

# Fur Trade between Joseon Dynasty and Jurchens in the Sixteenth Century\*

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## I. Introduction

During the sixteenth century, Joseon dynasty actively engaged in ‘fur trade’ with the Jurchens in Manchuria.<sup>1</sup> The kinds of fur traded were that of sable, weasel, deer, leopard, fox, bear, tiger, lynx, and otter.<sup>2</sup> Among them, the fur of sable was the rarest and therefore became a major item of trade between Joseon and Jurchens at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> The Jurchens were a Tungusic people based in northeastern Manchuria. Among the Jurchens, Joseon maintained close relations with the Udige (兀狄哈) tribe along the Tumen River, the Wuliangha (兀良哈) tribe around the military outpost Maolianwei (毛憐衛), and the Odoli (斡朵里) tribe of the Jianzhou zuowei (建州左衛). In Joseon dynasty, the Jurchens were based north of the Tumen and Amnok rivers were referred to as yain (野人), which means ‘wild people.’

<sup>2</sup> Sable fur was referred to as chopi (貂皮), while weasel fur was seopi (鼠皮), deer fur was nokpi (鹿皮), leopard fur was pyopi (豹皮), tiger or fox fur was hopi (狐皮), bear fur was wungpi (熊皮), lynx fur was yipi (狸皮), and otter fur was sudalpi (水獺皮).

Throughout the fifteenth century, Joseon government tried to embrace the less socially sophisticated Jurchens. At the time, it attempted to stabilize its state system through a ‘good neighbor policy’ that sought to maintain relations with the other surrounding people by welcoming envoys from abroad and exchanging gifts and rewards. Circumstances changed, however, since the mid-fifteenth century when the Jurchen society’s development began to accelerate. And as the trade of sable fur grew vibrant in the sixteenth century, the societies of Joseon and the Jurchens entered into a new historical phase.

Bilateral trade between the two societies began around the end of the fifteenth century and became full-blown in the sixteenth century because the demand for sable fur in Joseon coincided with the demand for oxen and tools for farming among the Jurchens. To satisfy the domestic demand for sable fur and secure it for tributary purposes, Joseon had to allow horses, cows, and ironware to trickle across its border into Manchuria. This ended up weakening Joseon’s military capacity to defend its northern border and people living along the border would run away to Jurchen territories to escape the burden of making tributary payments and performing military duties which were required by Joseon government. The Jurchen society, on the other hand, quickly made use of the horses, cows, and iron goods from Joseon to expand farming and improve weaponry. As the Jurchens increasingly became able to secure the goods they desired through trade, they no longer felt the absolute need to send envoys to Joseon. This eventually led the relations between the two societies into a new historical phase.

Despite carrying historical significance, sixteenth century Joseon-Jurchen fur trade is yet to be studied in depth. Previous studies on the two societies have primarily tended to review their traditional neighborly relations, highlighting how Joseon took great pains to control the ignorant Jurchens.<sup>3</sup> This approach, however, actually differed from the historical truth.

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<sup>3</sup> For studies on the traditional relations between Joseon and the Jurchens, see Lee Hyun-hee, “Joseon jeongi naejo yain cui jeongnyakjeok daeue daehayeo” [Diplomatic Treatment of Jurchens in the First Half of the Joseon Dynasty], *Sahak yeongu*, no. 18 (1964), pp. 299-328; Lee Hyun-hee, “Joseon jeongi ryugyeongsiwi yaingo,” *The Hyangto Seoul*, no. 20 (1964), pp. 55-96; Lee

The supposedly ignorant Jurchens managed to establish the Later Jin dynasty by the early seventeenth century and evolved into a power player in East Asia that came to dominate mainland China. Some studies took note of this fact and recognized the Jurchens as an entity separate from China and Joseon Korea<sup>4</sup> and the latest studies on the Jurchens have confirmed that the Jurchen society had developed considerably by the mid fifteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Based on research outcomes produced thus far, this paper aims to examine fur trade between Joseon and the Jurchens so as to uncover previously unknown aspects about the two societies during the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The paper first looks into the circumstances that led to the vibrant trade of fur at the time, then attempts to grasp how fur trade developed, and finally tries to understand how such trade caused the two societies to change and evolve. Delving into the reality of the societies of Joseon and the Ju-

