CHAPTER 23

KOREAN EUNUCHS AS IMPERIAL ENVOYS

Relations with Chosŏn through the Zhengde reign

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INTRODUCTION

The usual way to describe Ming relations with Korea is through the notion of the "tributary system." The Ming emperor, with the moral and cultural authority as a universal ruler of "all-under-heaven," enforces a China-centered world order by investing foreign rulers as vassal-kings, with the expectation that they render obeisance through regular tribute missions. This formula for understanding pre-nineteenth-century diplomacy in East Asia has received its fair share of criticism since its influential scholarly articulation in the work of John King Fairbank.[1] But for being overly general, anachronistic, Sinocentric, reductively functionalist, and culturally essentialist, its hold on Ming-Korea relations nevertheless remains tenacious. Its tenacity reflects in part the utility of the "tributary system" as an analytical framework for scholars and the malleability of tributary practices and institutions, which were used in flexible ways by both parties for domestic legitimation and foreign relations.[2] Korean embassies were also notable for the frequency, regularity, and intensity of participation in Ming tributary practices. They arrived in the Ming capital at least three times a year. Unlike most other groups along the Ming's maritime and land frontier, the Korean court also professed (at least in the context of these embassies) shared cultural values and an ideological commitment to Ming claims of universal sovereignty. Both countries were administered by a Confucian elite who could communicate with one another through literary Chinese (also referred to as classical Chinese or literary Sinitic). In other words, whatever the faults of the "tributary system" as a descriptor in general, the Ming-Korea case seems to fit the bill as a "paradigmatic", if one-of-a-kind, example of tributary relations, with Korea stereotyped as imperial China's most loyal vassal.[3]

This stereotype has its origins in historical Chinese perceptions of what Korea meant for the imperial project. The primary narrative of Ming relations with Korea that could be gleaned from official imperial historiography concerns precisely matters of imperial legitimacy. When Korea appears in the laconic entries of the Ming *Veritable Records*, it is usually in the context of routine tribute embassies, especially those who arrived to participate in the New Year's rituals. On the other hand,

the detail regarding the few years of the Imjin War of 1592–98, when the Ming defended the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) of Korea against the invasion launched by the Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98) contrasts starkly with the terse coverage of the preceding two centuries.[4] The considerable attention devoted to the war is unsurprising, considering the Ming's outlay of blood and treasure, though as scholars have argued, the expedition to rescue Chosŏn also sought to reaffirm a "Ming-centered world order."[5] These concerns are reproduced in the official Qing-compiled *Ming History*, which devotes an entire fascicle to the history of Ming relations with Korea. It largely reproduces the contours of Ming official sources, with a shared concern with imperial legitimacy extending into detailed coverage of how the Qing managed to replace the Ming as Korea's tributary overlord.[6]

The prominence of these topics—dynastic transition, imperial legitimacy, and the Ming defense of Korea—reflect the historiographical concerns of the late imperial Chinese state, and revolve around the issue of Korea's status as a tributary vassal. But it takes two to tango. Korea too played a part in shaping this relationship. As Ji-Young Lee has recently argued, the resilience of the Ming tributary institutions and practices have as much to do with the domestic interests of the states and rulers who participated in it as it does with Ming imperial ambitions and cannot simply be reduced to a function of Ming imposition or the logical consequence of shared Confucian culture.[7] While it is hard to gainsay the importance of relations with the Ming for Korea, the view from Chinese official historiography is a pale reflection of the total picture. The preoccupation with tribute as a function of Ming legitimacy occludes whole swaths of the diplomatic experience: practices of envoy poetry,[8] cultural competition,[9] Korean *realpolitik*,[10] the importance of language interpreters,[11] the impact on Korean domestic politics,[12] and Korea's lateral relations with the Ming's other northeast Asian "tributaries": the Jurchens, Japanese, and Ryūkyūans.[13] All in all, a much more in-depth and nuanced understanding of Ming-Korea relations have developed to not only challenge the once dominant, stereotypical view, but also broaden our understanding of how interstate relations operated in East Asia during the Ming period. Given the limitations of space, this chapter cannot provide a comprehensive discussion of the ramifications of these insights. What it will offer instead are snapshots of two facets of Ming-Korean interactions before the cataclysmic Imjin War, the value of envoy travel for the Korean court as a vehicle for information gathering and the role of Korean-born eunuchs as mediators between the Ming and Korean courts that will both complement and challenge the usual diplomatic history of this period.

MING-CHOSŎN RELATIONS AT A GLANCE: KOREAN MISSIONS TO BEIJING

When Zhu Yuanzhang expelled the Mongols from Dadu (Beijing) in 1368, Korea was ruled by the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392). The rulers of Koryŏ had maintained a marriage alliance with the Mongols for nearly a century and its last kings were both *bona fide* members of the Mongol aristocracy as well as royal scions of Korea. Although early Ming relations with Koryŏ were peaceful, an assassinated Ming envoy, a regicide at the Korean court, border disputes, excessive Ming tribute demands,

and the lingering presence of the Mongols in Manchuria were sources of instability. Relations deteriorated for the worse in 1388, when the Koryŏ launched an invasion of Ming-controlled Liaodong, but war was averted when the general charged with the attack mutinied, leading his troops to seize control of the Koryŏ capital instead. This general, Yi Sŏnggye (1335–1408, r. King T'aejo 1392–98), soon founded a new dynasty, and became the king of Korea in 1392.[14]

As Korea's new ruler, Yi Sŏnggye faced challenges at home and abroad. A military man from the north whose ancestors had served the Mongols for generations, Yi Sŏnggye lacked the genealogical credentials of the traditional Koryŏ aristocracy. As a usurper, he had to move quickly to eliminate pockets of domestic resistance. He sought external legitimation from the Ming, requesting patents of investiture from the Ming that would have recognized him as Korea's new ruler. He also invited the Ming emperor to choose from two options a new name for his state. The Ming emperor selected Chaoxian, or Chosŏn in Korean, calling it the "most beautiful name among the eastern barbarians."[15] But, he remained mistrustful of Yi Sŏnggye, refusing to grant him investiture.[16] Ming-Korean relations again lurched from one crisis to another until 1398, when the Ming emperor had died, spurring a succession dispute between the legitimate successor, Jianwen, and his uncle Zhu Di. In the same year, Yi Sŏnggye abdicated the throne in the wake of a palace coup, which paved the way for the accession of his son, Yi Pangwŏn (1367–1422, r. King T'aejong 1400–18) in 1400. Then in 1402 Zhu Di, victorious over his nephew, became the Yongle emperor, and from one usurper to another, granted the new king of Chosŏn royal robes, with patents of investiture to follow the year after, that confirmed him as Korea's ruler in the eyes of the Ming.[17]

In the decades to follow, Ming and Chosŏn exchanged envoys in moments of dynastic import. Korean emissaries arrived to present felicitations on imperial accessions and investitures, as well as condolences for imperial deaths. They also announced events pertaining to Korean dynastic succession: a new ruler, a new heir apparent, or a new queen. Each of these cases usually also involved a Ming embassy to Korea, either to proclaim developments in the Ming palace or to bequeath Korean royalty with patents of investiture and ceremonial robes, valued at the Korean court as symbols of royal legitimacy. But these embassies occurred only as frequently as the pace of dynastic succession would require them. The bulk of envoy travel fell on the shoulders of the Korean court, which timed three annual envoy missions to fit the Ming ritual calendar: the New Year, the emperor's birthday, and the birthday of the heir apparent.

