

POLYPOROUS BOUNDARIES: BORDER CROSSING IN PRE-MODERN SINO-CHOSŎN RELATIONS

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Abstract: This paper examines the history of crossing the Sino-Chosŏn borders in various contexts. The evolution of border crossing can be traced from its origins as a political mission that was part of the diplomatic ritual to its later development as an economic circuit where individuals vied for profits, and finally to its status as a public program that carried significant weight in high-level politics. Throughout its history, border crossing was characterized by its dual nature, encompassing both ritual and mundane, exotic and domestic, national and international elements. It was emblematic of the ongoing interactions between China/Chinese and Korea/Koreans, and the flows of people and goods between them. These individuals and items were re-identified and re-categorized following their crossing of the borders, and the processes of identification and categorization shed light on the political dynamics of both countries.

Keywords: border crossing, Chosŏn Korea, Ming-Qing China, Sino-Chosŏn relations, pre-modern history, border regime

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1. Introduction

Recently, I added a pet entry to my front door to accommodate my partner's new border collie puppy. The size of the opening is just right for an adult border collie to pass through, but too small for the neighboring Rottweiler to enter our home. The pet door boasts a three-flap system, according to the advertisement that effectively

regulates the temperature inside our home and keeps out harsh weather. As a result, my front door has transformed into a sophisticated device that not only allows furry companions to enter, but also regulates environmental conditions. However, only small and fearless creatures are able to enter through the lower opening. The pet entry, in conjunction with the front door, successfully bars all unwanted visitors, including the seemingly aggressive Rottweiler next door and the moisture during rainy season. In short, the door's evolved mechanism selectively admits certain beings and objects while barring others.

The same concept can be applied to a border.¹ Instead of viewing a border as a symbol of seclusion, as exemplified by the Great Wall of China, it should be understood as a passage device. People and goods cross back and forth on both sides of the border. Categories are created to distinguish between different types of people and items: migrants for those who are welcome, stowaways for those who are not, trade for those that are taxable, and smuggling for those that are not. As a result, crossing a border is subject to specific conditions. Not everyone and everything can pass through, and not everyone and everything is subject to the same conditions. The focus of this paper is on the conditions imposed by the Sino-Chosŏn borders from the 15th century to the 19th century, as well as the methods used to establish and enforce these conditions.

Central to the process of imposing and implementing these conditions were the interrelated practices of evaluating and managing the exotic. Whether it was the Chosŏn embassies traversing the rugged paths of Manchuria or the Ming sojourners remaining in Korea, or the wild ginseng unearthed from the Paektu Mountain, or the Chinese calendar gifted to Chosŏn astronomers, knowledge was created both to satiate intellectual curiosity and, more importantly, to address practical requirements.

Much of the exotic trade in pre-modern times presented management with two sets of practical problems: population and things. The first problem was competition for sovereignty over a state. Those granted licit passages were regarded as defenders of international etiquettes and, more importantly, used to bolster state sovereignty. For instance, in the case of the Chinese state, a Chosŏn embassy traveling to Beijing was necessary to ensure its suzerain status. Similarly, for a Chosŏn monarch, paying homage to a Chinese envoy could help legitimize their rule amidst political turmoil. Crossing the Sino-Chosŏn borders was typically associated with high politics. The second problem was an economic competition. Crossing the Sino-Chosŏn borders was more than just a practice of relocation; it was an intermediary step in the process of transactions. Different names were given to this process under different conditions, such as tributary trade, private trade, and smuggling. The process was categorized depending on the level of institutional practices involved. It is, therefore, crucial to understand the role of institutions/states in cross-border transactions in pre-modern times. However, this does not imply that cross-border transactions were entirely dependent on political activities. People would always find ways to circumvent institutions that restricted their behaviors, which, purely from the state's perspective, was regarded as smuggling.

¹ The allegory takes inspiration from Delaplace 2013: 3-5. But my story is based on real events.

