the emperor on his birthday. Likewise he sent his minister Kwun Chung-wha (權仲和)29 and others to express gratitude. Yi had already, on account of the piao with the rude and insulting phrases, ordered the arrest of the author. Wherefore Yi Dan had sent Chung-wha to the court saying, “Your small subject state is completely without guile, and would not dare to be wanting in respect even in the slightest degree. But the scholarship of outsiders is coarse and shallow, and makes (us) ignorant of the form for congratulatory messages at court; hence the errors in our language. After receiving your command, we did not know what to do, because we were afraid. So, to honor your majesty on your birthday, we did not dare to send a message, but have despatched our minister Chung-wha to render our felicitations to the emperor in person.”

On October 14 [11 days later], the king sent Chyeng

28. For biographical notices see Kouk cho in mul ki 1/2-4 and Ch’ien Ch’ien-i (錢謙益) (1582-1664): Lieh ch’ao shih chi (列朝詩集, 閏) 6/19, He first served the Wang Dynasty, but as that dynasty began to totter he supported Yi Dan, becoming commander of the right division of Yi’s army in 1391. (See T’u shu chi ch’eng VIII 23/16a.) He died in 1398 in the palace revolution preceding the enthronement of the next Korean king. Both Chien Chien-i and Chu I tsun (朱彜尊) (1629-1709) (Ming shih tsung (明詩綜) 95/6 cite him in their collections of Ming poets. He was one of the compilers of the original Koryu sa (Courant, Bibl. Cor.# 1816, now lost, and other works, and built the palace of Yi Dan.

29. The compilers of the Tai tsu shih lu have made a mistake in the name of the minister, if we may trust his Korean biographer (Kouk cho in mul ki l/5), Kwun Chung-wha was an important servant of the Korean king, but no mention is made in his biography of this mission to China. The official sent was Kwun Keun, already mentioned above. His biography reads at this point as follows : Kwun Keun volunteered to go, saying to the king : “It was Chyeng Tsong [vide infra] and I who had a hand in the piao and chien. Therefore I ought to go and handle this affair.” Yi Dan replied, “You do not have to go.” Keun answered “If I go, the Ming emperor may forgive us” The king was pleased and let him go. Whereupon Keun went to Nanking. Ming T’ai-tsu did not press the issue, but called him an honest man. The following year he returned to Chosun.

[page 43] Tsong (鄭總) 30 and others, three in all, who had written the [offensive] despatch, but said that Chyeng To-chen was sick and could not leave, and that Tsong and the rest had really been the ones who phrased the message. The emperor re-marked to the officials of the board of ceremonies: “Chosun has now sent several scholars. Let us not let them return, because they know a little about civilization but are unfamiliar with its true essence (大道) ; therefore they use what little knowledge they possess to make sport and ridicule us. If Chosun is ruined it will be because of these scholars.... The ancients have said, ‘To aid your master in accordance with the tao, force must not be used to subdue the empire.’ These scholars have not measured the power of their king, and they have dared as a small enemy to oppose us ; hence they have made light of us, and they stirred up ill feeling, harming the people in consequence. Send a messenger to Chosun telling (the court) not to employ these individuals. Let them be held in our capital And confer on them, besides, trifling offices, in order to put to an end the woes of the king’s ministers.”

On January 29, 1397 [first day of his 30th year], the em-peror said to the ministers of the board of ceremonies : “Since days of old princes of feudal states have had to have upright men as their vassals ; then their territory would flourish. When they employed men of no character, turmoil was the inevitable result Through the dictates of Heaven the king of Chosun, Yi Dan, has succeeded to the throne as the Wang dynasty was brought to an end. Accordingly Yi came into possession of the three Han (韓), and restored its former name of Chosun. Ceremony was based on tradition, law observed the ancient formulae, and the method of ruling

30. Here again the T’ai-tsu shih lu editors seem to have erred. So also, the Ming shih 320/6b and Ming shih kao lieh chuan 294/6 In Korean sources and in Seno Makuma, op. cit. 24, the given name is written (揌) and his biography in Kouk cho in mul ki 17 confirms the above. He shared with Chyeng To-chen the composition of the lost Koryu-sa. He was held for a time in Nanking and then exiled to Ta-li wei, Yunnan dying on the road.

