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## **Distancing All Around: Post-Ming China Realpolitik in Seventeenth-Century Korea**

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### **Abstract**

During the Ming-Qing transition period, Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910) tried to articulate geopolitical change on its own terms by prioritizing state security. The way the Chosŏn court and ruling elites responded to the Revolt of Wu Sangui (1673–1681) and its aftereffects offers a snapshot of their accommodationist strategy for survival. This article explores how the court and elites maintained a policy of noninvolvement in association with domestic stability for social integration and self-strengthening for border defense. The author reveals the way the Chosŏn court and ruling elites handled the ongoing unexpected situations caused by Qing China, the anti-Qing force, and the Mongols. This approach helps contextualize the links between the realpolitik of Chosŏn and the *longue durée* of Pax Manjurica, Pax Mongolica, and Pax Sinica and promotes further inquiry into the international relations of East Asia from a transhistorical perspective.

**Keywords:** Chosŏn-Ming alliance, Ming loyalism, Mongols, realpolitik, Revolt of Wu Sangui, state security, Qing dynasty

### **Introduction**

Since the rise of China's Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), the maritime and overland proximity of the imperial capital Peking to the Liaodong and Korean peninsulas paved the way for a new paradigm of international relations in continental East Asia (Robinson 2009, 15–60). For whoever conquered Peking and North China, the defense of this imperial city was directly linked to the security of Chosŏn proper. This adjacency fashioned an immediate "lips and teeth" relationship between Ming China (1368–1644) and Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910) during the seventeenth century. Under Ming hegemony in the fifteenth century, the Chosŏn court kept its eyes on the moves of the Manchus and Mongols, whose alliance might be both a pivotal variable in the shift of power relations and a lethal obstacle to the security of Chosŏn. The Ming hegemony encountered the inescapable challenge of "Mongolian-Jurchen intruders in the north and Japanese pirates in the south" 北虜南倭 (Han 2012, 189–196) from the mid-sixteenth century. On top of the collapse of the Ming in mainland China, the pattern of north-south turbulence also aggravated Chosŏn's security, which had been seriously challenged during the Japanese invasions of Korea from 1592 to 1598 and the Manchu invasions in 1627 and 1636.

How the Chosŏn court and the ruling elites responded to the Revolt of Wu Sangui 吳三桂 (1612–1678), known as the Revolt of the Three Feudatories (1673–1681), provides a snapshot of the complex interaction between Chosŏn and its neighbors, including Qing China (1636–1912), during the second half of the seventeenth century. This article charts the way the Chosŏn court and ruling elites started building action plans against Wu’s rebellion from a more diachronic perspective in tandem with the pattern of north-south turbulence. More specifically, the article focuses on how they employed a noninvolvement policy by referring to the recurrent pattern of north-south turbulence in the past and collecting information, whenever and whatever available, for situation analysis. Drawing heavily on primary sources, the article examines a practical two-tiered strategy in which the court and ruling elites disengaged Chosŏn from diplomacy in any provocative matter with its stalwart neighbors and reengaged the late Ming in the ideological furtherance of home front defense.

Taking note of this accommodationist posture complements historian JaHyun Kim Haboush’s emphasis on a new epistemological strategy in a dual response to the new regional order by the formerly “barbarian” Qing, whose Jurchen past had long been regarded as militarily and culturally inferior to both the Ming and Chosŏn (Haboush 2005, 115–117). Haboush gives insight into the reconstruction of the discursive practice by the Chosŏn court and ruling elites who denied Qing-Chinese time, centering on the use of Qing reign titles, for the sake of Ming time inscription and reconceptualized their civilization, claiming its culture had been inherited from the late Ming while embracing Qing hegemony in terms of the traditional Sinocentric world order. That study paved the way to probe into a constructive convergence of pragmatic engagement, as will be explored here, and discursive practice, as revealed in Haboush’s research, toward a larger momentum of state security. This assemblage will enable us to reexamine how the Chosŏn court and ruling elites articulated the power relations of the time on their own terms and to recontextualize the dynamic unfolding of power relations in continental East Asia.

## A Search for Noninvolvement

### *Distancing All Around*

Located next to the Liaodong Peninsula, Chosŏn faced a large part of Manchuria from which the major defense lines, including the Shanhai Pass 山海關—the bastion at the easternmost point of the Great Wall—were constructed and beyond which the vast steppes of Mongolia stretched far and wide. Thirty years before Wu’s rebellion, the Qing attacks on Chosŏn in 1627 and 1636, accompanied by the formidable march of the Jurchen-Mongol cavalry, started from this area and moved southward to the northwestern part of Chosŏn. At the same time, Wu’s stronghold was Yunnan, and he allied himself with Geng Jingzhong 耿精忠 (d. 1682) in Fujian and Shang Zhixin 尙之信 (d. 1680) in Guangdong.<sup>1</sup> At that time, the provinces under

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<sup>1</sup> In 1655, the Shunzhi Emperor bestowed the three feudatories—largely the current Yunnan, Fujian, and Guangdong provinces—upon Wu, Geng, and Shang, respectively. These men had

the control of Geng and Shang were not only geographically linked to Taiwan under Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–1662) and his family but also widely open to the southwestern coast of Chosŏn and the west coast of Japan.

Given the geographical and geopolitical context, the court and the elites judged that Wu’s rebellion had established one front line in the north and another in the south. This situation prompted them to consider the possibility that the rebels might ally themselves with Zheng’s force in the south and the Mongols in the north. In other words, the Chosŏn court and elites did not consider Wu’s rebellion merely a confrontation between the Qing hegemony and Ming loyalism but predicted an interregional entanglement in which both North China and South China might fall into geopolitical chaos inseparable from the security of Chosŏn.

As a result, the court and ruling elites adopted a transhistorical perspective enabling them to orchestrate action plans against Wu’s rebellion in the context of “Mongolian-Jurchen intruders in the north and Japanese pirates in the south” that ruined the northern borders and southern coastlines of Ming China, especially during the Jiajing (1521–1567) and Longqing (1567–1572) reigns. Chosŏn witnessed its territory turning into a horrible battlefield during the Japanese invasions of Korea and encountered the invincible Jurchen-Mongol cavalry 鐵騎 during the Manchu invasions of Korea (1627 and 1636). This north-south turbulence, which shook the territorial and maritime security of its country, continued into the early seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

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rendered superior meritorious service as Han-Chinese generals in pro-Qing military operations before and after the fall of the Ming. The imperial intent was to break any post-Ming vacuum and secure the rule of the Qing in South China. As the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661–1722) decided to abolish the three feudatories in 1673, however, they stood up against the imperial order and waged armed resistance against Qing dominance. In 1678, Wu died of an illness. His grandson Wu Shifan 吳世璠 (d. 1681) discontinued the military campaign three years later by committing suicide under attack of the Qing army. Shang was ordered to commit suicide in 1680, and Geng was executed in 1682.

