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Author(s)	Hara, T
Citation	Modern Asian Studies, 1998, v. 32 n. 2, p. 389-430
Issued Date	1998
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10722/42121
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*Korea, China, and Western Barbarians:
Diplomacy in Early Nineteenth-Century Korea*

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The story of the 'opening' of Korea presents us with a peculiar problem of its own. For, when Westerners arrived on the shores of Korea in the nineteenth century, they found a country that was shielded in the shadow of China. Korea, so it seemed to Westerners, would not open the country without Chinese approval, but China would not interfere in Korea on Western countries' behalf or, at times, even on her own behalf. And both Korea and China professed that they were acting according to the dictates of the traditional relationship which had bound the two countries for many centuries in peace and harmony. To Western observers this traditional Sino-Korean relationship seemed to offer nothing but a diplomatic cul-de-sac. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that Western diplomats concluded that this relationship was merely ceremonial and largely dismissed it as having little political consequence.¹

It was perhaps also unfortunate that this negative view of traditional Sino-Korean relations has affected our perception of Korea much more seriously than of China. In examining Korea's diplomacy, we would inevitably compare it with that of China. In this comparison, Korea, whose seclusion was more complete and lasted longer, would invariably appear the more backward, ignorant, and bigoted.

I would like to thank the participants of the undergraduate seminar of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, the University of Cambridge, and of the East Asian School Seminar of the University of Sheffield for their critical comments. I am also grateful to Professor Sir Harry Hinsley for his insightful comments.

¹ The American minister in Seoul remarked on Korea's professed inferiority and various duties to China under the tributary relations: 'While nothing could be clearer than this concession, the Legation has never laid much stress upon it, being disposed to believe that in all the essential points of government, in laws, customs, and religion, Corea was as independent as Japan. All that remained was a sentimental, ceremonial suzerainty, never going beyond gifts and compliments, embassies of courtesy now and then, with no practical interference by China in Corean affairs'. John Russell Young to Freylinghuisen, March 21, 1883, quoted in M. Frederick Nelson, *Korea and the Older Orders in Eastern Asia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1946), p. 167.

0026-749X/98/\$7.50+\$0.10

This is nowhere more apparent than in the oft-quoted work by Mary C. Wright. In her article entitled 'The Adaptability of Ch'ing Diplomacy: The Case of Korea', Wright challenged the prevailing assumption that Chinese foreign policy of the 1860s was 'weak, inept, and uninformed', and argued that, when one considered 'the striking accomplishments of the Ch'ing government in the 1860s' and when one had adequate 'appreciation of either the character or the magnitude of the problems the Ch'ing government faced', the ultimate failure of the Ch'ing government's Korea policy was 'because the task was impossible, not because Chinese diplomacy was rigid, in-adaptable, uninformed, supine, or lacking in finesse'. She also wrote: 'Chinese adaptability stands out in bold relief when Chinese policy . . . is compared to Korea's own absolutely rigid policy.'² The end result of Wright's persuasive argument, so far as our approach to Korean history is concerned, was to transfer the weight of all these pejorative adjectives onto Yi Korea and thereby to make us less than sensitive to the more complex realities of Korean diplomacy. Wright's influence is apparent, for example, in Key-Hiuk Kim's book, published more than two decades after her article. Having analyzed the triangular relations among China, Korea and Japan most carefully, using primary sources of these three countries, he concludes: 'in light of what we have seen, there is little need for further proof of the rigidity of the Korean stand against the Western world during the 1860s.'³

While diplomatic historians continued to assess Yi Korea's foreign policy by the application of rigidity-adaptability scale, a somewhat different perspective on the subject has emerged from a work which focused primarily on domestic politics and government of the late Yi period. James B. Palais, in his *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*, devoted a chapter to the fierce debate which took place in the Korean court in the 1870s over the diplomatic overture for new relationship from the new Meiji government in Japan. His findings indicate that, in this debate, problems of foreign policy were linked to issues in Yi Korea's domestic politics. The refusal by the Taewon'gun and conservative officials in the Yi court to have anything to do with the Meiji Japan or, for that matter, Western powers was indeed founded

² *Journal of Asian Studies* 17.3 (May 1958), pp. 363-81. The quotations are from p. 363.

³ Key-Hiuk Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan, and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 62.

on their anti-foreign ideology. But Palais' account shows the debate also touched on the real issues of Korea's national security.⁴

It appears that some efforts are now in order to examine Yi Korea's foreign policy from a broader perspective than is offered by a rigidity–adaptability model. In this paper, I propose to review a number of incidents involving Westerners in Korea from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the 1860s. Some of these incidents involved Christian movements, which the Korean government considered as heresy against the orthodox Confucian teaching. The others involved foreign ships, British and French, which sailed into Korean waters to demand trade relations. China figured prominently in all these incidents, even when she took no active part. Christianity came to Korea from China, and the priests, whether of Chinese or French nationality, travelled to Korea from China. The foreign ships which came to Korea also sailed from Macau in the early days and from one of the treaty ports in China after the Opium War. In the eyes of the Koreans, these foreign incidents were inseparable from Korea's relations with China. Korea's response to the Western incursions in the nineteenth century must therefore be judged in relation to her traditional policy towards China.

Korea's Traditional Relations with China and Japan

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Korea continued to enjoy the stable relationships with China and Japan as she had done for the past one hundred and sixty years. With China, she maintained a cordial relationship which was based on the Chinese claim of suzerainty over Korea. The government of Korea sent a regular mission bearing tributes to the emperor of China at least once a year, usually at the time of the winter solstice, and irregular missions on other special occasions, as an expression of its submission to China. The Chinese government reciprocated by sending on such special occasions as the death of an important royal person or the investiture of a new king an imperial mission to show its 'benevolence and concern for the small neighbour' (*tzu-hsiao*).⁵ With Japan, Korea had main-

⁴ James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), ch. 13, 'The Debate over Accommodation with Japan'.

⁵ Hae-jong Chun, 'Sino-Korean Tributary Relations in the Ch'ing Period', in John K. Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 90–111; Kim, *The Last Phase*, pp. 4–15.

tained contact on two levels. Since the early seventeenth century, she had sent occasional 'communication envoys' to Edo carrying congratulatory messages usually on the accession of a new shogun. Their functions were mostly ceremonial, and diplomatic matters of substance were seldom discussed between these envoys and the Japanese host. Korea also maintained a much closer relationship with the feudal fief in Tsushima, the islands that lay across the Korean Strait between southwestern Japan and the Korean peninsula. Poor in natural resources, the islands depended much on Korean trade for their livelihood. The daimyo of Tsushima had long entered into a quasi-tributary relationship with the Korean king which gave him the monopoly of Japanese trade with Korea, and also had served as a diplomatic intermediary between the national governments in Edo and Seoul thereby enabling them to negotiate without being overly hampered by delicate questions of protocol.⁶

Yi Korea had suffered immensely at the hands of these two neighbours, first by the Japanese who, under the hegemon Hideyoshi, invaded Korea without the slightest provocation in the late sixteenth century, and then by the Manchus in the early seventeenth as these border tribes waged a war of conquest against the Ming dynasty. Even after the Manchu conquest of China in 1644, the ruling house of Yi Korea suffered much hardship at the hands of the Manchus who suspected the Koreans of pro-Ming motives. The policies of *sadae* ('serving the great'—China) and *kyorin* ('neighbourly relations'—with Japan) had emerged from these traumatic experiences.⁷

The essence of these relationships was to bar all intercourse between Korea, on the one hand, and China and Japan, on the other, except for formalized ceremonial exchanges of envoys and limited trade conducted under close official supervision. In both relationships, even though one emphasized the inequality of status between the two parties and the other the equality, the great ceremony with which the tributary missions to China and the communication envoys to Japan were dispatched signified the desire to keep these two neighbours at a safe distance. The two policies also dovetailed to complement one another: by submitting themselves to China's suzerain claim, the Koreans gained something like a defensive alliance against Japan; the *kyorin* relationship enabled them to control

⁶ Kim, *The Last Phase*, pp. 15–23. George M. McCune, 'Exchange of Envoys between Korea and Japan during the Tokugawa Period', *Far Eastern Quarterly* 5.3 (May 1946), 308–25.

⁷ Kim, *The Last Phase*, pp. 25–31.

marauding mariners of Japan which, besides clearing her own coasts of their menace, gave them a useful bargaining position against China as a buffer (or 'fence' as the Chinese term *fan* for a vassal state signified) on her northeastern frontier.⁸

The two policies had served Korea admirably in keeping the two neighbours at bay. Korea had also remained entirely isolated from the rest of the world: she had no Canton or Nagasaki to serve as a window on the world beyond her immediate neighbours. The Koreans were, therefore, wary of any move which might disrupt Korea's peaceful relations with China and Japan. It was this wariness which conditioned their response to Western incursions in the early nineteenth century.

The 'Evil Teaching'

With the hindsight of history, it is ironical to note that the annual tributary missions to China served as the conduit for Western influence to reach Yi Korea. Members of Korean missions were in theory prohibited from having personal contacts with Chinese people in Peking. But such prohibition did little in practice to stop them from going about the city in search of Chinese books, curios and learned friends with whom they would converse with writing brush and paper. One place of habitual visits was the 'South Church' (*Nan-t'ang*), where Jesuit priests in the employ of the Manchu court as directors of the Imperial Board of Astronomy resided. They would provide the Korean visitors with scientific works in Chinese translation and sometimes Christian writings as well. These were brought back to Korea by mission members and found readers among a small but creative group of scholars known as 'Practical Learning' (*sirhak*) school.⁹ Academic interest in Christian teaching in the early days led

⁸ Chang Ts'un-wu gives an interesting example of the use by the Koreans of the Japan scare to press their demands on the Ch'ing government. See his 'Ch'ing-Han lu-fang cheng-ts'e chi ch'i shih-shih: Ch'ing-chi Ch'ing-Han chieh-wu chiu-fen ti tsai chieh-shih' [The formation and execution of the border defence policies of China and Korea: a reinterpretation of Sino-Korean border disputes in the nineteenth century], in his *Ch'ing-tai Chung-Han kuan-hsi lun-wen chi* [Monographs on Sino-Korean relations during the Ch'ing period] (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 1987), pp. 249-51.

⁹ One *sirhak* scholar left detailed notes of his visits to the South Church and of his conversations with the Jesuit official there. See Kim T'ae-sun, *Kyogaku kara jitsugaku e: juhassseiki Chosen chishikijin Ko Daiyo no Pekin ryoko* [From philosophy to science:

to conversion, and the first baptism of a Korean convert took place in Peking in 1784. Christianity spread quickly without the benefit of missionary assistance, and when, in 1794, the first Catholic priest, a young Chinese named Chou Wen-mo (Jacques Tsiou), entered Korea, he is said to have found about four thousand converts.¹⁰

The government's reaction to the 'evil teaching' (K: *sagyo*; C: *hsieh-chiao*) began early, but it was sporadic and was mostly localized. In 1801, the year of *Shinyu*, the first large-scale persecution occurred. The *Shinyu* Persecution was primarily motivated by political rivalries in the court, which intensified after the death of King Chongjo and the accession to the throne of a young boy of twelve years (*sui*) of age. Some influential members of the dominant faction under the late king Chongjo were Christians, and the charge of heresy provided a convenient reason for removing from office and even executing them.¹¹ The edict issued by the Queen Regent asserted that the late king had always hoped to suppress the 'evil teaching' (Christianity) through clarification of 'correct teaching' (Confucian teaching). But this benign attitude had not produced the effect the late king had desired. The edict therefore proclaimed the Queen Regent's wish to uphold the late king's wish and ordered that any one persisting in his or her evil belief should be held guilty of high treason.¹²

That this 'evil teaching' found its way into Korea from China was well known in the Korean government. The Queen Regent's edict noted that 'the teaching of Jesus and the heavenly lord' had originated in the West but the books had been transmitted to Korea from China. And the interrogation of the first Korean convert, Yi Sung-hun, had revealed the details of his baptism in Peking while he accompanied his father on the 1784 tributary mission, and of the smuggling of Christian books over the Sino-Korean border. The Korean reaction to this knowledge was, however, not to alert the Chinese government of the illegal activities by the Catholic priests

the travel to Peking by an eighteenth-century Korean intellectual Hung Dae-yong] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1988), pp. 33-48.