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Hyun-hee, "Joseon jeongi yain eui yugyeongsuhoechaek" [Strategies to Molli the Jurchens in the First Half of the Joseon Dynasty] in *Ilisan Kim Du-jong baksa huisu ginyeom nonmungip* [Essays in Celebration of Ilisan Kim Du-jong's Seventieth Birthday], 1966, pp. 61-121; Lee Hyun-hee, "Daeyeojin: Muyeok daeyain gyoseop jeongchaek baegyeyong" [Trade with the Jurchens: Conditions Surrounding Joseon's Negotiation Policy Toward with the Jurchens], *Hanguksaron*, no. 11 (1982), pp. 285-324; Suh Byung-kuk, "Joseon jeongi dae yeojin gwangye" [Relations with the Jurchens in the First Half of the Joseon Dynasty], *Guksagwan nonchong*, no. 14 (1990), pp. 135-170; Kang Sung-moon, "Joseon sidae yeojin jeongbeol e gwanhan yeongu" [A Study on Yeojin Conquests in the Joseon Period], *Gunsa*, no. 18 (1989), pp. 43-72; Han Sung-joo, "Joseon chogi sujik yeojinin yeongu: Sejongdae reul jungsim euro" [A Study on the Received the Office of Jurchens in the Early Chosun Dynasty-Focused into Sejong period], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo*, no. 36 (2006), pp. 67-108; Han Sung-joo, "Joseon chogi jomyeong ijung sujik yeojinin eui yangsok munje" [Study on the Jurchens who were dually appointed from both Chosun and Ming in the Early Chosun Dynasty], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo*, no. 40 (2007), pp. 5-43.

<sup>4</sup> Kim Han-gyu, *Yodongsa* [The History of Liaodong] (Seoul: Moonji Publishing Company, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Kim Soon-nam, "Joseon Seongjongdae uljeokhape daehayeo" [A Study of the Udige Clan during the Reign of King Seongjong of Joseon], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo*, no. 49 (2009), pp. 35-63; Kim Soon-nam, "Joseon Seongjongdae eui geonju samwi" [Jianzhou sanwei (建州三衛) during the Reign of King Seongjong of Joseon], *Daedong munhwa yeongu*, no. 68 (2009), pp. 223-54.

<sup>6</sup> Yi Tae-jin studied the extent to which the Jurchens were involved in East Asian trade and its connection to fur trade. Yi Tae-jin, "16segi gukje gyoyeok eui baldal gwa seoul sangeop eui seongsae" [The Sixteenth Century Development of International Trade and the Ebb and Flow of Commerce in Seoul], in *Seoul sangeopsa* [The Commercial History of Seoul] (Taehaksa, 2000), pp. 79-142.

rchens in the sixteenth century should be able to confirm that fur trade played an important role in bringing change to the traditional relations between the two societies.

## II. The Circumstances Surrounding Fur Trade

### 1. Farming Expands Among the Jurchens

The Jurchen society's development was what initiated the fur trade with Joseon since the end of the fifteenth century. After leading a semi-agricultural, semi-nomadic lifestyle throughout the first half of the fifteenth century, the Jurchens gradually transitioned into an agricultural society. As farming expanded since the mid-fifteenth century, the Jurchens found themselves in a set of political, social, and economic circumstances different from before. And fur trade with Joseon was one of the factors that facilitated such change within the Jurchen society.

During the early years of Joseon, the Jurchens were incapable of relying entirely on agriculture. Their farming had remained rudimentary up until the early fifteenth century so that their techniques and production lagged behind those of Ming China or Joseon Korea. Their own efforts were necessary in order to advance, but they were also in dire need of assistance from the outside world. This is why they kept abducting the Han Chinese in the Liaodong region who were familiar with farming methods or Joseon farmers living near the Amnok and Duman Rivers, forcing them to perform agricultural labor.<sup>7</sup>

Among the Jurchens, the Jianzhou Jurchens were the quickest to achieve agricultural development.<sup>8</sup> This was because they had been geographically located close to Joseon and the Liaodong regional military commission (*Liaodong dusi*), the local defense headquarters of Ming Chi-

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<sup>7</sup> Suh, "Joseon jeongi dae yeojin gwangye."