The range of purposes an envoy mission served far exceeded the scope of these express ceremonial functions. A considerable number of Ming embassies, especially during the first decades, were to extract needed resources from Korea, notably oxen and horses, not simply tokens of symbolic fealty. The Chosŏn court also valued their missions to the Ming capital for much more than to seek political legitimacy and security assurances. While an envoy's official task in Beijing could be to present tribute and felicitations, his portfolio reflected a much wider range of concerns.[18] They often had to carry out specific orders. For instance, Sejong ordered his envoys to research Ming ceremonial regalia in 1437. By the sixteenth century, these practices became matters of routine. One member of the envoy mission, the Corrector (*chijŏnggwan*) was charged with investigating Ming ritual and institutional practices,

as well as to consult Ming officials and literati regarding matters of classical scholarship.[19] The travelogue of the Corrector for the 1576 embassy, Cho Hŏn (1544–92), reported his observations of Ming customs, institutions, and rituals. Impressed with China's urban economic development as well as its cultural accomplishments, Cho highlighted aspects of Ming society worthy for Korean emulation.[20] But proposals for reforming Korean society along Ming lines were seldom taken-up wholesale. Even for the zealous Cho Hŏn, his search for Ming models was highly selective, reflecting his own philosophical and political agenda.[21]

Alongside this research, Chosŏn envoys eagerly sought out the newest Ming books.[22] This bibliophilia generally impressed Ming observers, but in one case it raised an alarm. A Korean envoy had been discovered purchasing the *Gazetteer of the Great Ming Unification*, a geographical text court officials believed should not fall into foreign hands.[23] In general, book purchases were to augment the holdings of the government libraries, and thus focused on works of learning. One Chosŏn king, Yŏnsan'gun, however, also asked his envoys to indulge his interest in Chinese romances, by purchasing titles such as the *Story of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji*) and the *Story of Alluring Crimson* (*Jiaohong ji*).[24]

Korean court records documented these and other requests for exotic luxuries like lychee, longans, and betel nuts with disapproval.[25] Though maligned, they were only atypical because a *king* had asked for these particular objects. Yŏnsan'gun's repeated demands that his envoys bring back "licentious and frivolous" goods were evidence of an unrestrained royal character, unfit for rule, and justified his later dethroning (a matter which will be discussed later in this chapter). Other kings made special orders before and after, while the journeys of their own officials were in part funded by trade in tropical commodities such as peppercorn.[26] Members of the embassy, envoy-officials, interpreters, and even their porters, profited from this opportunity for trade, despite royal injunctions against it. At times, even high-ranking court officials were caught abetting the smuggling of porcelains, books, and silks.[27]

NEWS FROM THE MING: EMBASSIES AS INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Chosŏn envoys were also charged with intelligence gathering. Given the sheer number of individual envoy missions and resulting reports, the information collected was wide-ranging. Nevertheless, matters of war and peace, Ming imperial politics, and the presence of other tributary envoys were perennial concerns. The Yongle emperor's military expansion in Mongolia, for instance, caused a stir at the Korean court, as some Korean officials believed the Ming would turn to Korea afterward. Though a false alarm, the Chosŏn court remained wary of the Yongle emperor's penchant for "vainglory" and remained on the look-out for overweening imperial ambition.[28]

In documenting the Ming's other foreign contacts, Chosŏn envoys also reported on the first European emissaries to arrive at the Ming court in 1516. The embassy, led by the Lisbon apothecary Tomé Pires (ca, 1465–1524) on behalf of the Portuguese king Manuel I, ended disastrously. The Portuguese had recently conquered Malacca and their aggressive presence in the South Sea led the Ming to suspect their intentions and eventually the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1523 and their subsequent exclusion from Chinese ports.[29] Before this dramatic denouément, Tomé Pires and his embassy

remained in Beijing, where they encountered a Korean embassy.[30] In an audience with the Chosŏn king, the returning Korean emissaries identified them as envoys from the country of the "Franks" (Korean: *Pullanggi*, Chinese: *Folangji*), a usage derived from an Arab-Islamic convention for describing Christian Europe. The presence of these previously unknown foreigners, who arrived by sea from far Western reaches and traveled "three thousand leagues" overland to reach the capital, piqued the king's interest. He learned about their impressive books, which contained writing in "small script" that "resembled *dhāraṇī*" that is, the Sanskrit-derived letter forms used in esoteric Buddhist rituals. They were strange of appearance, wearing "goose down coats" and "wide trousers." They practiced the curious custom of monogamy, where even the "ruler . . . has [but] one queen and does not remarry even after her death." Their dietary habits were also puzzling. They ate "chicken and wheat products," which led the envoy to surmise that these must be the "sole produce" of their faraway country. According to the report, these "Frankish" envoys had complained about their shoddy lodging, which led the Ming Board of Rites to deny them an imperial audience for three years.[31] Meeting such strange foreigners were rather exceptional; more common during a sojourn to Beijing were encounters with embassies from other civilized countries such as the Ryūkyūs and Vietnam, with whom Korean envoys occasionally exchanged poems and letters in classical Chinese.[32]

Korean envoys also paid close attention to the shifting landscape of power at the Ming court. When envoys reported that the Grand Secretary Xia Yan (1482–1548), whose support Chosŏn envoys counted on,[33] had been impeached, the Chosŏn knew they had to work on his replacement, Yan Song (1480–1567).[34] Knowing that Yan held the keys to power, the Chosŏn valued the relationship with Yan and acceded to his requisitions for special gifts, in particular, for Korean memorial paper.[35] When Yan had rebuffed a Korean petition for revising sections of the *Ming Compendium* (Da Ming huidian) the Chosŏn found offensive, it dropped the issue, knowing full well attempting to circumvent him would have been fruitless.[36]

As Korean emissaries kept an eye on the state of Ming politics, the Chosŏn became privy to court intrigue and palace coups, along with the personal moral failings of the Ming emperor. Korean envoy testimonies spoke of the scandal and violence that surrounded the nexus of imperial power. As historians of China have long noted, Chosŏn record-keepers, unconcerned with the taboos of *lèse-majesté*, had no compunction casting the imperial person or his rule in a negative light.[37] Chosŏn envoys related in gory detail the aftermath of the attempted coup by the palace eunuch Cao Jixiang in 1461. When this massive mutiny of Mongol military units in the Ming capital was suppressed, several thousand were dead with eight hundred executed by slicing. For the three next days, it rained, and "water, mixed with blood, flooded the forbidden palace." The bloodshed, even if exaggerated, was a chilling reminder of the violence that lay behind imperial authority.[38]

Reports detailing the carnage of Ming imperial politics are in good company. Even scandal from the emperor's seraglio did not escape the Chosŏn court's attention. The Yongle emperor requisitioned from Chosŏn several well-born women as concubines in his harem.[39] In 1424, upon the Yongle emperor's death, a returning Korean envoy related the facts of these women's gruesome demise. According to his informants, a Korean nurse who once served the Korean concubines and a Korean-born eunuch at the Ming palace, the women were implicated in a series of purges and massacres.