¹⁰ James Huntley Grayson, *Early Buddhism and Christianity in Korea: A Study in Emplantation of Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), pp. 74-5.

¹¹ Oda Shogo, 'Richo no hoto o ryakujo shite tenshukyo hakugai ni oyobu' [An outline of factionalism in the Yi dynasty and notes on Catholic persecution], *Seikyu gakuso* 1 (August 1930), 1-26.

¹² 22 Feb. 1911, *Yijo sillok* [The veritable record of the Yi dynasty] (Tokyo: Gaku-shuin daigaku, Toyo bunka kenkyusho, 1953-67), *Chongjo*, 2:4b. (Hereafter cited as *Sillok* followed by the reign name.)

in Peking. On the contrary, they tried to do everything within their power to keep China out of the affairs of the 'evil teaching'. This they did at first by keeping information away from the Chinese; when secrecy became impossible, then they would supply the Chinese with a distorted, if not false, account of events in order to justify the position of the Korean government, as the following accounts of three incidents in the *Shinyu* persecution would show.

Yi Sung-hun's conduct during the 1784 tributary mission clearly pointed to negligence on the part of the senior members of that embassy.¹³ In April, the Queen Regent therefore ordered the ministers of the Border Defence Command to advise her on appropriate punishment for the three official envoys and the chief interpreter of the 1784 mission, and the prefect of Uiju district, the last of whom was in charge of the border crossing. The ministers recommended that only Yi Sung-hun's father (Yi Tong-uk), who was the secretary of the mission and was now deceased, be punished posthumously. They found the others (of whom the chief envoy only was still living) guilty of unwitting negligence, but they feared that their punishment, especially of the chief envoy who was once 'a ceremonial guest' at the Chinese court, might 'hurt the basic structure of the state' (K: *sang choch'e*; C: *shang ch'ao-t'i*).¹⁴ Not provoking China's interest in Korean affairs was clearly more important to the Korean officials than upholding the principle of personal responsibility in law.

It must, therefore, have come to the Koreans as an uncomfortable surprise when, only ten days after they had made these recommendations, the ministers learned that a Chinese priest, Father Chou Wen-mo, gave himself up to the authority in Seoul.¹⁵ For here was a man, a Chinese, who stood beyond the law of Korea. Something like an extraterritorial jurisdiction operated under the tributary relationship with China: a Chinese national found on Korean soil had to be

¹³ They were the Chief Envoy Hwang In-jom, the Deputy Envoy Yi Hyang-won, Secretary and Yi Sung-hun's father Yi Tong-uk, and the Chief Interpreter Hung t'aek-hon.

¹⁴ 13 and 14 April 1801, *Pibyonsa tungnok* [Records of the Border Defence Command] (Seoul: Kuksa p'yongch'an wiwonhoe, 1959-60) 19:303c-304c. I follow Fairbank's translation of the term *t'i-chih*: 'basic structure of the Chinese state'. In the context of Sino-Korean relations, the 'basic structure' would have extended beyond the national boundaries and covered the whole of the established rules and customs of the tributary relationship. John K. Fairbank, 'The Early Treaty System in the Chinese World Order', in Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order*, pp. 266-7.

¹⁵ 24 April 1801, *Sillok: Sunjo*, 2:46b-47.

extradited to China; he could be punished or executed only if the Korean government had an explicit permission from the Chinese government.¹⁶

The Koreans rejected the idea of repatriating Chou on two accounts. First, the extradition procedure would take time, and that would necessarily prolong the period of uncertainty which the Christian purge had caused in the relations with China. Second, as some ministers argued in a conference on 28 April, Chou Wen-mo possessed much too sensitive information on Korea. As one example of this, one of the ministers pointed to the following confessions by Chou:

Kim Kon-sun [a Korean convert] said to Chou Wen-mo: 'We are going to build large ships and form an army. We shall sail over the ocean . . . and strike your country to avenge the earlier humiliation.' . . . Brother Chou replied: 'It certainly will not succeed. I have the correct method which I shall teach you. You must for the time being give up your plan and follow what I teach you.'

The same official explained to the Queen Regent: 'This refers to the affairs of 1636 [the Manchu invasion of Korea] . . . This appears in Brother Chou's confessions. If we now let the Chinese know it, they will certainly raise some difficult questions in the various [Chinese] yamen. If the story that our country is preparing an army to strike China is implanted in the heart of that country, would there ever be an end to our future worry?' The deep-seated anti-Manchu sentiment which underlay Korea's seemingly total submission to the Ch'ing court was a secret which the Korean ministers would keep from the Chinese at any cost. Further interrogation of Chou and Korean converts satisfied the ministers that the Christians had sent no messages to China. Chou Wen-mo was beheaded on 31 May. They did not report the execution to the Chinese Board of Rites.¹⁷

Unfortunately for the Koreans, this was not the end of the Christian affairs. On 5 November, in the hills of Chech'on in Ch'ungch'ong province, a young scholar by the name of Hwang Sa-yong was arrested. On him was found a letter, written on a piece of thin silk and addressed to the Bishop of Peking.¹⁸ The letter

¹⁶ Chang Ts'un-wu, 'Ch'ing-Han feng-kung kuan-hsi chih chih-tu-hsing fen-hsi' [An institutional analysis of Sino-Korean tributary relations], in his *Lun-wen-chi*, pp. 75-6.

¹⁷ 28 April 1801, *Sillok: Sunjo*, 2:50b-51b.

¹⁸ The letter was written on a piece of thin silk cloth. Silk cloth could be easily folded and sewn into the clothes worn by a servant accompanying the tributary missions to avoid detection. Yamaguchi Masayuki, *Ko Shiei hakusho no kenkyu* [A study of Hwang Sa-yung's letter on silk cloth] (Osaka: Zenkoku shobo, 1946), p. 4. For

recounted in great detail the persecution against the Christians. It also described the political strife between the two opposing factions in the court, and accused one of them of political opportunism and manipulation of anti-Christian sentiments for its own gain. The letter also included an account of Chou Wen-mo's religious activities in Korea, from his arrival in 1794 to his arrest and subsequent execution. It then went on to propose some measures to restore and protect the Korean church, which included (1) Chinese annexation of Korea and the appointment of a Manchu prince of blood to rule the territory; (2) seeking the Chinese emperor's permission to send Western missionaries to Korea; (3) dispatch of a few hundred European ships and several tens of thousands of soldiers to protect the peaceful propagation of Christianity; and (4) setting up a shop near the Sino-Korean border to serve as a secret communication depot between the Chinese and Korean churches.¹⁹

The content of the letter shocked the Queen Regent and her ministers and confirmed the worst they had feared of Christianity. It also reminded them how dangerous it was for them to assume, as they had done, that the news of Chou Wen-mo's execution was a safe secret from the Peking government. It revived their fear of China's retribution for the unauthorized execution and, even worse, also of Korea's national secrets being revealed to China. It was decided, therefore, that, if the Chinese were to know of the Chou Wen-mo affair, it was better that they should have the Korean government's own account of the events before they learned it from other sources. On 24 November, the Queen Regent ordered that a memorial be prepared and that the tributary mission, which was shortly to depart for Peking, be concurrently designated as a special 'explanation' envoy to carry the document.²⁰

references to earlier silk letters and the importance of Korean tributary missions in providing the vital link between the Bishop of Peking and the Korean church, see Yamaguchi Masayuki (tr.), 'Chosen okoku ni okeru tenshukyo no kakuritsu' [Translation of 'Relation de l'établissement du Christianisme dans le royaume de Corée' by Bishop of Peking, Alexandre de Gouvea], in *ibid.*, pp. 142-74, especially 169-70.

¹⁹ Ching Young Choe, *The Rule of the Taewon'gun, 1864-1873: Restoration in Yi Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asian Research Centre, Harvard University, 1972), p. 93 for a brief summary of this letter in English. For a detailed study with full Chinese text and a facsimile reproduction of the original letter, see Yamaguchi, *Ko Shiei hakusho*. For a Japanese translation and detailed annotation of the letter, see his 'Yakuchu Ko Shiei hakusho' [The letter of Hwang Sa-yong on silk cloth, translated and annotated], *Chosen gakuho* No. 2 (October 1951), pp. 121-54.

²⁰ *Sillok: Sunjo*, 3:44.

The memorial was prepared as the envoys were being selected for the mission. The document justified the hasty execution of Christians by emphasizing the insidiousness of the evil teaching. It pointed to the peculiar customs among the converts, such as destroying ancestral shrines and giving one another special names (baptism names) for secret recognition and likened them to such Chinese anti-dynastic secret societies as the Yellow Turbans and White Lotus societies, thus greatly exaggerating their subversive nature. It referred to Hwang Sa-yong's silk letter as a further evidence of the subversiveness of those Christians which justified the speedy action by the Korean government. As for Chou Wen-mo, the memorial emphasized that he had to be executed immediately because he was an important leader of this religious sect and also because he was indistinguishable from other Koreans in his dress and his hair style, and in his speech. It was only in Hwang Sa-yong's confessions, the memorial asserted, that Chou was said to be a Chinese, but Hwang's confessions could not be trusted.²¹

The memorial carefully avoided mention of any part of Hwang's letter that might prove to be embarrassing to Korea. Hwang Sa-yong's letter was also copied out for presentation to the Chinese Board of Rites if it should be demanded for evidence, in which the same care was taken to delete potentially damaging passages such as the reference to political rivalries in the Korean court and the proposals for protection of the Korean church.²² Then the chief and

²¹ 2 Dec. 1801, *Sillok: Sunjo*, 47-48b; *Ch'ing-tai wai-chiao shih-liao: Chia-ch'ing* [Sources on diplomatic history of the Ch'ing dynasty: Chia-ch'ing reign] (Peking: Palace Museum, 1932), 1:8-9b. The point of Chou's disguise as Korean gave the Koreans three lines of defence. First, it excused the authority from failing to suspect Chou might be a Chinese to begin with. Second, even if it was suspected he might be a Chinese, by disguising himself as a Korean, Chou had turned himself from an easily recognizable foreign criminal into more dangerous internal enemy of the state, which made it imperative that he should be dealt with quickly before he could harm the people further. And third, Chou had willingly given up the protection of the suzerain government as he chose to wear Korean clothes. The reference to Chou's speech was a lie: Chou could not speak Korean and interrogation was conducted in written Chinese. Most of the Korean converts were members of the elite Yangban class, and at least male converts would have had little difficulty in communicating with Chou in written Chinese.