<sup>8</sup> The Jianzhou Jurchens resided along the upper Songhua River as well as the Amnok River and Pozhu River.

na.<sup>9</sup> At a location where it was easier to be either assisted or threatened by Joseon and Ming China, the Jianzhou Jurchens made the most of their position to agriculturally evolve at a much faster pace than any of the other Jurchens.<sup>10</sup> Like most Jurchens, they too abducted and made slaves of the Han Chinese or people from Joseon, particularly making them perform agricultural tasks in addition to other household labor. Joseon therefore played an influential role in the agricultural development of the Jianzhou Jurchens during that time.<sup>11</sup>

Various records of the Joseon dynasty prove that the Jurchens did indeed abduct Ming Chinese and Joseon people and force them into agricultural slavery. One mentions how a Jurchen named Tong Mōngke Temür led his tribe in an attack on Gyeongwon (慶源) County in 1410, the tenth year of King Taejong. After killing or injuring Joseon men and women in the area, some were taken away as slaves along with their horses and cows.<sup>12</sup> This invasion is mentioned once more in a report by an army deputy commander from Hamgil Province submitted in 1434, the sixteenth year of King Sejong.<sup>13</sup> These are also mention of Ming Chinese taken away to have them perform farming tasks. Another record describes how the Jurchens approached a Joseon border commander and threatened him when in 1437, the nineteenth year of King Sejong, Joseon tried to repatriate some

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<sup>9</sup> The Jianzhouwei was a military outpost (*weisuo*) that belonged to Nuergan dusi (奴兒干都司) established by the Ming dynasty in 1409, the seventh year of the Yongle Emperor, to prevent the residual forces of the Yuan dynasty from collaborating with the Jurchens in eastern Liaodong. In November 1403, the Ming established Jianzhouwei and appointed Ahacu, the leader of the Huligai tribe, as the outpost's commander. Ahachu thereafter advised Mōngke Temür, the leader of the Odoli tribe, to submit to the Ming dynasty and when he did a couple of years later in 1405, the Ming dynasty appointed him as commander-in-chief and installed the Jianzhou zuowei. Later on, the commander of Jianzhou zuowei Mōngke Temür was murdered by Yang Mutawuta, Mōngke Temür's son Tung-shan and brother Fancha came into conflict over the hegemony of Jianzhou zuowei. The Ming stepped in by having Tung-shan inherit his father's position as a commander of Jianzhou zuowei and newly installed Jianzhou youwei for Fancha to oversee.

<sup>10</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 80, 1<sup>st</sup> of fifth month 1477, entry no. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Kim, *Yodongsa*, p. 544.

<sup>12</sup> *The veritable records of King Taejong*, vol. 19, 5<sup>th</sup> of fourth month 1410, entry no. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 65, 10<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1434, entry no. 4.

Ming Chinese who had been captured by the Jurchens. The Jurchens claimed that the people of Joseon were trying to repatriate to Ming China were slaves they had duly acquired through trade and threatened that if Joseon refused to hand the slaves over, they would retaliate by taking Joseon people away instead.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, when the Joseon dynasty was in its infancy around the early fifteenth century, the Jurchen society was still inexperienced in agriculture to the degree that it was impossible to operate properly without external help. It was only by the mid-fifteenth century during King Sejong's reign when agriculture in the Jurchen society was able to develop to a certain extent due to a combination of internal and external factors. Such progress also prompted Joseon to determine the opportune time to launch a military conquest. In 1433, the fifteenth year of his reign, King Sejong ordered Choe Yun-deok to lead a conquest of the Jianzhou Jurchens. The attack was scheduled to take place after the 20<sup>th</sup> of fourth month when the Jurchens were likely to come down from the mountains for the farming season<sup>15</sup> and make their way to Joseon to ask for seeds.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, since the mid-fifteenth century, what Joseon bestowed to the Jurchens in return for the harvest they presented were items other than grain such as clothes, hats, or saddled horses.<sup>17</sup> This implies that the Jurchen society steadily shifted from a semi-agricultural, semi-nomadic to a completely agricultural lifestyle between the early to mid-fifteenth century.

By the second half of the fifteenth century when King Seongjong ruled Joseon, the Jurchen society, especially that of the Jianzhou Jurchens, went through rapid development. Such development not only involved transitioning into an agricultural society, but the implementation of Confucian practices for weddings, harvest rituals, and funerals.<sup>18</sup> Although no

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<sup>14</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 76, 30<sup>th</sup> of second month 1437, entry no. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 59, 24<sup>th</sup> of third month 1433, entry no. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 63, 29<sup>th</sup> of third month 1434, entry no. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 92, 2<sup>nd</sup> of third month 1441, entry no. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Kim, "Joseon Seongjongdae eui geonju samwi," p. 231.

match for the developmental level achieved by the Jianzhou Jurchens, some in the Jurchen-Udige tribe who maintained relations with Joseon made considerable progress in settling into agricultural routines, pounding rice all day long, keeping such rice in crates stored indoors, cooking it in cauldrons, or trading their harvested rice for animal skin with other Jurchen tribes.<sup>19</sup>

