

Rhetoric and Reality of the Tribute System:
Interstate Relations in the 10th-11th Century East Asia
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I. Rhetoric and Reality of the "Tribute System"

Chinese states in the premodern period approached interstate relations in terms of the so called tribute system. By the Han dynasty, the tribute system was "a continuous quest on the part of the Chinese empire for a proper form in which Sino-foreign relations could be regulated in keeping with the general imperial order" (Yü 1967, 39), and "the Chinese had begun to believe that the tributary relationship was the only normal one which did not conflict with their view of the known world" (Wang 1968, 41). It has also been asserted that China's size, culture, power, and wealth would induce foreign people to voluntarily accept inferior status and seek recognition as "tributaries" in the hierarchical "Chinese World Order." Indeed, the conduct of regular interstate exchanges in traditional East Asia utilized mostly Chinese [or Confucian] in concept, ritual, and rhetoric.

The tribute system model has been useful in providing its basic features in theory and practice, and in understanding how such a system had become so deeply embedded in premodern Chinese political ideology. However, there have been efforts to rethink the model on both empirical and conceptual grounds. The Chinese superiority in the East Asian World Order was not based on its "cultural advancement" but had to be demonstrated through economic wealth and military power. The Han Chinese states often did not dominate surrounding states and peoples, and at times parts or all of China fell under the direct rule of foreign peoples. Tributes were not always a sign of submission, but rather of peace and accommodation. In order to understand the actual relationship between the so-called "Chinese suzerain" and "barbarian tributaries," we need to go beyond the China-centered ideological and overly culturalistic framework of the tribute system.

Chinese historical documents offered an idealized portrait of a superior Chinese state surrounded by uncivilized "barbarians" (Yang 1968, 27) by employing carefully chosen terminology to maintain the myth of China's superiority over its neighbors even when the reality was otherwise. The traditional historical practice of "proper concealment" often signified omissions and distortions. Chinese historians were neither unique nor necessarily worse than others in their attitude towards their neighbors, but it was only natural that cultural prejudice would color their description of Chinese interactions with foreign peoples. Chinese military expansion against foreign people was justified as defensive and proper, whereas foreign military actions against China were denounced as unprovoked and greedy aggression. All items coming to China, either economic imports, gifts, or bestowals of foreign rulers, were recorded as "tributes," while those sent from China to foreign states were always referred as "bestowals" from the Chinese ruler. Even the yearly payments [歲幣] imposed by force and paid by the Han Chinese states to buy off "barbarian" aggressors were rationalized as "bestowal" supposedly given in recognition of merit of those who came voluntarily to "submit" to China. In other words, when they could not impose their will politically or militarily, Chinese simply kept up the empty rhetoric and ideological pretension of China's "superiority" in historical writings.

The dominance of Chinese style ritual, protocol, and format of the state diplomacy in East Asia gave Chinese some cultural [but often rather empty] sense of superiority. When the entire Chinese territory came under the direct rule of foreign people, they turned to the theory of sinicization to preserve their sense of cultural superiority by asserting that their superior culture would triumph over their conquerors (Langlois 1980, 356-58). Countless military failures supposedly could not undermine the basic ideological belief in Chinese cultural superiority as long as the conquerors were perceived to have admired and adopted the Chinese culture and institutions such as Confucian ideology, writing system, and government service examination system, etc. However, questions have been raised on the China-centered version of history and the unidirectional view of “sinification” [or “sinicization”] in China’s relations with other peoples.¹

The Chinese assertions of its superiority and concomitant distortion of “barbarians” in historical documents have hindered our efforts to understand interstate relations in premodern Asia. Such generalized sense of Chinese cultural superiority embodied in the tribute system is of little use in analyzing the actual foreign policy formulations. In fact, actual relations between Chinese and other states were determined by the relative military power of each player, and the “tribute system” encompassed a wide range of political relationships that ranged from total subjugation to virtual equality and to the “barbarian” superiority (Franke and Twitchett 1994, 38; Fletcher 1968, 209-16). Indeed, nominal recognition of the formalities of the tribute system never signified actual exercise of Chinese suzerainty or even an acceptance of the Chinese claims of cultural superiority.