<sup>2</sup> Seven years after the Japanese invasions, in his audience with King Sŏnjo (r. 1567–1608), Han Hyosun (1543–1621) proposed parallel reinforcement of the northern and southern front lines by stationing 20,000 soldiers south of the Han River against Japanese provocation and 10,000 soldiers north of that river against Jurchen attack. Han stated the necessity of securing military machinery composed of firearms and artillery in preparation for any northern or southern battle (*Sŏnjo sillok* [The veritable records of King Sŏnjo] 191:19a7–20b15). A year later, in 1606, Yu Yŏnggyŏng (1550–1608) delivered to King Sŏnjo a report from a royal messenger that the Lotun Jurchens, one of the neighboring Jurchen tribes loyal to Chosŏn, had started interacting with the Hŭlun Jurchens as well as the Jianzhou Jurchens, a development that surprised the king. Yu voiced to the king his concern about whether Ming intelligence in Liaodong correctly read the border situation. Yu gave the example of General Li Chengliang (1526–1618), who favorably received the missionary from Nurhaci (1559–1626) without knowing of a new alliance between the Hŭlun Jurchens, and thereby suffered diversionary tactics from both the Ming and Nurhaci, and the Jianzhou Jurchens under Nurhaci. At the same time, Yu mentioned rumors of the death of Sō Yoshitoshi (1568–1615), one of the key diplomatic figures active between Chosŏn and Japan during the Japanese invasions. The king shared Yu’s distress by pointing out unverified news of the removal of Toyotomi Hideyori (1593–1615), the son of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), from the

These painful historical experiences shaped the pattern by which the court and ruling elites, while carefully checking the rebellion's direct bearing on the security of the Qing, circumspectly watched other variables, such as alliances between Wu's force and other anti-Qing forces and the revival of Mongolian dominance. The court and ruling elites saw the internal commotion caused by the rebellion and the external threat, disposed to aggravate disorder amidst the rebellion, as equally dangerous to their own security. A defensive mode of action led them to a neutral position not only in their distance from the Wu force, the Zheng force, Japan, and the Mongols, but also in their negotiations with the Qing.

When the first report on Wu's rebellion was delivered to the court in the third lunar month of 1674,<sup>3</sup> the court was eager to obtain correct and detailed information on the event, specifically the scale of the rebellion and the reaction of the Qing court to it. One of the court's proactive opinions proposed expeditious military measures to ally with other anti-Qing forces and attack the Qing via both maritime and overland routes. For example, referring to the recent history of defeat by the Qing, Yun Hyu 尹鑄 (1617–1680) regretted two mistakes made by Chosŏn.<sup>4</sup> The first mistake concerned the Battle of Sarhū in 1619, when Chosŏn did not send its best general and collaborate with the Ming army against the Jurchens, whose fierce military potency rose immediately after the construction of the Later Jin (1616–1636) by Nurhaci. The second mistake pertains to the excessively passive treatment of Chosŏn on its western front line, which should have been closely associated with the victorious maneuver of General Yuan Chonghuan 袁崇煥 (1584–1630) on the Ming's eastern front line in 1630, before the breakdown of the second Manchu invasion in 1636. Chosŏn wasted these two military opportunities without fighting well against the Jurchens. That negligence cost Chosŏn dearly, as it was compelled to surrender to the Qing in a humiliating manner.

The rise of Wu's force might have been a great opportunity for Chosŏn to withstand the Qing of Jurchen origin. Given the promising situation favorable to Wu's force, Chosŏn should not have clung to a defensive strategy without any action. With an emphasis on the strategic value of Chosŏn, Yun proposed a three-tiered action plan.<sup>5</sup> The first tier would be to dispatch a troop of 10,000 soldiers to the Liaodong Peninsula conterminous with the metropolitan area of Peking and keep the "neck" of the Qing army in check. The second tier would be to ally with the forces of Zheng Chenggong in Taiwan across the sea and keep the "belly" of the Qing army at bay. The third would be to send invitations to those willing to stand up against the Qing along the southeastern coast, including Japan, and the northeastern borderlands with a view to stirring up the Ming royalist movement into full operation.

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political center. In the process, more information gathering was propounded at court. The king ordered Yu and other officials to dispatch an envoy to Tsushima for the purpose of confirming whether these reports came from reliable sources (*Sŏnjo sillok* 195:18b2–20b15). Regarding the conflict between the Hūlun confederation—the Yehe, Hada, Hoifa, and Ula—and Nurhaci up to the early seventeenth century, refer to Crossley (2002a, 205–209) and Wakeman (1985, 48–53).

<sup>3</sup> *Hyŏnjong sillok* [Veritable records of King Hyŏnjong] 22:8a14–b5.

<sup>4</sup> *Paekho chip* [Collected works of Yun Hyu] 14:10a5–11a5.

<sup>5</sup> *Hyŏnjong sillok* 22:23a4–7.

Yun Hyu's proposal was not accepted. Instead, the court took great interest in finding out whether Wu planned to claim a new dynasty by himself or enthrone a Zhu descendant from the deposed Ming imperial family. In his audience with the king after his diplomatic mission, Yu Ch'ang 俞場 (1614–1690) very cautiously mentioned a rumor about the enthronement of a Zhu prince by Wu.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the Chosŏn court and ruling elites, eager to learn of any existence of the late Ming imperial family, had concentrated on what was happening to Peking and mainland China after the fall of the Ming, especially on an anti-Qing movement for the revival of the deceased Ming. In the eighth lunar month of 1650, the court learned of the royalist regime of Zhu Youlang 朱由榔 (r. 1646–1662) near Guangdong and Guangxi provinces under the reign title of Yongli 永曆.<sup>7</sup> In 1662, receiving the information that Zhu had been killed by the Qing army, King Hyŏnjong (r. 1659–1674) and the court acknowledged the complete demise of the Ming.<sup>8</sup>

Still, some elites remained open to news regarding the Ming royalist movement after 1662. In 1668, five years before the outbreak of Wu's rebellion, Yi Tansang 李端相 (1629–1669) intimated the survival of a Ming interim regime led by a collateral line of the bygone Ming imperial house, with the era name of Yongli after the bygone reign of the Zhu imperial lineage in the western provinces.<sup>9</sup> Referring to Mongols coming under the banner of the royalist regime, Yi also emphasized a continuous effort to remain abreast of current events.

What should not go unnoticed with respect to updated reports on the situation in mainland China is the frequent overlap between the whereabouts of the Ming royalist regime and the anti-Ming operation under the Qing general Wu Sangui. The Chosŏn court knew that Wu, himself a Ming general before 1644, was the person who ushered the Qing army into Peking and became one of the most powerful Qing generals during the reign of the Shunzhi Emperor (r. 1644–1661).<sup>10</sup> The negative image of Wu Sangui, who as a Han Chinese general stood at the forefront of the suppression against the Ming royalist movement, had been inevitably imprinted on the memory of the Chosŏn court.

Consequently, irrespective of the success of Wu's rebellion the Chosŏn court and ruling elites paid great attention to the relationship between the Southern Ming court and Wu, or, more precisely, the legitimacy of Wu's rebellion whose cause was expected to be bound to a revival of the late Ming. A constructive collaboration of the court with Wu's force was predicated upon the premise that Wu's rebellion should expedite the Ming loyalism. Only in the context of the revival of the erstwhile Ming could Wu's rebellion be accorded the warm support of the court and ruling elites who were not persuaded headlong by an anti-Qing movement. A conditional and reserved attitude toward the rebellion and, conversely, a discerning and modest approach to diplomacy with the Qing were never discarded but exploited as a major standard by which to appraise Wu's past career as a pro-Qing collaborator. Although

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<sup>6</sup> *Hyŏnjong sillok* 28:43a7–11.