A Chinese concubine by the name of Lü tried to befriend a Korean concubine, Lady Yŏ, by claiming virtual kinship with her on the basis of their shared surname (which though is pronounced differently in modern Korean and Chinese, are written with the same Chinese character). Lady Yŏ, however, snubbed Lü. The spurned Lady Lü sought vengeance against Yŏ by accusing her of poisoning another Korean concubine, Lady Kwŏn, causing her death. The emperor, who had favored Kwŏn, was enraged, and executed Lady Yŏ along with several hundred others, including many of the Korean palace ladies. Later Lü was discovered to have engaged in sexual relations with palace eunuchs. The emperor questioned her servants under torture, who confessed to conspiring to assassinate the emperor. The Yongle emperor personally attended to their executions by dismemberment. In all, two thousand eight hundred individuals perished. Upon her demise, one palace woman cursed the emperor saying, "It was your own penis that shriveled, how could you have blamed [Lady Lü] for having an affair with a young eunuch?" When the Yongle emperor died, only two Korean concubines survived him, but they were forced to commit suicide to accompany the emperor in his grave.[40]

These salacious details, while admittedly difficult to verify, escaped the confines of the inner palace, and traveled with envoys back to Korea to be preserved in the records kept by the Chosŏn's court historians. Whatever one makes of the Chosŏn court's "admiration" of Chinese high culture and political allegiance to the Ming throne, it entertained no romantic fantasies about the Ming. Chosŏn envoys had no qualms appraising the failures of Ming emperors and blamed them for the perceived devolution of court politics and Ming governance. Consider the ways in which they described the Zhengde emperor. Korean records describe him as "an immature and young ruler, who did not like listening to sound words." They noted his neglect of government, refusing to hold court until well past noon, leaving his court officials to "wait outside until their feet froze."[41] One envoy remarked that the "emperor grew lazier by the day," and did not hold court "more than once or twice a year." Things had devolved to the point that whenever the envoy tried to ask the Chinese about contemporary affairs, they "covered their mouths and ran away," unwilling to speak of such matters.[42] Ming interpreters (*xuban*) who worked at the Huitong House, the hostel responsible for lodging foreign envoys, nonetheless divulged a few things here and there. The emperor now took up dressing as a Mongol warrior, complete with "felt caps, leather coats, robes, and socks" and ordered his eunuchs to role-play with him, "calling each other 'barbarians'," and "galloping around on horseback day and night, not returning [to the palace] for the whole evening." When one loyal eunuch tried to reproach his ruler, the emperor answered, "you are by nature loyal and straightforward; it would be good if we sent you to a post to Nanjing," and had him assassinated on the way. According to the report, after this incident, no one else dared remonstrate with the emperor.[43]

From the emperor's infatuation with a young catamite leading to disinterest in his harem, to the outbreak of rebellions led by imperial princes, reports of the Zhengde emperor's troubled reign continued to flow into the Chosŏn court.[44] In the months before the boy-emperor's premature death in 1521, the Korean court even weighed the risks of the Ming's collapse, but the envoys assured the king the common people were not "especially worried or anguished" and "court officials still managed all affairs with utmost diligence."[45]

Pithy appraisals of nearly every Ming ruler can be found in Korean sources. By and large, they do not depart far from how they are described in Chinese historical accounts. King T'aejo once described the Hongwu emperor to have "killed excessively," as even his "founding officials and important advisers could not preserve themselves."[46] His son T'aejong condemned the Yongle emperor's love of glory. The Chenghua emperor was notorious for giving his eunuchs free rein, while Zhengde could not cease with "childish games."[47] A Chosŏn high official went so far as to say that it was only "appropriate that a muddleheaded ruler" like Jiajing "suffered an assassination attempt."[48] The early Chosŏn court, its rulers, officials and historians would probably agree, more or less, with the appraisals of the sixteen emperors of the Ming dynasty by the American historian Sarah Schneewind.[49] They were "respectively, murderous, impractical, grandiose, sickly, licentious, vainglorious, improvident, doltish, hen-pecked, bibulous, self-indulgent, profligate, completely irresponsible, debauched, frivolous, and ineffectual." Yet, a resoundingly negative image of Ming rulers did not prevent the Chosŏn court from adhering to a diplomatic posture of reverence. One might then ask—why?[50] Was this outward presentation of reverence only an expedient means to avert Ming intervention in Korean affairs?

The reasons are complex. In part the diplomatic framework built over the years had worked well enough to provide the political legitimacy, cultural and economic access, and security guarantees the Chosŏn court desired. It may not be very accurate, however, to reduce the meaning of Korean participation to any one of the above priorities. Nor should Korean participation in the Ming tribute system be understood as simply a matter of cultural attraction or ideological commitment. While it is true the Chosŏn courtiers and rulers alike turned to Ming examples as a source of authority for their arguments, they served more as case examples of statecraft in action, rather than a model for unqualified emulation. During one royal lecture in 1509, King Chungjong's advisers described their own experiences from traveling to Ming Beijing. One named Sŏng Hŭiyŏn (1461–1513) recounted a case when a Ming high-official was punished with severe beatings over a minor offense. Lamenting the excessiveness of Ming punitive measures, Sŏng then implored the king to exercise leniency when it came to the punishment of his own officials. In the same lecture, Sŏng praised the Ming's use of a systematic mechanism for assessing the merits and accomplishments of court officials. A subtext of the censure of Ming imperial excesses were veiled criticisms against the abuses committed by Korea's own rulers.[51] Ultimately such discussions were tied up, first and foremost, with Korean concerns. Pressure for reform according to a Ming example could always be deflected with a simple acknowledgment that "there is much in [Korea] that does not follow the institutions of the Chinese—there is no need to change everything."[52]

KOREAN EUNUCHS AS IMPERIAL EMISSARIES

One institution that Chosŏn envoys regularly condemned was the employment of eunuchs in Ming government.[53] Their condemnations were also accompanied by glimmers of *schadenfreude*. When discussing the overweening influence of the eunuch dictator Liu Jin (1451–1510), a Chinese scholar once asked a Korean envoy:

"how does your country treat eunuchs?" The envoy answered proudly that "they are only in charge of cleaning and sweeping," a remark that supposedly "earned the unceasing praise" of his interlocutor.[54]

The Korean envoy downplayed the position of eunuchs in the Korean palace, whose role was indeed minor when compared to the prominence of Ming eunuchs. Like in the Ming, these castrated men were primarily entrusted with serving and safeguarding the monarch's harem, but in the Ming they were also administrators, imperial tutors, ritual specialists, military officers, soldiers, and diplomats. The seafarer Zheng He, with his many voyages to the Indian Ocean, was but the most famous of these eunuch-diplomats.[55] Often, eunuchs were sent to their place of cultural or ethnic origin. Korea was no exception. Many of the eunuch emissaries the Ming sent there were natives of Korea.[56]

The documentary record of Ming-Korean diplomacy, with its epistles, poetry anthologies, and travelogues, resulted from exchanges between Ming literati officials and their Korean counterparts, but they reflect poorly the social constitution of Ming diplomacy for most of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century.[57] From 1392 to 1469, the period of highest diplomatic activity between the Ming and Chosŏn, eunuchs led 63 out of 105 Ming embassies, while literati officials only led 22. The bulk of the diplomatic burden fell on the shoulder of the eunuchs of the inner palace.[58] Their value to the Ming emperor was their awareness of local conditions, which presumably included competence in the local language, but this competence was not universal. One Sin Kwisaeng was mistaken for a Chinese because he refused to speak Korean. Taken for arrogance, this refusal may very well have been due to lack of ability. Sent as tribute to China often as young boys, they might not retain or develop skills in Korean. Indeed, some clearly depended on Chinese-speaking Korean interpreters employed by the Korean court during their travels to Korea.[59]