From the 10th to the 13th centuries, China was not the center but one “among equals” in East Asian multistate system. The Khitan, Jurchen Jin, Tangut Xia and Korean Goryeo states did *not* accept the Han Chinese superiority. Instead, interstate relations were maintained not by the tribute system but by treaty relations in the multistate system. Moreover, in the eleventh century, the Song Chinese state had to submit annually a total of 500,000 bolts [匹] of silk and 300,000 ounces [兩] of silver as “yearly payments” (or tribute?) to the Khitan and Tangut Xia 夏 states on its northern and western borders to “buy” peace. This paper investigates investitures [冊封] and adoption of regnal titles [年號] in the 10th-11th century East Asia to illustrate the gap between the rhetoric and reality of the tribute system and thereby attempt to put East Asian interstate relations in their proper historical and geopolitical setting.

II. “Tributes” and “Investitures” in the 10th-11th century East Asia

John K. Fairbank found different patterns in China’s foreign relations in premodern times according to the degree of [cultural] sinicization. The nomadic tribes in “the Inner Asian Zone” and the countries of “the Outer Zone” maintained only sporadic contacts with China. However, unlike the “unsophisticated” and “barbarian”

¹ Recent debates on the sinicization thesis have shown that the so-called Chinese worldview was a product of both the Chinese and non-Chinese perspectives, and that the sinicization thesis is too simplistic to describe the rich and complex relationship between the Chinese and the foreign people (Rawski 1996, 829-50; Ho 1998, 123-55).

nomadic peoples, the more culturally “sinic” states of Korea and Vietnam had been convinced of the moral validity of the China-centered world order due to high level of “sinicization” (Fairbank 1968, 11-12, 16). This model reflects an overemphasis and exaggeration of ideological and cultural aspects while ignoring the reality of geopolitical balance of power in pre-modern East Asian interstate relations. It also led to a naive assumption that Korean states *always* had a “tradition of admiring China” (as in Kawachi 1992, 11) and even more uncritical assumption that such alleged cultural admiration somehow influenced Korean states’ policy toward Chinese states. The “sinic” states of Korea and Vietnam did not always accept the notion of Chinese political and cultural superiority. Early Goryeo kings were “emperors” [皇帝], with their own regnal titles, who resided in the “imperial city” [皇都] of Gaegyeong (*Goryeosa*, 2:28a8). Goryeo kings also personally presided over the ritual of the worship of Heaven that was supposedly the sole prerogative of the Chinese emperor (Yun 2002a, 19-20). In a similar fashion, Vietnamese rulers also styled themselves as the Sons of Heaven, adopted from and comparable to the Chinese concepts of empire and emperor (Woodside 1971, 8-11).

Northeast Asian interstate relations from the 10th century to the rise of the Mongol empire were governed by a treaty system based on the principle of reciprocity among a number of legitimate and equal regimes (Franke and Twitchett 1994, 16-21). In the multistate system, investitures by the Chinese or Manchurian “emperors” often meant little to the legitimacy of the ruler of “tributary” states such as Goryeo and Xia. Let us look at the triangular “tribute-investiture” relations between Goryeo [Korea], Later Jin 後晉 (936-946) [North China], and the Khitan 契丹 [Manchuria] in the 10th century East Asia that clearly demonstrate the rhetoric and reality of the “tribute relations” (Yun 2007, 124-26).