²² Hwang's proposals showed a curious mixture of the contempt the Koreans felt for the barbarian Manchu dynasty and the sense of reliance on the suzerain country. Some of his proposals would have profoundly offended the Manchu government. The gist of Hwang's argument for the Chinese annexation of Korea, for example, was as follows: The Manchu dynasty had in recent years suffered from defeat at the hand of Western bandits, and they might now be inclined to a proposal to annex Korea to their ancestral homeland in Manchuria in case they might lose control of

associate envoys were carefully briefed by the Queen Regent, almost in the manner of a schoolmaster coaching his pupils for an interview, on how they should reply to questions from the emperor and the Board of Rites. 'After you are in China,' she said,

the emperor and the Board of Rites may ask you questions. The three envoys should then prepare to speak accurately without differing from one another, and it is best to reply in the most plausible manner. When there is an unexpected question of troublesome kind, you must answer reasonably and say that it was unavoidable under the circumstances. If they blame their border officials because the border defence was slack, they may even execute some of their officials. Then the border areas in Korea would become unstable. If this happens, there will easily be some conflicts. You must speak very carefully so that you do not hurt any Chinese.²³

After all these cares and anxieties, the Chinese reaction was almost an anticlimax. The imperial edict issued on 30 January 1802 acknowledged the Korean king's memorial, and praised the young Korean king's efforts to 'exterminate' the evil bandits in his country. But it dismissed the allegation that these Koreans had learned these evil beliefs from the Catholic priests in Peking. The imperial government had employed foreigners, the edict said, as they were skilled in mathematics and astronomy, but had strictly forbidden their missionary activities in China. They had come to China well aware of this prohibition. The edict blandly claimed that the Korean criminals must, therefore, have made false confessions under duress. As a token of his support for the Korean king's efforts to suppress Christianity, the emperor graciously ordered the Chinese border officials to arrest and hand over to the Korean authorities the Korean fugitives found on the Chinese side of the border.²⁴

The Chinese emperor might have been blissfully unaware, but the Koreans knew very well the fallacy in this edict.²⁵ But the importance

China proper. The Manchus would have seen in this argument not so much a docile invitation from an admiring subject as an offensive taunt from a hostile enemy. The silk letter, which contained over thirteen thousand characters was, as a result, shortened to about one thousand and five hundred characters. It is interesting to note that the Koreans scrupulously avoided faking the letter: they deleted characters and phrases, but they did not add a single character, with the exception of three characters added for syntactical reasons. Yamaguchi, 'Yakuchu . . .', p. 150. See Yamaguchi, *Ko Shiei hakusho*, pp. 99-136 for comparison between the original letter and the copy.

²³ 2 Dec. 1801, *Sillok: Sunjo*, 3:48b-49.

²⁴ *Ch'ing-tai wai-chiao shih-liao: Chia-ch'ing*, 1:9b-10.

²⁵ Christianity had formally been proscribed by the Yung-cheng emperor in 1723. But the church survived in various parts of China—including the inland province of

of this edict to the Koreans lay in the fact that it removed all the fears the Koreans had felt of Chinese interference whether direct or indirect. It tacitly admitted, by referring to Christianity as 'evil bandits' (C: *hsieh-fei*), the view that the Christian church was an anti-state society, and legitimized the harsh suppression of Christianity in Korea. It also made it known to the Koreans, by its silence, that the execution of Chou Wen-mo was not seen as a transgression of the rules that governed the relationship between the two countries. And the expression of the emperor's confidence that all the foreigners in the employ of the imperial government were aware of the prohibition of Christianity signaled, on the one hand, to the Catholic priests the emperor's displeasure at the breach of this prohibition and, on the other, to the Korean king an assurance that the activities of these foreigners, outside their official duties, would not enjoy the support of his government. Not content with these imperial assurances, the Korean envoys sent an agent to speak to the priests at the South Church: the priests were in a state of complete dejection, the agent reported, and they denied there ever was a plan of sending ships to Korea or of setting up a shop near the border as a secret communication post.²⁶

So ended the crisis in Sino-Korean relations in 1801. It was a crisis in the eyes of the Koreans only, for it passed with the Chinese government almost unaware that a crisis existed at all. The imperial edict represented a great success for Korean diplomacy toward China. Now Korea could suppress Christianity without fear of retribution from China even when Chinese or other nationals were involved. But this success did not come without a price. Though the *Shinyu* persecution might have put a stop to the inflow of Christian influence for the time being, this was bound to resume once the vigilance over the border traffic relaxed. The only way to stop it entirely was to plug it at the source in China. But China had refused to act on Korea's behalf and, the 1802 edict had essentially declared, she would not do so in future either. So, Christian persecution went

Szechwan—until 1844, when the proscription was formally lifted. Yazawa Toshihiko concludes in his study of the 1805 persecution of Catholics in China that the Chia-ch'ing emperor had naively believed that the Catholic priests in Peking had faithfully observed the proscription of religious activities until that year, when even some Manchu bannermen had converted to Christianity. 'Kakei 10 nen no Tenshukyo kin'atsu' [The Chinese suppression of Christianity in 1805], in *Toa ronso* [Essays on East Asia], No. 1 (Tokyo: Bunkyo, 1939), p. 182.

²⁶ 11 May 1802, *Sillok: Sunjo*, 4:9b-10.

on sporadically in Korea. None of these involved foreign nationals, Chinese or European. The Korean church gradually recovered from the 1801 persecution and even grew under the harsh conditions imposed upon it by the government. In 1831, Korea was created a separate diocese. In 1836 and 1837 two French priests, Fathers Jacques-Honore Chastan and Pierre-Philibert Maubant, came to Korea. They were soon joined by the newly-consecrated Bishop Laurent-Joseph-Marie Imbert.²⁷ This resulted in another major persecution in 1839. This time Korean officials were elated when they heard of the arrest of the three French missionaries. Nor did they show any hesitation in putting them to death.²⁸

It was not for the Koreans to worry yet how the French might view the killing of these Catholic missionaries. Most Korean officials did not even know such a country existed; and the few who knew probably could only point to the great distance that separated Korea from that country. The Koreans were almost solely concerned about the repercussions from China, and they had succeeded in removing the problem of Christianity from the both present and future agendas of Sino-Korean diplomacy.²⁹

'Strange Ships'

All this would have been perfectly all right, both for Korea and for China, had they still been isolated from the West. But European ships began sailing into the Eastern Ocean in increasing numbers from the early nineteenth century. And Korean knowledge about these barbarians was woefully inadequate, even though this is not to say they were not interested in these barbarians.

Like Christianity in Korea, it was also the regular tributary missions to China that provided the main conduit of knowledge on the West in the early nineteenth century. The envoys of 1794 presented a report which included a detailed description of Lord Macartney's embassy to the court of the Ch'ien-lung emperor. The envoys the

²⁷ Grayson, *Early Buddhism and Christianity*, p. 78.

²⁸ 13 Aug. 1839, *Pibyonsa tungnok*, 23:113a. 15 Sept. 1839, *Sillok: Honjong*, 6:14b. When the news reached the court, it was proposed that the informer and the arresting officers should be amply rewarded for their deeds.

²⁹ The question of French or Chinese intervention never came up in their discussions of the affairs of the French missionaries. See 2 Sept. 1839, 5 Nov. 1839, *Sillok: Honjong*, 6:14, 6:15b; *Pibyonsa tungnok*, 23:122b-123a, 23:137a-c.

year after gave a graphic account of the Dutch embassy, whom they had obviously met at a banquet in the imperial palace. Lord Amherst's unsuccessful mission in 1816 was again reported in some detail by the Korean envoys of the same year.

These reports always described these foreigners as 'tributary envoys', and it appears this was what the Chinese host told them, often with considerable pride and perhaps exaggeration: Macartney was said to have come to China with a large retinue of 700 men, of whom only one hundred were allowed to travel to Peking; Lord Macartney and his deputy Staunton were close relatives of the English king; the Dutch embassy was said to have come to congratulate the Ch'ien-lung on the sixtieth year of his reign, and so on. The Koreans also noted with particular interest the peremptory way in which Lord Amherst had been ordered out of the imperial capital, after he had refused to perform kowtow to the Chinese emperor in 1816.³⁰

These reports were inadequate to give the Koreans any coherent picture of the unknown world beyond the ocean. But the Koreans were interested in England and the Netherlands primarily because they had diplomatic (i.e. tributary) relations with China. The reports contained sufficient information for them to judge that England was a more powerful country than the Netherlands. And the manner of Lord Amherst's departure from Peking, which was closely noted by the Korean envoys, meant that the tributary relations between China and England had broken down. China had thus lost a means of controlling this distant barbarian country. It signified to them that England was a country to watch out for. It was against this background that a British ship sailed into Korean waters sixteen years later.

On 18 July 1832, a 'strange ship' was sighted off the coast of Hwanghae province. It sailed southward and anchored off Hongju in Ch'ungch'ong province four days later. It was an East India Company ship, the *Lord Amherst*. The supercargo on board, Hugh Hamilton

³⁰ The envoys' reports that touch on Westerners in China are in *Tongmun hwigo* [Diplomatic documents of the Yi dynasty] (Seoul: Kuksa p'yonch'an wiwonhoe, 1978). *Pop'yon sok* [3rd ser., cont.], 'Sasin pyoldan' [Envoys' reports]: Macartney's embassy, twelfth moon of Ch'ien-lung 58 (2-30 Jan. 1794), 1:29b; the Dutch embassy, intercalary second month of Ch'ien-lung 60 (21 March-18 April 1795), 1:32b-33; Christian church in China, eleventh month of Chia-ch'ing 10 (21 Dec. 1805-19 Jan. 1806), 2:5b-6; Dutch, Burmese and other embassies, 26 March 1806, 2:7a-b; the Russian mission in Peking, 24 April 1807, 2:8b; on England, 23 April 1810, 2:14a-b.; Lord Amherst's embassy, 29 Dec. 1810, 2:24b-25b.

Lindsay, had been ordered by the Select Committee 'to ascertain how far the northern Ports of this Empire be opened to British Commerce which would be most eligible and to what extent the disposition of the natives and local governments would be favourable to it.' Lindsay was accompanied on board by the maverick missionary, Rev. Charles Gutzlaff, who, knowing a southern Chinese dialect of Fukien, acted as interpreter for the ship.³¹

The interview between the local official of Hongju and Gutzlaff seems to have been a difficult one, as Korean officials found Gutzlaff's written Chinese less than competent and unintelligible. This difficulty, which was probably aggravated by the Hongju magistrate's own ignorance of foreign affairs, makes the subsequent report to the Korean court a jumbled collection of information on England and the ship. It described England's relationship with the Chinese empire in the following terms:

[They say England] has traded with China for as long as two hundred years. She is equal to China in power and influence, and she does not pay tribute [to China]. [When an English envoy goes] from his country to Peking, he does not kowtow in the imperial presence. The emperor of the Great Ch'ing controls distant nations by a show of conciliation. Recently because [Chinese] officials do not faithfully observe the imperial will, the imperial grace does not reach distant people. And, because these officials extort bribes, many foreign merchants have been obstructed [in their trade].

The ship had also brought gifts for the Korean king and a letter addressed to him. The Korean officials steadfastly refused to accept these. In the end, Gutzlaff threw them overboard as the ship sailed off, leaving the hapless officials to gather and present them to higher officials in the provincial capital with the sure knowledge that they would be punished for illegally accepting goods and communication from foreigners.³²

³¹ Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicle of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1839*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926-29), 4:332.