The presence of Korean eunuchs at the imperial court was in part a Mongol legacy. Under the Mongol empire, many Korean elites, including the royal family, intermarried with the Mongols. When Korean women entered the households of Mongol aristocracy, which included the imperial harem, they were also accompanied by their servants from Korea. The chief consort of China's last Mongol emperor was a Korean woman, Empress Ki (fl. 1340–68), who had at her beck and call a vast number of eunuchs, including her favorite, a Korean named Pak Bukha.[60] When Zhu Yuanzhang reached Beijing in 1368, the Mongol imperial entourage fled in haste, leaving behind much of the palace personnel. Among them were Korean eunuchs who continued to serve the Ming. In 1395, the Ming emperor allowed those who were still alive to retire, repatriating them to their home country, Korea.[61] In the meantime, Chosŏn Korea continued to send intermittent tribute of castrated boys to supply the Ming court with fresh personnel.[62]

When some returned to Korea as official envoys, they were often tasked with the procurement of tribute. This included not only exotic goods, but also human tribute in the form of young women and more eunuchs. The Yongle emperor, dissatisfied with the three thousand castrated prisoners-of-war from Vietnam whom he called "muddle-headed and stupid", tasked a Korean-born envoy to Chosŏn to procure three or four hundred eunuchs who were "bright and quick-witted and ready to be employed." The Chosŏn court king balked at the request, remarking that "such objects do not sprout from seeds; how can we get so many," and only

sent only twenty-nine to the Ming. A human tribute responsible for procuring more of his kind, the Korean eunuch represents well the extractive practices of the Ming empire.[63]

SERVANTS OF TWO MASTERS: THE KOREAN EUNUCH AS MEDIATOR

As their personal slaves, the eunuchs of emperors were often charged with tasks the emperors wished to conceal from the civil bureaucracy. The Chosŏn court suspected the Xuande emperor to have done as much when he sought Korean women for his harem.[64] By relaying oral edicts, rather than proclaiming written declarations, a eunuch could execute orders with no paper trail.[65] But it was precisely their position as agents of the emperor, as opposed to members of literati-dominated civil bureaucracy, that made them useful for the Chosŏn court. At times when the Ming bureaucracy proved intractable toward Chosŏn demands, a Korean eunuch with strong ties to the emperor and his household could resolve them by circumventing the usual bureaucratic channels.[66] Although the emperor's slave, the Korean eunuch also mediated Chosŏn's relationship with the Ming.

The loyalties and motivations of Korean-born eunuchs were the subject of suspicion. As natives of Korea in Ming service, their persons were contested by overlapping sovereign claims. In 1468, one Ming official in Liaodong, Hou Ying (1430–?) wrote the following in a memorial to argue for why the practice of employing Korean eunuchs as envoys should cease:

> The eunuchs Chŏng Tong and Ch'oe An have gone to Chosŏn to invest [the new Chosŏn king] . . . but they are both people of Chosŏn. Their ancestral graves, parents, brothers, and relatives are all in that land. When meeting the king, it would be difficult for them not to prostrate before him and ask him for favors. This greatly belittles the prestige of the Central State [the Ming].[67]

Hou's proposal to cease employing Korean eunuchs in diplomacy was accepted, but the injunction was clearly not observed. Korean-born eunuchs continued to serve as emissaries for several decades until 1521. Hou's observations of the subtle relationship these eunuchs had with their two "masters," the Ming emperor and the Chosŏn king, were nevertheless astute.

Korean eunuchs did behave differently from their Ming literati counterparts. All Ming envoys took a superior position when proclaiming imperial edicts, for in such a ritual context, the envoy stands not as himself, but the vehicle of the emperor's voice. When the ceremony concluded and the imperial edict was received by the Chosŏn king, so too the imperial aura around the envoy dispersed. In the more informal court audiences that followed, Ming literati envoys usually took a position of parity with the Chosŏn king. In contrast, the eunuch Chŏng Tong offered to relinquish his ritual position, and insisted the Chosŏn king occupy a position of symbolic superiority: facing south. The Chosŏn king declined, and insisted that their proposal was a "breach of precedent." Chŏng insisted that the king "face south" and he "face north" because they, as "commoners native" to Chosŏn, should observe the rites of "ruler and subject." The Korean eunuchs then remained "prostrated on the floor"

until the Chosŏn king reluctantly accepted the ritual elevation as his sovereign.[68] Another envoy, Kang Ok, insisted on the same, exclaiming that he "was but a slave of this country, whose flesh and bone are all gifts of his majesty's grace. In his reasoning, the "public ritual" performed in the main palace halls had already concluded; now that they were in the king's private chambers, a "private ritual" where he was to make personal obeisance to the Korean king was to take place.[69] Explained as expressions of affinity to native place, ritual deference to the Korean king ("We were originally commoners of this land, please allow us to kowtow to Your Majesty") may have been rooted in genuine sentiments, or at least a recognition of the Korean ruler's importance to their interests.[70] King Sejo, for instance, personally selected the boys who were to go to the Ming as eunuchs. One, the eunuch Kim Po, credited the king's graces for his "fortune" of being able to serve the emperor and return home in glory as an imperial emissary.[71]

Despite these professions of fealty, these eunuchs' relationship with their home country was ambivalent. When Kang Ok and Kim Po returned to Korea for the first time in 1468 as imperial emissaries, the Chosŏn court reunited them with their surviving family members in the capital.[72] When the relatives arrived, the court granted these relatives a variety of requests—ranging from speedy and favorable conclusions to lawsuits, amnesty from prior legal violations, to reprieve from corvée obligations—all to ingratiate themselves with the Ming emissaries.[73] But the day of reunion made for a bittersweet homecoming. Kang Ok learned from two surviving relatives that his mother had died fourteen years ago, a discovery which led him to "weep bitterly without end." Kim Po received his father and older brother at his hostel in Kaesŏng, but he refused to entertain his three uncles, blaming them for inciting his father to abandon his mother.[74] About two weeks later, Kim Po's mother arrived in the capital. Kim went to pay his respects, the two "held each other and wept with overwhelming bitterness." He assured his mother that her suffering would soon end, because the king was willing to grant his older brother an official salary and they no longer had to live with his father who "now loved his second wife." He then scolded his father: "you have treated my mother so poorly, but today you drink my wine. Are you not ashamed?" In his fury, he then turned to his ten-year-old half-brother, the child of his hated stepmother. He slapped the child repeatedly, while swearing to bring the child to the palace in Beijing, presumably as a eunuch. But in the chaos the boy ran away and could not be found.[75]

To take the boy with him, Kang would have needed to make the request to the Chosŏn king. Had the boy not escaped (and thwarted his older brother Kang Ok's chance at retribution), the king would have likely granted the request, for the Chosŏn court disbursed numerous favors to the eunuchs and their families. These included building or repairing their families' residences, titles of nobility for deceased parents and ancestors, official posts and stipends to living relatives, and pilgrimages to the sacred Diamond Mountains (Kŭmgangsan).[76] This generosity owed at least in part to the value these imperial emissaries had for the Chosŏn court. For this particular Chosŏn king, Sejo, good relations with the Ming inner palace was crucial for the success of the coup d'etat that led to his accession and the concealment of this reality from the Ming court.[77] For his grandson, King Sŏngjong, the access granted to the inner palace through these Korean-born eunuchs served him well in managing a series of political challenges, including a troublesome Ming trade embargo on

the export of buffalo horns, a critical raw material for manufacturing war bows.[78] Sustaining this useful relationship of course was not simply lingering native loyalties, but also what the Chosŏn court could offer.

