

A Hermit Nation not for Everyone: First-hand Contacts with Qing and their Consequences in Late Choson P'yongan Province

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I. INTRODUCTION

Following the example of William Elliot Griffis (1843–1928), many observers have described Choson Korea (1392–1910) as a “Hermit Nation”, a country cut off from contact with the outer world, apart from tributary relations with China (*sadae*) and “neighbourly” relations with Japan (*kyorin*). As Yi T’aejin argues, this notion of a country living out of touch with the new reality of nineteenth century East Asia has to a large extent influenced the analysis of Korea’s response to the foreign pressure that eventually led to its colonization by Japan in 1910. But however eager the pre-1874 regime might have been to have the country protected from corrupting contacts with foreigners, no country can be hermetically sealed off, and as this notion of an isolated country is being challenged, contemporary research focusing on interaction rather than seclusion is shedding new light on Late Choson history. Still, when dealing with contacts between Korea and foreign cultures this is still mostly done on a conceptual level, in terms of ideas meeting, not people, focusing on the changing worldview of a “progressive” intellectual elite.

However, even though ordinary Koreans in general admittedly had limited contacts with foreigners, we must avoid the tendency to treat the Korean people as one entity with a single history and acknowledge regional differences and the diversity of the country’s population. Even before the late nineteenth century there were parts of the country and segments of the population that had frequent first-hand experiences of foreigners. Such contacts were of course most frequent in the parts of the country involved in the dynasty’s limited foreign trade, and the areas where locals interacted with the Chinese and Japanese were thus along the northern border in the provinces of P’yongan and Hamgyong, and the south-eastern tip of the peninsula around Tongnae, the only harbour where Japanese ships were allowed to land.

The purpose of this paper is first to describe the nature of the contacts between inhabitants of P’yongan province, and to a lesser extent Hamgyong, and Qing nationals: illegal entries and settlements, and trade. Second, this paper will look at what consequences these contacts with Qing had for the society and economy of the province and the identity of its inhabitants. Regarding the identity of the people of this border province, as a case study this paper will look at the ideology of the Hong Kyongnae rebellion 1811–12. This rebellion has often been explained in terms of provincial identity, and this paper will especially look at the ideology’s “Chinese/Manchu connection”.

II. THE BORDER AREA

Before dealing with the cross-border contacts of this area we need to look at the peculiar characteristics of the region in large. Manchuria and the northern part of the Korean peninsula had for long time periods not been at the centre of any state formation, but rather distant border areas inhabited by nomadic people. The border between Korean kingdoms and the dynasties in control of Manchuria tended to fluctuate following the political upheavals on the continent. During the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) the northern part of the peninsula had been under Yuan control. After Ming (1368–1644) seized control of the continent, Korean borders were pushed northwards to the Yalu and Tumen rivers, but large parts of the Hamgyong province were still inhabited by Jurchen. The Choson government tried to populate the northern provinces through forced migration, especially during the fifteenth century, but still the main concern of the area was military and the civil presence was weak.

When the Manchus, formed out of Jurchen people, defeated Ming and founded the Qing dynasty, Manchuria, and especially the area north of the Korean border, was given a special role in its territory. The border between Qing and Choson, still along the borders of the Yalu and Tumen rivers, was recognized through treaties after the two Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1636, and Manchuria was declared a “sealed off” (*fengjin*) area to protect the Manchu people and their interests. In 1677 Emperor Kang Xi (r. 1661–1722) named Changbaishan (Paektusan) the Divine Mountain (*lingshan*) as the birthplace (*faxiang*) of the Qing dynasty and a zone more than 400 kilometres north of the mountain and the Yalu and Tumen rivers was designated “area of dragon ascent” (*longxingzhidi*). Another reason for this special treatment was to protect the special products of the Paektusan region, such as ginseng, pearls and rare animal species, the economic base for many Manchu banner men.

But of course it was difficult for Qing to keep this vast, sparsely populated area (by mid nineteenth century the population density of Manchuria was still only two persons per square kilometre) with abundant resources sealed off, as more people entered the area, primarily to gather ginseng. In 1726 reportedly as many as 10.000 people from Shenyang and 3000 from Fenghuang were in the area for this purpose. More people also moved in to this area and established themselves permanently. Furthermore, the locals on both sides did not seem to share the central governments’ view on the sanctity of the national border, and there were frequent violations in both directions. This in itself was a cause of concern, but sometimes those violations of the border also had violent results. So after inspecting the area, a border stone was erected on Paektusan in 1712, signalling a stronger sense of the importance of the border.