As farming spread within the Jurchen society, oxen or horses naturally became necessary to serve as draft animals. Oxen were a particularly valued asset in farming,<sup>20</sup> which is why the Jurchens tended them with care.<sup>21</sup> However, there were not enough routes for them to acquire oxen or horses. Since the reign of King Taejong, Joseon banned the transborder sale of oxen or horses. In 1412, the twelfth year of King Taejong, a magistrate of Uiju (義州) County named Wu Bak was punished for the sale of horses. He was not directly involved in the sale but looked the other way when someone from Liaodong crossed the border into Joseon and left with his purchase of nearly one thousand horses. This, of course, was possible because Wu Bak had been bribed by a commander from Liaodong. The incident caused the Joseon government to require all horses owned by civilians in the northeastern and northwestern border regions to be branded so as to prevent their sale across the border.<sup>22</sup> Oxen were also involved in similar incidents. Left with no means to acquire oxen or horses, the Jurchens had to resort to taking them by force from Joseon.<sup>23</sup> The Joseon government would send border garrison commanders over to persuade the Jurchens to return the oxen or horses they had stolen,<sup>24</sup> but the plundering was likely to persist unless the Jurchens were formally allowed to obtain oxen and horses whenever necessary. And that was indeed what happened all

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<sup>19</sup> Kim, "Joseon Seongjongdae uljeokhape daehayeo," pp. 43-44.

<sup>20</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 21, 13<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1514, entry no. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 12, 3<sup>rd</sup> of tenth month 1471, entry no. 7.

<sup>22</sup> *The veritable records of King Taejong*, vol. 23, 18<sup>th</sup> of first month 1412, entry no. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 1, 7<sup>th</sup> of ninth month 1418, entry no. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 98, 10<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1442, entry no. 2.

throughout the first half of the Joseon period.<sup>25</sup>

As the demand for oxen and horses continued to rise with the Jurchen society's agricultural development, there were essentially two ways in which the Jurchens could acquire such draft animals while their trade remained prohibited. One was to steal or seize them by force and the other was to secretly engage in trade to acquire them. Since the reign of King Seongjong in the mid fifteenth century, luxury goods grew popular among the ruling class of Joseon and led to an increase in demand for fur goods produced by the Jurchens such as sable and weasel fur. As such, the exchange of oxen and horses for fur goods between Joseon and the Jurchens grew frequent during the sixteenth century.

## 2. Luxury Goods in Joseon Society

Sable and weasel fur were notable favorites among the fur items the Jurchens frequently traded with Joseon over the sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Such items were also produced in Joseon and made available at four counties along the border in Pyeongan Province as well as other locations in Hamgil Province.<sup>27</sup> However, their total output was restricted by the Joseon government, making them uncommon even among bureaucrats, some of whom could afford to wear clothes lined or trimmed with weasel fur.<sup>28</sup>

The value of sable fur can be guessed from how it was bestowed by the king only to subjects he especially trusted. In 1409, the ninth year of his reign, King Taejong discussed state affairs at the council hall with several court officials including Ha Ryun, Seong Seok-rin, and Jon Yeong-mu

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<sup>25</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejo*, vol. 23, 10<sup>th</sup> of third month 1461, entry no. 1.

<sup>26</sup> It has been suggested that the warm fur can offer was another factor that led to the rise of fur demand apart from the growing popularity of luxury goods. Yi Tae-jin pointed out that the sixteenth century was part of the Little Ice Age when temperatures dropped across the globe, which could have served as a more fundamental reason behind the rise in fur demand. Yi, "16segi gukje gyoyeok cui baldal gwa seoulsangeopeuisongsoe," p. 103.

<sup>27</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 29, 27<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1425, entry no. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 50, 23<sup>rd</sup> of tenth month 1430, entry no. 1.

and afterwards gave them each with fifty sheets of sable fur.<sup>29</sup> The ones who received fur had devoted themselves to helping Prince Yi Bang-won (King Taejong) seize power and eventually rise to the royal throne. Unlike some contributors who later grew distant from the royal court or became purged during the reign of King Taejong, the ones who were given fur had continued to serve as the king's closest advisors and as senior officials within the government.<sup>30</sup> The fact that sable fur was a token of trust and encouragement indicates that it was a fairly rare and expensive item.