The act of smuggling not only highlights human agency but also prompts reflection on the nature of borders. Recent studies have come to a consensus that a border has a ‘zonal’ character and is a ‘middle ground’, as Richard White (1991) has aptly put it. It is a place where people from different backgrounds come together and co-create a shared and mutually comprehensible world. Border studies now emphasize the border area as a self-contained community that encompasses the edges of states. The Sino-Chosŏn borders, for example, spanned a vast territory that included Manchuria and P’yŏngan Province. For thousands of years, Chinese, Jurchens, Mongols, and Koreans lived and interacted in this region. It is worth noting that administrative units and national boundaries held little significance for the local population, and crossing the border was often just a daily routine. In other words, a demarcated border was a political construct.

However, the focus of this paper is not on the local population, or a particular geographic area defined solely by official boundaries. Rather, the individuals at the center of this study are emissaries, international merchants, soldiers, and travelers who set out from the ‘center’ and ventured out into the wider world. These individuals were distinct from the local population and crossed political borders to satisfy their specific goals and needs, thereby identifying themselves and their goods as exotic and subject to the receiving state’s approval. For instance, selling Korean-produced ginseng in Chinese markets could be profitable, but only if the product was marketed in this way. Similarly, only Chinese envoys would receive the ceremonial *Kyoyong* rite, in which the Chosŏn king would prostrate himself before a Chinese edict. The relationship between exoticism and reception thus serves as a key to understanding the act of crossing borders, and the policies that limited such crossings were shaped by the Sino-Chosŏn relations. As such, this paper seeks to shed light on the interplay between Sino-Chosŏn relations, border policies, and the practices of border crossing.

2. Departing from the tributary relations

Borders are not universally open to all individuals and goods, and the terms of access are not uniform across all parties. The Sino-Chosŏn border was subject to a specific system of openness that mandated certain conditions for the movement of people and goods. Within this system, there existed restrictions on the flow of people, with specific authorizations in the form of official documents or imperial edicts required for limited migration. Similarly, the transport of particular goods and their quantities was subject to limitations imposed by the tributary relations between China (Ming China, 1368–1644; Qing China, 1644–1911) and Chosŏn Korea (1392–1897), with China occupying a nominally higher status.

The hierarchical international order of the Chosŏn dynasty was maintained through a conscious decision. Chosŏn Korea sought the support of the Chinese empire to establish effective governance. However, early attempts to secure investiture from the Ming dynasty were unsuccessful due to the skepticism of Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368–1398), the founding emperor of the Ming dynasty, regarding the loyalty of Yi Sŏnggye (r. 1392–1408), who later overthrew the Koryŏ dynasty and established

the Chosŏn dynasty in 1392. Eventually, official relations were established with the Ming in 1401, and the Chosŏn king obtained legitimacy after investiture in 1401 and 1403. According to Kenneth Robinson (1992: 94-115), paying tributes and gaining legitimacy from the Chinese emperor was a strategic move to ensure the national security of Chosŏn Korea. This enabled the Chosŏn to focus on managing their more unpredictable neighbors, such as the Japanese and Jurchens. Robinson believes that the Chosŏn's relationship with China was not based on cultural bonds but on the power disparity between the two nations. The suzerain state, as implied in the Korean term *Sadae*, meaning 'Serving the Great', could be substituted based on the changing international situation.

As the Chosŏn state gained more experience in dealing with Ming China, they added another incentive to Serving the Great in the early sixteenth century. Seung B. Kye (2010: 41-66) argues that the Confucian value of filial piety reinforced the political bond with a father-son relationship, causing the Chosŏn elites to view the Ming emperor as both their suzerain and a ritual father. Kye connects the change in Sino-Chosŏn relations with the ruling agenda of King Chungjong (r. 1506–1544). During Chungjong's reign, there were frequent dispatches of *Chinhasa*, special congratulatory envoys that were not mandatory, to Beijing. Additionally, there was a change in the protocol for the reception of the imperial letter. The Chosŏn king not only agreed to receive the Ming embassy outside the walls of the capital city but also performed 5 bows and 3 kowtows to the imperial letter, which was much more demanding than the previous protocol of 4 bows and 1 or 3 kowtows in the palace. This new *Kyoyong* rite became a new precedent that the succeeding kings followed, and it was an important symbol of Chosŏn sincerity. These changes were a natural result of King Chungjong's political status. He was enthroned in his late teens after a successful coup d'état orchestrated by leading officials and military men against King Yŏnsan (r. 1494–1506), who was infamous for his tyranny. As a result, King Chungjong sought to establish a personal tie with the Jiajing Emperor (r. 1521–1567) and accumulate political capital to secure his nominal kingship and, more importantly, to save his life.