Up till the early seventeenth century the Choson government had displayed a rather passive stance on the border area, willingly conforming to Qing demands. But the border now more firmly established, Choson assumed an increasingly active posture when dealing with border issues, and they also adopted a more positive attitude towards people moving into the this area to bring new land under cultivation. During the reign of Chongjo (1776–1800) the ban on migration to the “four deserted counties” (*p’ yesagun*) was abolished and the population in that and adjacent areas increased. The eighteenth century saw a great increase in population figures for the province in general: between censuses

taken 1717 and 1786 it had increased from 763,340 to 1,288,399. This increase of sixty-nine percent meant that the province's share of the country's total population increased from eleven to seventeen percent. By the late eighteenth century we thus have increasing permanent populations on both sides of the border, creating new patterns of cross-border contacts.

III. FORMS OF INTERACTION

Illegal entries

Given the above described history of the border region, for a long time most recorded contacts in Korean sources tended to be of people suddenly appearing on the Qing side, approaching Korean garrisons or county seats and asking for food. In the fourth month of 1675, for example, a group of five Qing nationals approached the Tumen river border by Hoeryong county, Hamgyong province, claiming to be starving. Looking at their appearances the official in charge found it difficult to decline their request, but there were concerns that giving them food would instigate others to come, creating a delicate situation for those guarding the border. Such concerns were well grounded; in the tenth month of 1707 it was reported that a group of 186 had gathered on the other side of the border by Pyoktong county, P'yongan province. Four of them crossed the border, approached the Korean officials and asked for salt and soy sauce. When refused this they got furious and violent, and had to be tied and kept in custody. The governor of P'yongan province reported that the last couple of years these gatherings on the other side of the border occurred more frequently, and recently they had started to grow in size.

But soon the governments were going to have other concerns. With increasing permanent populations on both sides of the border the main issue now became to keep these two groups apart. In the early eighteenth century there were repeated reports of more permanent settlements on the Qing side of the border and a new type of interaction. These settlers built their houses just by the river, which brought the risk that might cross the border. In 1714, for instance, central government discussed the fact that on the Qing side opposite to Onsong and Kyongwon counties, Hamgyong province, settlers had constructed houses, reclaimed land, and even built roads. Some even built their villages just on the river to fish. The number of "barbarian ships" (*hwangdangson*) appearing in Korean waters also increased, some fishing and others to engage in trade.

As the Korean side feared, more Qing nationals now seemed to enter Choson territory, and even more alarmingly, they had contacts with the Korean population. In 1711, for example, a group of around ten Qing nationals entered Kapsan county in P'yongan province. Not only was this the first time something like that happened in that part of the border area, these intruders were furthermore not the kind of starving people asking for food that had been seen earlier; they brought horses and cattle, raised their tents on Korean territory, frequented and even stayed for longer times with natives, indicating some kind of interaction, presumably trade. Given this increased cross-border interaction, from the Korean central government's point of view nobody could be trusted to resist the attraction of contact and trade, as the following example will show. When Qing nationals were caught in Korea, interrogation was ineffective due to the language barrier. It was thus suggested in the capital that people with some knowledge in the Manchu language

should be positioned in each county along the border, just as there were interpreters in Uiju. The counterargument, however, was that Uiju was the place where contacts *should* take place, and thus the need to have interpreters. As for the other counties, any contact was forbidden, so placing people with language skills there would only increase the risk of interaction, and this could not be discussed separately from the problem of illegal trade, it was concluded.

Given the less populated area north of the border, Korean entries into China were naturally more frequent than Chinese such into Choson territory. Attracting the Koreans were of course the abundant resources of the area, and most crossed the border to gather ginseng, hunt, or cut wood. These entries are, however, of less relevance for us since they seldom resulted in any contacts with Qing nationals, unless they were caught by Qing troops or met Qing nationals in the area for the same purpose; in the latter case violence was often the result. In 1690, for example, a group of ten from the Hamgyong province entered Chinese territory, killed a group of Qing nationals and took their ginseng. In 1704 a similar incident occurred, and after once again Koreans had entered Qing territory and killed people for their ginseng, Qing sent a message to Choson demanding a joint investigation. Partly as a result of this the Paektusan border stone was erected in 1712. These incidents continued, however. In 1734 twenty-eight people crossed the border, killed a group of nine Qing nationals and took their ginseng, something to be repeated in 1750 and 1756.