³² Chosen sotoku fu, Chosen shi henshu kai (ed.), *Chosen shi* [Chronological abstracts of historical documents on Korea] (Keijo: Chosen sotoku fu, 1932-40), 6.2:416-20, for a summary account of the *Lord Amherst* incident. The report is in *Sillok: Sunjo*, 32:27b-29b. On the punishment of the local officials, see *Pibyonsa tungnok*, 22:289c-90a, 293c-4a. The story of Gutzlaff throwing the letter and gifts for the king overboard might have been invented by the Korean official to cover up his failure to return these to the foreigners after he had received them without authorization from higher officials. Gutzlaff wrote: 'Kim made the last attempt to return the letter and presents; but when he saw that we did not receive what we had once given, and what had been accepted, he praised our rule of conduct as most consistent and commendable. He lamented the mean shift to which Woo had

The *Lord Amherst* became a subject of much debate in the court. In the past a 'strange ship' had strayed into Korean waters on two occasions.³³ In 1797, H.M.S. *Providence* appeared briefly off the southern coast of Korea. The language barrier proved to be insurmountable for the ship to be identified, and no action was deemed necessary once she had sailed off. In 1816, two British ships, the *Alceste* and the *Lyra*, came to Ch'ungch'ong province. The Korean officials were satisfied when they found on one of them a paper written and affixed with the seal of the king of England requesting provision of food and water for the ships accompanying his envoy [Lord Amherst] to Tientsin in case they were blown off course. Again no action was taken.³⁴

The ministers of the Border Defence Command thought that the *Lord Amherst* might just be another ship which strayed into Korean waters. But they also suspected that the ship might have come in search of trade in deliberate contravention of the ban on foreign trade and intercourse. The arrogant remarks about the strength of their country and their strong criticism of Chinese officials also disturbed them as they seemed to indicate some ulterior motive which had to do with China. There was such a possibility, they thought, for they learned from the papers the *Lord Amherst* had left behind that sixty to seventy English ships sailed every year to Kwangtung and Fukien ports in southern China.³⁵ For this reason, the Border

betaken himself, by declaring his country dependent on China. He expressed his regret at our parting, and was almost moved to tears.' Charles Gutzlaff, *Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832, & 1833, with Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-choo Islands* (London: Frederick Westley and A. H. Davis, 1834), pp. 352-3.

³³ Three, if we count the Dutch ship that was wrecked on the coast of Cheju Island in 1653. But this incident had completely faded from their memory. See Gari Ledyard, *The Dutch Come to Korea* (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1971).

³⁴ On H.M.S. *Providence*, see *Chosen shi*, 5.10:922, *Sillok: Chongjo*, 47:18a-b, and *Pibyonsa tungnok*, 18:690d. On the *Alceste* and the *Lyra*, *Chosen shi*, 6.1:568, *Sillok: Sunjo*, 19:23b-24b. The memoirs by those on board these ships shed no light on the response of Korean officials to their arrival. See William Robert Broughton, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean . . . in the years 1795, 1796, 1797, 1798* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1804) on H.M.S. *Providence*; Captain Basil Hall, R.N., *An Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea, and the Great Loo-choo Island* (London: John Murray, 1818) for the *Lyra*; and John M'leod, *Narrative of a Voyage in His Majesty's Late Ship Alceste, to the Yellow Sea along the Coast of Corea . . .* (London: John Murray, 1817) for the *Alceste*.

³⁵ See two documents: 'Hu Hsia-mi shang Ch'ao-hsien wang tsou-chang' [Hugh Hamilton Lindsay's memorial to the king of Korea] and 'Hu Hsia-mi yu Ch'ao-hsien kuan-yuan shu' [Hugh Hamilton Lindsay's letter to a Korean official], in Hsu Tishan (ed.), *Ta-chung chi: Ya-p'ien chan-cheng ch'ien Chung-Ying chiao-she shih-liao* [Histor-

Defence Command recommended: 'we must take a preemptive action to prevent future worries.' That is, the Korean king must send a letter to the Chinese Board of Rites, giving an account of the *Lord Amherst's* visit to Korea before the Chinese government heard of it from foreign sources in southern China.³⁶

In the official version of the event, the rather messy proceedings of the *Lord Amherst* incident were considerably tidied up. As they did earlier with Hwang Sa-yong's silk letter, delicate references—such as the claim that England was comparable to China in power and influence—were all deleted. The barbarians were reported to have supplicated for trade, to which the local official was said to have replied:

A dependent country must not engage in private trade with other countries. Moreover, our country is closest to the imperial capital. We therefore report everything [to the imperial government] and dare not deviate from this without proper authority.

And the king reaffirmed the determination to uphold the policy of not having any diplomatic or trade relations with another country as 'the unchanging law of the dependent country.'³⁷

The Chinese responded warmly to the Korean report. In an edict issued on 21 November 1832, the Chinese emperor praised the Korean king highly for 'deep understanding of the principles of righteousness' (*shen-ming ta-i*) and ordered bolts of satin to be bestowed on him. The warmth of this response seems to have surprised the Koreans, who expressed most profuse gratitude for the imperial gifts.³⁸ But why this extraordinary generosity on the part of the Chinese emperor? Had the Korean king performed any extraordinary service to the empire by turning away the *Lord Amherst* from Korean waters?

ical materials concerning Sino-British relations before the Opium War], reprint (Hongkong: Lung-men shu-tien, 1969), pp. 67–79. Also see Hugh Hamilton Lindsay with Charles Gutzlaff, *Report of proceedings on a Voyage to the Northern Ports of China in the Ship Lord Amherst, Extracts from Papers Relating to the Trade with China* (London: B. Fellowes, 1833), pp. 216–18, 252–6 for English texts.

³⁶ 5 Aug. 1832, *Pibyonsa tungnok*, 22:291b.

³⁷ 24 Sept. 1832, *Tongmun hwigo, wonp'yon sok* [1st ser., cont.], 'P'yomin' [Cast-aways] 5 'Sanggugin' [Chinese], 45b–47 (4:3655b–56a); also in *Sillok: Sunjo*, 32:29b–30b, where it appears in the entry of 16 Aug. 1832.

³⁸ Edict, 21 Nov. 1832, *Ta-Ch'ing shih-lu* [The veritable records of the Ch'ing dynasty] (Tokyo: Man-chou-kuo kuo-wu-yuan, 1937–38), *Tao-kuang*, 222:31a–b (hereafter cited as *Shih-lu* followed by the reign name); Korea's reaction thereto, 14 Feb. 1833, *Sillok: Sunjo*, 32:46a–b. The ministers of the Border Defence Command remarked, 'The great imperial honour is almost unprecedented.'

The *Lord Amherst* had left Macau in March, and journeyed northward along the Chinese coast. She had stopped at Amoy, Foochow, and Shanghai as well as other smaller ports between these limits. Then she had sailed further north to Shantung Peninsula. She then sailed to Korea before turning back westward into the Gulf of Peh-chili towards the strategic pass of Shan-hai-kuan on the Manchurian border. At each of these ports Lindsay had addressed a letter to the local official requesting trade and met with refusal. The ship's movements were reported to the throne in memorials from the governors and governors-general of the coastal provinces. The emperor bombarded these officials in return with orders urging them to coordinate the pursuit and set up an effective barrier to stop this roving ship. But the Chinese navy proved to be inadequate for the task, partly because their boats were inferior in size and speed, but also because the provincial officials were under order not to fire upon the British ship 'so as to avoid any incident.'³⁹ The *Lord Amherst* continued to play hide-and-seek and as she came nearer to Peking, the emperor's ire increased.⁴⁰ It was in the midst of this turmoil that the Korean king's memorial was received in Peking. We can imagine the emperor's delight at seeing the rover *Lord Amherst* properly turned back by the Korean king when he was so exasperated with the ineptitude of his own officials. Hence the generous reward of unprecedented proportion to the Korean king.

But the Koreans never learned the whole story of the *Lord Amherst* affair. The edict which bestowed praise and gifts on the Korean king merely mentioned how righteous the Korean king was in driving away the British ship without acceding to the demand for trade, but did not say a word about the havoc her voyage had caused along the Chinese coast, nor did the Koreans learn of it. The Koreans had decided on informing China because they were concerned that the *Lord Amherst* affair might cause China to suspect a collusion with the Western barbarians if they had kept the *Lord Amherst's* visit secret. Superficially the interests of China and Korea converged completely. The two countries were unanimous in their refusal to trade with the *Lord Amherst*. Korea, as China's faithful vassal, reported the coming of a foreign intruder to her suzerain. And China rewarded the vassal's loyalty warmly. In reality, each country was motivated with the

³⁹ See, for example, the edict, 16 Sept. 1832, *Shih-lu: Tao-kuang*, 218:19b-21.

⁴⁰ For the reports and edicts, see *Ta-Ch'ing shih-lu: Tao-kuang*, 211:1-2, 213:1-2b, 213:14a-b, 213:29-30, 215:6b-10b, 215:26b-28b, 215:31, 216:3b-4, 216:15b-16b, 217:8b-10; 218:19b-21, 219:10-11, 222:31a-b, 224:22-3, 225:16a-b.

concern for its own domestic security. As foreign incursions became more frequent in Korea, this seeming convergence of interest became increasingly more difficult.

The Opium War and Sino-Korean Relations

China's foreign relations underwent great changes in the 1840s. China concluded formal treaties with Western powers. China opened the five ports of Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai to foreign trade and residence. Hongkong was ceded to the British, and soon outstripped Macau as a centre of Chinese coastal trade. In 1844 the ban on Christianity was formally lifted by an imperial edict.

That the Koreans were not blind to the changes that were taking place in China's foreign relations before and after the Opium War is apparent in the tributary envoy's reports. The low morale of the populace and the drain on the national treasury caused by opium smoking was known for some time, and the debate in the Chinese court in 1836 on the legalization of opium was also reported to the Korean king. The progress of the Opium War was followed keenly, and the cession of Hongkong was noted with alarm.⁴¹

But the information on events in China was fragmentary and not always consistent. Some important events, such as the conclusion of the Nanking Treaty, escaped their attention, probably because the authors of these reports failed to grasp its meaning. The military defeat in war and the cession of Hongkong were easy enough to understand. But the full significance of the treaty settlement was most likely lost on the Koreans who knew nothing of the international law. The problem was further aggravated for them because they had never had any sustained contact with any Western country. And it was even exacerbated by the fact that the Chinese would never inform the Korean government of the changes taking place within their borders. But what the Koreans learned through their

⁴¹ The envoys' reports that touched on the Western impact on China are found in *Tongmun hwigo, pop'yon sok*, 'Sasin pyoldan': the debate on legalization of opium, 11 Aug. 1834, 2:36-7; opium causing the drain of silver, 14 Sept. 1837, 2:39; opium smoking and low morale of the population, 7 May 1839, 2:39b-40; the Opium War, 10 April 1841, 2:40-1, and fourth month of Tao-kuang 22 (10 May-8 June 1842), 2:40-2; postwar condition of the Chinese government, such as sale of office and punishment of officials, 28 April 1843, 2:42b-43b; treaties and domineering England and other lesser Western countries, 4 May 1845, 2:44b-45.

tributary envoys was nevertheless disturbing. As a result they began to modify their attitude towards China. The changes were very subtle at first but were nevertheless noteworthy.

In May 1845, H.M.S. *Samarang* appeared off Cholla province and sailed up and down the coast for about a month surveying the waters. The court decided to report this to Peking following the precedent that was set in 1832. In fact they did more than simply follow the precedent. The document prepared did not simply report the Korean handling of the incident. It also requested the Chinese government to issue an order restraining the Western barbarians in Canton and Macau from sailing into Korean waters in future.⁴² The Chinese complied with this request. Ch'i-ying, the governor-general of Kwangtung, met with the British representative, who told him that the ship in question had been sent by Her Majesty's government to chart the area and the ship had already returned home. He assured Ch'i-ying that the British had no intention of demanding trade with Korea. Ch'i-ying duly reported this to the throne, who ordered the Board of Rites to pass this information to the Korean king.⁴³

This bolder attitude by the Korean government probably had to do with what they knew of the changed international situation in

⁴² Report to the Chinese Board of Rites, 30 Aug. 1845, *Tongmun hwigo, wonp'yon sok*, 'P'yomin' 6 'Sanggugin', 14-16b. Captain Edward Belcher, R.N. *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Samarang, during the Years 1843-46*, 2 vols (London: Reeve, Benham, and Reeve, 1848) is a dry account of the voyage which gives us no information on the people he saw.