Moreover, clothes made with sable fur were also bestowed to officials or officers traveling long distances for a mission. In 1455, the third year of King Danjong, Yi Sa-cheol was appointed as the inspector of Hamgil Province in order to check the accuracy of records pertaining to each county and village in the province. Since Yi was dispatched in cold weathered January, the Joseon government supplied him with a fur coat, hat, and earmuffs made of sable fur.<sup>31</sup> In 1457, the third year of King Sejo, officials including Han Myeong-hoe and Gu Chi-gwan set out for China to earn the Ming dynasty's approval on installing Prince Haeyang as crown prince. They were given fur coats and hats upon their departure in eleventh month of 1457. King Sejo especially had a sable fur collar urgently made and delivered to Han Myeong-hoe not long after his departure.<sup>32</sup>

Yet, Joseon bureaucrats were not alone in their desire for sable fur. Sable fur coats were also an important item that Chinese envoys prized the most. However, they were extremely difficult to procure during the Goryeo period.<sup>33</sup> This was why Ming envoys explicitly asked for sable fur items whenever they came to Joseon. During King Taejong's reign, a Ming en-

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<sup>29</sup> *The veritable records of King Taejong*, vol. 18, 8<sup>th</sup> of twelfth month 1409, entry no. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Choi Sung-hi, "Taewangjo eui wanggweon gwa gukjeong unyeong cheje" [Royal Authority and the Government System during the Reign of King Taejong], in *Joseon chogi jeongchisa yeongu* [Studies on the Political History of Early Joseon] (Seoul: Jisik-sanup Publishing Co., Ltd., 2002), pp. 61-104.

<sup>31</sup> *The veritable records of King Danjong*, vol. 13, 7<sup>th</sup> of first month 1455, entry no. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejo*, vol. 10, 10<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1457, entry no. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 38, 19<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1427, entry no. 1.

voy named Huang Yan (黃儼) brought a Jurchen clothing made of blue silk to Joseon and asked for it to be lined with sable fur.<sup>34</sup> The Chinese envoys Jiang Yu and Jin Fu were offered clothes, hats, and earmuffs made of sable fur as gifts in 1468, the fourteenth year of King Sejo.<sup>35</sup>

As such, sable fur items were not readily available to commoners. As a rule, only officials of the senior third rank such as *Bujehak* (副提學) or higher were allowed to wear sable fur items in Joseon. Then, King Sejong expressed his discomfort in 1432, the fourteenth year of his reign, about old, infirm subjects having to carry out rituals in the cold. While those serving in the position of *Bujehak* or higher wore sable fur and silk items, those of the sixth rank, such as *Sagan* (司諫), and down to the ninth rank thereafter became allowed to wear items made of weasel fur and blue silk.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, only court officials of the third rank or higher could wear sable fur earmuffs.<sup>37</sup> Until the reign of King Sejo, donning sable fur was strictly controlled so that other than for official purposes, it was scarcely consumed by civilians.

However, from the mid-fifteenth century during the reign of King Seongjong, a trend of extravagance emerged across all tiers of Joseon society. A reflection of that trend can be glimpsed through parties hosted by the nobility where women would be embarrassed to attend without wearing clothes made of sable fur. Although sable fur trimmings were technically permitted only to officials of the third rank and above, most of the lower ranked officials wearing silver belts<sup>38</sup> eventually trimmed their clothes with sable fur as well. The problem was that not only was it difficult to obtain

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<sup>34</sup> *The veritable records of King Taejong*, vol. 34, 13<sup>th</sup> of seventh month 1417, entry no. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejo*, vol. 47, 11<sup>th</sup> of seventh month 1468, entry no. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 58, 10<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1432, entry no. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejo*, vol. 10, 9<sup>th</sup> of twelfth month 1457, entry no. 2.

<sup>38</sup> In Joseon, the civil and military officials between the senior third rank and the junior sixth rank wore belts decorated with silver along the edges. Belt decorations differed according to rank so that senior and junior first ranks wore belts decorated with rhino horn, while the belts of senior second ranks and junior second ranks were respectively decorated with gold and gold plus red-colored ornaments. The senior seventh rank and lower ranks wore belts with ornaments made with black horn.

sable fur in Joseon, but even if it was possible, its inferior quality caused demand for it to be satisfied through the Jurchens.<sup>39</sup>