However, there also seems to have existed contacts over the border with elements of positive interaction?equivalent to the incident of Qing entries in Kapsan in 1711?as the following interesting case from 1699 shows. Three slaves from Chongsong county, Hamgyong province, Om Kwihyon, his wife Okchi and neighbour Myongbok, had?forced by starvation?left their homes to gather wild greens in the mountains. The group came across the post-station slave Kim Mangnam, who told them that if they joined him across the border they would have no problem when it came to clothing and food. Rejoiced they joined him over the river and after a two days journey arrived at a Manchu settlement, which Kim Mangnam entered leaving them behind. Suddenly four Manchu approached the group and one of them, speaking some Korean, said that if they were willing to stay they would live, otherwise they would be killed. As all this happened, Kim Mangnam never came out from the settlement, and they realized that he had brought them there to sell them as slaves. They refused, but the Manchus did not carry out their threat to kill them, and instead brought them to the Qing authorities, probably collecting an award for catching Choson trespassers. This case informs us of lasting contacts across the border; obviously Kim Mangnam knew the people in the Manchu settlement, presumably he had done similar things before, and the Manchus were accustomed to these contacts to the extent that one of them knew Korean.

Illegal settlements

Given the strict border control and relatively dense population on the Korean side of the border it was difficult for Qing nationals to settle permanently on Korean territory. The only place where this could be done was on uninhabited islands off the western coast, and the island with most frequent such incidents was Sin island, sixteen kilometres off the coast of Yongch' on county. This island had been a cause of concern for central power throughout Choson due to its closeness to China. In 1528 a community of forty-eight Chinese families was discovered on the western part of the island, and in 1578 the

government expelled some Chinese from Liadong who had come there for fishing. Troops from the Mikot garrison, located by the coast, inspected the island three times per month, but Choson was not able to stop these illegal settlements. In 1701 seventeen Qing nationals on three boats entered the island, built dwellings and settled. The same year eight people on two boats landed on Sin and Somaan islands. In 1714 six people on one boat landed on Sin island, and in 1746 Qing fishermen came to settle on the island?they even stored grain to stay for a long time. Once again in 1755 sixty-one people on eleven small vessels entered Sin and Somaan islands.

The above incidents, however, were small compared with what was discovered in 1786 when a full-fledged fishing village was found with forty-two straw huts, seven temporary dwellings, forty-nine boats, chicken and dogs, and a population of 623 people. The village was obviously flourishing and expanding as also 744 tree logs to build new boats were found. Even after these villagers had been expelled from the island, smoke from human dwellings could be seen, so troops from the Mikot garrison were once again sent out. When they returned they said that they had encountered Qing settlements on seven places on the island, and altogether 107 people. Not many years later, in 1792, Qing settlements were once again discovered?this time it was twenty-one people with two middle-sized and one small boat that were spread over three settlements?as well as in 1804, when four settlements were found. These repeated Chinese settlements on Sin island were explained with the fact that the fishing waters off the island were very good and the existence of waterways to transport logs. The Choson government couldn't stop these illegal settlements even if they were well aware of the problem.

As with illegal entries, when it came to illegal settlements it was also more common for Korean such on Qing territory than vice-versa, of course due to the vast, sparsely populated area north of the border. Even though the main migration from the Korean peninsula to Manchuria started in the 1860s, there was a significant movement earlier as well. In the early seventeenth century, Korean and Jurchen settlers made up thirty percent of the population in the Liadong valley, and the Korean settlers formed separate Korean villages. According to a figure given in 1771, seven to eight thousand Koreans lived in the area north of the border. But since these people tended to stay permanently on Qing territory, this paper will not deal with them, as they were not influential in shaping the socio-economic characteristics and identity of the inhabitants of P'yongan province.

Trade

The only permitted trade with Qing was the one conducted in connection with embassies going to the Chinese capital, and the limited markets held on Qing territory across the river by Uiju county and in a few Korean border counties in Hamgyong province, mainly catering the needs of the nomadic people living north of the border. This study will only deal with the trade that was performed by the northwest border and in Qing, and exclude what was going on in Hamgyong. The merchants of the P'yongan province engaged in legal, or what later was legalised, trade with Qing at mainly two markets. The first was the "mid-river market" (*chunggang kaesi*) on Qing territory by Uiju, and the second the trade performed at the "palisade-gate market" (*ch'aengmun kaesi*) by merchants accompanying embassies going to China.