⁴³ Edict, 29 Oct. 1845, and Ch'i-ying's memorial, 21 Dec. 1845, *Ch'ou-pan i-wu shih-mo* [The complete account of the management of barbarian affairs], reprint (Taipei: Kuo-feng ch'u-pan-she, 1963), *Tao-kuang*, 74:25b-26, 74:32b-33b (Hereafter cited as *Shih-mo* followed by the reign name); Chinese Board of Rites to the Korean king, 25 Dec. 845, *Tongmun hwigo, wonp'yon sok*, 'P'yomin' 6 'Sanggugin', 17a-b.

Key-Hiuk Kim relies on the same memorial by Ch'i-ying to say that Ch'i-ying told the British that 'it [Korea] could not be opened to trade by China, for it was not a part of China; it could not open itself to trade, for it was not independent.' *The Last Phase*, p. 40. The relevant passage in the memorial was: 'I [Ch'i-ying] also told [them] that Korea was a dependency of the Heavenly Dynasty and that, now that a treaty has been concluded [between China and these barbarians], these barbarians must comply with all the stipulations, [and demanded to know] why they were dispatching warships to Korea for surveying and [why] there was a talk of trading.' Ch'i-ying's memorial was a far more cogent document than Kim makes it out to be, and might be said to be the first documentary evidence of the Chinese view that the treaties China had signed with the Western powers did not extend to Korea or other dependencies. That the Chinese government in Peking understood Ch'i-ying's memorial in this spirit is apparent in the imperial edict given to him in reply: 'This governor-general [Ch'i-ying] must clearly agree with [them] whereby

China. Before the Opium War, the Koreans had no reason to take the direct threat from barbarians so seriously. They regarded the foreign ships that came their way as stray ships and were happy to give them food and provision as they had traditionally cared for castaways. That the Koreans now had specifically to ask the Chinese to issue an order to these barbarians in Canton and Macau was a sign that they began losing confidence in China's ability to control them.⁴⁴

A similar, but potentially more dangerous, incident occurred in 1847 involving the French. In 1846 three French warships under the command of Admiral Cecille came to Korea carrying a letter demanding satisfaction for the 1839 execution of the three French missionaries. These ships departed before local officials could approach them, leaving a letter with the island's inhabitants and with the word that the ships would return the year after to receive the reply. The following year Captain Lapierre who had replaced Cecille as commander of the French Asiatic Squadron, sailed to Korea with two warships, the *Gloire* and the *Victorieuse*. His plan foundered, however, when the two ships ran aground on an island off Cholla province and he had to write the Korean authority asking for help.

The appearance of Admiral Cécille's three warships caused a panic on the streets of Seoul,⁴⁵ and the first reaction of the court was to report the matter to the Chinese government following the precedent set in 1816. But this was deemed to be unwise, as one minister advised the throne, because the Chinese might then start asking awkward questions, like why the Koreans had failed to report the killing of the three foreigners to begin with.⁴⁶ With Lapierre's arrival, the matter became a live issue again in the Border Defence Command. It was now obvious to the ministers that the French

they must hereafter restrain their warships from going to any territory of the dependencies of the Heavenly Dynasty . . .', *Shih-mo: Tao-kuang*, 74:34-5.

⁴⁴ Another sign of this waning confidence was that the Koreans also decided to inform the Japanese of the activities of the H.M.S. *Samarang*. 15 Oct. 1845, *Sillok: Honjo*, 12:8b-9; *Pibyonsa tungnok*, 23:611b-c for the decision to inform Japan. *Tongmun hwigo, pup'yon sok* [4th ser., cont.], 'pyongum' [Frontier prohibitions], 1:1-2 for the letter to the daimyo of Tsushima.

⁴⁵ This is the first occasion a panic was reported in Seoul on account of foreign warships. This seems to signify considerable nervousness caused among the Korean population by the Chinese defeat in the Opium War. 5 Sept. 1846, *Chosen shi*, 6.3:147.

⁴⁶ 5 Sept. 1846, *Sillok: Honjo*, 13:11b-12.

would keep on coming back unless they were given a reply. One difficulty the ministers faced was they could not accept Cecille's initial note as a basis for their reply, since an exchange of such diplomatic communications would violate the code of tributary relationship which prohibited intercourse with foreigners. Fortunately, however, Lapierre's ships had run aground and he had written to the local authority asking for the provision of food for his men and of some boats for sending messages to Shanghai. Even though Lapierre briefly mentioned his desire to conclude a friendship treaty with Korea, the ministers decided they could accept this as a legitimate request from unfortunate castaways on the Korean shore, which required some form of reply.⁴⁷

The note the Koreans prepared was, in form, addressed to Lapierre, but it was, in its substance, a point-by-point reply to the allegations of unlawful killing of the French missionaries, contained in Cecille's earlier letter which they had rejected. It was true, the note said, that Korea had customarily repatriated Chinese, Manchus or Japanese to their own countries when they were arrested in Korea, as Cecille had pointed out. But Imbert, Maubant and Chastan had entered the country illegally and had associated with Korean criminals. They dressed like natives and spoke Korean. When they were arrested, they refused to say where they had come from. Even if they had confessed it, the Koreans had never heard of France before. These foreigners were not hapless castaways; they had infiltrated Korea with an intent to violate her laws. As for Cecille's threat that the French emperor would not tolerate the humiliation the killing caused him, the note responded by asking: Would the French government have tolerated a Korean if he had disguised himself as French and engaged in illegal activities in France? The same severe punishment would have been passed on Chinese, Manchus or Japanese if they had violated Korean law in a similar way. In an obvious reference to the execution of Chou Wen-mo, it said that there had recently been a case involving a national of the suzerain country, but China had not rebuked Korea for it.⁴⁸

In the concluding passage of the note, the Koreans touched on the nature of this correspondence. It said:

[Cecille's] letter of last year was not in conformity with the principle of mutual respect. It would be improper for us to reply to it. Obviously it is

⁴⁷ 11 Sept. 1847, *Pibyonsa tungnok*, 23:837c-d.

⁴⁸ For text, see *Chosen shi*, 6.3:183-6. French text appears in Charles Dallet, *Histoires de l'église de Corée* (Paris: Victor Palme, 1874), 2:339-41.

not a matter that concerns the provincial governor. Also our country is subordinate to the Great Ch'ing, and all our correspondence with a foreign country must be reported [to] and approved [by the suzerain]. Now, we cannot give you a reply unless we first obtain their approval. This is merely what the prime minister would have meant, had he replied to you himself.⁴⁹

This is a remarkable document. The arguments in defence of the missionaries' execution are forceful and clear, if we accept its anti-Christian bias as valid for the time. It should dispel any doubt that Yi officials were incompetent in diplomatic affairs. What is more remarkable is the way they formed the note as an unofficial document—or a kind of *note verbale*. The last paragraph of the note had more than mere formal significance. For, though the Koreans had accepted Lapierre's letter as a plea for help from a foreign castaway, this note not only went beyond the limit permitted for the treatment of foreigners in distress but it probably transgressed the ban on foreign intercourse implied in the 'basic structure of the state' (K: *choch'e*; C: *ch'ao-t'i*). It was imperative for the ministers that the French should be given an unambiguous reply to their allegations and the demand for trade, but in the process it was also important that China should not be alerted to their violation of the code of tributary relations. The note was designed to achieve these two goals at once. It gave a strong message to the French on the killing and on the trade. Even if this note fell into the hands of Chinese officials in Kwangtung province, it would not appear to them as illegal intercourse with foreigners.

When the note was dispatched to Lapierre, he and his men had departed for Shanghai on the British ships that came to their rescue. On earlier occasions, the Koreans would have left the matter there. Now they decided to take it further. They would report the whole French affair to China and to request that the governor-general of Kwangtung should be ordered to persuade the French not to return. They would also send the note to Peking for forwarding to the French captain in Macau.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Translation based on the Japanese text in *Chosen shi*, 6.3:183-6. Also see Dallet, *Histoires de l'église*, 2:339-41 for a French text. Dallet's version is somewhat different from the Japanese and omits reference to the prime minister.

⁵⁰ Dallet says about the transmission of this letter: 'Il [le gouvernement coreen] envoya donc, par Peking, une depeche qui fut remise a M. Lapierre a Macao.' *Histoires de l'église*, 2:339. I was not able to confirm this in Korean or Chinese sources. I accept Dallet's statement on two accounts. The Japanese and French texts in *Chosen shi* and Dallet are sufficiently close to be translations from the same Chinese text. And, for the reason I have described above, the Koreans did not think this note would be offensive to the Chinese.

The Korean king's letter to the Chinese Board of Rites did not dwell long on the killing of the French missionaries. Its justice was so evident in the context of the traditional relationship that they did not have to explain it in great length. Its primary objective was to reaffirm Korea's fundamental policy of upholding the tributary relationship in the face of changing circumstances.

The letter described the grounding of two 'strange ships' on 10 August on an island in Cholla province, and the kind treatment given these shipwrecked men while they were camped ashore. It then went on to make two points of note: before he left on 13 September, Captain Lapierre had addressed a letter to the Korean official, in which he included some papers titled 'regulations' (K: *changjong*; C: *chang-ch'eng*) and 'notifications' (K: *kosi*; C: *kao-shih*), which, I suspect, were texts of the Sino-French treaty and notices issued by the Kwangtung provincial authority acknowledging foreign missionary activities. Lapierre had also been accompanied by two Chinese from Kwangtung province, who, he claimed, came as interpreters by the permission of the Kwangtung governor-general.⁵¹ The letter therefore emphasized to the Chinese that they had no intention of entering into any relations with France and requested the Chinese government to impress this fact on the French in China.

Our small country is located in the remote corner of the eastern extreme and is separated from the Western countries by many oceans. No letters reach there, and no boats or carts go there. We have heard for the first time of a country called France. Moreover, we are duty-bound to report to you on frontier affairs. In 1816, when we reported about the English ship, we were commended and honoured by the emperor; in 1832, when we reported on an English ship again, we received a special edict instructing the people of that country not to go to Korea again. Our small country is all in one mind in relying on the superior country with respect and gratitude. Now this French affair is very different from the English affairs before. Moreover, judging from the letters they left behind, it appears this is a country which is controlled by the superior country in its maritime trade and traffic. We would trouble your Board to submit this to the emperor and request an imperial edict to let the governor-general of Liang-Kuang

⁵¹ The Korean official who was dispatched from Seoul to treat with the *Gloire* and the *Victorieuse* was not at all impressed by these two Cantonese 'interpreters', who seemed to him rather inadequate in written Chinese, and not at all proficient in French, as this official observed from the way Lapierre had difficulties in communicating with them. The Korean suspected Lapierre was making a false claim to impress him. He was probably right. See the report of Pang U-so, no date, *Tongmun hwigo, pop'yon sok*, 'Sasin pyoldan', 2:49b-60.

instruct [the French] first so that there would not be any more disturbances.⁵²

The Korean documents were dispatched to Peking with a 'calendar-returning' mission. An imperial edict was issued on 6 November ordering these Korean documents to be sent to Ch'i-ying for him to act on. Ch'i-ying accordingly sent a diplomatic note to Lapierre.