Undoubtedly, the Chosŏn kings' decision to engage in tributary relations was a means of promoting Chinese imperial authority. However, this did not imply that the Chosŏn produced their own political institutions and discourse of subjugation. Instead, the Chosŏn's historiographies appear to fit into a quasi-nationalistic narrative claiming independence from China.² For a long time, the tributary system was viewed as a means of managing a Sino-centric world order, with China at the center, and surrounding political entities submitting to its suzerain status. Recent studies have challenged this perspective, arguing that China was one of many equals rather than the center of the system. Furthermore, the concepts of submission and suzerainty

² This thesis has been recently challenged by Pae 2014. Pae asserts that it is anachronistic to appraise the people and institutions of Chosŏn based on their assertion of Korean autonomy and self-esteem, as well as their dependence on or admiration for China. The Chosŏn populace, for the most part, did not perceive such issues in those specific terms, nor did they view membership in the Sinitic cultural and political realm as being at odds with Chosŏn's distinctiveness.

were often understood differently between the vassal state and the suzerain. For example, Siam saw its submission ritual to Qing China as a gesture of alliance and friendship rather than hegemony (Winchiakul 1994: 87-88). Similarly, the Chosŏn presented themselves as a model vassal, but they did not fully accept Chinese supremacy. Instead, they maintained their autonomy and agency by manipulating tributary relations without infringing on China's claim of universal empire (Wang 2015, Kim 2006). For the Chosŏn, submission and suzerainty could be a rhetorical language.

However, it was specifically this language that standardized the conduct of diplomatic ceremonies, particularly those involving the granting of investitures and the payment of tributes. These ceremonies established a routine for sending out embassies between states. Essentially, the practice of tributary relations necessitated travel and border crossings. The Chosŏn Korea regime made it a priority to send at least 3 envoy missions each year, 2 of which were sent for celebrations on the lunar new year and winter solstice, while the third was sent on an imperial birthday. Conversely, Chinese envoys traveled to Seoul to bestow the investiture upon the new king when he ascended the throne. Since both nations implemented stringent regulations on border crossing, only a select few individuals on diplomatic missions were granted passage.

3. Crossing political line

For the majority of individuals traveling between Seoul and Beijing, their journey was primarily a diplomatic endeavor, with crossing the Sino-Chosŏn borders serving as a component of the political rhetoric crafted to achieve diplomatic objectives. This trend is particularly evident in the case of Kwŏn Kŭn (1352–1409) and his crossing of the Amnok River. Kun's mission to Beijing in 1396 aimed to resolve a dispute surrounding alleged improper wording in Chosŏn diplomatic documents and alleviate Hongwu Emperor's doubts about Chosŏn loyalty.³ Dane Alston (2008: 104-147) analyzes Kwŏn Kŭn's poem depicting his crossing of the turbulent waters of the Amnok River. Kwŏn spoke allegorically of the stormy and tumultuous events that disrupted Ming-Chosŏn relations. As he crossed the Amnok River, he submitted to the towering waves that buffeted his small ferry. Suffering from severe seasickness, he expressed his longing for "heaven's sun to illuminate his remote and barren place" (Alston 2008: 130). In a humble and self-effacing tone, Kwŏn

³ The journey from Seoul to Beijing was an arduous one, taking several months to complete. Even with a month-long stay in Beijing, the entire round trip could last anywhere from 4 to 6 months. The route taken by the Chosŏn embassies to Beijing was not fixed and changed periodically over time. During the Ming dynasty, they took the southern route, passing through Niuzhuang to reach Guangning. However, during most of the Qing dynasty, they took the northern route via Shenyang, which was equally challenging. The journey was made more difficult by the poor road conditions in the P'yŏngan Province and Manchuria. For much of the year, the roads were impassable for carts and horses, which severely limited travel during the winter months when the ground was frozen. Even so, the harsh winds and freezing temperatures made the journey extremely challenging for those who braved the trip.

appealed for the emperor's influence to enlighten the obscure corners of his realm. For him, crossing the boundary river that separated 'the cultured' and 'the cultureless' symbolized breaking down the barriers between Ming China and Chosŏn Korea. His small ferry and the journey across the river represented his efforts to reconcile the ongoing diplomatic conflict between Ming and Chosŏn. Meanwhile, the incoming waves and the massive swell that violently tossed his ferry symbolized the broader river of events that flowed through time.