The "mid-river market" had been established already in Ming times as a way for Choson to secure grain supplies during the Japanese invasions of the late sixteenth century. In the

turbulent Ming–Qing transition period it was abolished, but the Manchus later demanded it to be reopened, this time to secure necessary items for Manchu officials in the area north of the border. This market was limited to two times a year, and the items that could be traded were restricted as well. The cattle, salt, paper etcetera that was required from Choson by Qing was assigned to the counties of Hwanghae and P’yongan provinces, and government officials escorted merchants and goods to the marketplace where the trade was performed under strict control. These items were paid for with cloth of low quality, which meant that this trade rather was a burden for the Choson side. However, more and more private merchants were able to join the groups crossing the border, and the private transactions of them eventually constituted a black market (*husi*) that later was legalised and taxed. Whereas the official market only was opened twice a year, transactions were performed on this private market whenever an embassy entered Qing territory on its way to the Chinese capital. This private market flourished for a period of fifty years, but was abolished together with the official market in 1700, meaning that trade on Qing territory now had to be performed only in connection with embassies.

While diplomacy of course was the purpose of the embassies going to the Qing capital, not trade, official merchants (*kwansang*) accompanied them and interpreters were also allowed to engage in trade to fund their private expenses. The official merchants were designated by government institutions that used this trade to increase their funds, and some worked for these on a permanent basis while others operated temporarily often buying or bribing themselves a place. The official trade was thus accompanied by private trade, and illegal trade was also performed on a large scale. In fact, private trade had surpassed official trade already by late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. The official merchants and interpreters performed trade privately as well, and private merchants were able to join the embassies as grooms, a group that mainly was recruited from the northern P’yongan province. Uiju, the gateway to China, was the trading base for many private merchants, and the town was filled with people trying to follow the embassies. By the late eighteenth century members of embassies were allowed to bring a certain amount of silver with which to perform trade at the Chinese capital so as to fund their trip. If a member, however, were too poor to bring any silver he could sell his right which would most often be purchased by merchants in Chinese goods from Kaesong, P’yongyang, Anju etc who joined the embassies.

The trade by merchants accompanying the embassies as grooms was mostly performed at the so-called “palisade–gate market”. When Qing “sealed off” the area north of the border, they erected a long palisade to stop the infiltration of Han Chinese. This palisade was located 48 kilometres from the Yalu river, and by Fenghuang there was a gate for the embassies to and from Choson to pass. The positions as official merchants and grooms in Choson embassies were of course limited, and the pressure of private commercial interests had to find other means to make use of them, and this is where the palisade gate grew in importance. When the embassies entered Qing territory, Uiju had to send more than ten extra horses with it to replace any horses carrying tributes that might fall ill or get wounded (a system called *yomaje*). After passing the gate, the load of the embassy was carried by Qing nationals from the gate to the Qing capital and back to the gate. Any horse that hadn’t been used was sent back, which of course opened a great opportunity for extra trade. Another, similar opportunity was provided by the *yonbok* system. According to this, Uiju sent empty horses when the embassies on their way back reached the gate to carry any eventual extra load.

Just as with the “mid-river markets” the official “palisade-gate market” was also accompanied by a black-market that later was legalised, and the merchants of the two countries that met at the gate were on very close terms. To make use of Pak Chiwon’s attentive observations from his trip to Qing in 1780 will give us a good picture of the atmosphere by the palisade gate, even though he, joining an embassy, does not talk of the black market.

A couple tens of metres from the palisade we stopped and erected the tent for the three envoys and had a rest. The tribute goods all arrived and were piled on the road in front of the palisade. Many Manchus lined up inside the palisade to have a look at us [...] The interpreters and grooms scuffled to get to the palisade. The two groups [Manchus and Koreans] shook hands and greeted each other delightedly. The Manchus asked: “When did you leave the capital? Have you been spared from rain during your journey? Are your families all well? Have you received a sufficient amount of silver?” They all chatted like it came from one mouth. Then they scuffled to ask: “Have sanggong Han and sanggong An come as well?” These were inhabitants of Uiju who every year trade in the Chinese capital, unscrupulous men well informed of the affairs in the Chinese capital. As for sanggong, that’s an honorific title used among merchants.