In 936, Shi Jingtang 石敬瑭, the founder of the Later Jin was invested as the “Emperor of the Great Jin” 大晉皇帝 by the Khitan emperor Taizong 太宗 (*Jiu Wudaishi*, 75.985; *Liaoshi*, 3.38-39). The Khitans had provided crucial military assistance in the rise of Shi Jingtang, and Shi in return ceded the so-called Sixteen Prefectures of Yen 燕 and Yun 雲 (regions around modern Beijing) to Khitan in 936 and submitted substantial amount of annual tributes (*Liaoshi*, 4.55-56). In reality, Shi Jingtang was a “Child Emperor” 兒皇帝 (*Jiu Wudaishi*, 137.1833) and “nothing more than a puppet of the Khitan” (Twitchett and Tietze 1994, 70). Yet, a couple of years later in 938, King Taejo, the founder of the Goryeo who had previously enforced his own the regnal title, adopted the Later Jin regnal title of *Tianfu* 天福 (936-946) (*Goryeosa*, 2:13b2-3). In the following year, he formally accepted the investiture as the “King of Goryeo” from the Later Jin court (*Goryeosa*, 2:13b6-8). Thus, we have a situation where the Goryeo king was invested by the puppet “emperor” of the Later Jin who in turn had been invested by the Khitan emperor.

Do these records of investitures in the triangular relations reflect the actual international order of the time? Since Goryeo was a “tributary” of a tributary (Later Jin) of the Khitan, was Goryeo a tributary and a vassal state of the Khitan empire as well? Historical records show that the 10th century Goryeo was hardly a “tributary” of the Khitan. In fact, there were few official contacts between the two states in early 10th century. The Khitan embassy of 922 came bearing presents of the steppe products of camels and woolen fabrics to Goryeo (*Goryeosa*, 1:16b2), and Goryeo sent an embassy a month after the Khitan conquest of Balhae in 926 (*Liaoshi*,

2.21-22). The next Khitan embassy came in 942, but the Goryeo court took a drastic measure of banishing the thirty members of the Khitan embassy and letting the Khitan gift of fifty camels starve to death under a bridge in the capital city (*Goryeosa*, 2:14a9-b1).

Goryeo was aware of the Khitan threat, and King Jeongjong (945-49) organized the Resplendent Army (Gwanggun 光軍) supposedly numbering 300,000 (*Goryeosa*, 81:3b6-7; Yi Gibaek 1968, 162-181). King Gwangjong 光宗 (949-75) continued the push toward the Amnok River by establishing several garrison forts across the Cheongcheon River (*Goryeosa*, 94:2b8). In this atmosphere of impending hostilities, relations between the Khitan and Goryeo were sparse and definitely not those one would expect between the “suzerain” and the “tributary.” After 942, there was no exchange of envoys between the two states for four decades. Thus, while the Later Jin, that sent tributes and received investiture of its “emperor,” can justifiably be called a tributary of the Khitan, the same cannot be said of Goryeo. Was Goryeo a “tributary” just because its “king” was “invested” by the “emperor” of the Later Jin? In this case, the titles of “emperor” and “king” did not reflect the hierarchical suzerain—tributary relations.²

It cannot be overemphasized that Chinese or Manchurian “investitures” did not make Goryeo a “loyal vassal” (as asserted in Twitchett and Tietze 1994, 112) or a model tributary. Goryeo’s foreign policy sought to exploit continental conflicts and rivalry between bigger Manchurian and Chinese states. While Goryeo’s military capability was less than those of the Manchurian or Chinese states, it was still a force to be reckoned with as the Northeast Asian balance of power or equilibrium could potentially be disrupted by Goryeo.³ Goryeo may have paid lip service [at least externally] to the ideal of the “tribute system” but it always pursued a pragmatic foreign policy designed to enhance its security and autonomy.

III. Politics and Function of the Goryeo Adoption of Regnal Titles in the 11th century

The ruler of the tributary state had an obligation to adopt the regnal title of the suzerain state, and the official break in interstate relations was demonstrated through abolition and/or adoption of regnal title of other state. In the early 10th century, the founder of the Goryeo dynasty had proclaimed his own regnal title of “Cheonsu” 天授 (“Heaven Bestowed”), and his successor King Gwangjong regnal titles of Gwangdeok 光德 and Junpung 峻豐. In 960, when the Song dynasty was established, Gwangjong was an “emperor” with his own regnal title, who resided in his capital city of Gaegyeong known as the “imperial capital” (hwangdo 皇都). However, when