What was at stake was not simply the Chosŏn envoy's crossing of the boundary river to complete his diplomatic mission, but the very imagination that correlated geographic division and territorial boundaries. Like most Sino-Chosŏn borders, the Amnok River was not heavily guarded, nor was it a site of administrative formality, aside from the troubled waters. This 'border' lacked many of the material elements typically found in border assemblages, such as fortress walls, soldiers, and customs. Consequently, Kwŏn Kŭn's poem implicitly suggests an invisible line demarcating interstate borders through the Amnok River. His visions of a dissolute terrain to the east of the river and fertile land to the west were based on an approximate idea of where the political influence of both states ended. For Kwŏn, the river became part of a border imaginary that enclosed the territories of Ming China and Chosŏn Korea within clear-cut demarcations.

To claim that the Sino-Chosŏn territories were unequivocally marked would be an overstatement. While the Amnok River formed a portion of the Ŭiju border, it was just one element of a three-part arrangement, which included the river, a region of wilderness, and ultimately, a palisade with a gate. Once they crossed the river, Koreans had to traverse 2 days before reaching the Fenghunagcheng (literarily meaning Phoenix City), the first walled city they encountered in China (Alston 2008: 168-169). Beyond this point lay an extensive border region with rough terrain and inhospitable terrain that both countries struggled to regulate. Consequently, the exact location of the borderlines remained uncertain.

Efforts to demarcate clear borders during the Qing dynasty were limited to the Kangxi reign (1662–1772), but even those attempts were unsuccessful. The Kangxi Emperor's decision to clarify the border with Korea in 1712 was a response to the 1685 border incident, during which a Qing squad encountered a group of Koreans hunting for ginseng on the Paektu Mountain, resulting in a skirmish. The Qing court viewed the Koreans as illegal trespassers, and this small incident led to a larger imperial project of mapping the topography of the border region. Although stone markers were erected, the exact location of the border remained undefined, as the Qing court did not attach much importance to their placement. Both Seonmin Kim (2007: 33-61) and Andre Schmid (2014: 126-150) contend that the survey of the borderland was a Qing ploy to assert its suzerainty over the Chosŏn border area. The precise demarcation of the border was of little consequence to Qing politics, as long as the imperial power and virtue were upheld. Even the small border incident, when viewed from a heightened perspective in Chosŏn, escalated into a larger crisis.⁴

⁴ It is noteworthy that the Chosŏn court raised considerable concern regarding the precise placement of the stone markers, fearing that any discrepancy would result in territorial loss to the Qing.

The Qing case bears similarity to that of Kwŏn Kŭn with regards to the dissociation of material borders. The demarcation of the Sino-Chosŏn borders was not contingent on the physical aspects of check points, custom buildings, and warehouses. Rather, it was the intangible components of border assemblages – namely, the political rhetoric and diplomatic agenda – that were at play. This separation of materiality presents one aspect of border assemblages. It is important to note, however, that borders appear dissimilar depending on the identity and intentions of travelers. To the majority of individuals traveling between Seoul and Beijing, the crossing of borders was akin to traversing a political boundary rather than a physical entity.

4. Weaving through bureaucracy

The central objective behind implementing this political policy was to pass through the border inspection. However, for a few privileged travelers who had no significant responsibilities, it was merely an inconvenience that delayed their journey. Seonmin Kim (2006: 171) documented an instance of this phenomenon where Hong Taeyong, a royal ambassador with a privileged yangban status, underwent the border inspection in Fenghuangcheng. Unlike the other travelers who had to endure the bitter cold while waiting, Hong Taeyong comfortably lay down inside his luxurious cart, which was being driven by a Chinese and pulled by 2 horses, all at the expense of 45 taels of silver.