Private trade was not only performed in connection with embassies going to Qing, but also illegally across the border. As the population grew denser on both sides of the border, the main concern of the two governments turned to contacts between them, as argued above, and they were correct in linking these increased contacts with trade. In 1731 a man secretly housed a Qing national in his house to trade with him, and the Sin Island was not only a centre for illegal settlements but also of trade. In 1733 the uncontrolled illegal trade that flourished on the island was lamented, and the following is what Yi Wonp’al had to say about the island when he visited the area as Secret Inspector in 1805:

Sin island in Yongch’ on county is located twelve kilometres off Mikot garrison and has the best fishing in the West Sea. Therefore fishermen of those people come and stay irregularly. Fishermen from our country also visit the waters frequently and the two groups trade with each other.

Yi Wonp’al recommended that the governor should take steps to control this trade, but it seems that it continued. In 1807 there was once again a case of illegal trading on the island. A boat anchoring on the Taedong river passing P’ yongyang was found to carry a lot of Chinese money, silver and merchandise like sappanwood, alum?both ingredients used in Chinese medicine?and plates. Since it was forbidden to bring in Chinese currency into the country the authorities launched an investigation. It was disclosed that an inhabitant of Uiju named Paek Taehyon and an inhabitant of P’ yongyang named Yi Sajup had brought 120 *som* of rice and illegally traded with Qing nationals on Sin island. They had not been able to receive full payment for the rice in wanted merchandise, and had to accept Chinese currency and brass for some of the rice. The Chinese currency and brass they sold at local brassware shops in the province, and the utensils, alum and sappanwood had been sold on markets. The Chinese currency they hadn’t been able to dispose of amounted to more than 1300 *yang*, and they also had more than twenty *yang* of silver currency.

The above incident shows how developed the illegal trade with China was, and the same year, because this and other incidents of illegal settlements and trade on Sin island, it was suggested that the island be populated and decided that the Mikot garrison should be moved there. The significance of the trade with Qing, both legal and illegal, in the economy of the province can also be seen in the fact that during the Hong Kyongnae rebellion the rebels seized several caravans with Qing merchandise to fund their activities.

IV. CONSEQUENCES FOR P' YONGAN PROVINCE

Socio-economic

It is a well-known fact that the socio-economic structure of the P'yongan province was different from the southern provinces, the part of the country that has provided us with our notion of "traditional" Korea. The special socio-economic features of this region of course had several reasons. To begin with it was, as discussed earlier, a border area that for long periods had been out of "Korean" control, and when in Korean control, still a sparsely populated, mostly military region. Moreover, the natural conditions of P'yongan province are unfavourable for agriculture. The area is mountainous and lacks wide plains. Irrigation was difficult during the Choson dynasty so the predominant form of agriculture was the dry-field. It was only in the coastal counties that wet-field farming was performed on a small scale. The main crop in the mountainous areas was millet, and in the valleys of the coastal counties the peasants grew beans and barley. Therefore the period-typical agricultural communities did not develop as in the south.

A third reason for the special characteristics of P'yongan was the consequences of trade with Qing; compared to agriculture, more profit could be made from this trade. Uiju, P'yongyang and Anju grew into relatively large towns with populations of wealthy merchants (Uiju merchants were called *mansang* and P'yongyang merchants *yusang*) surpassed only by the capital and Kaesong, and many Chinese products could be found in the markets of these towns. The trade with China was of course closely linked to and gave a positive impetus to internal trade. Even though this province had a strong merchant class, the commercial activities were not monopolized by them, and they had close ties to the financial management of the counties. The resources of the county offices were invested in this trade to increase revenues. Military provision storehouses in P'yongyang and Uiju, and the Army Command in Anju, were institutions in P'yongan province that designated official merchants, and as we have seen these towns consequently grew into commercial centres. The need for large reserves of provisions in the border area of P'yongan province thus had a positive influence on the development of trade.