<sup>7</sup> *Hyŏnjong sillok* 5:3b10–11.

<sup>8</sup> *Hyŏnjong kaesu sillok* [Revised veritable record of King Hyŏnjong] 8:3a2–7.

<sup>9</sup> *Chŏnggwanjae chip* [Collected works of Yi Tansang] 12:33a2–5.

<sup>10</sup> *Hyŏnjong sillok* 14:15a10–14.

conceding Qing hegemony in public, the court and elites still in no way admitted their voluntary collaboration with the Qing. They firmly believed themselves to be entitled to define and handle anti-Qing activism, and this conviction motivated them to display an antipathetic posture toward the rebellion. That is how the court and elites distanced themselves from Wu's force and kept their stance objective and analytical for the development of the rebellion.

What should also be further taken into consideration here is the additional attention of the Chosŏn court to any cooperation between the anti-Qing forces in South China and Japan during the rebellion. In the sixth lunar month of 1675, Japan (via the Tsushima daimyo) informed Chosŏn of the rebellion and the enthronement of a youth from the late Ming imperial lineage, and asked if Chosŏn had any problems with this development due to its geographical proximity.<sup>11</sup> Seven months later, in 1676, new information, collected from Tsushima, arrived. It concerned the role of the Zheng force in assuming full charge of maritime power after allying with Wu Sangui.<sup>12</sup> It also recounted the connection between the Zheng force and Japan; about ten years earlier, Zheng's father, Zheng Zhilong 鄭芝龍 (1604–1661), had asked Satsuma Province for military aid, but the request was rejected. The daimyo of Satsuma Province was severely reproved by the Bakufu, which stopped any further connection with the Zheng force.<sup>13</sup>

By tracing the steps of the Zheng family, who fought against the Qing army for two generations, the Chosŏn court continued to entertain the possibility that the Zheng group, active across several southern provinces of the Qing, could wage certain combined operations with Japan against the Qing. Nonetheless, Chosŏn did not ally with the Zheng force or Japan, even though the former fought an anti-Qing fight. As with Wu's rebellion, the Zheng force lacked any great anti-Qing cause, such as the restoration of the Han-Chinese dynasty or Ming loyalism, except for its military action in South China. The court and elites desperately sought a diversification of information sources in order to have a clearer and more objective understanding of Wu's rebellion. Therefore, although information and news from Japan were considerably restricted and censored, the Chosŏn court and elites sat resilient and open to intelligence collected there.

More importantly, in view of the unforgettable experience of the Japanese invasions (1592–1598), the Chosŏn court and ruling elites had been carefully watching Tokugawa Japan (1603–1863) with suspicion and mistrust. What if Japan were to invade again? Even when the hardliner Yun Hu heard of possible collaboration between Zheng Chenggong and Tokugawa Japan, he displayed great vigilance toward Japan.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the approach of the Zheng force to Japan gave rise to some distrust with a considerable degree of apprehension. In the eleventh lunar month of 1675, the Chosŏn court notified the Qing of the fact that Japan was paying attention to the rebellion and that Japan had officially asked the Chosŏn court whether it knew of the matter.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Sukchong sillok* [Veritable records of King Sukchong] 4:16a11–15.

<sup>12</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 5:3a15–b11.

<sup>13</sup> The authenticity of this story must be examined carefully, because Zheng Zhilong was executed by the Qing army in 1661.

<sup>14</sup> *Paekho chip* 14:12a6–7.

<sup>15</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 4:59b3–8.

Here we can locate the pattern of Chosŏn's response to Wu's rebellion. The cause of Ming loyalism was at the fore; yet, when it came to any sensitive matter with respect to Chosŏn's border security or the stability of mainland China in a larger sense, the court did not hesitate to share that matter with the Qing. That is to say, the anti-Qing action of the Zheng force did not instantly spur on any measure of coalition from the court and ruling elites who had a self-referential standard of judgment regarding the proper way to resist the Qing. This security-focused doctrine provided them with a somewhat wider view that was not limited to a downfall of the Qing. With circumspection, the court and ruling elites watched other external elements surrounding Chosŏn, such as the activities of the Zheng force and the possible alliance between it and Japan as a grave maritime threat to their southern provinces and coasts. They would then calculate the ensuing impact of foreign factors on a collapse of the Qing or even on the entire disarray of continental East Asia.

We should recognize that the court and elites grasped a way of thinking that identified both Wu's rebellion and other accompanying events as an obstacle to the newly established regional order, if controlled by the Qing, as well as the fate of Chosŏn. This defensive yet foresightful stance inspired the court and elites to take a neutral position in response to the Wu force, the Zheng force, and Japan; to communicate, if necessary, even with the Qing; and to distance Chosŏn militarily from its neighbors. At this juncture the cause of Ming loyalism was adjusted to prioritize the security of Chosŏn amid and beyond Wu's rebellion.

At the same time, the movement of the Mongols, considered the most powerful of Chosŏn's neighbors, also distressed the court whose indelibly vivid memory of the Manchu invasion in 1636 included the unstoppable onslaught of the Mongolian cavalry under the command of the Qing army. That recent past engendered a heightened sensitivity toward a return of the Mongols amid the rebellion or in lieu of the Qing in mainland China. The court and elites saw the potential of the Mongols as a determining factor in playing a primary role in a future collapse of the Qing in addition to the future path of Wu's rebellion. Thus, the Mongols had turned out to be Chosŏn's worst adversary and were to be distanced by any means. For that reason, the information about the relationship between the Qing court and the Mongols throughout Wu's rebellion was of immense significance.

In the tenth lunar month of 1669, the court received the latest news regarding tensions between the Qing and the Mongols, specifically concerning the aggravated relationship between the Qing imperial family and the Chahars, a powerful Mongolian confederation.<sup>16</sup> The report described the oppositional attitude of a Mongolian prince, the brother-in-law of the Shunzhi Emperor, to the imperial authority of the Qing court. He was not satisfied with his status of feudal lordship under the Qing, and upon the demise of the emperor he did not participate in the imperial funeral of his brother-in-law in Peking. Accordingly, he was ordered to be detained at Shenyang and his son was enfeoffed as the next prince.