² The empty rhetoric of “emperors” can also be seen in the puppet regimes established by the Jurchen Jin in North China. The Jin invested Zhang Bangchang 張邦昌 as the “emperor” of the Great Chu 大楚 in 1127, but Zhang died a couple of months later. The Jurchens then set up Liu Yu as the “emperor” of the Great Qi 大齊 in 1129, but Liu Yu’s “Empire of Great Chi” was abolished in less than a decade in 1137 (see *Da Jin diaofa lu* 大金弔伐錄 2001, 434-36, 539-41).

³ Even the Mongols took Goryeo’s military capability seriously and were worried about a possible alliance between Goryeo and the Southern Song (*Yuan Gaoli jishi*, 19a4-5, 20a7-8).

the Song officially confirmed the previous investiture of Gwangjong by the Later Zhou (951-60), Goryeo adopted the Song regnal title in 963.12 and began “tributary relations” with Song China.

Did this switch to the Song regnal title signify that the status of Goryeo had fallen from the “empire” to the “tributary state”? Here we must recognize that the tributes and investitures did not always reflect hierarchical order in interstate relations. The system of tribute-investiture functioned as expression of mutual recognition of political legitimacy and border security. As Goryeo was able to secure the official Song recognition, its acceptance of the “tributary” status may even be regarded as a diplomatic success (Bak Seongrae 1978, 146).

This function of the tribute-investiture in interstate relations can explain why Goryeo did not sought or receive investiture from the Khitan state even as it accepted investiture from the Later Jin, a tributary of the Khitan. In the early 10th century, Goryeo and Khitan had not yet share borders, and there was no need for mutual recognition between the two states. The Khitan conquest of Balhae did not immediately make Goryeo and the Khitan immediate neighbors as Jurchen tribes occupied a buffer zone between the Cheongcheon and Amnok Rivers.

Just before the military showdown of 986 between the Song and Khitan, both states dispatched envoys to Goryeo. Whereas the Song embassy of 985.5 wanted an active military alliance, the Khitan embassy of 986.1 merely tried to secure Goryeo’s neutrality (*Goryeosa*, 3:10a3). Goryeo was said to have ignored the Khitan overture and agreed to help the Song (*Goryeosa*, 3:8b9-9a2), but it ultimately kept itself out of the Song-Khitan conflict of 986. In any case, Khitan must have realized that Goryeo was a serious security threat to its southeastern border. In 991 the Khitans built a fortress on the lower reaches of the Amnok River to prevent communication between the Jurchens and the Song court. The Khitan was concerned with Goryeo’s support for and incitement of anti-Khitan elements in Manchuria and Goryeo’s possible alliance with the Song.

The first major Khitan invasion came in 993, when the Khitan force of allegedly numbering 800,000 under the command of Xiao Hengde 蕭恒德 (recorded as Xiao Sunning 蕭遜寧 in the *Goryeosa*) crossed the Amnok River (*Liaoshi*, 13.143, *Goryeosa*, 94:2a4). Goryeo was clearly not prepared for the invasion at this time even though Jurchen tribes had given an advanced warning (*Goryeosa*, 3:26a5-6). Perhaps several decades of peace have fostered a false sense of security. The Khitan army was victorious in its first battle north of the Cheongcheon River, but rather than pressing south toward the capital, Xiao stopped his advance and sent several communications demanding immediate surrender by Goryeo. From the Khitan communications and rather passive military actions of the Khitan army, Goryeo official Seo Heui 徐熙 concluded that the invaders were not really looking for a full scale military engagement. When Seo went to Xiao’s camp in person to negotiate, Xiao declared:

Your state (Goryeo) originated from the territory of Silla. The [former] territories of Goguryeo [now] belong to us, but you have encroached [upon those lands]. Moreover, your state shares a common border with us but serve [instead] the Song across the sea. These are the reasons for today’s military action. If you cede the land [in dispute] and restore relations [with us], there will not be any trouble (*Goryeosa*, 94:4b1-3).