Perhaps most valued by these eunuchs was a contribution towards their position in the Ming palace hierarchy. Excluded from the civil bureaucracy, their sole avenue of advancement was through ingratiating themselves with the emperor and his family, an effort which the Chosŏn court abetted. The procurement of exotic tribute goods, such as hunting birds are a case in point. Early Ming emperors, fond of the hunt, desired birds of prey, especially the gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*), the largest of the raptors. According to the Korean king Sejong, these rare and magnificent birds were "valued as priceless objects, treasures of the first order in China."[79] Known as *haidongqing* in Chinese, they were not perennial denizens of Korea, but migrated south from the Arctic Circle in the winter. Their capture required either the help of Jurchen tribesmen or the dispatch of experienced falconers to Korea's northeast frontier.[80] Once, in 1452, Chosŏn refused a Ming eunuch envoy's request for these birds and instead sent them to the emperor as a separate tribute, so that "they would be seen as gifts from Chosŏn," and not the merit of the eunuch.[81] Later that year, then only a Korean prince, the future King Sejo seized power through a *coup d'état*. With his eye on the throne, he proved more forthcoming to the demands from eunuch envoys whose cooperation he required. With no gyrfalcons on hand, he granted a white eagle to his guests as a "gift to the emperor."[82]

The gyrfalcon tribute, connected with the institution of the imperial hunt, was a controversial issue at the Ming court. Ming emperors, their eunuchs, and the civil bureaucracy had different opinions, with the latter protesting their propriety.[83] In 1467, following one such debate, an imperial edict arrived in Korea declaring: "Ever since We [the Chenghua emperor] acceded to the throne, We have already proclaimed to all places prohibiting tributes of flowers, trees, birds and beasts. What more of white pheasants, prodigious objects, and gyrfalcons, used as hunting birds?" and ordering King Sejo to refrain from sending such tribute.[84] Dubious of the Ming court's sincerity, Sejo ordered local officials in the northern frontier to make "advance preparations" in case the tribute was to be renewed, even as he dispatched an emissary to offer thanks for the tribute reprieve.[85]

The Ming had "canceled" such tribute several times before, only to reinstate it afterward.[86] One year later, when the eunuchs Kang Ok and Kim Po arrived, they made demands, not for gyrfalcons *per se*, but other kinds of animals: lynxes, yellow hawks, and hunting dogs.[87] When a Korean official rebuffed the request, citing the imperial edict prohibiting tribute of exotic fauna, the two envoys offered conflicting responses. Kang Ok insinuated this prohibition could be safely ignored, but his assistant Kim Po apologized, professing ignorance of the imperial orders. But when the date of their return approached, the two envoys stalled, leading the court to suspect they were still waiting for these items as parting gifts.[88] Several days later, when Sejo offered to capture these animals for him, Kang Ok was "overjoyed" but citing the prohibition against presenting "birds" in particular, declined the offer of gyrfalcons.[89] Meanwhile, Kim Po explained to the king in private that the whole procurement trip was Kang Ok's idea, an attempt to ingratiate himself with the emperor. He advised the king to observe the prohibition against tributes of "rare birds and strange beasts," lest the "Central State [the Ming] look down upon *our* country," that is, Korea.[90]

Rather than acting in concert, the two envoys undercut one another, a dynamic likely representative of the frequently contentious relationship between individual eunuchs. When Kang Ok returned to Korea in 1480, this time as an assistant emissary, his designs were again undermined by a colleague. This time it was his superior, the chief emissary Chŏng Tong. Chŏng claimed it was he, not Kang, who truly represented the emperor's personal wishes, which had been "deliberately concealed" from Kang.[91] Their rivalry soon erupted dramatically, and the Chosŏn court found itself interceding to mediate in Kang and Chŏng's tattered relationship.[92]

The extent to which the Chosŏn court colluded with these eunuchs became a sore issue for the Korean officialdom. They protested what they saw to be the disbursement of emoluments and titles to undeserving men of lesser social standing. They also objected to the court's tactic of using imperial eunuchs as proxies.[93] When the eunuch Chŏng Tong found that, in the wake of such protests, the Korean king proved reluctant to grant his requests, he voiced his grievances, reminding the king of how hard he had worked on the king's behalf in the past:

> How could the king know about all the things I've done for our country? How can the high officials [of Chosŏn] know about them? Only heaven knows! The other day, during the banquet, I fell to tears—it was not for any other reason, but that the king had thought [acceding to my wishes] would break the rules of his court. But if we say that I am breaking the rules, what about the requests that this country has made [of the Ming]? Are they all in accordance with the rules? We could say that the rules of the Ming court have also been broken!

He certainly believed that, given all he had done for the Chosŏn court, he deserved to be better treated:

> The other day, during the banquet, [the king] gave me only ten boar skins and one lamp. How can a king give gifts like this? If it was only about me, that would be fine. But how would I look in front of all [my underlings]? This must be because the king finds me annoying. Even if I am annoying—just look at how the previous kings treated [the other Korean eunuchs] Chang Kŭn (fl. 1401) and Yun Pong (fl. 1440), who came year after year to ask for gyrfalcons. Now that His Majesty treats me this way, I don't really want to help him with all the favors he asked of me.[94]

The court was livid at the eunuch's "irreverence," but King Sŏngjong ultimately bent to Chŏng Tong's pressure, because soon an imperial edict arrived from the Ming to demand an even more exorbitant tribute. The items included a vast array of animal and plant products, including ornate ivory carvings to be crafted to exacting specifications, items that the Korean court had no ability to furnish. The Chosŏn court suspected that these imperial requests were most likely a result of Chŏng's own machinations, for now he agreed to "do his best" to help "reduce" the tribute quantity, "however difficult it may be."[95] Though the Chosŏn court repeatedly lamented Chŏng's "greed," believing that the Ming's literati-officials would never stoop to such lows,[96] the fact was, as Chŏng described it and now reminded them, their relationship was reciprocal and symbiotic, if costly and unnerving.[97] The link to the inner palace

that the Korean eunuchs provided again proved critical in the aftermath of the *coup d'état* of 1506 that deposed the king Yŏnsan'gun in favor of his younger brother, for it was the "lobbying" efforts of Korean eunuchs in Beijing that ensured the arrival of Ming patents of investiture for the new king, despite the air of suspicion that hung over the succession.[98] When these eunuchs returned to Chosŏn as emissaries in 1508, they were none too shy about demanding recompense for their "merits."[99]