To halt the trend, the Joseon government became compelled to issue a ban. In 1472, the third year of King Seong-jong, *Yejo*, the Ministry of Rites, drafted and submitted a list of bans including one that prohibited commoners from using sable or weasel fur to make clothes or earmuffs with the exception of weasel fur used by women.<sup>40</sup> A few years later, the royal secretariat *Seungjeongwon* once more devised a set of regulations for the prohibition of extravagance and presumptuousness in 1475, the sixth year of King Seongjong. The regulations concerning fur strictly forbid the use of sable or weasel fur in the clothes and earmuffs of court officials apart from those above the senior third rank and their wives. In addition, anyone caught engaging in the trade of silk, sable fur, or weasel fur would be subject to a punishment of one hundred flogs and then be sent far away to the frontier on military duty. In such cases, the magistrate of the village where the offender originally lives would also be deemed responsible for the offense so that he would be dismissed from his position, never to be hired again by the government. King Seongjong had the proposed regulations relaxed slightly and instead drew a sharper distinction between officials and commoners on what was to be permitted. Hence, only officials above the senior third rank could use sable fur while their wives were to be exempt from regulations. Weasel fur could be used by any other official, but commoners were banned from using either sable or weasel fur.<sup>41</sup>

Overall, the popular desire for luxury goods in Joseon from the mid-fifteenth century onward led to a surge in demand for fur items and drove their prices up. This formed circumstances for trade between people in Joseon who desired sable and weasel fur and the Jurchens who desired oxen, horses, and ironware.

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<sup>39</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 55, 12<sup>th</sup> of fifth month 1475, entry no. 3.

<sup>40</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 14, 22<sup>th</sup> of first month 1472, entry no. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 57, 17<sup>th</sup> of seventh month 1475, entry no. 3.

### 3. Sable and Weasel Fur as Tributary Items

The rise in civilian demand for fur due to a trend of extravagance in Joseon since the reign of King Seongjong is what spurred the trade of fur between Joseon and the Jurchens beyond the late fifteenth century, but there was another reason behind the vibrancy in fur trade. By King Seongjong's reign, sable fur and weasel fur, the most typically traded items among fur, became included in the list of tributary items presented to the Ming court.

Sable and weasel fur do not appear to have been items officially offered to China prior to 1478, the ninth year of King Seongjong.<sup>42</sup> Until then, it was given to Chinese envoys as bribes to make adjustments to the list of tributary items. During the second year of his reign in 1420, King Sejong sent several officials including Minister of Rites Ha Yeon and Han Hwak, the vice minister of Guanglusi (光祿寺), to Beijing to ask whether gold and silver could be excluded from the list of tributary items since they were not produced in Joseon during that time. The envoys from Joseon presented the Ming official Huang Yan with numerous bribes including four bolts of hemp and *gyogi*, or tabby damask, six bolts of silk, an iron belt, and a sable fur coat.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, because Ming envoys who came to Joseon usually sought sable fur, the Joseon government catered to their wishes by permitting them to trade items such as sable fur and lynx fur. Proof of this would be the list of goods tradable at the envoy's quarter submitted by *Yejo* (Ministry of Rites) in 1423 to King Sejong during the fifth year of his reign. On the list were items favored by Ming envoys such as tabby damask, gold, silver, sappan wood, alum, black pepper, fabrics made of ramie or hemp, lynx fur, and sable fur.<sup>44</sup>

In particular, Ming envoys brought silk to Joseon to purchase sable fur at bargain prices. In 1425, the seventh year of King Sejong's reign, *Yejo* assigned each province with different amounts of fur they were expected to

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<sup>42</sup> “上曰如土豹皮貂鼠皮之類我國自前不貢矣.” *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 99, 17<sup>th</sup> of twelfth month 1478, entry no. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 7, 25<sup>th</sup> of first month 1420, entry no. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 19, 21<sup>st</sup> of third month 1423, entry no. 4.

prepare. Pyeongan Province and Hamgyeong Province had to supply a total of two thousand sheets of sable fur, while other provinces had to together prepare one thousand sheets each of red fox fur, wild marten fur, and lynx fur. The Joseon government thereafter ordered for 150 sheets of sable fur, 80 sheets of lynx fur, 50 sheets of fox fur, and 100 sheets of wild marten fur to be delivered to the capital within twenty-five days.<sup>45</sup> The ordered items were purchased with the linen from the budget of the government offices *Insubu* (仁壽府), *Insunbu* (仁順府), *Naejasi* (內資寺), *Naeseomsi* (內贍寺), *Jeonnosi* (典農寺), and *Jeyonggam* (濟用監) because the Ming envoy Yin Feng visiting Joseon at the time wished to acquire them.<sup>46</sup> The fur items were then sold to Yin Feng at a rate of one bolt of Chinese silk for 25 sheets of sable fur, one bolt of patterned Chinese silk for 130 sheets of gray weasel fur, and one bolt of raw official silk for 10 sheets of fox fur. In the case of a different Ming envoy named Pu Shi, the applied rate was one bolt of official silk for 6 sheets of sable fur, one bolt of triple-weaved silk twill damask for 3 sheets of sable fur or 5 sheets of tiger fur, and one bolt of raw official silk for 130 sheets of gray weasel fur.<sup>47</sup> In essence, the Joseon government facilitated Ming envoys in exchanging the silk and other fabric they brought from China with furs they desired from Joseon.