For other travelers, however, passing through border inspection was a tedious process of navigating local bureaucrats, often involving bribery or gift-giving. Despite being prohibited by the Chinese state, evidence from both the Ming and Qing dynasties indicates that bribery was a common result of local officials abusing their power. In a travelogue from a 1576 envoy mission, Ho Pong, a Chosŏn envoy, recounts an incident involving Chen Yan, an official of the Liaodong Command, to illustrate the mistreatment Korean emissaries endured at the hands of local officials. Chen Yan not only accepted the embassy's meager gift but also demanded luxurious trade items and forced the interpreter to accept silk bolts as 'payment'. The ordeal concluded with the embassy making concessions and the interpreter placating Chen Yan with alternative goods (Wang 2015: 174). During the Qing dynasty, gift-giving became an integral part of the border-crossing process. Every Manchu and Chinese official who encountered Koreans from the border gate to Beijing expected some form of present, either paid in kind or in silver. Gift-giving seems to have originated during the early visits of Koreans to the Manchu court in 1656 and developed into a tradition by 1712 (Kim 2006: 152-153).

The 'gifts' that were received from the Koreans were a part of the customary fees known as *lougui* in Ming-Qing China. These fees were an informal network of funding that existed within the Chinese bureaucracy (Zelin 1984: 55). For instance, a military officer stationed in Liaodong who regularly interacted with Chosŏn emissaries could choose to establish a long-term rent-seeking relationship with the Chosŏn court instead. This relationship was based on informal patronage, where

customary gifts and political favors could result in tangible benefits (Wang 2015: 208-209). To some Chinese officials, the arrival of a Chosŏn embassy with tributary goods was a way to intercept the Korean entourage indirectly. The received ‘gifts’ were viewed as evidence of corruption, and denunciations of such practices were common in official Chinese correspondence.

However, it was often the case that what was being condemned was not so much the acquisition of illegitimate profits, but rather the personal relationships that existed between the diplomats of the two states. The Chinese government had a strong commitment to upholding the principle of tributary relations, which dictated that diplomacy was the exclusive responsibility of rulers and that personal connections were strictly forbidden (Wang 2015: 201-202). Furthermore, another reason for this strict policy was the belief that a corrupt and avaricious official was more likely to engage in extortion, and therefore would be willing to turn a blind eye to violations of imperial edicts.

To Koreans, it was often seen as a sign of freer flows of sensitive information and forbidden goods when a Chinese bureaucrat went against imperial regulations. Wang Sixiang’s study (2015: 132-145) examines the clandestine trade that occurred in Chosŏn after the imposition of the gate restriction policy by the Ming court in 1522.⁵ This policy established curfews to prevent foreign envoys from traveling and trading freely in Beijing, resulting in the embargo of prohibited commodities such as horns for making composite bows, gunpowder, and history books across the Sino-Chosŏn borders. Although formal bureaucratic correspondences lacked records of the flows of these contraband goods, they were documented in Chosŏn’s records. Military officers such as the Liaodong Commander and his subordinates tacitly approved these transactions. The tactic used to persuade them to make exceptions did not involve bypassing the Chinese administration but rather weaving through it by bribing border officers.

The interactions with these bureaucrats provide a concrete example of how this particular openness regime, which refers to the conditions under which a border is open to specific individuals and items, was implemented in reality. In this instance, the extent of this regime was contingent upon individual ethical standards and financial exigencies. Formal, authorized diplomatic relations were supplanted by unofficial connections, which created vulnerabilities in the borders and allowed illicit goods to pass through undetected.

5. Flow of things

The categorization of an item as contraband was solely at the discretion of the Chinese state. Only Korean tribute items and Chinese return gifts were allowed to cross the Sino-Chosŏn borders as legal commodities, as outlined in the *Collected Statutes* of both the Ming and the Qing. The Chinese court believed that it had the authority to determine which items could be traded and which could not. Originally, transactions were to take place only in Beijing, where the Ministry of Rites would

⁵ For the flow of sensitive information, also see Kwon 2015: 166.

oversee the exchange of goods with the Korean envoys. However, in practice, the Chosŏn envoys would engage in unofficial trading with border residents and procure their own supplies once they reached Beijing. This was often necessary, as the envoys were given specific orders to purchase books and Chinese luxuries (Clark 1998: 281, Wang 2015: 192). As the number of locations where embassies were received increased, transactions with the Koreans became more widespread. During the Ming, Liaoyang became a destination where Korean tribute horses could be obtained, while Zhamen and Mukden were added to the list of border-trade posts during the Qing (Kwon 2015: 168).