Seo replied that Goryeo, not the Khitan, was the rightful and legitimate successor of Gogurye, and he blamed interference by Jurchen tribes for the cessation of normal diplomatic relations. In the end, Seo successfully persuaded Xiao to make a withdrawal, and, ostensibly for the purpose of securing safe diplomatic passage, also obtained an explicit Khitan consent to incorporate the land between the Cheongcheon and Amnok Rivers (*Goryeosa*, 3:26b4-27a6, 94:4b4-5a2).⁴ The main objective of the Khitan invasion was not to conquer Goryeo but to ensure Goryeo's neutrality in the imminent Khitan-Song conflict. Once its border with Goryeo was secured, the Khitan could commit most of its troops and resources in its military showdown against Song China.

Under the terms of the agreement, Goryeo recognized the Khitan as the suzerain state and broke off its diplomatic ties with Song. The Song calendar that had been in use since 963 was discarded, and the Khitan regnal title of *Tonghe* 統和 was adopted in 994.2 (*Goryeosa*, 3:27a6-7). However, Goryeo was still concerned about the true Khitan intentions, and only a few months later in 994.6, it sent an envoy to the Song urging a military action against the Khitans (*Goryeosa*, 3:27b4-5). The Song refused this overture as it was trying to conquer the Tangut Xia and did not want to provoke Khitan intervention (*Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* 36.789-90, 74.1695). Disappointed by the Song rebuff, Goryeo sought to accommodate the Khitan by sending three tribute missions from 994 to 995. It also dispatched ten boys to study the Khitan language (*Liaoshi*, 13.144-147; *Goryeosa*, 3: 27b5-6, 28b6-7). In 995 King Seongjong 成宗 even proposed a marriage alliance with the Khitan court, and he was granted a daughter of Xiao Hengde and Princess Yueguo, the third daughter of the Khitan emperor Jingzong 景宗 (r. 969-82) (*Goryeosa*, 3:28b7-8; *Liaoshi*, 13.147, 65.1002, 88.1342-43).⁵

During the last decade of the 10th century, the Khitan concentrated its military efforts against the Song, and Goryeo was generally left alone. Goryeo tried to make the best of the tense interstate situations by dispatching regular envoys to the Khitan court. It sent congratulatory messages after the Khitan military victory over the Chinese in 1002 (*Liaoshi*, 14.157) and after the Treaty of Shanyuan in 1004 (*Liaoshi*, 14.161). The Khitan had taken the initiative by launching a full-scale invasion in 1004 and fought its way to Shanyuan, a town not far from the Song capital of Kaifeng (*Liaoshi*, 14.160; Twitchett and Tietze 1994, 104-5). On January 19, 1005, and the Treaty of Shanyuan was signed there in the form of "oath-letters" that provided for "friendly relations" on the condition that the Song would submit an annual payment of 100,000 *taels* of silver and 200,000 *bolts* of silk to the Khitan (*Songshi*, 7.126-27, *Liaoshi*, 14.160).

As it secured its southern border with the Song with the Treaty of Shanyuan, the Khitan turned their attention to Goryeo. The Khitan soon found a convenient pretext to launch an attack when Kang Cho 康兆, a military

⁴ Michael Rogers remains skeptical about this account of Seo Heui's exploits as recorded in the *Goryeosa* (Rogers 1983, 154-156).