Ch'i-ying's note has been a source of some confusion among historians. As it purports to quote extensively from the Korean letter to the Board of Rites, Mary C. Wright used this as such to support her contention that Korea's diplomacy was rigid and uninformed,⁵³ a view which does not accord with the resourceful argument presented in the text or with the dexterity with which its transmission to Lapierre was achieved. Ch'i-ying's note, in fact, did not simply copy out the original Korean letter; it took a considerable liberty in paraphrasing the original document so that, even though Ch'i-ying was pressing on Lapierre the views the Koreans put forward, the tone of the argument was changed from that of dignified, reasoned suasion to whining supplication, which was more in accord with Ch'i-ying's own style of diplomacy which consisted of appeasing the Western barbarians with flattering and conciliatory words. It was Ch'i-ying's, and not Korea's, words that made the Korean position look rigid and uninformed. The Korean letter, as presented in Ch'i-ying's note, read like this:

The land of our country is remote and small, and our people poor. Since its produce is meagre, there is really no economic strength to conduct trade with foreign countries. And also Christianity may really encourage people to do good; but our people are stupid and difficult to educate. Moreover, they had not heard of this teaching. It would really be difficult to teach them.

Having thus presented the Korean view, Ch'i-ying begged for Lapierre's sympathy and understanding for this small country, as the latter, 'with your [Lapierre's] intelligence which surpasses all other

⁵² Eighth month of Tao-kuang 27 (9 Sept.–8 Oct. 1847), *Tongmun hwigo, wonp'yonsok*, 'P'yomin' 6 'Sanggugin', 17b–19b.

⁵³ Mary C. Wright wrote: 'On the Chinese point that Christians were law-abiding and Christian teaching not immoral, the Korean letter remarked that this might be so but that the Korean people were too stupid to understand anything of which they had not heard before; moreover the country was too poor to engage in trade.' 'The Adaptability', p. 376.

people', would certainly agree with the reasonableness of the Korean position.⁵⁴

Ch'i-ying then sent a memorial to Peking expressing his view that the French were unlikely to disturb Korea again as about 400 French troops had already been sent home from Macau.⁵⁵ A while later, Ch'i-ying reported he had received a note from Lapierre. The note concerned mostly the treatment of Christian missionaries in various parts of China; but, since it made no mention of Korea except to say that Lapierre had never requested trading concessions from any country, Ch'i-ying took this to mean France was no longer interested in Korean trade. He only feared Lapierre might still go back to Korea to reclaim the cargoes he had left behind. Since it was impossible to stop him, Ch'i-ying proposed to the throne that the Board of Rites should tell the Koreans to receive the French courteously in order to avoid further incidents. The imperial edict merely ordered Ch'i-ying to keep an eye on these barbarians and do what he could to stop them from going back to Korea, but ignored this sensible proposal.⁵⁶

'Foreign Disturbances'

One wonders what might have happened if the emperor had adopted Ch'i-ying's proposal and had indeed warned the Korean king of the necessity to avoid further incidents with the French. Would it have led to Korea changing her seclusionist policy towards France and Britain? The answer must, unfortunately, be 'probably not'. For Korea to adopt a more open attitude to the West, she would have had to know far more about the Western world and recognize these barbarian countries as a force that was at least as formidable as, if not more than, her mighty neighbour China. For, in spite of the Opium Wars and the Taiping rebellions, China still remained the only tangible power to reckon with in the eyes of the Koreans. These 'internal disturbances and external aggressions' (*nei-yu wai-huan*) were certainly a sign of the Ch'ing dynasty's declining power, but it did not change the fundamental fact of Korea's security being

⁵⁴ Ch'i-ying to Lapierre, enclosure in his memorial received at court on 23 Dec. 1847, *Shih-mo: Tao-kuang*, 78:24b-25b.

⁵⁵ Ch'i-ying's memorial received at court on 23 Dec. 1847, *Shih-mo: Tao-kuang*, 78:23-24b.

⁵⁶ Ch'i-ying's memorial received at court 14 Feb. 1848, and edict, *Shih-mo: Tao-kuang*, 79:3b-5b.

dependent first and above all upon maintaining a friendly relationship with China, which the tributary relationship had provided for. The relations with all the other countries were acceptable only so far as they were entirely compatible with it. Her long and unperturbed relationship with Japan had been built on this premise. If Korea were to open her door to Western countries, that, too, had to be done on the same premise. An open diplomatic relationship with Western countries would not have appeared safe to the Koreans unless these countries were powerful enough to check a Chinese threat to Korea. The change in Korea's position towards the Western barbarians depended on how much she would come to recognize the power of the West relative to China. So long as Korea saw China as a greater threat than Western countries, her policy of dependence upon China had to continue. And so long as the sole provider of knowledge on these Western countries and China's dealings with them was China herself, it was unlikely that Korea would form any other opinion.

The Korean envoys reported on the great Taiping rebellion in South China, but the disorder in distant South China failed to stir the Koreans to take a fresh look at the Sino-Korean relationship.⁵⁷ The news of the sack of Peking by the Anglo-French allied forces and the flight of the emperor to Jehol was brought to Seoul in January 1861. It caused such a great consternation among Koreans that many fled the capital. There was a fear that the Chinese emperor might retreat further northeast and even seek refuge on Korean soil, which would inevitably bring Chinese interference in Korean affairs and even invite a Western attack on Korea.⁵⁸ The Korean court decided to dispatch a special embassy ostensibly to enquire after the emperor's well-being, but undoubtedly motivated by a more mundane desire to obtain up-to-date information in China, without waiting for the return of the regular tributary mission which was not expected until late spring.

When the 'enquiry mission' reached Peking, the Chinese government reacted with an ostentatious show of magnanimity by bestowing on them various gifts and an edict full of warm praise for their loyal act. But it rejected the request from the embassy for a

⁵⁷ The earliest envoys' report to refer to the Taiping rebellion was in 1854, which reported the fall of Nanking. But the references to the Taipings are generally short and do not seem to show the same degree of concern as towards the Anglo-French campaign in North China in 1860. See the envoys' reports between 1854 and 1866 in *Tongmun hwigo, wonp'yon sok*, 'Sasin pyoldan' 2:61-80b.

⁵⁸ *Chosen shi*, 6.3:601, entry of 10 March 1861; Kim, *The Last Phase*, p. 42.

permission to travel to Jehol on the grounds of the emperor's ill health.⁵⁹ By then, the foreign troops had been evacuated from Peking, and China had signed new treaties with Britain, France and Russia. In the meantime, the regular embassy returned to Seoul and the three envoys reported to the king that the foreign barbarians had compelled the Chinese government to accept their terms of peace, and that the capital city itself had recovered its former tranquillity. The enquiry mission, which returned two months later, also told of the restoration of calm in Peking and of increasingly successful anti-Taiping campaigns led by more able provincial officials outside the capital.⁶⁰

But nowhere do we find evidence that, through this crisis in China, the Koreans were made aware of the potentially more insidious concessions which China had been compelled to make to the powers. These included the opening of several ports in North China including Newchwang in Manchuria, the concession to the French Catholic missionaries of the right to own properties in the interior of China, and the cession of the trans-Ussuri region to Russia, the last of which exposed Korea to direct threat from the Russians across the newly created eleven-mile-long land border on her northeastern frontier. Thus, neither the Taiping rebellion nor the Chinese defeat in the Second Opium War compelled the Koreans to make a fundamental reappraisal of Korea's policy of dependence on China. On the contrary, the spectacle of China's dynastic decline, of which these internal disturbances and the external aggressions were both causes and symptoms according to the Confucian ideology of state, seems to have hardened the Korean resolve to resist all demands for foreign trade and to root out all domestic unrest.

It was at this juncture, in 1864, that the Taewon'gun assumed power as a de facto regent for his son, King Kojong. A man of forceful personality, he set out on an ambitious reform plan to strengthen the power of the Korean state and, if he had been at all affected by the news of China's domestic and foreign imbroglios, to spare it a similar fate.⁶¹ One of these measures was the Catholic persecution of 1866.

⁵⁹ The Korean king's letter to the Board of Rites, 6 Feb. 1861, and the Board's reply, 7 April 1861, *Tongmun hwigo, wonpyon sok*, 'Mun'an' [Enquiry after the emperor's health], 2:1, 2:2b-3b. The emperor's health was probably not very good; he was to die in Jehol on 22 August.

⁶⁰ Audience of the three envoys, 6 May 1861, and of the Jehol envoys, 27 July 1861, *Sillok: Ch'oljang*, 13:4, 13:6.

⁶¹ On the Taewon'gun's reforms, see Choe, *The Rule of the Taewon'gun*. For more critical assessment, Palais, *The Politics and Policy*.

A curious story is told of the origin of this persecution. From about 1860, the Koreans had noted with some concern signs of increasing Russian activities along the northeastern frontier. Prompted by a desire to secure government approval for their faith, two Catholic officials proposed to the Taewon'gun that Korea should conclude an anti-Russian alliance with France and England, and that the French missionaries would help negotiate such an alliance with the French minister in Peking. The plan fell through because the French priests were unwilling to involve themselves in politics. The Taewon'gun is said to have shown considerable interest in the proposal, though he eventually rejected it for a fear that such a treaty might make China suspicious.⁶² If this story is true, it is interesting that the Taewon'gun should have considered an alliance with Western powers even for a brief moment, suggesting that he might not have been as anti-foreign as he was generally thought to be. Unfortunately, the proposal revealed to the government the presence of French missionaries in the country, and the persecution began soon thereafter. At first, it seems to have been aimed more at these foreigners than at Korean converts at large. The persecution lasted barely one month. Ten French priests were arrested and quickly put to death between February and March, but the number of Koreans executed during this month probably never exceeded thirty to forty.⁶³

In carrying out the execution of these French priests, the Korean government had never thought of international repercussions. The current purge of the 'evil teaching' reminded Korean officials of the last great purge in 1839. The comparison they drew, however, was not the killing of the French priests that might cause the French to send warships to Korea again, but rather the traitorous nature of the Korean Christians who associated with these beastly barbarians.⁶⁴ Lapierre's visit to Korea in 1847 had completely failed to offer a diplomatic lesson to the Koreans.

The news of the Christian purge was carried to China by Felix-Clair Ridel, one of the three French priests who escaped arrest. He went by a junk to Chefoo and then to Tientsin, where he told Admiral Pierre-Gustave Roze, the commander of the French Asiatic Squadron, of the two compatriots still in Korea. Roze consulted the French charge in Peking, Henri de Bellonet. On 13 July, Bellonet sent the following extraordinary note to the Tsungli Yamen.

⁶² Choe, *The Rule of Taewon'gun*, p. 96 for a summary of this episode.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; *Chosen shi*, 6.4:64-5, 67-70, gives ten names, but the number of French priests killed is given as nine in Choe, *The Rule of Taewon'gun*, p. 96.

⁶⁴ For example, 10 March 1866, *Sillok: Kojong*, 3:5a-b.