Min Chŏngjung 閔鼎重 (1628–1692), who returned from Peking in the second intercalary month of 1670, identified the Mongolian prince as Abunai (1635–1675),

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<sup>16</sup> *Hyŏnjong sillok* 17:36b4–13.



the Prince of the Chahars married to Makata (1625–1663)—the second daughter of Hong Taiji (r. 1626–1636). Makata was the elder sister of the Shunzhi Emperor.<sup>17</sup> Min also described the present relationship between the Qing court and the Mongols, stressing the powerful and tough character of the Mongols. The Qing had tried to keep a tight rein on the Mongols over whom full control was not exercised yet.<sup>18</sup>

During the rebellion, the court and the ruling elites suspected that the move of the Mongols correlated with how the Qing handled Wu's rebellion and that the Mongols were waiting for a chance to attack the Qing. At the beginning of the rebellion, supporters of an immediate measure against the Qing, such as Yun Hyu, pointed out the recalcitrant stance of the Mongols to the Qing court and foretold an offensive of the former against the latter. In the eighth lunar month of 1674, five months after the first report on the rebellion, Yu Ch'ang reported to King Hyŏnjong what he had heard in Peking: the emperor himself was going to marshal an army against the rebellion by mobilizing 110,000 Qing soldiers and 15,000 Mongol soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

In the fifth lunar month of 1675, an investigative report was delivered to the court. The report concerned five Qing people who had relocated to Ningguta 寧古塔—the current Ning'an of Heilongjiang Province—and were coming across the Tuman River begging for food.<sup>20</sup> Claiming to be Han Chinese, they described the situation of the region where a total of 1,500 heavily armed soldiers were transferred for the first three months and the remaining 300 old and infirm soldiers were on guard. According to these deserters, the Mongols turned away from their previous loyalty to the Qing and approached the victorious Wu force, which would accelerate a collapse of the Qing before long. In case of a retreat to their hometown, the deserters reported, the Qing authorities deployed armed forces to a place called Bixian 栢峴, located a day's journey from Ningguta, against any unexpected attack by the perfidious Chosŏn, whom the Qing would in no way ask for military support. Actually, the Chahars raised an army in the same year but suffered a catastrophic defeat by the Qing. In the fourth lunar month of 1675 the Chosŏn court learned (albeit through a report not officially verified) that the armed conflict between the Qing and the Chahars and the ensuing military movements—in which the defense corps at Shenyang was positioned in Peking and the troops stationed in Dandong, Liaoning Province—were transferred to Shenyang.<sup>21</sup>

As explained earlier, without solely fixing their eyes on the confrontation between the Qing and the Wu force, the Chosŏn court and ruling elites investigated the development of the relationship between the Qing court and the Mongols. They deemed the alliance or disassociation of the two sides to be a decisive watershed for the fate of Wu's rebellion or even a way of creating an unsafe condition in the Qing's northeastern border in the Liaodong Peninsula. Hence, as in the case of the Zheng

<sup>17</sup> *Nobong chip* [Collected works of Min Chŏngjung] 10:33b4–34a2.

<sup>18</sup> *Nobong chip* 10:34b5–10.

<sup>19</sup> *Hyŏnjong kaesu sillok* 28:43a8–9.

<sup>20</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 3:53b8–54a3.

<sup>21</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 3:25b8–26a9.

force and Japan, the Mongols were thought to be a crucial external factor, immediately relevant to the border-security status of Chosŏn and even a possible hegemon over the continent in place of the Qing, which made clear the Amnok River as the borderline with Chosŏn. According to the court and elites, an appearance of the Mongols in the Liaodong Peninsula might presage another phase of Pax Mongolica after the Yuan dynasty when North China and Manchuria witnessed an unprecedented level of Mongolian dominance, towering over the rule of contemporary Qing in the region. On no account could Chosŏn guarantee its northwestern border under a Mongolian invasion. This urgency and alertness, on the one hand, served as a foothold for the countermeasures for their defense strategy against the likelihood of collaboration between Wu's force and the Mongols, and, on the other hand, offered to the Chosŏn court and ruling elites an objective and observant stance that sidestepped a precipitous anti-Qing action.

Under these circumstances, the Chosŏn-Qing relationship was so complex that both sides tended to distance themselves from each other (see figure 1). The Chosŏn court and elites had noted a standoff attitude from the Qing that strove not to leak any specific, concrete, or accurate information regarding the Mongols, to say nothing of the rebellion. As for the Qing, any negative or unfavorable information could stimulate a breakaway of Chosŏn from Manchu dominance or turn militarily against Peking along with other anti-Qing forces. What we can detect here is a mistrust between Qing and Chosŏn in the middle of Wu's rebellion.

Cautious of border-security matters, controlled in large part by the governmental organs in Shenyang and Ningguta, the Qing court made preparations against any unexpected incident with Chosŏn. According to a report in the third lunar month of 1677, Songgotu (1636–1703), a powerful minister at the Qing court, announced before the Chosŏn delegation his unwillingness to receive any information from Chosŏn.<sup>22</sup> The Qing translators expressed their deep concern about the large recruitment of military candidates for the state (military service) examination and the current reconstruction of fortresses in Chosŏn. On their way back, the delegates experienced a harsh security check at the Shanhai Pass, where all of them were subjected to full body searches.<sup>23</sup> These events exemplify the Qing mistrust of Chosŏn and indicate the Qing's tight control of information to test Chosŏn's intention beyond its yielding to expedient rhetoric in diplomacy.

The unveiled tension between Chosŏn and Qing legitimized the Chosŏn court and ruling elites for strategic responses that were more sensibly and gingerly calculated. For example, Im Yŏng 林泳 (1649–1696) believed that as of 1678 the recent update on the state of the rebellion was not different from that received three years ago; the Wu force had been roaming, in one way or another, for four or five years in the far western regions, especially in Hubei, Henan, and Zhejiang provinces, without securing a bridgehead, once available near Taiyuan of Shanxi, toward Peking.<sup>24</sup> Plus, the news of intermittent victories over the Qing army in

<sup>22</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 6:19a2–6. Songgotu, an uncle of Empress Xiaochengren who predeceased her husband the Kangxi Emperor, was an influential minister at the Qing court.

<sup>23</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 6:19a13–15.

<sup>24</sup> *Ch'anggye chip* [Collected works of Im Yŏng] 13:6a1–7a8.

places located in western Guangdong or Fujian, might indicate a steady shrinkage of Wu's force. Moreover, the oversensitive behavior of the Qing court toward Chosŏn officials a year earlier and the hasty return of the Qing diplomats to their country also propelled Im to think of certain untold yet unfavorable events that the Qing would not share with Chosŏn and to conjecture a deterioration of Qing military readiness. Finally, by offering the possibility of a war of attrition between the Qing and Wu's force, Im forecast a gloomy chance of a formidable Mongolian appearance from the north in the days to come.



Figure 1. Chosŏn-Jurchen border map 朝鮮女真分界圖, c. 1740s or later. The map shows the major military posts of the northwestern and northeastern areas in Chosŏn as well as some important geographical and security information in Manchuria. Source: Kyuganggak Institute for Korean Studies, Seoul National University.

Consequently, the Chosŏn court and ruling elites exerted themselves gathering as many different types of relevant information as possible—albeit controlled and limited strictly by either the Qing or the Japanese authorities—and put all the puzzle pieces together to figure out what was occurring. What mattered to them was how and how far the wavelength of the rebellion linked directly to state security. Notwithstanding the low degree of accuracy and reliability of the information conveyed, they prioritized state security as the most essential criterion for decision-making. With this priority, they read between the lines of overflowing and inconsistent information from the Qing or Japan, scrutinized the unspoken yet considerable tension beneath the Manchu-Mongol alliance, and strategized against the changing nature of the rebellion.

In the fourth lunar month of 1678, the Chosŏn delegation, having returned from Peking, related an upturn of the Wu force winning over the Qing army in Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian provinces.<sup>25</sup> An interesting addition to this new development was the naming of Wu himself as emperor. King Sukchong (r. 1674–1720) intimated that the real intention of Wu was to gain the hearts of the people for himself and not for a revival of the erstwhile Ming dynasty.<sup>26</sup> Wu's potential attempt to become a self-proclaimed emperor, immaterial to Ming loyalism, did not convince the court and ruling elites to support Wu's rebellion as a form of anti-Qing movement.