[page 44] the country was correctly initiated. How does it happen that now he is short-sighted, and gives no thought to underlying principles? His chief ministers are men without depth and substance and are incapable of helping their prince as they should. In drawing up piao and chien they seek out and utilize words which may cause ruin, and place him in an intolerable position. What use are such followers? Although in my opinion it does not seem essential, nevertheless the gods are wise and punishment may not be withheld. Do you officials of the board of ceremonies transmit therefore a letter to the king of Chosun, making him aware of my views.”

On the day ping-hsul (丙戌) 31 of the third moon (1397). because Ryu Ku and others had received the emperor’s pardon and been sent back, Yi Dan despatched his cabinet minister Sal Chang-soo to thank the emperor for his mercy. The emperor declared to the officials of the board of ceremonies, “In ancient times Tzu-ch’an (子產)32 of the state of Cheng (鄭) was accustomed, in making up the draft of an order, to discuss it with his advisers, and to amend and correct it Not until it had passed through many hands was it delivered. For this reason people called the state of Cheng well governed. But as Chyeng To-chen and the rest are men of no account, who among the king’s ministers are going to help him to a satisfactory status? If he again employs Chyeng Tsong, No In-to (盧仁度), and Kim Yak-han (金若恆) in Chosun, Chyeng To-chen will once more become his chief aid. Now since Chyeng Tsong and the others are not forgiven, if the king is not careful he will again put himself in another’s hand. Now I order this king of Chosun to ponder this situation very thoughtfully in order to save the three Han.”

Mr. Ku Chieh-kang continues ：一

..........The mistake of Chosun, in its piao and chien,

31. The cyclical date is either a slip or the author or printer of the original source, for it does not fall in the third moon ; unfortunately I have no way of checking it.

32. Kung-sun Ch’iao of the 6th century B. C.

[page 45] was in repeatedly being cautioned by imperial warning, until in the 10th moon of the 30th year of Hung-wu (1397) its ministers presented the throne with a petition the words of which were disrespectful ; as before their envoys were detained. In the 4th moon of the 31st year (1398) ,83 because Chosun still maintained Chyeng To-chen in office, the emperor once more ordered the board of ceremonies to reprove Chosun for its impenitence, and to warn it against future cause for regret ; and on the pretext of repeated troubles with Chosun, he wanted to raise an army to chastise it The Kuo ch’u shih chi34 adds, And T’ai-tsu commanded the first captain of Liaotung to forbid Koreans from crossing the border, and to stop foreign merchants from trade forever

Mr. Ku does not give the exact date, nor source, of the emperor’s pronouncement that he wanted to invade Korea. It is fair therefore to turn to two works not used by him giving a view at variance with this, and dated the same month. I refer to the Ming t’ung chien (11/28a) by Hsia Hsieh and to the Ming shih. The former reads : On April 20, 1398 the ministers in audience proposed the invasion of Chosun The emperor was unwilling. At the beginning, because of the emperor’s not opposing Yi Dan’s change of dynasty and the change of name [of the country], Yi presumed that T’ai-tsu was easy to deal with. From the 27th year [1394] on, the tributary messages were all offensive in their wording. When asked for an explanation, he always shifted the responsibility to Chyeng To-chen. When the latter was sent for, he made the excuse that Chyeng was ill and could not leave. The present year’s congratulatory message of the New Year was slanderous also. The emperor remarked, however, that the country was situated on a remote peninsula, and that he did not wish to fight it All he did was to detain its envoys, for on two occasions they had upset relations both with China and at home...... This story, in much briefer form, is confirmed in the Ming shih (T’ai-tsu pen chi 3/15).

33. The emperor died shortly after, on June 24.1398.

34鲁 This occurs in vol. (子) of the manuscript copy belonging to my colleague Mr. Chi-chen Wang.

[page 46]

CONCLUSION

My conclusion as a result of this study of the first Ming emperor’s relations with Korea is as follows : T’ai-tsu may not have exerted direct influence on Korean administration in the way that was done in the period of Kuang-hsu (i. e. after 1882), as he certainly did not invade it ; but by threatening invasion, by cutting off Korean commerce across the Yalu, and by continually holding envoys, by exiling a number of them to Yunnan, and by occasionally demanding the submission of others, he was just as surely interfering in the country’s management Some of these emissaries were among Korea’s most important officials, and their absence must assuredly have been felt.