The Chosŏn court did not allocate a significant amount of state funds to pay its envoys. It was assumed that the envoys would trade privately with merchants while traveling to and from Beijing. Nonetheless, the amount of start-up capital required for these journeys was substantial, reaching approximately 500,000 – 600,000 taels of silver annually by the early 18th century. This amount of silver was equivalent to around half of China's yearly silver imports and accounted for over 1.8% of the value of Chosŏn's entire rice production (Kwon 2015: 170-173). While the exact figures regarding the volume of cross-border trade are not known due to insufficient and fragile data, a considerable return on investment after a challenging and lengthy journey was undoubtedly expected.

It is true that the exotic goods brought by Korean envoys were highly sought after in China, with ginseng being one of the most coveted items. This valuable medicinal herb was considered a precious drug and was highly prized for its alleged health benefits. It had long been included as a tribute item from Chosŏn Korea and was even used as currency by Korean travelers. However, it is important to note that ginseng was not a rare commodity to the Chinese. The mountainous regions of Shangdang and Northeast China had been the main centers of ginseng production since the 10th century and were recognized as the source of the highest quality ginseng. Ginseng grown in other areas such as Handan and Hedong in Hebei, Mountain Tai in Shandong, and Mountain Zituan in Sichuan were also highly regarded. Although Korean ginseng was occasionally mentioned in Chinese *materia medica* texts, it was not specifically emphasized for its quality (Nappi 2013: 36).

The popularity of Korean ginseng in China was attributed to a unique way of perceiving the herb. According to Carla Nappi (2013: 35-37), a notable shift occurred in the late Ming period regarding the regions that were associated with high-quality and abundant ginseng. Late Ming *materia medica* texts indicate that the hub of ginseng production and harvesting was centered in three locations: Koryŏ, Paekche, and Shilla. These three terms were sometimes used separately to refer to specific areas in Korea or were collectively identified with the country itself.

The change in identifying the location where top-quality ginseng could be found had a significant impact on the plant's business. In the Qing era, the origin of ginseng played a role in its grading, and Korean ginseng was particularly sought after and commanded higher prices in the Qing market (Nappi 2013: 37). Interestingly, the pricing mechanism for Korean ginseng did not strictly follow the principles of supply and demand; rather, it was influenced by the exoticism of the product, a cognitive factor.

The significance and value of ginseng were amplified once it crossed borders. The trade of ginseng across different countries reflects a story of cultural assimilation, as the foreign allure of Korean ginseng perfectly matched the Chinese preferences for taste and consumption.⁶ Despite lacking any superior medicinal properties or the ability to cure incurable diseases, ginseng has been a staple in Chinese traditional medicine for centuries, although modern clinical research provides little evidence of its health benefits (Lee 2016: 85-97). Korean ginseng was transformed into a luxurious item of tribute, meant exclusively for consumption by the Chinese court, to showcase their opulence, elegance, and dominance over Korea. Consequently, the Ming and Qing courts were the primary consumers of this esteemed product. However, with the growing commercialism, commodification, and connoisseurship (Brook 2010: 186-212), the consumption of ginseng spread throughout society. As soon as the Koreans arrived in Beijing, Chinese traders eagerly purchased their surplus ginseng, subsequently reselling the Korean product in local markets (Clark 1998: 281).

The thriving economic trade involving ginseng and other similar goods was a major driving force for the increased movement of people across borders. As an example, a Chosŏn embassy consisting of 40 registered members would often bring along a large number of retainers, most of whom were small merchants and laborers responsible for delivering tribute and luggage, as well as leading horses. Over time, the size of these embassies grew significantly, with the number of people accompanying them reaching as high as 300 in the 17th century and easily surpassing 700 by the 18th century (Kim 2006: 163). All members of the embassy, including envoy-officials, interpreters, and porters, profited from the cross-border trading opportunities.