This was, however, all before sable and weasel fur turned into gifts presented to the Ming emperor in 1478, the ninth year of King Seongjong. Previously they had been local goods prepared as a trivial offering on the side.<sup>48</sup> The Ming dynasty originally had the Jurchens regularly offer fur as a tributary item. The military commission established by the Ming government appointed Jurchen tribal leaders as military officials, and in return, those tribal leaders were obligated to regularly offer tributary items. Those items were sable and weasel fur, lynx fur, duck hawk, rabbits, crow fal-

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<sup>45</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 27, 25<sup>th</sup> of first month 1425, entry no. 6.

<sup>46</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 27, 1<sup>st</sup> of second month 1425, entry no. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 27, 22<sup>nd</sup> of second month 1425, entry no. 3.

<sup>48</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 37, 25<sup>th</sup> of seventh month 1427, entry no. 3.

cons, year-old hawks, donkey hide glue, and ivory.<sup>49</sup> Sable and weasel fur therefore used to be tributary items presented by the Jurchens instead of Joseon. Whenever Joseon occasionally offered them, the quality of the items had to be good, meaning the head and feet intact on them. Unfortunately, it was difficult for Joseon to produce a satisfying amount and quality of such fur.<sup>50</sup>

The list of tributary items Han Chi-hyeong brought back in 1478 confirms that the Ming dynasty had begun to officially request Joseon to pay tribute with sable and weasel fur.<sup>51</sup> This turned into a source of frustration for the Joseon government. For instance, a controversy occurred in 1482, the thirteenth year of King Seongjong, when Ming China demanded Joseon to send five hundred sheets of sable fur. At the time, lynx fur, considered to be inferior than sable fur, was only produced in the provinces of Pyeongan and Yeongan (or Hamgyeong). This limitation meant the amount produced was not enough to satisfy the domestic demand in Joseon, let alone what the Ming court requested. The reason it was even more challenging to secure the fur of sable than any other animal may have had to do with the abolition of four counties in Pyeongan Province during the reign of King Sejo. The very counties that happened to be major areas of sable fur production in Joseon became abolished one by one, the last being Jaseong County in 1459, the fifth year of King Sejo. After the abolition, the areas turned into a hunting ground for the Jurchens that remained barely within the Joseon government's boundary of control.<sup>52</sup>

As it became difficult to procure sable fur from Pyeongan Province,

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<sup>49</sup> The Ming dynasty installed a provincial headquarters called *dusi* in Manchuria with guard units called *wei* and *suo* under its wing. Jurchen tribal leaders became appointed to positions that reported to the *dusi* such as commander (指揮使), vice commander (指揮同知), judge (鎮撫), battalion commander (千戶), deputy battalion commander (副千戶), and battalion prison warden (所鎮撫).

<sup>50</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 38, 14<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1427, entry no. 5.

<sup>51</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 99, 21<sup>st</sup> of twelfth month 1478, entry no. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Kim Soon-nam, "Joseon Jungjongdae eui bukbang yain guchuk" [Joseon dynasty's Strategy of Pushing Back the Jurchens Militarily during the Reign of King Jungjong], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo*, no. 54 (2010), pp. 59-61.

the Joseon government had to resort to sending court officials to five garrison forts in Hamgil Province from time to time. However, that still failed to secure the required amount of sable fur. Discussions within the Joseon court arrived at the consensus that it would eventually be impossible to gather enough of the rare sable fur when it was already challenging enough to get lynx fur. The need to modify the Ming court's excessive request was raised.<sup>53</sup> When the Ming envoy Zheng Tong visited Joseon the following August, King Seongjong informed that Joseon no longer produced lynx, sable, and weasel fur. Since Joseon would be forced to procure the items through the Jurchens, he asked for them to be excluded from the list of tributary items.<sup>54</sup>

The Joseon and Jurchen society were both on the verge of change since the late fifteenth century. Before fur trade flourished, several Jurchen tribes presented fur as tributary items to Ming China and Joseon in exchange for their tribal leaders' appointment to government positions, and depending on the volume of tributary items, silk from Ming China. From Joseon, they were rewarded with goods like cotton and paper. Such was the customs of trade in relations of investiture and tribute.<sup>55</sup> Yet, this pattern changed near the end of the fifteenth century. Agricultural development helped the Jurchen society evolve to a degree that no longer had to heavily depend on the economic interests it stood to gain from maintaining its customary relationship with Joseon established since the reign of King Sejong.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, by the reign of King Seongjong, change within the Joseon society triggered an increase in the trade of fur between the two societies, thereby launching a new historical phase in their relations in the sixteenth century.