EPILOGUE: END OF AN ERA

One of the eunuchs the Chosŏn court relied on to conceal the Yŏnsan'gun affair was Chin Ho (fl. 1506–22). He was sent to Beijing as tribute, at the age of seven, in 1483. Neither he nor the Chosŏn court knew it at that moment, but Chin and the eighteen other boys selected were the last contingent of Korean human tribute to the Ming court.[100] The cessation of human tribute has been viewed as a major turning point in Chosŏn-Ming relations. Without new tributes of castrated boys to the Ming palace to replenish their dwindling numbers, Korean eunuchs completely disappeared from the historical stage. Ming-Chosŏn diplomacy in 1580 would look very different from that in 1480. This difference has been seen as evidence of a transition from a period characterized by arbitrary imperial exactions to one of stable relations, rationalized and routinized by ritual, protocols, and the force of precedent.[101]

The transition was, however, less stark than such characterizations may initially suggest. It was a gradual one accompanied by other shifts, such as the growing importance of literary exchange in diplomacy, that were accretions of smaller, piecemeal institutional changes. Human tribute did not end because of Hou Ying's memorial against the employment of Korean eunuch envoys (as the Ming *Veritable Records* would suggest), but rather due to a convergence of several contingencies. One factor was the growing role of envoy poetry and literary exchange in the diplomatic arena. While the Ming continued to dispatch eunuch envoys to Korea, especially for rituals of investiture at the Chosŏn court, they were often over-shadowed by their literati assistants.[102] For instance, Wang Xianchen (fl. 1493), a scholar-official from Suzhou, later famed for building the renowned Humble Administrator's Garden (*Zhuozheng yuan*), a center of late Ming Suzhou literati life (and, now, a modern tourist attraction), went to Korea in 1495 as the third-ranking assistant envoy to a Korean-born eunuch charged with investing Yŏnsan'gun as king. In Korea, he took the spotlight as a pedantic ritualist, who insisted on conforming Korean diplomatic ceremonies to his exacting and idiosyncratic standards.[103] During the reign of the Hongzhi emperor (1488–1505), eunuch influence waned, but the reign of his son, Zhengde (1506–21), saw a resurgence in their imperial patronage, and their power. Chin Ho's 1483 class of Korean tribute eunuchs had by that time matured to occupy important positions in the Ming inner palace. Thirty-five years later, Chin Ho, and his assistant Kim Ŭi returned to Chosŏn in the winter of 1521, which unbeknownst to them was the Korean eunuch mission to Korea, an event to bookend an era.

The mission had come about as result of the Zhengde emperor's investigation into "precedents from the Xuande reign" concerning the reception of Korean envoys. Before the investigation had concluded, Chin Ho alerted a visiting Korean embassy to the emperor's project, and warned that he would likely discover that his great-great grandfather, the Xuande emperor, once acquired concubines from Korea. The news

alarmed the Chosŏn envoys, for it raised the possibility that the Zhengde emperor would seek to reinstate the tribute of palace women.[104] It is unclear whether all this was part of Chin Ho's plan, as the Chosŏn envoys suspected, but indeed, several months later, Chin set off to Korea bearing a decree that demanded eunuchs, female cooks, and virgins for the imperial harem.[105] But only days after the mission's departure from Beijing, the young Zhengde emperor died in a boating accident, a fact Chin relayed to a Korean interpreter upon their arrival at the Chosŏn border.[106] He explained he divulged this information only because he was "as a native of Korea," but cautioned the interpreter to keep the matter a secret from the rest of the Ming embassy. He then proceeded to Seoul with the dead emperor's orders in tow.[107]

With knowledge of the emperor's death, the Chosŏn court tarried, anticipating the edict's revocation. In the meantime, how much and what to comply with remained an open question.[108] King Chungjong recognized that the "eunuchs of our country (Korea)" had often "been of aid in matters at the Central Court." With only but a "few remaining" from the 1481 contingent, sending more tribute was the only way to have these valuable contacts in the Ming palace.[109] Sending women for the palace, however, was another matter. This "preposterous order of the deceased emperor" required a temporary prohibition of marriage for the selection of tribute virgins—a great nuisance to the population. Chungjong's officials exhorted the king to refuse this particular demand.[110] Meanwhile, the eunuch envoys sent contradictory signals, both insisting compliance to all the demands and insinuating the Chosŏn court could still act according to its own discretion.[111]

The Chosŏn court hesitated not because it faced limited options, but rather because it had a surfeit of them. It wished to proceed from a morally and ritually unassailable position. As for where it should lie—that was unclear. The instructions of an imperial edict were in theory inviolable; however, the emperor who had promulgated it was now dead, which meant his orders might yet be rescinded. To continue with the unpopular procurement would not only be unnecessary, but would also call attention to the moral faults of the deceased emperor. King Chungjong desired a consensus of opinion that was not easily reached. Some officials argued that, by acceding to a portion of the imperial demands, it had no grounds to refuse the rest. Other officials questioned the propriety of presenting women for a dead emperor's harem during the period of his mourning. Neither could Chosŏn excuse itself on grounds of ignorance, for it had already dispatched envoys to the Ming to express condolence. Still others insisted it would be best to follow the imperial edict to the letter, preposterous as it was. After an extended debate over the primacy of political expediency and ritual rectitude, the king finally decided that fifteen women between the age of thirteen and seventeen would be selected, with the expectation that the procurement would be canceled.[112]

The aforementioned condolence emissaries, while *en route* to Beijing, learned that another envoy sent by the Ming military commander across the border was on its way to Korea. The Chosŏn emissaries dispatched their own messenger to Seoul to inform the court of the envoy's intent. They presented a verbatim copy of the Ming edict, which contained orders for the Ming commander to arrest Kim Ŭi and Chin Ho. The edict accused the two eunuchs of "ignoring the gravity of the imperial mission, being unbridled in their greed, conspiring for profits beyond established precedent, [and exploiting] foreign barbarians to indulge in their own pleasures," among other

crimes. Lest the "eastern barbarians [i.e. Koreans] are disappointed" and develop "sentiments of condescension" toward the imperial court, the envoys were to be apprehended in "chains and manacles" with their baggage seized and escorted back to Beijing for "severe punishment." The Chosŏn court decided to conceal the matter from their Ming guests, but showed them a heavily redacted version to insinuate that the imperial court expected their immediate return.[113]

Unaware of their imminent arrest, they still dallied, and pressed the Chosŏn court to make good on their earlier requests. Although some officials suggested that the Chosŏn court apprehend the Ming envoys, others argued that it would be better to accede to their requests for the time being, and treat them no differently than before.[114] King Chungjong agreed. The language of the imperial edict notwithstanding, there was no way to know whether they would in fact be severely punished upon their return. The eunuchs, if they remained in power, would then only resent their ill-treatment and slander Chosŏn to the new emperor in revenge.[115]

The decision to treat them deferentially proved judicious. The Liaodong commander, likely unwilling to make a commotion in lands beyond his jurisdiction, did not attempt to apprehend the Ming envoys, but tried instead to coax them to return. When the Chosŏn court finally received formal notices for recalling Chin and Kim from the Liaodong commander, there was no longer mention of their arrest. The procurement was canceled and the Ming envoys departed.[116] True to the prediction of one Korean interpreter, who told the king that "Kim Ŭi and company will certainly escape punishment," the two eunuchs were shortly restored to their original posts.[117] The Chosŏn court concluded that the Ming knew full well the two were acting under the emperor's orders, and only scapegoated Chin Ho and Kim Ŭi to deflect blame for the deceased Zhengde emperor. By pretending the two had "falsified" the edict, it could be rescinded without implicating the Zhengde emperor.[118] Though Chin and Kim continued to work at the Ming court, their attempt to acquire young Korean eunuchs to follow in their footsteps had failed. Neither Chin nor Kim returned to Korea after this incident. With the convergence of these contingencies—the Zhengde emperor's sudden death, the indecision of the Chosŏn court, and the Ming court's actions—the age of Korean eunuchs had come to an end.