⁵ The *Goryeosa* has no record of the Khitan princess ever coming to Goryeo, and she is also missing in the list of King Seongjong's queens and consorts. Moreover, as Xiao Hengde married Princess Yueguo in 983, any offspring of that union would be at most about twelve years old in 995 (*Liaoshi*, 88.1342). Thus, it is most likely that the marriage was arranged but never materialized. However, the marriage proposal suggests that the Goryeo court decided to pursue a policy of accommodation toward the Khitans.

commander of the Western Capital, killed King Mokjong 穆宗 and installed King Hyeonjong 顯宗 (1009-31) on the throne in 1009 (*Goryeosa*, 3:37b5-38a7, 4:1b9-2a3). In the following year, the Khitan Emperor Shengzong 聖宗 (983-1030) personally led an army of 400,000, ostensibly to punish Kang Cho's crime of regicide (*Liaoshi*, 15.168; *Goryeosa*, 4:5a2-3). Kang confronted the Khitan army near the Amnok River with the force of 300,000, and initially scored several easy victories, but Kang was soon captured and killed in 1010.11 (*Goryeosa*, 4:6a3-4, 127:8a9-9a7, 127:9a9-10a7). The Khitan army then pushed southward and entered the capital on the first day of lunar year 1011, forcing King Hyeonjong to flee south (*Liaoshi*, 15.168; *Goryeosa*, 4:6b5-6). However, only ten days later, and before it had obtained any concession from Goryeo, the Khitans began a hasty retreat after having looted and burned much of the Goryeo capital. They left the Goryeo capital on the eleventh day and crossed the Amnok River back to Manchuria on the twenty-eighth day, as it suffered a great loss of men and materials to Goryeo counterattacks (*Goryeosa*, 4:7a1-5, *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian*, 74.1695, *Liaoshi*, 15.169).

When the invading army left Goryeo, the Goryeo court sent a mission in 1011.4 that expressed "gratitude" for the Khitan withdrawal (*Goryeosa*, 4:8b6-7). It also dispatched three more embassies in the eighth month, tenth month, and the eleventh month of the same year, but it was only in the fourth month of the following year (1012) that the Khitan court notified its conditions for peaceful relations (*Goryeosa*, 4:10a8, 10b9-11a1, 11a2-3). It demanded that the Goryeo king present himself at the Khitan court and pay respect to the emperor (*Liaoshi*, 15.170; *Goryeosa*, 4:12a4). When Hyeonjong refused such demand on the pretext of illness, the Khitan renewed its attacks on the Six Fortresses located between the Amnok and the Cheongcheon rivers that Goryeo had fortified after the first Khitan invasion (*Liaoshi*, 15.171; *Goryeosa*, 4:13a1-3). Goryeo was able to stand its ground against sporadic attacks by Khitans in 1015, 1016, and 1017, but it reportedly suffered a serious defeat losing several tens of thousands of troops in 1016.1 (*Liaoshi*, 15.176-177, 179; *Goryeosa*, 4:19b3-4).

All through these military skirmishes, two states still continued to exchange official envoys, and there were four Goryeo embassies and nine Liao embassies from 1012.10 to 1016.1. In 1014 Khitan ordered the fortification of several border prefectures and built a permanent pontoon bridge across the Amnok. This was a direct threat on the security of the Goryeo's northern border (*Liaoshi*, 15.175), and Goryeo took a hard line against the Khitan. It detained the Khitan envoy in 1015 and refused to admit other envoys in 1016 (*Goryeosa*, 4: 18a7-8, 19b5). In the tense military confrontations with the Khitan, the Goryeo court once again sought to enlist military help from the Song, sending embassies in 1014.11, 1015.11, 1017.7, and 1019.8 (*Goryeosa*, 4: 16b7-9, 19a9-b2, 23b9-24a1, 30b8-9). Here Goryeo employed the politics of the regnal titles by adopting the Song regnal titles of *Tazhongxiangfu* 大中祥符 in 1016 and again *Tianxi* 天禧 in 1018. Goryeo had adopted the Song regnal title even though its king had not yet been invested by the Song court. It was trying to incite the Song by appealing to its pretension as the "central kingdom" and at the same time deny the Khitan legitimacy. However, the Song was comfortable with its arrangement with the Khitan and was unwilling to provide assistance to Goryeo.