6. Moving to Korea

Economic incentives prompted people to travel from Korea to China, while wars and political turmoil forced people to move in the opposite direction. The Imjin War of 1592–1598 resulted in a significant influx of people into Korea. In response to Japanese aggression, an imperial order mobilized 50,000 Ming soldiers to enter Korea during the first phase, a number that almost doubled during the second phase. This sudden influx of foreign population caused enormous problems for the receiving country. Both Nam-Lin Hur and Masato Hasegawa examine the Ming demand for Korean logistical support. Hur's analysis (2015: 235-255) is relatively negative, arguing that the task of providing food and weapon supplies was unaffordable for the Korean people, as most of the local population were struggling to survive. On the other hand, Hasegawa (2016: 125-126) emphasizes the difficulty of maintaining a supply line along and across the Sino-Chosŏn borders due to the harsh environment and financial burden on both the Ming and the Chosŏn. Nevertheless, all these factors contributed to a relatively hostile attitude towards the Ming migrants after the war, as

⁶ During premodern times, it was common for objects to undergo acculturation. For a study, see Hur 2015: 1-22, which reveals how Korean tea bowls met the aesthetic requirements of the Japanese tea ceremony and became highly valued in Japan from the late 16th century onwards.

shown in some parts of the *Chosŏn Veritable Records* (Bohnet 2008: 79-80).

The negative image of the Ming migrants was further compounded by the violent actions of the runaway soldiers from the Ming dynasty. These individuals were a constant source of concern for the Chosŏn court, but despite their reputation, they were vehemently opposed to being repatriated. This was partly due to the fear of being arrested upon their return to Ming, but more importantly, it was because they believed that Korea offered better prospects for them. Adam Bohent (2008: 88-90) suggests that many of these soldiers came from South China, which meant that Korea might not have felt any more foreign to them than Shandong or Beijing. In addition, conflicts with their superiors in the Ming army also motivated many deserters to stay in Chosŏn rather than risk returning home. For example, in 1601, a group of approximately 100 runaway soldiers and Ming merchants chose to remain in Korea due to injury, having sold their possessions, or because they had conflicts with their commanding officer. These individuals settled in the Chŏlla Province, where they established themselves as either farmers or salt-merchants.

The ascent of the Manchu in the early 17th century served as a catalyst for the second wave of migration to Korea. According to official records, the largest exodus of people due to warfare came from Ming Liaodong. In 1621, an estimated 200,000 Liaodong people sought refuge in Chosŏn. This number was equivalent to the population of Seoul at its peak before the 19th century and made up roughly 2% of Chosŏn's total population. By 1626, it was reported that the Ming migrants had surpassed the native residents in the North P'yŏngan region, comprising between 60% and 70% of the local population (Bohnet 2008: 96-99).

In contrast to the Ming soldiers who were ordered by the state to fight, the migration of the Liaodong people in the early 17th century was not directly influenced by official intervention. Instead, individuals were motivated by political turmoil in their homeland and sought out opportunities for a potentially better future. Adam Bohent (2008: 104-105) explores the experiences of two individuals who left self-accounts of their journeys. One of these was Ma Shunshang, who claimed to be a descendant of a Ming general from the Imjin era. Ma set out on his journey by sea from Dengzhou in 1627, landed at Pungchon, and eventually settled in Kwangju as a silk farmer. Another individual was Kang Shijue, who was involved in the anti-Manchu campaign during his early life. He managed to escape Manchu imprisonment and entered Chosŏn through Mampo in 1625. After wandering around P'yŏngan and Hwanghae Provinces for a year, he spent the remainder of his life in Hamgyŏng Province. It is unclear whether there were private networks that facilitated the migration of these groups, but it is known that neither Ma Shunshang nor Kang Shijue traveled alone. Kang, for example, was accompanied by 29 companions during his sea journey. Many individuals, such as Kang Shijue, are mentioned in Chosŏn historical records because the court occasionally employed Ming migrants for their expertise in fields such as language, gunpowder technology, medicine, and astronomy. Kang himself became a part of the Chosŏn bureaucracy as a Chinese-Korean interpreter, serving in the North Hamgyŏng administration in the 1660s. However, most of the Ming migrants remained anonymous and integrated themselves into the peripheries of

Chosŏn society. The exact scale of the migration is undefined, but the numbers are recorded in Chosŏn histories as being in the hundreds of thousands.