Historiography has not been kind to Ming eunuchs in general. They have been blamed summarily for leading young and ambitious emperors on vainglorious military adventures, for manning a secret police apparatus intended to terrorize the scholar-official bureaucracy, and for the downfall of the dynasty itself.[119] As seen in this chapter, Korean writings about Ming eunuchs, Korean or otherwise, are no less flattering and depict them as overbearing, indecorous, and greedy. Perhaps because eunuchs seldom have descendants to defend them, they serve as convenient scapegoats for endemic structural features of the Ming state or the excesses of imperial autocracy.

When it comes to foreign relations, one strand of interpretation treats the employment of eunuchs as an aberration of how a Confucian tributary relationship ought to function. As one modern historian put it, eunuchs "interfered" with politics, and acted against the spirit of their emperors, who repeatedly attempted to curtail their abuses.[120] Indeed, the extractive and exploitative practices associated with eunuch emissaries contrasts starkly with the professed Confucian ideals of Ming empire where "men afar" such as the Koreans, are supposed to be "cherished" (*rouyuan*

neng'er) and turns on its head the principle of magnanimity where foreign emissaries are supposed to "arrive with little" but be sent off "with much" (Ch: *houwang bolai*). Such scapegoating, which portrays "unreasonable and arbitrary demands" as working "outside of the system", shifts all moral hazard of extraction and coercion onto these eunuchs, conveniently preserving the "moral" tenor of the Ming diplomatic practice as an institution guided by "rituals and norms."[121] Of course these extractive practices, though rendered marginal when one adopts the gaze and values of Korea and China's Confucian elite, were just as fundamental to Ming-Korea relations as the Confucian moral and political ideals that supposedly guided them. By the same token, the prominence of eunuchs in the Ming is better seen, not as a corruption of an ideal system (even if their Confucian literati rivals would like to think so), but as a function of Ming practices of empire and the economy of violence integral to them.[122]

NOTES

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48 *Chungjong sillok* 99:62b [1542/11/17#1].

49 The Hongzhi emperor managed to escape Korean censure while enjoying a relatively positive reputation in historical memory. See *Chungjong sillok* 5:31a [1508/02/23#1].

50 Sarah Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 167.

51 *Chungjong sillok* 9:35a [1509/09a/10#1].

52 *Chungjong sillok* 5:6a [1508/01/08#1].

53 For instance, the favor enjoyed by the eunuch military commander Wang Zhi 汪直 (?–1487) from the Chenghua emperor (r. 1465–87). *Sŏngjong sillok* 134:6a [1481/10/07#3].

54 *Chungjong sillok* 8:42b [1509/05/21#1].

55 Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 119–42; Scarlett Jang, "The Eunuch Agency Directorate of Ceremonial and the Ming Imperial Publishing Enterprise," in David M. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition : The Ming Court (1368–1644)*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 116–85 .

56 For example, Muslim eunuchs were sent to Muslim regions, Mongols to Mongolia, Jurchens to Liaodong. See Sun Weiguo "Lun Mingchu de huanguan waijiao," *Nankai xuebao*, 2 (1994), 34–42; Chŏng Tonghun, "Myŏngdae chŏn'gi oegyo sajŏl ŭi sinpun chŏngmyŏng pangsik kwa kukkagan ch'egye" *Myŏng Ch'ŏng sa yŏn'gu* 10 (October 2013), 1–34.

57 Wang, "Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea," ch. 6; Philip de Heer, "Three Embassies to Seoul: Sino-Korean Relations in the 15th Century," in Leonard Blusse and Harriet T. Zurndorfer, eds., *Conflict and Accommodation in Early Modern East Asia: Essays in Honour of Erik Zurcher* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993).

58 For a comprehensive list of Ming-Korean embassies, see Chŏng Ŭnju, *Chosŏn sidae sahaeng kirokhwa: yet kŭrim ŭro ingnŭn Han-Chung kwan'gye sa* (Seoul: Sahoe p'yŏngnon, 2012), 582–9.

59 *T'aejo sillok* 14:15b [1398/06/24#1]; Clark, "Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming," 284; *Sŏngjong sillok* 130:4a [1481/06/09#1].
60 Robinson, "The Ming Court and the Legacy of the Yuan Mongols," 382–6; See also David M. Robinson, *Empire's Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
61 *T'aejo sillok* 7:12b [1395/05/11#3]; 14:15b [1398/06/24#1]; *T'aejong sillok* 6:24a [1403/11/01#1]; 6:29b [1403/11a/17#1]; 7:23b [1404/06/02#2] etc.
62 *T'aejo sillok* 7:12b [1395/05/11#3]; 14:15b [1398/06/24#1]; *T'aejong sillok* 6:24a [1403/11/01#1]; 6:29b [1403/11a/17#1]; 7:23b [1404/06/02#2] etc.
63 *T'aejong sillok* 14:14b [1407/08/06#1]; *T'aejong sillok* 14:24b [1407/09/11]. Evidently the Yongle emperor did not find all his Vietnamese prisoners useless. One, Nguy n An (1381–1453), designed and oversaw the construction of the new Ming capital, Beijing. Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 203.
64 *Sŏngjong sillok* 99:17a (1478/12/23#1).
65 *Sŏngjong sillok* 132:6b [1481/08/10#1].
66 Cho Yŏngnok "Sŏnch'o ŭi Chosŏn ch'ulsin Myŏngsa ko – Sŏngjong cho ŭi tae Myŏng kyosŏp kwa Myŏngsa Chŏng Tong," *Kuksagwan nonch'ong* 14 (1990), 118–27.
67 *Ming shi lu* Xianzong 61, 1253–4 [Chenghua 4 (1468/12/renzi)].
68 *Sŏngjong sillok* 129:13b [1481/05/22#1].
69 See *Sejo sillok* 46:6a [1468/04/13]. For other cases, see also *Sejong sillok* 68:9b [1435/04/26#3]; *Sejong sillok* 68:10a [1435/04/27#2].
70 *Sŏngjong sillok* 117:3b [1480/05/05#1]
71 *Sejo sillok* 45:42b [1468/03/27]
72 *Sejo sillok* 45:19b [1468/2/24#1]; 45:22b [1468/2/26#3].
73 *Sejo sillok* 45:26a [1468/3/2#5].
74 *Sejo sillok* 46:2a [1468/4/6#1].
75 *Sejo sillok* 46:7b [1468/4/17#1].
76 For examples of emoluments for ancestors see *Sejo sillok* 1:24a [1455/06a/24#], relatives and residences, *Sejo sillok* 45:22a [1468/02/26#3]; *Sejo sillok* 45:26a [1468/03/02#5]; *Sejo sillok* 45:34b [1468/03/23#4]; trips to Kŭmgangsan, *Sejo sillok* 46:5a 1468/04/10#5].
77 Wang, "Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea," 241–61.
78 Wang, "Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea," 127–32.
79 *Sejong sillok* 63:23b [1434/03/01#4].
80 Widely desired by royal courts all across Eurasia, their place as a Korean tribute item, along with maidens and eunuchs, had Mongol period origins. The Koryŏ king Ch'ungnyŏl (1274–1308) established a Falconry Agency to procure hunting birds as tribute for the Mongol emperor. The agency allowed him to centralize monarchical authority, as he installed officials personally loyal to it, and used it as a platform to conduct royal hunts. See Yi Ikchu [Lee Ik Joo], "Koryŏ Ch'ungnyŏl wangdae ŭi chŏngch'i sanghwang kwa chŏngch'i seryŏk ŭi sŏnggyŏk," *Han'guk saron* 18 (1988), 155–222. Note the fourteenth-century Korean falconry manual, the *Ŭnggolbang* (Prescriptions for Hawks and Falcons). See Yi Usŏng and Anp'yŏng taegun *Kobon Ŭnggolbang oe ijong* (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1990). See also the Tianshun' emperor's edict demanding yearly tributes of three to seven gyrfalcons. *Sejo sillok* 19:2a [1460/01/04#4].
81 *Tanjong sillok* 3:23a [1452/09a/21#1, #2].
82 *Tanjong sillok* 14:18b [1455/05/07#1].
83 David M. Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 95–101.
84 *Sejo sillok* 41:19b [1467/03/10#3]. Note that this edict was meant as a gesture of magnanimity. Refusing exotic gifts was supposed to be a gesture of friendship. The language here presages the Qing Qianlong emperor's famous gesture to Lord MacCartney in 1793. There, as was the case here, the point was not that the Chinese had no curiosity for the unknown and exotic, but that the emperor, by stemming his desires, had demonstrated his virtue. James Louis Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 225–49.
85 *Sejo sillok* 43:46b [1467/08/28#8]; 43:35a [1467/08/13].