There were strong links between merchants and employees of official institutions, and albeit in adjacent Hwanghae province, an incident in Koksan county 1811 illustrates this well. The granary supervisor and local clerks embezzled rice when handling the grain-loan system in conspiracy with the wealthy county farmers and merchants. The farmers would store the embezzled rice in their private granaries and then in spring, when the price peaked, the merchants would transport it to the markets in neighbouring P'yongan province and sell it with good profit. Violence erupted in 1811 when the magistrate arrested the granary supervisor and clerks on charges of embezzlement, and it was the local clerks and local administrative elite that led the attack on the magistrate. Commercial development and the more widespread use of cash thus made it possible for clerks and the local administrative elite to seek the help of merchants when handling embezzled rice, and price differences made such transport of rice between provinces a common form of corruption. The price of rice in P'yongan province was relative high due to unfavourable agricultural conditions, and it might be surmised this was the reason the Koksan clerks and merchants transported the rice to the markets there.

Further, the resources accumulated from this trade were invested in local society and generated more wealth through handicraft and mining. In P'yongan province handicraft production started to develop from the middle of the eighteenth century; Yongbyon and Songchon were centres for weaving, famous for their silk, and in the nineteenth century Anju also developed weaving and smithery. Anju was famous for embroidery, and was, together with Kaechon and Tokchon, also a centre for silk gauze production. Moreover, from the beginning of the nineteenth century the Napchong market in Chongju and the Yonggye sub-county in Pakchon county developed brassware shops on large scale. Mining also developed in P'yongan province, and this had close ties to the commercial activities. First, the lively trade with China necessitated the production of silver and this spurred the development of silver mining. Secondly, merchants often invested money in mining, functioning as financiers (*mulchu*); and since the merchants of P'yongan province had large resources to invest, many mines were opened. The metal produced, in turn, was circulated in the markets of the province. In the early nineteenth century gold was traded in the markets of Kaesong, Anju, P'yongyang and Uiju, and ironwork was traded all over province. Some of the silver produced was smuggled to China.

All this, of course, had consequences for the social structure of the province. Apart from an influential class of merchants with close ties to the county offices, this province also had a large population engaged in handicraft and mining. The importance of trade and the strong position of the local administrative elite in the absence of a strong yangban class meant that the administrative and commercial towns played a more important role than the rural villages based on agriculture. Not only merchants, but people of all strands of life engaged in this trade. If we look at participants in the Hong Kyongnae rebellion, for example, even licentiate degree holder (*chinsa*) Kim Ch'angsi reportedly was engaged in trade. Kang Tukhwang and his father Kang Yunt'aek, from Pakchon, both had official military positions but made their living through commercial activities, and Kim Hyechol was both village head of the market town of Chindu in Pakchon and an influential merchant. The top leader U Kunch'ik travelled the area as geomancer, but also he had earlier been engaged in the lucrative trade with ginseng.

The less strict social order of the area due to the lack of a strong yangban class, and the wealth that could be obtained through trade, created a socio-economic atmosphere relatively open to social mobility, as can be seen in the case of Yi Huijo, a central figure in the Hong Kyongnae rebellion. In government texts he was described as a simple-minded person with a lot of money, and he was known in the northern parts of P'yongan province as a rich man. He was originally a post-station slave, but he pursued a military career, accumulated wealth, and bought himself a place on the local roster in Kasan county. Later, though, he was removed by the magistrate. It was the wealth of Yi Huijo, a former slave, that constituted the material basis of the rebellion in its preparatory stage, indicating the peculiar socio-economic situation of this province.

Identity

When dealing with the contacts between Korea and China in Late Choson, and how the Koreans perceived of themselves, we must remember that although respect for China and its civilization lay at the centre of Choson politics and culture, Qing China was a non-Chinese, "barbarian" dynasty that had overthrown the Ming dynasty, highly revered in Korea, not least because of its assistance during the Japanese invasions of late sixteenth

century. Of course the conception of the Manchus as barbarians was a central government, politically dictated view based on ideology that had little relevance for those Koreans who lived close to and interacted with them. If we go back to the early seventeenth century when the Manchus rose in power, central government of course adopted a strong pro-Ming, anti-Manchu/Qing policy, but the outlook of Koreans living far from central government and in closer contact with the new force, or Koreans in conflict with central government was of course different; loyalty was not always linked to nationality. At this time there was a large group of Korean migrants in the Liaodong valley, as we have seen, and reportedly many of them served in the Manchu army. It is very telling of the situation in this region at this time that forty-three Korean clan names were included in the Manchu banners.