'According to the communication I received recently from Korea,' the note said,

it is said that in March this year the king of Korea suddenly issued an order whereby two French bishops, nine [French] and seven native missionaries, and numerous converts were killed. By such savagery [Korea] has chosen to defeat herself. Because it is a tributary country of China, it is only reasonable that I should inform your excellency we are sending troops to punish the guilty. . . . Therefore, I hereby declare that all our warships will go to Korea to take that country temporarily. We shall then await an order from France to determine who should be appointed the king to rule that land. I have on several occasions requested your yamen to issue the passports to the missionaries, but you have always given me evasive answers, saying that, even though Korea paid tribute to China, it was autonomous (K: *chaju*; C: *tzu-chu*) in all its state affairs and that, therefore the Treaty of Tientsin did not apply to it.⁶⁵

Although Bellonet's note was hostile to China, Bellonet's point about Korea being an 'autonomous' country did not contradict the view the Tsungli Yamen held. The ministers of the Tsungli Yamen had only recently declared with regard to Korea not only to the French charge but also the British minister that China's treaties with the Western countries did not apply to her dependencies and that China did not directly interfere in the affairs of her dependencies.⁶⁶ The Yamen's dispatch to the French minister avoided this legal point, and confined itself to a moral suasion.

Seeing, however, that when two countries come to war it involves the lives of their people, as it will in this case—and, therefore, I cannot but endeavour to bring about a solution (C: *p'ai-chieh*; K: *pehe*) of the difficulty between them—as the Koreans have killed a number of the missionaries, it seems to me that it would be best to inquire beforehand into the proofs and merits of the affair, and ascertain what were the reasons for this step, so that, if possible, a resort to arms might be avoided. I . . . suggest such a course for your excellency's consideration.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Bellonet to the Tsungli Yamen, enclosure in the memorial of the Tsungli Yamen, received at court 18 July 1866, *Shih-mo: T'ung-chih*, 42:54a-b. Choe, *The Rule of the Taewon'gun*, p. 97 gives a different translation, which is quoted from *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, enclosure in No. 122, Burlingame to Seward, Peking, 12 Dec. 1866.

⁶⁶ The Tsungli Yamen to Thomas Wade, and the Tsungli Yamen to Bellonet, enclosures in the memorial of the Tsungli Yamen, received at court 18 July 1866, *Shih-mo: T'ung-chih*, 42:53a-b, 54b-55.

⁶⁷ The Tsungli Yamen to Bellonet, enclosure to memorial of the Tsungli Yamen, received at court 18 July 1866, *Shih-mo: T'ung-chih*, 42:54b-55. The translation follows Choe, *The Rule of the Taewon'gun*, pp. 97-8, which quotes from *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, enclosure in No. 122, Burlingame to Seward, Peking, 12 Dec. 1866.

The Tsungli Yamen's tactics was probably to stall the French with the vague offer of mediation, while they had time to forewarn the Koreans of the impending French invasion, in the hope that the Koreans would somehow be able to avoid the conflict. What they meant by *p'ai-chieh*⁶⁸ was probably little more than passing the information to the Koreans and, if the Korean reply was received, forwarding it to the French with a few words of restraint. There was little likelihood of China risking a forceful intervention against the French naval forces, at any rate so soon after her defeat in the Second Opium War. The Board of Rites duly sent to the king of Korea a copy of the correspondence exchanged between Bellonet and the Tsungli Yamen.

When the Board's letter reached Seoul on 16 August, however, it seems to have given the Koreans an impression that the Tsungli Yamen would undertake some form of active intervention rather than mere mediation. In their reply to the Board's letter, the Koreans justified the killing of the French missionaries by pointing out, as they had done in 1839, that they were in effect Korean criminals who had dressed like the natives and colluded with native renegades in most serious crimes. They had never had hostile feeling towards France—how could there be any grudge against a country which they hardly knew? They affirmed the policy of seclusion with a phrase from Chinese classics: It was 'the permanent canon of the vassal state' (K: *subang chi yijon*; C: *shou-pang chih i-tien*) that 'people have no foreign relations, they close their market, and they jeer at foreign tongues.' They then professed their ignorance of foreign affairs and expressed profuse gratitude to the Chinese government

⁶⁸ According to a standard Chinese dictionary *Tz'u-hai*, the term is derived from *p'ai-nan chieh-fen* ('to remove difficulties and resolve conflict'), which describes the deed of a Lu Chung-lian during the Warring State period. When the army of powerful Ch'in laid siege to Chao capital, Lu undertook single-handedly to persuade the Ch'in king to lift the siege. When the king of Chao offered Lu a reward of gold, the latter replied that the gentleman valued 'eradicating calamities, removing difficulties and resolving conflicts for other people; [he] does not take anything [for reward].' Shu Hsin-ch'eng *et al.* (eds), *Tz'u-hai*, reprint of 1947 revised ed. (Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1974), p. 580.

This classical reference was not only apt for the situation as the Koreans saw it, but it would have suggested to them a more active intervention than what the Tsungli Yamen had in mind.

A contemporary Chinese-English dictionary translates *p'ai-chieh* as 'to arrange any difficulties; to put an end to a quarrel', admirably suggesting the ambiguity of the action envisaged from that of a passive intermediary to that of an active fixer. Robert Morrison, *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, in 3 parts, 6 vols (Macau: East India Company's Press, 1815-1822), part II, vol. 1, p. 633.

for the 'mediation' (*p'ai-chieh*) attempt by the Tsungli Yamen, ending the letter with a remark: 'We hereby give you the complete account of the affair in advance, and would trouble your Board to forward it in a memorial so that it might be put into practice.'⁶⁹

The last remark is significant, for it suggests that the Korean reply was not written in opposition to the Chinese suggestion to accommodate the French demands. The underlying assumption here was, as the Koreans saw it, that China and Korea were agreed on the point of the inviolability of Korean seclusion. The Chinese might have wished to urge flexibility on the Koreans by their exceptional act of forewarning; but the text of their communication stated categorically, as the opinion of the Tsungli Yamen which had the support of the emperor, that China could not, and would not, force Korea to open her door to foreign intercourse. To the Koreans the Yamen's offer of 'mediation' (*p'ai-chieh*) coupled with what, to them, seemed to be this firm support of Korea's seclusion policy signified an active support by the Tsungli Yamen for Korea against the French. The purpose of their reply to the Chinese Board of Rites was to thank the Tsungli Yamen for this concrete support and to provide a detailed brief of the affair in order to help the Chinese to put the Korean case more effectively to the French. As the ministers in council remarked, when they proposed that a reply be sent to the Board of Rites, 'We must express our gratitude for the mediation (*p'ai-chieh*) by the Tsungli Yamen and the forwarding of papers by the Board of Rites. And we must prepare a complete account of the case.'⁷⁰

Admiral Roze sailed on 18 September aboard the flagship *Primauguet*, accompanied by two other ships, the *Deroulede* and the *Tardif*. The French ships surveyed approaches to the Korean capital, at one point sailing up the Han River within the viewing distance from Seoul. The appearance of the French ships so near the capital caused a panic in the Korean court, but no resistance was offered. On 1 October the ships sailed back to Chefoo in China to prepare for formal campaign.⁷¹

The departure of the black ships without any incident was still seen as a sign of the success of the Chinese intervention. On 3

⁶⁹ The Korean king's letter, presented to the emperor on 29 Sept. 1866, *Shih-mo: Tung-chih*, 44:12b-13b.

⁷⁰ 17 Aug. 1866, *Pibyonsa tungnok*, 26:199a-b; *Ilsongnok: Kojong p'yon* [Record for daily reflection: Kojong's reign] (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1967-72), Kojong 3.7.8.

⁷¹ Choe, *The Rule of the Taewon'gun*, pp. 98-9.

October, it was decided that the forthcoming tributary embassy should also be designated a 'thanking mission' (K: *saunsa*; C: *hsieh-en-shih*) specially to show Korea's gratitude for the Tsungli Yamen's efforts.⁷²

The return of the French forces—now with seven warships—and the attack on the Island of Kanghwa on 16 October, however, radically changed the situation. The Taewon'gun set up a central military command known as *Kiboyonhae sunmuyong* (Metropolitan and Maritime Defence Command) with his trusted general Yi Kyong-ha as commander-in-chief, and prepared the country for war with the French.⁷³ In this frenzy of activities, he also ordered that a letter be dispatched to the Chinese Board of Rites to declare Korea's determination to fight on.

The letter was unlike anything the Korean king had ever sent to China. Its language was strong and uncompromising, verging on intransigence. It declared that Korea had never deviated in her history from the teaching of Duke Chou and Confucius, and that she was not going to let some Western teaching contaminate her land. It described in a highly idealistic tone the various reforms the Taewon'gun had carried out to improve the government and the welfare of the Korean people. It then thanked the Chinese government for helping to quash the rumour of war through its intervention (*p'ai-chieh*) with the French. As for foreign trade, it haughtily proclaimed Korea produced only enough to keep her people in a contented state: she had no goods to trade with the foreigners. They would not get anything they wanted from Korea, and Korea wanted nothing from them. It proclaimed that Korea was forthwith prohibiting all foreign goods in the country. Those which had been imported into Korea from the markets in China would now be confiscated and burnt by the authority. If these foreigners were in possession of correct reason, the letter said, how could they invade the land of Korea which had nothing to do with them? It reminded the Chinese that the Chinese officials were in a position to know much better than themselves the foreigners' grand designs. Would not the ministers

⁷² 3 Oct. 1866, *Ilsongnok*, Kojong 3.8.25. This thanking mission was performed even though the Tsungli Yamen's failure had been made painfully apparent by the hostility with the French. It may be that the mission started on its journey before the fighting began. See the Korean king's memorial to the Chinese emperor, 30 Nov. 1866, *Tongmun hwigo, wonp'yon* [1st ser.], 'Yangbak chonghyong' [Reports on foreign ships], 13a-b.

⁷³ Choe, *The Rule of Taewon'gun*, pp. 101-2.

of the Tsungli Yamen talk firmly to these foreigners so that they and the Koreans could each live in peace?⁷⁴

This was indeed a very strong protest to the Chinese government from the Koreans that the Tsungli Yamen's mediation had not only failed but that China's accommodation of the Western influence itself was threatening Korea. The profession of Korea's poverty was not an expression of humble supplication; it was, rather, a haughty declaration of her firm determination to continue the policy of seclusion and a sharp reminder to China that the superior country was not fulfilling its duties of protecting the inferior country.

It did not take this letter from the Korean king to remind the ministers of the Tsungli Yamen that the opening of hostility changed the situation in Korea. Roze had ordered the expedition against Korea even before Bellonet had formally notified the Tsungli Yamen of it, giving the Chinese no time for intervention of any kind. And the Tsungli Yamen's response merely affirmed the French right to declare a naval blockade as it was stipulated in Article 31 of the Treaty of Tientsin and lamely repeated the earlier demand for investigation and postponement of naval action.⁷⁵ And the Tsungli Yamen was at any rate certain that Korea would be militarily defeated, as China had been, at the hands of the Western invaders, and the defeat would lead to other issues than the killing of the Catholic fathers. In a memorial received by the throne on 11 November, the Yamen ministers pointed out that after the war the French demand would no longer be confined to the question of Christian missionaries. France would certainly demand trade as well as indemnities. Even worse, England and the United States would join with France to make similar demands on Korea. But Korea would certainly refuse to compromise on these points:

Now the letter from Korea deeply rejects trade and propagation of Christianity. We wonder if [Korea] has ever carefully considered the benefits and the harms [of trade and Christianity]. As for indemnities, their harm is equal [to the other two]. Our yamen cannot put even a slight

⁷⁴ The Korean king's letter, enclosure in Prince Kung's memorial, 21 Nov. 1866, *Shih-mo: Tung-chih*, 45:22b-25b.