Although these migrants could disappear into Chosŏn, it did not mean that their original state had abandoned its claim to them. In fact, both the Ming and the Qing asserted that the migrants were their own and demanded repatriation. Consequently, dealing with these migrants was intertwined with the border context of Sino-Chosŏn relations. Adam Bohent (2008: 137-152) reveals a complex situation with various political agendas behind the repatriation order. For the Ming, it was a way to prevent a Chosŏn-Manchu alliance, whereas for the Qing, their demand for repatriation was initially lenient but became more stringent in the 1660s due to their fear of a Ming-Chosŏn cooperation in the northeast. The Chosŏn court did take some measures to control the influx of Ming migrants, but ultimately chose to protect them as an ideological approach to support the Ming dynasty and undermine the Manchu regime.

Clearly, Ming migrants had close connections to high politics, and were perceived in two distinct ways in Chosŏn political thought. On one hand, they were viewed as a political problem, and on the other hand, they were seen as a political solution. Ever since the arrival of Ming soldiers during the Imjin war, these skilled and able men were considered a threat to Chosŏn society and the social order. They were classified as Chinese runaway soldiers, and were demonized as being exotic and non-Korean, resulting in them being treated as a problem. However, with the rise of Manchu, their perception transformed completely, and they were now revered as ‘loyalists to the Ming dynasty’, offering a solution to the cultural and ideological struggle faced by the Chosŏn court. Although the notion of the Ming migrants as exotic and non-Korean persisted, their status was now that of Chosŏn subjects participating in the official ideology of the Chosŏn monarchy, rather than merely being Chinese loyalists of the fallen Ming dynasty (Bohnet 2008: 27).⁷

7. Conclusion

This paper has embarked on a historical investigation into the act of crossing the Sino-Chosŏn borders by examining the conditions that were imposed on such crossings. It then shifts its focus to the various practices of border-crossing that emerged in different scenarios. Initially, border-crossing served as a political mission that was part of the diplomatic ritual, but it later evolved into an economic circuit where people competed for profits, and ultimately became a public program that held significant weight in high politics. The history of border crossing was both ritualistic and mundane, exotic and domestic, and encompassed the interactions between China/Chinese and Korea/Koreans across time and space, characterized by the movement of people and goods. These flowing individuals and commodities were subjected to re-identification and re-categorization after crossing the borders, and the processes of identification and categorization reveal the political ideologies of both countries.

⁷ In the case of Asian Americans, Henry Yu (2001: 7) generalizes that Asian immigrants were also regarded both as a problem and a solution in ‘white’ North America.

How typical are these occurrences? I will revisit the case of Caesar, the border collie puppy, and my newly transformed front door, and leave it up to the reader to decide their significance. Caesar is currently three and a half months old and growing at an impressive rate. He is now large enough that his front paws can reach the doorknob while standing, and clever enough to understand the relationship between opening the door and turning the doorknob. He could easily move between the inside and outside by using the pet entry I carefully installed for him, or he could wait patiently in front of the door – a clear indication of his desire for me to open it. However, he now chooses to cross the ‘border’ by manipulating the doorknob and opening the door in his own unique way, and then leaving it open without shutting it.

It seems that my ‘border policy’ has not been successful. My original intention was to grant Caesar, our well-behaved puppy, exclusive access to our home in a specific manner. However, Caesar, who has now proven to be a mischievous boundary-crosser, has found a way to bypass our pet entry system and allow anything and everything to come through the ‘border’. He even wants to invite our neighbor’s Rottweiler, who surprisingly gets along well with him. This is not what I had in mind, as they may cause damage to our home. However, my neighbors believe that dogs need socialization and that it is not their responsibility to keep our house in order. It seems that my best course of action now is to update our front door with a round doorknob and hope that it will be more effective in keeping unwanted guests out.

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