Not only did Koreans living in Manchuria fight for the Qing cause, also Koreans living in Korea defected or served the Manchus unswervingly after being taken prisoners. The most famous cases are of course Chong Myongsu, Han Yun and Han Ui. Chong Myongsu was a slave from Unsan county in P'yongan province. In 1619 he followed Korean troops sent into Manchu territory under the command of Kang Hongnip to support Ming troops and was taken prisoner. He stayed behind, learnt the Manchu language, and giving information on Korean affairs he was selected by the Manchu ruler as his secretary. In the Manchu invasion of 1636 he entered Korea as interpreter and through Qing backing he managed to gain influence on state affairs in Choson. Han Yun and Han Ui fled to the Manchus after their father Han Myongnyon, magistrate of Kusong county, P'yongyang province, had been executed for participating in the Yi Kwil rebellion of 1624, and joined Korean troops in the Manchu army, under the command of the captive Kang Hongnip. They reportedly urged the Manchus to invade Choson, participated in attacks, and even after a peace agreement had been settled Han Yun continuously argued for repeated invasions. Despite the experience of two Manchu invasions, not everybody guarding the border seem to have been antagonistic towards the northern neighbour; maybe the loneliness at the furthest outposts made them seek contact over the border. In 1685 a garrison commander was charged with socializing with Qing nationals, treating them with wine. He of course never reported this to his superiors and when it was disclosed by the reports of others, he was also found in possession of a Qing book that was suspected to be an exchanged gift.

To challenge the monolithic-nationalistic view of Choson-Manchu relations might be easy, but to trace the *identity* of the people of the P'yongan province is of course a different thing. The inhabitants of this province, however, had a strong sense of being mistreated by the central government in the south, a sense of "us" against "them", and this can especially be seen in the Hong Kyongnae rebellion of 1811-1812. The following is what the rebels wrote in a letter to the army commander of the province after two officers who had defected from his command had tried to kill Hong Kyongnae.

If you wanted to send assassins, why did you not send influential and noble men of your dynasty, but instead these simple soldiers under your command so as to eventually end up with nothing? The soldiers under your command are also people of our province, so how could they fulfil this mission wholeheartedly? [...] Furthermore, if you want to firmly oppose our orders, do not place people of our province to defend the Army Command and the fortress. If you mobilize your own sons, brothers, wives, concubines and slaves, then it would be possible for you to arrange troops with a unity of mind. You belong to a family of high officials, and you are a commander-in-chief. You thus have their sense of honour, and even if you know the will of heaven and the mind of people, you cannot make an alliance with the people outside the fortress. [...] Take a look around in your Army Command Camp. The *kisaeng* girls with eyebrows thin and curved as a crescent moon and rounded cheeks, even if they on the surface show affection for you, they are still of this province. How can you know that they are not an enemy in your own boat? The officers holding the swords and bending the

bows up on the Paeksang pavilion, they are also of this province. How can you know that they are not barbarians within the walls of the capital?

The rebels thus identified themselves with the people of P'yongan province, clearly differentiated from the people of the capital in the south, and one of the most fascinating aspects of the ideology of the Hong Kyongnae rebellion is its Chinese/Manchu connection. In the manifesto the rebels spread to the county offices of the province in the beginning of the rebellion, it is said that its fictive leader, Chong Chemin, at the age of five entered China with a holy monk. He commanded descendents of high ministers of the Ming dynasty, and when this story was told before and during the rebellion it was said that he commanded Chinese or Manchu troops.

This story about Chinese or Manchu troops was reiterated all through the rebellion. During the siege of Chongju, Hong Kyongnae said that Chong Chemin had moved his camp to the border of the Hamgyong province. To soothe his supporters he told them that more than ten thousand Manchu soldiers, gathered in Kanggye, would march out and come to their rescue. Some historians have interpreted these Manchu troops as meaning Koreans living north of the border. But it seems that when the rebel leaders talked about Manchu troops they meant it literally.

On 21st [December] I entered Chongju and the so-called Vice-Field Commander Kim Ch'onggak from T'aech'on, the Vanguard Troops Commander Yi Chech'o from Kaech'on, and three vice generals, one with the family name Sin from Hwangju, another with the family name Kim from Chaeryong – I can't remember their names – and Kim Unnyong from Yongbyon were all seated in the county office. *Three of them, Yi Chech'o and the two people named Sin and Kim, had trimmed their hats with yellow dog fur to make them look like the headgears the Manchus wear. They all had these hats on* [italics added].