The news concerning other major figures, such as Geng Jingzhong, Shang Zhixin, and Wang Buchen 王輔臣 (d. 1681), confirmed for the court and ruling elites the bleak picture of the rebellion. Observing where these generals moved was significant, because the Qing court tried to draw them over to its side by reason of strategic necessity to disperse the power of Wu and Zheng. As late as the end of 1676, the Chosŏn court acquired a report that Geng had surrendered to the Qing army and Wang had attempted suicide.<sup>27</sup> From that time forward, the court realized that these generals were killed or captured by the Qing army and, most of all, Wu's struggle might take the form of a local disturbance far from a nationwide royalist campaign, rather than cornering the Qing court in a fatal situation.<sup>28</sup> The report of the Chosŏn delegation on the imperial hunting for a few months in 1681, in juxtaposition with some information indicating a weaker position of Wu's force, gave an inkling of the indisputable predominance of the Qing.<sup>29</sup>

In the seventh lunar month of 1681, the court heard unverified information regarding the death of Wu and the chaotic aftermath generating a tug-of-war between the rebels and the Qing army.<sup>30</sup> Without any immediate and large-scale action, almost identical to the response pattern before the rebellion, the Chosŏn court kept updating itself on what was occurring via numerous, if not always trustworthy, sources of intelligence by the delegates dispatched to Peking. In the process, the main attention of the court shifted to a stalemate in which neither the

<sup>25</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 7:27b7–11.

<sup>26</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 7:27b1–3.

<sup>27</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 5:35b7–10, 5:49b3–9.

<sup>28</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 8:9b4–13, 12:8a5–b9.

<sup>29</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 12:46b3–7.

<sup>30</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 8:9b4–13.

Qing nor the remaining Wu forces held any overwhelming power against each other. In the second lunar month of 1682, the Qing officially informed Chosŏn that the rebellion had been completely quelled.<sup>31</sup>

Taken altogether, in addition to the north-south turbulence of the Ming in the mid-sixteenth century, the lessons from the devastating foreign attacks via land and sea from the late sixteenth century to the early seventeenth century entrenched the Chosŏn court and ruling elites in a defensive strategy of nonintervention against the complex and unpredictable situation of Northeast Asia in the late seventeenth century. The way the court and elites responded to Wu's rebellion exemplifies this self-protective neutralism. As demonstrated in this section, the court and elites exhausted all possibilities for carefully locating the movements of Wu's force, Zheng's force, the Mongols, and Japan en masse and adopted a wait-and-see policy. They took into serious account the Mongols as a strong hegemonic competitor to the Qing in the north, including the Great Wall and the Liaodong Peninsula, while treating Japan as the other potential player based on a wider range of information regarding Wu's rebellion and Zheng's force, both pivotal to changes of the anti-Qing situation along the southern coasts.<sup>32</sup> Without full confidence in a definite victory of Wu's force or the Mongols, they also kept fighting the mistrust and doubt of an anti-Qing conspiracy, questioned by the Qing, and proving their commitment to an ongoing amicable relationship with the Qing. In a similar manner, Chosŏn distanced itself from its neighbors and chose noninvolvement in the front rank of its actions as the most practical solution to handling Wu's rebellion. As will be discussed in the next section, this strategic operation of distancing all around also emboldened the Chosŏn court and ruling elites to prepare another stage of engagement in domestic security throughout and even after the end of the rebellion.

### Inward Turn

#### *Domestic Stability 內修 in the Absence of the Ming*

Even if many elites agreed with Yun Hyu on account of their sympathy for Ming loyalism, they opposed his hasty prowar approach to Wu's rebellion. Two months after the official report on the rebellion, Na Sŏkchwa (1652–1698) outlined in a memorial a plan that advanced collaboration with the anti-Qing force with a view to enthroning an imperial successor of the late Ming.<sup>33</sup> Through military cooperation, Na contended, Chosŏn should be able to express gratitude for the immeasurable support of the late Ming, which had sent relief troops to Chosŏn during the Japanese invasions, and to break free from the boundless humiliation caused by its defeat during the Manchu invasions.

<sup>31</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 13:15a7–11.

<sup>32</sup> In this vein, we need to appreciate the historicity of what the Mongolian empire left with respect to the international relations of Northeast Asia where “Jurchen, Mongol, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese interests intersected (and would continue to intersect until the last days of imperial East Asia)” (Robinson 2009, 7).

<sup>33</sup> *Samyŏn chip* [Collected works of Kim Ch'anghŭp] 29:18b8–19a3.

However, Na actively propounded the Confucian security strategy of “internal cultivation—domestic stability—and external repulsive force—international competence” 內修外攘 with a view to supporting Ming loyalism. According to this theory, the fundamental and ultimate solution to outside aggression or exterior conflict is to ensure internal stability, based on the treatment of public welfare, and to achieve a high degree of social cohesion and nationwide unity, namely, domestic stability against foreign threats. Along these lines, Na proposed some cooperative activities abroad.

Given the context of contemporary Chosŏn, Na Sŏkchwa’s thesis provided the court and ruling elites with a rationale for home front defense as the most fundamental and realistic countermeasure to Wu’s rebellion. The way Kim Suhang 金壽恒 (1629–1689) warned against any side effect of the rebellion reflects the typical framework for domestic stability, too. Kim insisted on the recruitment of the talented, the removal of public harm, and the provision of military implements including the fortification of the borders.<sup>34</sup> In the face of an unpredictable situation in mainland China, Kim’s tone, akin to that of Na, was heightened for domestic stability.

Significantly, the inward turn to domestic stability had tacitly spread widely through the mainstream of central politics, inspiring the court and ruling elites to adopt a more refined and neutral attitude toward anti-Qing movements, including Ming loyalism, and to arm themselves in a more self-motivated version of noninvolvement. One example can be seen in the way that Song Siyŏl 宋時烈 (1607–1689) subsumed the meaning of Wu’s rebellion from a noninterventionist perspective. With great reservations against Wu’s motivation, Song evinced the meaning of the rebellion as a matter of choice at the individual level. Why?

Song Siyŏl expressed deep doubts regarding the success of Wu’s rebellion by reviewing the political vicissitudes of China.<sup>35</sup> Dynastic replacement is widely known as a normal historical phenomenon among Han Chinese dynasties, whereas the conquest of mainland China by barbarians is regarded as a great mishap. Song’s premise was open to the interpretation that the rebellion of Li Zhicheng 李自成 (1606–1645), who led the peasant army against the Ming, took place in the dynamic vicissitude of Han Chinese polities. Song asked: What about Wu? Wu was the worst traitor by reason of ushering the Jurchen invaders past the Great Wall and receiving a feudatory from the barbarian dynasty Qing in addition to a merit-based rank title. Hence, Song argued, any abuse of the grand cause, the Ming revival in particular, for the sake of Wu’s own personal desires for imperial power must be denigrated as an unforgivable offense. Song’s focus here was mainly on how Wu should have conducted himself as a general of the late Ming and atone for his past treachery. This exposition tended to delimit the nature of Wu’s rebellion down to his own private choice. This approach freed Song from becoming obsessed with how to connect Wu’s rebellion and Ming loyalism. We can apprehend the manner in which Song made vigorous efforts to couch Wu’s rebellion in Confucian terminology and to justify a self-defensive noninvolvement.