86 Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 98–9.
87 *Sejo sillok* 46:7b [1468/04/17#3].
88 *Sejo sillok* 46:8b [1468/04/19#1].
89 *Sejo sillok* 46:9b [1468/04/22#1].
90 *Sejo sillok* 46:9b [1468/04/22#1].
91 *Sŏngjong sillok* 118:17b [1480/06/25#2].
92 *Sŏngjong sillok* 118:18b [1480/06/26#3].
93 Wang, "Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea," 130–31; *Sŏngjong sillok* 88:4b [1478/1/12#1]; 88:5a [1478/1/13#1]; 88:6a [1478/1/15#2].
94 *Sŏngjong sillok* 119:10b [1480/7/17#5]
95 *Sŏngjong sillok* 136:2a [1481/12/7#2]; 136:2b [1481/12/7#3]; 136:7a [1481/12/22#1]; 149:16a [1482/12/24#2].
96 *Sŏngjong sillok* 116:6a [1480/04/21#3]
97 Korean eunuchs occasionally even furnished gifts for the king of their homeland. *Sŏngjong sillok* 56:5a [1475/06/05#6]
98 David M. Robinson, "Korean Lobbying at the Ming Court: King Chungjong's Usurpation of 1506: A Research Note," *Ming Studies* 41.1 (1999), 42.
99 *Chungjong sillok* 6:22a [1508/06/16#5]. Not all Chosŏn officials approved the way the court dealt with Yŏnsangun's overthrow, and believed it would have been better to lay bare "his villainies" to the Ming. See also 5:35a [1508/04/15#1].
100 *Sŏngjong sillok* 155:9b [1483/06/16#12]; 157:6a [1483/08/07#5]; 157:21b [1483/08/20#7].
101 Ye Quanhong, *Mingdai qianqi Zhong Han guojiao zhi yanjiu: 1368–1488*, 119–120.
102 Du Huiyue, *Mingdai wenchen chushi Chaoxian yu "Huanghuaji"* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010), 183–95.
103 Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 23–40; 52–62. For activities of Wang in Korea, see entires in *Yŏnsan'gun ilgi* 5:20b–6:7b [1495/5/25#1]–[1495/6/7#1].
104 *Chungjong sillok* 41:28a [1521/01/24#2].
105 *Chungjong sillok* 41:57b [1521/04/29#2].
106 *Chungjong sillok* 41:47a [1521/04/10#3].
107 *Chungjong sillok* 41:49a [1521/04/13#3]; 41:49b [1521/04/15#1]; [1521/04/16#1].
108 *Chungjong sillok* 42:11a [1521/05/19#3].
109 *Chungjong sillok* 41:59b [1521/04/29#7]. See also 42:12b–42:13a [1521/05/20#2; #5].
110 *Chungjong sillok* 42:4b [1521/05/12#1].
111 *Chungjong sillok* 42:15a–42:16a [1521/05/21#1–2].
112 *Chungjong sillok* 42:19b–23a [1521/06/02#2]. There were other proposals as well. Some court officials suggested that the Chosŏn could dispatch an embassy to seek from the Ming a final confirmation of whether these orders were still valid, given the ritual incongruity of presenting women for a deceased emperor's harem.
113 *Chungjong sillok* 42:36a [1521/07/06#1].
114 *Chungjong sillok* 42:43b [1521/07/10#1].
115 *Chungjong sillok* 42:43b [1521/07/11#1].
116 *Chungjong sillok* 42:46b [1521/07/15#4]; 42:47b [1521/07/16#2].
117 *Chungjong sillok* 42:47b [1521/07/16#2]; 44:22b [1522/03/14#2]. Chin Ho, especially, remained an important point of contact for the Chosŏn court after this affair and continued to work for Chosŏn interests at the Ming court. *Chungjong sillok* 53:29b [1525/03/07#3].
118 See Nam Kon's discussion of the matter in *Chungjong sillok* 42:49a–b [1521/07/11#1]. The death of the Zhengde emperor led to the rise of a coterie of civil officials under the leadership of Yang Tinghe (1459–1529) who had sought to curtail the power of the inner palace by bringing in an outsider to the Ming throne, Zhengde's cousin, Zhu Houcong (1507–67), who was the Jiajing emperor.
119 Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 1–9, 59–63; John W. Dardess, *Blood and History in China: The Donglin Faction and Its Repression, 1620–1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 141–5; 150–56; Harry Miller, *State versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572–1644* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121–38; Matthew

Ernest Fryslie, "The Historian's Castrated Slave: The Textual Eunuch and the Creation of Historical Identity in the 'Ming History'," Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 2001; For the long-standing influence of the clichés of the evil Ming eunuch on the subsequent Qing period, see Norman Alan Kutcher, *Eunuch and Emperor in the Great Age of Qing Rule* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 1–67.

120 Wang Wei, Yang Xiaolei, and Wu Zhenqing, *Zhong Chao guanxi shi: Ming Qing shiqi*, ed. Bai Xinliang (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2002), 96–101.

121 For an example, see Huang Zhilian, *Dong Ya de liyi shijie: Zhongguo fengjianwang chao yu Chaoxian bandao guanxi xingtai lun* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chuban she, 1994), 402–5; 258–9.

122 David M. Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven: Rebellion and the Economy of Violence in Mid-Ming China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).