⁷⁵ On 5 October, Roze issued two proclamations, in which he explained to the general public the aim of the campaign and declared the blockade of the Han River. The Far Eastern fleet sailed for Korea on 11 October. It was not until 24 October that Bellonet informed the Tsungli Yamen of the Korean blockade. Choe, *The Rule of the Taewon'gun*, p. 100; Bellonet to the Tsungli Yamen, 24 Oct. 1866, and the Tsungli Yamen to Bellonet, 4 Nov. 1866, enclosures in the Tsungli Yamen's memorial, received at court on 12 Nov. 1866, *Shih-mo: Tung-chih*, 45:14-15.

pressure on Korea. We would request your edict to instruct the Board of Rites to [consider] how to inform the king of Korea that he should plan for all eventualities and take appropriate measures without the slightest oversight.⁷⁶

The Tsungli Yamen feared France was using the missionary affair as an excuse for trade, and once the trade became an open issue, England and the United States were bound to join in.

The debacle the Tsungli Yamen had feared for Korea did not come about, as Admiral Roze was compelled to withdraw his troops from Korea on 18 November. The French had occupied the strategic island of Kanghwa, but they were inadequately prepared for the protracted warfare which the determined resistance by the much larger Korean force imposed on them. But the Tsungli Yamen's fear was based less on the immediate outcome of the war than on the long-term concern that the foreign pressure on Korea would continue and would sooner or later increase to the point where she would be compelled to respond to the demands for concessions. In December, even after the hostility ended, the Tsungli Yamen ministers were apprehensive that the French still harboured some design on Korea, and wanted the Board of Rites to pass the information to Korea so that 'if France dispatched warships [to Korea] again in future, she might be able to take appropriate action herself and to plan for all eventualities. This is most important.'⁷⁷ The Board of Rites, whose task it was to oversee the dispatch and the receipt of correspondence with the Korean king, took a different view. It was less interested in the future development of the international situation and considered that the Chinese concern in the affair had come to an end when it received the glowing report of the Korean victory over the French, which the Korean tributary mission had now brought to Peking. The ministers of the Board of Rites therefore objected to the Tsungli Yamen's proposal. The Tsungli Yamen was not moved by these reports. It memorialized again on 27 February reiterating the importance of giving warning to the Korean king again only to find its counsel ignored by the throne.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Memorial from the Tsungli Yamen, 11 Nov. 1866, *Shih-mo: T'ung-chih*, 45:10b-13b.

⁷⁷ The Tsungli Yamen's memorial, received on 20 Dec. 1866, *Shih-mo: T'ung-chih*, 46:12-17.

⁷⁸ The Tsungli Yamen's memorial, received at court on 27 Feb. 1867, *Shih-mo: T'ung-chih*, 47:8b-10; the letters from the Korean king, reporting the victory, enclosures in the memorial of the Board of Rites, received at court on 16 Feb. 1867, *ibid.*, 47:1-5.

Conclusion

This survey of the Korean handling of the foreign incursions has shown that the Koreans consistently tried to deal with these incidents within the framework of traditional Sino-Korean relations. Whenever a wayward incident occurred, the Koreans made efforts, at times of dubious nature, to present their case to the Chinese court in as favourable a light as possible. They were also quite ready to withhold information from the Chinese when it seemed safe. They were careful to be seen to be dealing with these foreign incidents openly and above board. They feared most arousing the Chinese suspicion of their anti-Chinese (and especially anti-Manchu) sentiment. Once such a suspicion was implanted in the Chinese mind, the Chinese were bound to interfere in Korean affairs directly as they had done in the early days of the Ch'ing-Korean relations.

The Koreans paid close attention to China's external relations as well as her internal conditions both before and after the Opium War. Information-gathering was one task each tributary mission conducted with considerable vigour even at the risk of offending the Chinese host.⁷⁹ It was through the reports of the tributary envoys that the Koreans learned of China's defeats in the Opium War and the Arrow War. The sack of Peking by the Anglo-French forces alarmed the Koreans, but it seems to have had little effect on Korea's foreign policy thinking, probably because the Koreans did not know the full extent of the territorial and other concessions which the Chinese had made to gain the peace settlement, and also because, with the restoration of calm in the capital and the suppression of the Taiping rebellion, China posed just as much threat as before on the Sino-Korean frontier.⁸⁰ The effect of China's weakening position in the face of foreign incursion is apparent in the increased aggressiveness of Korea's diplomacy. After the *Samarang* case, the Korean government, rather than simply informing the Board of Rites, began asking the Chinese government to forward

⁷⁹ Chang Ts'un-wu, 'Ch'ao-hsien tui-Ch'ing wai-chiao ji-mi-fei chih yen-chiu' [A study of the secret service funds in Korean diplomacy towards China], in his *Lun-wen-chi*, pp. 112-16.

⁸⁰ We might recall that the panic among the population of Seoul in 1861 was caused by their fear of vanquished Manchu forces withdrawing to their homeland on the Manchurian-Korean border. See above, 'Foreign Disturbances'.

their request to the Kwangtung provincial authority to stop the foreigners from sailing to Korea. In the case of the two French ships, the *Gloire* and the *Victorieuse*, they even succeeded in sending their communication to a French captain in Macau through the official channel of the Chinese government.

The French invasion of 1866 strained the traditional Sino-Korean relations. In the face of the aggressive French naval force, all the initiatives and innovations which the Koreans had devised in the past decades in dealing with the Western barbarians proved ineffective. The Chinese government's response, on which the success of Korean measures was predicated, was ill-defined and tentative. But, when the Tsungli Yamen made an attempt to intercede with the French, it seemed to the Koreans to be an active intervention on their behalf, and the Koreans readily accepted the Chinese assistance. When the French naval attack made the inadequacy of this intervention painfully clear, the Koreans chose to go to war with the French. The alternative of a negotiated settlement was, under the circumstances, tantamount to a surrender, and would have compelled Korea into an uncharted water of open trade and diplomatic relations with France and, undoubtedly, other Western countries. Understandably such an alternative did not even become an issue in the debate of the Korean court at a time when the Koreans were preparing frantically for war to defend their capital.

But there was a more fundamental reason why the Koreans would not consider a negotiated settlement with the French. In the letter the Korean king addressed to the Board of Rites during the war against France, he proudly proclaimed that Korea had always followed the way of the sacred teaching of the Duke Chou and Confucius, thereby insinuating that the Chinese had departed from the way of the proper Sino-Korean relations based on the teaching of these sages.⁸¹ This inherent sense of dissatisfaction with China's recent policy of allowing Western barbarians to come to Korea was nowhere more apparent than in the *wijong ch'oksa* ('defend the orthodox and reject the heterodox') argument which gained prominence during the French invasion. Its protagonist, Yi Hang-no, equated the Western barbarians with the beast and argued that 'those who advocate peace with the foreign bandits are on their side', and advised the government to maintain this 'great distinction' between

⁸¹ See note 74.

the traditional civilized way within the Korean borders and the realm where humans had fallen into beastly ways.⁸²

What is most striking in these arguments, when they are seen in the context of traditional Sino-Korean relations, is the strong anti-Chinese tone that underscores their violently anti-foreign expressions. Neither of them named China directly, but by insisting that Korea had strictly adhered to the correct way of the sages and that its strict observance alone offered the way out of the crisis, they both blamed the present crisis on China which had made too many concessions to the Western barbarians in violation of the Confucian tenets which bound China and Korea in close suzerain-vassal relationship. And the Chinese failure to adhere to the way of the sages was not unexpected because China was now under the yoke of the Manchu rule and had allowed the Western barbarians to reside on their shores and engage in trade.

This line of argument was reminiscent of the controversy that divided the Korean court in the early seventeenth century when the Manchus formally declared the establishment of the Ch'ing dynasty and thus challenged the reigning Ming dynasty. The Korean king was then bound in suzerain-vassal relationship with the Ming dynasty. In the face of military invasion by the Manchu hordes, the pragmatists in the Yi court had argued for acceptance of the Manchu demand for recognition of the new regime, and the concomitant transference of their allegiance to the Manchu dynasty as unavoidable steps for the preservation of the Yi state. The idealists insisted that Korea's pledge of loyalty to the Ming dynasty was inviolable and advocated a policy of resisting the Manchu barbarians even to the death of the Korean state.⁸³ Even though the pragmatists won the day to pursue the policy of *sadae* towards the new Manchu dynasty, the fierce Ming-loyalism lived on in the Korean mind long after the Manchus had suppressed the Chinese Ming-loyalist movement in southern China. Throughout the Ch'ing period, the Koreans perceived their relations with China on two levels: on the one hand,

⁸² Yi Hang-no's memorial, 20 Oct. 1866, *Sillok: Kojong*, 3:62b. This sentiment was echoed in the Taewon'gun's own letter to government officials on 22 Oct. 1866: '[Anyone who] cannot bear the suffering and permits diplomatic relations are selling the country; [anyone who cannot bear] the poison and permits trade will be letting the country perish . . .' Quoted in Tabohashi Kiyoshi, *Kindai Nissen kankei no kenkyu*, reprint ed. (Tokyo: Munetaka shobo, 1972), 1:71.

⁸³ Chang Ts'un-wu, 'Ch'ing-Han kuan-hsi, 1636-1644' [Ch'ing-Korean relations, 1636-1644], in his *Lun-wen chi*, pp. 7-26.

there was this idealized and moral China as represented by the Ming dynasty to which Yi Korea had pledged absolute loyalty both moral and political, and, at the other end of the spectrum, the real China under the Manchu rule to which Korea was obliged to pledge loyalty which was more political than moral.⁸⁴ Korean diplomacy towards China operated, as it were, in the chasm that separated the political expediency of submission to real China, which represented the practical and businesslike approach to diplomacy, and the moral principle of idealized China, which called for tough, ideologically correct approach to diplomacy and rejected all practical expediencies. The former approach prevailed in times of peace; but the latter had much appeal to the conservative sector of the *yangban* class who advanced it in times of crises as an alternative to the morally corrupt policy of accommodation with barbarians.⁸⁵

In this scheme of things, the Western barbarians who arrived on Korea's doorstep in the nineteenth century, did not represent in Korean eyes a novel factor in their foreign policy considerations. They were merely another variable in their familiar matrix of Sino-Korean and barbarian-civilized world dichotomies. Thus, the Koreans managed foreign incidents with considerable panache from 1801 to the early 1860s, when their foreign policy operated on the pragmatic level. The crisis situation in 1866, however, swung them away from their usual pragmatism towards the advocacy of the idealized China (or the Ming) which the Ch'ing travestied. Such Korean intransigency rarely occurred, but, when it did, Korean diplomacy assumed a quixotic dimension and became less rational and less predictable.

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⁸⁴ Watanabe Manabu, 'Richō koki "jidai kyōrin" shiso no henbō katei shokō' [An essay on the process of transformation of the idea of *sadae kyōrin* in the late Yi period], in Hyon'gam Sin Kuk-chu paksa hwakap kinyom Han'gukhak ronch'ong kanhaeng wiwonhoe (ed.), *Hyon'gam Sin Kuk-chu paksa hwakap kinyom Han'gukhak ronch'ong* [Monographs in commemoration of Dr Sin Kuk-chu's sixtieth birthday] (Seoul: Tongguk daehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1985), pp. 306-19.

⁸⁵ Kang Chae-on, 'Ri Koro ni okeru eisei sekija shiso: Wesutan inpakuto to sakoku joi no ronri' [The *Wijong ch'oksa* ideology in Yi Hang-no: the Western impact and the seclusionist and anti-foreign logic], in Iinuma Jiro, and Kang Chae-on (eds), *Kindai Chosen no shakai to shiso* [Society and thoughts in modern Korea] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1981), pp. 45-9.

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