<sup>34</sup> *Chich’ŏn chip* [Collected works of Yi Hijo] 26:27b2–4.

<sup>35</sup> *Songjadaejŏn purok* [Appended works of Song Siyŏl] 18:33b6–34a5.

Kim Suhang carefully reexamined Wu's rebellion by problematizing the insincerity that Wu showed for years and reaffirming the importance of domestic stability in the Confucian sense. According to Kim, how to evaluate the success or the failure of a leader in state affairs should rest, as a rule, less on external factors than on internal capacity that fully handles domestic stability. Kim prioritized upright leadership so that people will submit themselves to the authority of a true leader.<sup>36</sup> In Kim's view, the leader is supposed to make up his mind by emptying any temporizing thoughts, recruit men of ability, uphold public discipline, encourage officials to fulfill their public duties, and pay full attention to the welfare of the people. This being the case, the people would wholeheartedly follow the leader. Regarding Wu, Kim greatly doubted the conduct of a man whose surrender to the Qing directly caused the downfall of the Ming and whose betrayal again induced the current crisis of the Qing. Without great cause and righteousness 名義, Wu was not entitled to take the lead in a movement to restore the bygone Ming.<sup>37</sup> Thus, reaffirming the significance of domestic stability, Kim challenged Wu's opportunistic behavior as unbecoming of a true leader.

Although politically opposed to Song Siyöl and Kim Suhang, Yi Chae 李裁 (1657–1730) confirmed domestic stability as the core of foreign policies. According to Yi, there is no doubt that Ming loyalism was the foremost cause for Chosŏn's diplomatic agenda; thus, any pro-Qing move deserves not even passing notice. Still, this does not mean that prompt anti-Qing measures should be taken in the name of Ming loyalism. Now that, according to Yi, the internal security met a state of overall crisis in which the government was gravely crumpled and the livelihood of the people was already impaired, any indiscreet and shallow anti-Qing plans were to be avoided.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the credo of Ming loyalism should never be abandoned, yet domestic stability needed to be appreciated as an essential requisite for the activation of Ming loyalism.

Yi Chae also disagreed with those who offered a counterargument to any military measure against the Qing.<sup>39</sup> According to Yi, their contention tended to be overdependent on the strength or weakness of the Qing, or on its changing condition; this response to Wu's rebellion pinpointed their opportunistic overreliance on the drift of power relations. Despite the fact that the area occupied by Wu's force was almost half of Qing territory, the rebellion eventually failed, and the Qing proved itself a dynasty of might and fortune; hence, any reckless attempt to defy the Qing should be rescinded. Yi warned that this seemingly antiwar opinion sounded plausible but deviated seriously from the great cause of Ming loyalism and made an opportunistic turn. Chosŏn should not lay down but rather maintain its retaliatory spirit against the Qing irrespective of the strength or impotence of the Qing. That is how the success or failure of Wu's rebellion was not supposed to influence the anti-Qing strategy of Chosŏn, including Ming loyalism.

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<sup>36</sup> *Nong'am chip* [Collected works of Kim Ch'anghyöp] 25:29b7–10.

<sup>37</sup> *Nong'am chip* 25:23a1–24a2.

<sup>38</sup> *Miram chip* [Collected works of Yi Chae] 12:7a1–4.

<sup>39</sup> *Miram chip* 12:6a1–8.

Yi contested that Chosŏn should instead embody the royal forefathers' tenacity for national defense, grasp the suitable order of priority in government, employ men of wisdom and talent, stop self-interested factionalism, and train troops along with the reserve of combat rations.<sup>40</sup> This agenda constituted the fundamental format of domestic stability while generating a force to conduct anti-Qing operations in due course. Thus, regardless of the result of the operations, Chosŏn could do its best without regrets and, accordingly, its neighbors would not denounce how Chosŏn handled the Qing. According to Yi, this self-reliant and self-referential initiative in response to external pressure, such as Wu's rebellion, should be grounded on the strenuous performance of domestic stability.

Overall, the court and ruling elites withheld an indiscreet support for Ming loyalism. Before and throughout Wu's rebellion, they were less concerned about the relevancy of the rebellion to a revival of the bygone Ming than about the safety of their own state, specifically domestic stability predicated upon public welfare and national defense. For example, notwithstanding their political differences, what Song Siyŏl, Kim Ch'anghyŏp, and Yi Chae had in common was home front defense as a key code of conduct for noninvolvement in which Chosŏn was not to be swayed by an external situation. Even Song and Kim distinguish Ming loyalism from Wu's rebellion by reason of the misbehavior of Wu himself, as he betrayed the Ming dynasty. Yi went so far as to advocate for full attention to domestic stability with complete disregard for how the rebellion unfolded. Hence, the discourse on domestic stability played a crucial role in vesting Chosŏn with an objective and observant posture, restraining the court from taking any speedy action against the Wu force, and giving the most pragmatic response to the use of Ming loyalism. As a result, the court and ruling elites promoted an inward motif as the indisputable fulcrum of Chosŏn's decision-making for foreign policy and legitimized the principle of noninvolvement in the maelstrom of Wu's rebellion.

### *Self-Strengthening 自強 in the Presence of the Qing*

In retrospect, the Qing remained imperturbable during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Still, taking a closer look at the historical context, unpredictable affairs ceaselessly unfolded before the eyes of the Chosŏn court and ruling elites who estimated that any vacuum of power after Wu's rebellion might invoke an unstoppable return of the Mongols. For example, Kim Suhang worried that the Mongols, who had long awaited another opportunity to occupy mainland China, might march over the Shanhai Pass during and even after Wu's rebellion.<sup>41</sup> Although they would fail to conquer Peking, Kim surmised, the Mongols could start invading its northeastern environs and plaguing Chosŏn with pertinacious demands for a new hierarchy to the neglect of the Qing.

Furthermore, while holding to the position of noninvolvement in the name of domestic stability, the Chosŏn court could not merely reject the Qing's demand for collaboration against the rebellion. The Qing had enough armed power to command

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<sup>40</sup> *Miram chip* 12:7a4–8.

<sup>41</sup> *Nong'am chip* 25:27b4–7.



adherence to its hegemony. As for the Qing court, which distrusted Chosŏn even before Wu's rebellion, military cooperation could be one efficient way of testing the response of Chosŏn to the unstable situation of mainland China. The court and ruling elites strove for a realistic, two-pronged scheme to divert the Qing's request for military assistance during the rebellion.

First, Nam Kuman 南九萬 (1629–1711) asked the court not to broach military aid as a diplomatic agenda item before the Qing, because sending weapons would escalate the Qing's demand for manpower or for a dispatch of troops.<sup>42</sup> Still, evading the issue of military support might foster thoughts that Chosŏn was doing something traitorous behind the scenes. How would the court and ruling elites avoid this predicament? Nam suggested that Chosŏn propound in public the rule of demilitarization that Chosŏn was expected to observe after its surrender to the Qing in 1637; ever since then, weapons and military equipment had not been prepared without military training in the Chosŏn army. Nam asserted that this principle of disarmament, agreed upon by both sides, would be the most effective rationale for making Chosŏn unavailable for any military assistance.