In 1018 the Khitan launched its third major expedition, but this time Goryeo was ready. The Khitan army of 100,000 was unable to take the well-defended Goryeo fortresses in the North, and Xiao bypassed them and headed directly south to take the Goryeo capital (*Goryeosa*, 4:28b8-29a3; *Liaoshi*, 16.185). However, the Khitan

army faced a stiff resistance from the strong Goryeo defense around capital, and it soon retreated toward the Amnok River. Before the invaders reached the border, they were encircled and trapped at Kuju on the first day of the second month of 1019, and General Gang Gamchan 姜邯贊 led an assault that annihilated the Liao army that reportedly lost all but a few thousand of the original 100,000 that had crossed the Amnok (*Goryeosa*, 4:29b1-3). Goryeo had scored a decisive victory in 1018-19, and its international standing in Northeast Asia rose as evident by the fact that many Jurchen tribes in Manchuria sent tribute missions to formally “submit” to the Goryeo court (Chu 2002, 34-5). Yet the disaster of 1018 did not dissuade the Khitan from assembling another expeditionary force in the late summer of 1019 (*Liaoshi*, 16.186). The Goryeo court once more sent an embassy to the Song in 1019.8 but could not bring the Song Chinese into the conflict (*Goryeosa*, 4:30b8-9).

It was becoming clear that neither side could expect a decisive victory and the cost of war put a severe strain on both states. In early 1020 Goryeo released the Khitan envoys who had been detained for six years, and soon official state contacts were reestablished with the Khitan court’s investiture of King Hyeonjong as the “King of Goryeo” in 1022. Goryeo re-adopted the Khitan calendar (*Goryeosa*, 4: 32b8-33a1, 38a1-4; *Liaoshi*, 16.187), and in 1023.7, the Khitan court dispatched the Birthday Felicitation Embassy [生辰使], and this embassy would continue to come without exception until 1116. However, soon there were further complications arising from a major rebellion in Liaodong in 1029.8 by Dae Yeollim 大延琳, allegedly a seventh generation descendant of the founder of the Balhae state.⁶ Even though Goryeo had refused to provide any help to Dae Yeollim’s rebel force, the Khitans still suspected Goryeo of aggressive and hostile designs, and Dae Yeollim’s rebellion in Liaodong fueled Khitan suspicion and strained Goryeo-Khitan relations.

To respond to this tense and dangerous situation, the Goryeo court finally completed construction of the outer wall of the capital in 1029.8 that had taken twenty-one years (*Goryeosa*, 5:12b9-13a1). The court welcomed a number of refugees from the border region of Liaodong who were fleeing from chaotic conditions, military conscription, and exploitation, and incorporated them into the Goryeo military in the defense of the northern border (*Goryeosa*, 9:9a8-b1). Goryeo also tried to maintain friendly relations with other northern nomadic tribal groups such as the Tieli 鐵利 in Manchuria (*Goryeosa*, 4:35b2-3), but those contacts were too sparse to be of any importance. Finally, Goryeo again approached the Song court in 1030, but nothing seems to have come out of this contact (*Songshi*, 487.14045). Disappointed yet again by the Song, the Goryeo embassy of 1030 was to be the last until the resumption of Goryeo-Song relations in 1070.

Although it did not attempt another major expedition, the Khitan made minor incursions into Goryeo’s northern border in 1033.10 and again in 1037.10 (*Goryeosa*, 5:29a3-4, 6:12b5-6). The issues of the disputed territory near the Amnok and detained envoys continued to be the main points of contention between Goryeo and the Khitan. Goryeo’s state letter to the Khitan court in 1035 stated:

⁶ The rebellion was as an explosion of a widespread resentment among the former Parhae people against the Khitan rule, and Dae declared the new dynasty of “Xingliao” and organized his administration after the patterns of the former Balhae kingdom (*Liaoshi*, 17.203-4; *Goryeosa*, 5:13a3; *Goryeosa jeoryo*, 3:55a9-b1).

..... Your rescript also mentioned that the region of the East Sea (i.e., Goryeo) alone has yet to submit to the honorable state of the North Pole (i.e., the Khitan). [However], our envoys of the six previous embassies have been detained by the superior state (Khitan), and you have built two fortresses at Seonju (Ch Xuanzhou) and Jeongju (Ch Dingzhou) inside our territory. We have yet to obtain the release [of our envoys] and return [of our territory]... If you show sincerity, would we dare to neglect the rites of voluntarily submitting tribute? ... (*Goryeosa*, 6:4b4-5a2).