These Manchu “tiger fur hats” (*hop' igwan*) appear frequently. Before the rebellion broke out Yi Huijo obtained tiger fur that he smuggled into Tabok village. A hat worn by one of the rebels' subordinates was sent to the Army Commander from the government troops camp during the siege of Chongju. The hat of Han Ch'ogon from that county is described in a report from the Army Commander. It is said to have been made of red silk trimmed with the fur of a wild dog. It was not only the headgears that were going to give a Manchu impression; ten horse loads of “Manchu clothes” (*hobok*) were also sent to the rebel base at Songnim village.

The places where the fictive leader Chong Chemin and his Chinese and Manchu troops were said to have their camp were well selected. In the preparatory stage, when Hong Kyongnae met U Kunch'ik he said: “We have long harboured these ideas and had gathered several tens of thousands Chinese troops on Sin island. But since the garrison was established there we had to move to the Yoyon area in Kanggye county.” Presumably to make the story more plausible they claimed to have gathered these Chinese troops on Sin island, a place we have seen constantly subject to illegal Chinese settlements, and when talking about a garrison being established there, they of course meant when the Mikot garrison was moved there in 1807 to stop these settlements and the trade that was being performed there. Using Sin island to make their story more plausible shows the extent to which the activities on the island was known in the province. Moreover, the Yoyon area was one of the “four deserted counties”. This was also a natural place to choose since it was a relatively sparsely populated mountainous border area, difficult to control from illegal border crossings. It was a wild frontier area renowned for bands of robbers, and during the reign of Yongjo (1724–1776) a group called “the four deserted counties band” (*p' yesagun' dan*) marauded P'yongan province.

This aspect of the ideology of the Hong Kyongnae rebellion has been understood as a way for them to legitimise their seizure of power, making use of the legitimacy of the Ming dynasty, or as a reflection of the close ties the merchants of this area had with China. But it must be remembered that a pro-Ming stance in the Choson dynasty was concomitant with an anti-Qing stance, and the rebels made more references to Manchu troops than to Chinese. Furthermore, why would the rebels make all these efforts to make their *own* troops appear as Manchus? It would be to overstate the case to argue that this was based on any affinity with the Manchu; this Chinese/Manchu connection seems to be an attempt to make use of some kind of amalgamation of the legitimacy of the Ming dynasty and the strength of the Qing dynasty. The rebels also said that troops were on the march from Japan, and obviously this was to overstate the size of their troops and the rebellion, and to give the impression that the Choson dynasty was soon to be overthrown. Memories of the Japanese invasions of the late sixteenth century and the Manchu invasions of the early seventeenth century were kept alive even in the late Choson dynasty, and in the divinatory text *Chonggamnok* “long wailings of Manchu horses north of the Paektusan” and “southern armies appearing on the sea” were signs of the chaos that would come and bring down the Choson dynasty.

What is of interest for us here, though, is the fact that the inhabitants of P’yongan province, in a challenge to the southern central government of the Choson dynasty, clearly distanced themselves from the rest of the country. In the manifest the rebels wrote that the fictive leader Chong Chemin would spare the population of the P’yongan province from an invasion since it was his home province, instead he would advance southwards through the Hamgyong, Kangwon and Kyongsang provinces. The inhabitants of this province also showed an appreciation of the power of the Manchus. The fact that the rebels aimed at leading their followers pretending to be Manchus show that they did not consider the risk of any xenophobic resistance from the inhabitants of the province. Furthermore, supposing that they believed the rebel leaders’ claims, those of the local elite that supported the rebellion obviously did not object to Manchu troops on Korean soil, if that would further their interests in the conflict against central government.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This brief treatment of Qing contacts in Late Choson P’yongan province has tried to show that this region certainly was not part of a “Hermit Nation”, people had contacts with their neighbours north of the border and large parts of the population seem not have shown any xenophobia or antagonism towards international trade. If there was any sense of “us” against “them” it was rather towards the southern provinces, and in this conflict they might even ally themselves with the Manchus, in not in practice so at least ideologically. Moreover, the example of this province shows the importance of the impetus from international trade in socio-economic changes and the development of domestic trade. Admittedly, 19th century Korea was still a predominantly agricultural society with less commercial developments than China or Japan, but the changes that did take place were significant and they were indeed conspicuous in the part of the country that was relatively open for interaction with foreign nationals. Much of this might be self-evident, but it is often overlooked when telling the larger saga of 19th century Korea.