Nonetheless, the court and ruling elites did not abandon the military. According to Nam Kuman, a quiet yet exhaustive preparation for the reconditioning of military facilities and the performance of military training was to be made under the facade of the demilitarization.<sup>43</sup> Put another way, Chosŏn should be equipped with a high level of self-reliant defense capacity, or self-strengthening, apart from domestic stability, in order to concretize the noninvolvement policy. Particularly, reconstructing the defense system of the northwestern border across the Liaodong Peninsula and alongside the Amnok River became more important than any other matter in terms of border defense.

In this context, the defense of Pyŏng'an Province, which formed a natural border with the Qing along the Amnok River, was reorganized into three positions: (1) border guard on the front line, (2) main road guard along the intermediate line, and (3) inland strongpoint line (Kang 2004, 176–189). In the middle of Wu's rebellion in 1678, King Sukchong ordered the reinforcement of border security based mainly on the seven counties—Kanggye, Wiwŏn, Isan, Pyŏktong, Ch'angsŏng, Sakchu, and Ŭijo—south of the Amnok. Since then, approximately 230 observation posts were also rebuilt in these counties. In two years, the second and the third lines of defense were also strengthened with the realignment of troop deployments, a process by which the military training period was extended (Roh 2004, 243–244). The court endeavored to not only blunt the edge of the enemy, specifically the Qing's ironclad cavalry for a kind of blitzkrieg, but also block its fast march southward into Hansŏng, the capital early in the combat. This strategy could give Chosŏn more time to line up for counterattacks and to reinforce the viable offensive capacities of the Chosŏn troops.

The strategy posed a question: What should be done if the invaders broke through the three-layered defense lines of P'yŏng'an Province and simultaneously moved southward into Hwanghae, a province south of P'yŏng'an Province and

<sup>42</sup> *Yakch'ŏn chip* [Collected works of Nam Kuman] 5:4b5–5a1.

<sup>43</sup> *Yakch'ŏn chip* 5:5b6–8.

conterminous with the environs of the capital? If the enemy advanced farther to the attack after P'yŏng'an Province, Hwanghae Province would become the premier battle zone that Chosŏn should secure by all means. The governor of Hwanghae, Kwŏn Su 權脩 (?-?), proposed a plan against an intrusion by the enemy passing through P'yong'yan Province, which extends more than 200 kilometers (about 125 miles) from north to south.<sup>44</sup> First, Kwŏn paid attention to the environmental features of the six main routes to P'yŏng'an Province. All of them were composed of steep and narrow paths. Thus, three methods were required in accordance with the level of accessibility determined by these geographic factors. One method was to reforest certain wooded areas to camouflage weaponry and deploy troops for clearing away brush. The second method was to construct bastions with wooden barricades, and the third was to construct or reconstruct high-walled fortresses in preparation for a large-scale campaign.

In 1680, when the second and the third defense lines of P'yŏng'an Province were rearranged, the king confirmed a new plan for the Border Defense Command 備邊司 that combined regular combat personnel, readied reserve personnel to different strategic points, and reestablished the chain of command over the province so as to increase the maneuverability of the defense manpower.<sup>45</sup> The bureau also asked the court to prohibit slash-and-burn fields and logging in Hwanghae Province and take maximum advantage of the local terrain's configuration. In terms of logistics, combat units were required to join together under a self-sustaining system of transportation and distribution for provisions and armaments. Consequently, in keeping with the second and the third lines of P'yŏng'an Province, the court also rehabilitated a defense system in Hwanghae Province whose uttermost strategic parts were fortified with the objective of inflicting great damage on enemy forces heading for the capital.

There was a possibility that this type of positional warfare would leave the enemy exposed to an attack from the rear by Chosŏn troops even if some units of the enemy could move to the vicinity of Hansŏng. The reason was that rearguard units of the enemy must stay behind in order to find and destroy the strongholds of the Chosŏn army one by one throughout the province. This operation of the enemy's rearguard units would divide the enemy's invasion into forward and rearward lines, a situation in which the aggressors might lose its first-strike capability and eventually find themselves entering a prolonged war. What brought the enemy in danger of retreat was an ongoing expansion of supply lines as well as lines of communication across battlefields extending more than 300 kilometers (186.4 miles) from P'yŏng'an Province to Hwanghae Province. That is precisely what had happened to the Ming army dispatched to Chosŏn during the Japanese invasions. In 1593, the main forces, mostly cavalry regiments, stormed through the northwestern front and in almost two weeks recaptured Kaesŏng, a city about 55 kilometers (34.1 miles) north of Hansŏng. Ironically, from that moment the Ming army started to face the awful quagmire of how to provide manpower, weaponry, and food supplies over the vast operation area distant from its easternmost border with the Liaodong Peninsula.

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<sup>44</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 7:43a14–44a11.

<sup>45</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 9:1a5–2a7.

Furthermore, the Chosŏn court and ruling elites surveyed the possible retreat routes of the Qing in the event of an interregnum following a downfall of the Qing due to Wu's rebellion. They monitored the northern, specifically northwestern, territory, which could be used as a geographical detour for a defeated Qing from Peking back to Manchuria. In addition, the court and elites discussed the military strategies of total war and limited warfare with the Qing (Pae 1997, 307–313). The court also constantly updated information on the borderlands; recorded road networks, military facilities, and relay/supply stations in Manchuria; identified the strategic points between Manchuria and Mongolia; and boosted the development of military cartography for these purposes.

Nam Kuman recalled a border-security issue, presented in court during the reign of King Hyŏnjong, regarding an unwanted entanglement in Chosŏn's northwestern frontier with a retreat of the Qing from Peking to Ningguta—its base camp before the conquest of the Ming—in the case of an emergency.<sup>46</sup> Making a desperate return home, a fleeing Qing would break into the northwestern area of Chosŏn for a shortcut along the southern part of Mount Paektu eastward and then turn northward into Ningguta instead of a distant and rugged road vulnerable to Mongolian raids between Shenyang—the pivot of the Qing administration in Manchuria—and Ningguta.

Kim Suhang was aware of disarray that could follow the collapse of the Qing. It was the historical geopolitical nexus tying the security of Chosŏn to that of the regional hegemon, whose capital was Peking. Thus, disorder on the continent was liable to bring forth direct aftereffects on the security of Chosŏn. Kim anticipated the fall of the Qing by discussing its retreat route: a faltering Qing would first pass Shenyang close to the territory of Chosŏn.<sup>47</sup> These circumstances would catalyze endless pillaging by the retreating Qing across the northwestern border of Chosŏn. As a required response, heavily armed troops would be deployed along the frontier, cross over the border if necessary, and strike a blow to the fleeing Qing.<sup>48</sup>

In the eleventh lunar month of 1691, a decade after the cessation of Wu's rebellion, an official report was brought up to the court apropos of a presumably imperial request that Chosŏn agree to cooperate on a cartographic project for an official government map by the Qing court.<sup>49</sup> Several high-ranking officials from Peking were staying in Ningguta to view the shape of Mt. Paektu.<sup>50</sup> After the field survey from Ningguta, they were going to enter into Chosŏn's territory to conduct another field survey from Ŭiju, one of the seven major military bases along the Amnok River, all the way up to Mt. Paektu under the well-informed guidance of local people from Chosŏn, and observe the topography of that area.