The Goryeo court also tried to deny the legitimacy of the new Khitan emperor Xingzong 興宗 (1031-55) by ignoring the new regnal titles of *Jingfu* 景福 (1031-32) and *Chongxi* 重熙 (1032-55). Instead, It continued to use the regnal title *Taiping* 太平 of the deceased emperor Shengzong (982-1031). Why did Goryeo not use the Song regnal title as it had done a decade earlier? First, Song found accommodation with the Khitan after the Treaty of Shanyuan, and it was no longer a forceful factor in Goryeo-Khitan relations. Second, Goryeo was using the regnal title of the deceased Khitan emperor Shengzong symbolically to press the Khitan court to honor its previous recognition of the legitimacy and security of Goryeo as manifested in Shengzong's investiture. Unless the Khitan court honored its previous recognition, Goryeo would deny the political legitimacy of the Khitan emperor Xingzong by refusing to accept his regnal titles.

It was in 1037.9 when the Khitan court finally hinted its willingness to compromise (*Goryeosa*, 6:12a9-b3), and King Jeongjong 靖宗 (1034-46) responded in the letter sent in the twelfth month of 1037:

... Previously [when] my deceased older brother (King Deokjong 德宗) inherited the enterprise of our ancestors (i.e., came to the throne), he submitted to the authority of the imperial dynasty (the Khitan). [When] he heard that a virtuous lord (the new Khitan emperor Xingzong) was about to promulgate his new rule, he had presented a memorial concerning two [unresolved] matters.⁷ However, as we have not obtained the favor of your consent, our doubts multiplied. That is why we have until now stopped sending tribute in the past few years as the seasons changed. Just recently I received the imperial decree that satisfied my heart... I shall again send memorials to convey my sincerity and forever make long journey across the sea (i.e., dispatch embassies) to perform the [diplomatic] rites (*Goryeosa*, 6:13a2-8).

After the issue of its northern border was resolved to its satisfaction, Goryeo finally adopted the Khitan regnal title of *Chongxi* in the eighth month of 1038, almost six years after it was first proclaimed by the Khitan court.

Goryeo's adoption of the regnal titles of the "suzerain" state was not a passive gesture of political submission but an active diplomatic strategy. Just as an investiture by the "suzerain" state could offer symbolic political legitimacy to the "tributary" state, an adoption of [or refusal to adopt] regnal titles could recognize or deny the legitimacy of the "suzerain" state. In the multistate interstate system, the system of "tribute-investiture" did not reflect the relationship of superiority and submission but represented reciprocity in which two sides recognized the other's political legitimacy.

⁷ The two matters were those concerning the release of detained Goryeo envoys and the return of the two fortresses of Seonju and Jeongju south of the Amnok seized by the Liao (*Goryeosa*, 6:4b5-6).

Conclusion

In East Asian multistate system, treaties such as the Treaty of Shanyuan were maintained between “equal” states, whereas tributes and investitures supposedly governed other “unequal” interstate relations. However, a critical investigation of historical records shows that both treaties and tributes functioned in a similar way to ensure mutual political recognition and border security. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of East Asian multistate system, one must overcome a deep attachment to the ritual and nominal terminology of the tribute system and instead look into pragmatic foreign policies in the international order maintained by the balance of power. The tribute system is not a “proof” that foreign states and peoples were “subjects” of China. Recent rethinking on the tribute system came about because of the tribute system’s limitations and inadequacy as an analytical framework for a comprehensive understanding of pre-modern Northeast Asian interstate relations. For Goryeo, an adoption of the regnal titles of the “suzerain” state was not an obligation of a tributary state but a diplomatic device to gain official recognition of the legitimacy of the Goryeo court and to ensure security of its northern border.

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