<sup>46</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 31:30a10–12.

<sup>47</sup> *Nong'am chip* 25:27a9–b4.

<sup>48</sup> *Nong'am chip* 25:28b4–9.

<sup>49</sup> *Nong'am chip* 23:37b10–38a1.

<sup>50</sup> The Peking bureaucrats were not identified. Four central government officials are recorded in *Sukchong sillok*. Two of them, Minister of Justice 刑部尚書 and one Attendant Center 侍御史, can be clarified with their titles. However, the rest of them, printed as 內大臣 and 翰苑官, can only be assumed to be as one person from the Grand Secretariat and one person from the Hanlin Academy, respectively.

What disturbed the court was the fact that high-ranking officials from Peking were dispatched to Ningguta and its surrounding area for topological data, terrain analysis, and regional intelligence. For what purpose were they conducting this survey? Entering the northernmost territory of Chosŏn, including Mt. Paektu, was regarded as an aggressive step against the security of Chosŏn. Additionally, the southwestern part of the mountain across the Amnok River was the birthplace of the Jianzhou Jurchens 建州女眞 where Nurhaci and the founding fathers of the Qing came from. All the information provided in the 1691 report indicated a strong possibility that the Qing was preparing something associated with its old base prior to the conquest of the Ming and with the border area inseparable from the security of Chosŏn. The court and ruling elites were encouraged to presume that the Qing might be planning a project designed for a withdrawal back to its homeland via the northern area of Chosŏn at some time or another. Even though the court received the news that the Qing had decided to cancel the Ŭiju-to-Mt. Paektu schedule three months later in the second lunar month of 1692,<sup>51</sup> the Chosŏn court's doubt and apprehension never withered. The other part of this post-Qing scenario concerned a Mongolian intervention in concurrence with a retreat route via inland areas of Chosŏn. After the official message from the Qing in 1682 regarding the end of Wu's rebellion, the court and ruling elites sensed a new Mongolian threat to the Qing by those who were putatively called the Oyiroids-Dzungars in Western Mongolia.<sup>52</sup> That latest news rendered both inadequate the security of the Qing—especially concerning the north of the Shanhai Pass—and excessive the obsession of the Qing court toward Shenyang and Ningguta.

In the second lunar month of 1691, Minister of State Defense Min Chongdo 閔宗道 (1633–?) had expressed to King Sukchong his concern regarding border crossings that might be vulnerable to a Qing runaway back to Ningguta via Shenyang.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, Min pointed out two features of Shenyang in relation to the possible comeback of the Qing. The first, as already addressed by his previous generation, was the geographical difficulty of the Shenyang-Ningguta road. The second was the geopolitical factor whereby Shenyang joined Mongolia and Manchuria together. This discussion implied the unobtrusive yet well-known fact that the Mongols, one of the worst threats for a collapse of the Qing, would not leave the Qing alone after catching sight of its stumble. In other words, Shenyang was highly exposed to the Mongols whose assault against the Shenyang-Ningguta corridor in times of chaos might not be unthinkable at all.

With a fundamental platform of geopolitical strategy based on the long-term perspective of “Mongolian-Jurchen intruders in the north and Japanese pirates in the south,” the Chosŏn court revitalized the policy of domestic stability and self-

<sup>51</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 24:7a14–15.

<sup>52</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 13:9b1–3, 28a14–b2. Even after the defeat of the Chahars by the Qing army in 1675, the powerful Oyiroids, headed by Galdan (1632–1697 or 1644–1697) and his successors, in Western Mongolia, vehemently resisted Qing's expansion into Turkestan and Tibet in the late seventeenth century (Crossley 2002a, 311–320). The intense tension and conflict continued into the eighteenth century until the end of the Dzungar-Qing Wars in 1757 (Crossley 2002b, 350–355).

<sup>53</sup> *Sukchong sillok* 23:9b7–10.

strengthening toward any change after the end of Wu's rebellion. The inward initiatives, which were not simply confined to internal unity, always came in step with external relations, centering on the Chosŏn-Qing relationship and border defense in preparation for contingencies, including the intrusion of a faltering Qing into its territory or a revival of Mongolian dominance over Manchuria and North China across the Amnok River. Given that a possible shift from Pax Manjurica to Pax Mongolica was amply forecast by the Chosŏn court and ruling elites, we can chart the degree to which the modus operandi of their pragmatist foreign strategy was geared toward how to treat the two northern powers of the Qing and the Mongols in continental East Asia up to the late seventeenth century. What was the place of Ming loyalism? The return of a Han Chinese empire served as theoretical nourishment for a self-defensive program under the motto of domestic stability and self-strengthening and constituted the core of anti-Qing discourse. This deliberate calculation of Ming loyalism in the past, Qing dominance at present, and a Mongolian return in the future characterized the inward turn toward the goal of living with the mighty Qing past Wu's rebellion and the Mongolian threat during that period.

### Concluding Remarks

Throughout Wu's rebellion, the Chosŏn court and ruling elites prioritized state security over anything else by taking an observant and objective stance in which the movements of the Qing court, anti-Qing forces, Mongols, and Japan became the main objects of their counterstrategy. In the process, the court and elites affirmed noninvolvement as the most practical solution to the chaotic situation in mainland China while forgoing both all-out submission to the Qing and a full-fledged anti-Qing campaign including Ming loyalism. The Chosŏn government also cultivated domestic stability for social integration and self-strengthening for border defense sufficient to handle diplomatic difficulties, such as Qing military requests. Even after the rebellion, the court and elites prepared for certain post-Qing scenarios centered on a withdrawal of the Qing back to its homeland in Manchuria and a return of Mongolian dominance over a crumbling Qing. Ming loyalism, which was far more distant from the geopolitical reality along with the failure of the rebellion, blended into the self-defensive discourse of domestic stability and self-strengthening and internalized into ideological commitments to a self-sustaining state of Chosŏn.

As we have seen, the practical and resilient position of the court and ruling elites demonstrates a Chosŏn-focused perspective in which the *longue durée* of "Mongolian-Jurchen intruders in the north and Japanese pirates in the south" never ended, and exhibits a modality of realpolitik that coupled geopolitical schemes with ideological warfare vis-à-vis Qing dominance. This pattern of north-south turbulence sheds light on diplomatically and culturally multilayered "interactions" among different states or historical agencies in the second half of the seventeenth century, especially during the Ming-Qing transition (Rawski 2015, 4–10). Furthermore, Wu's rebellion could have prefigured a possible divide between North China and South China—the latter being open to competitive maritime partners against the Qing—in an interregional conflict (Hang 2015). Still, the maritime forces of the time did not play a decisive role in the fate of the Qing. Seen from the perspective of the Chosŏn

government, the security of Peking and North China formed the linchpin of power relations; the normal Chosŏn-Qing relationship and the uneasy prediction of the Chosŏn court regarding a Mongolian return evidenced where the regional hegemony of seventeenth-century Northeast Asia stood. In this sense, considering Chosŏn's strategies during the rebellion helps to enliven the contexts of interstate power practice on continental East Asia before the full-fledged influx of the Western powers in the nineteenth century.

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