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<sup>53</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 137, 14<sup>th</sup> of first month 1482, entry no. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 157, 11<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1483, entry no. 1; *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 157, 27<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1483, entry no. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Kim, *Yodongsa*, p. 537.

<sup>56</sup> Kim Ku-jin, "Joseon jeongi dae yeojin gwangye wa yeojin sahoe ui siltae" [Joseon's Relations with the Jurchens and the Jurchen Society in the First Half of the Joseon Dynasty], *Dongyanghak* 14 (October 1984), pp. 513-21.

### III. The Pattern of Fur Trade

#### 1. The Fur Quotas of Pyeongan and Hamgil Province

Fur trade between Joseon and the Jurchens flourished in the sixteenth century because they were able to satisfy one another's needs. The Jurchen society's shift toward agriculture led to a rise in the need of draft animals such as oxen and horses while the growing popularity of luxury goods and the Ming court's request for fur as tributary payment increased the demand for sable and weasel fur within the Joseon society. Such coinciding interests was what made fur trade possible between the two societies.

Even without considering tributary purposes, government demand for sable and weasel fur was already on the rise in Joseon since its establishment. From the early fifteenth century, the central government mostly procured fur by requiring certain provinces to offer it as a form of tax payment. The provinces of Pyeongan and Hamgil were to make their tax payments with sable and weasel fur. Because sable fur was particularly favored, the quota of other goods as tax payment would sometimes be reduced to allow the provinces to focus their efforts on fur production. For instance, in 1407, the seventh year of King Taejong, the frontier was exempted from its quota of honey while the Gapju area was exempted from its quota of hide used in armor so that the two areas could make their tax payment with sable fur.<sup>57</sup> In 1425, the seventh year of King Sejong, the quota for sable and weasel fur as tax payment became fixed: 700 sheets of sable fur and 500 sheets of weasel fur for Pyeongan Province and 1,365 sheets of sable fur and 3,990 sheets of weasel fur for Hamgil Province. People in the two provinces had to annually present those fixed amounts to *Sanguiwon* (尙衣院), the Bureau of Royal Attire. In addition, Gapsan County (甲山郡) in Hamgil Province had to separately present an extra 200

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<sup>57</sup> *The veritable records of King Taejong*, vol. 14, 6<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1407, entry no. 2.

sheets of sable fur<sup>58</sup> as tax collected from shamans.<sup>59</sup> In total, Hamgil Province had to offer more than twice as much sable and weasel fur than Pyeongan Province.

The annual quotas fixed in the seventh year of King Sejong was cut back considerably later on. According to the record of goods collected in 1465, the eleventh year of King Sejo, 115 sheets of sable fur, 260 sheets of weasel fur, and 375 sheets of birch bark were presented by Yeongan (Hamgil) Province. These numbers were changed once more in 1474, the fifth year of King Seongjong. The same province was to present 65 more sheets of sable fur, 20 more sheets of weasel fur, and 350 more sheets of birch bark, making the annual total 180 sheets of sable fur, 280 sheets of weasel fur, and 725 sheets of birch bark. Such an increase in the collection of furs since the reign of King Sejo brought about complaints from the people of Yeongan Province, especially those in Gapsan County who had to bear the extra burden of taxation against shamans.<sup>60</sup> Upon such complaints, King Seongjong ordered the Royal Treasury to cut back the amount of fur collected from the two border districts in Yeongan Province referred to as Yanggye for a limited period of five years since there was enough reserve of fur at the time.<sup>61</sup>

This adjustment in fur collection that only applied to Yeongan Prov-

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<sup>58</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 29, 27<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1425, entry no. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Only South Hamgyeong Province levied a tax called *sinpo* (神布) on shamans. The reason was because the people there tended to be arrogant and imprudent enough to worship spirits, and more often than not, shamans would tempt and exploit them for profit. Hence, shamans became required to pay the same sort of tax levied on merchants, which was one bolt of hemp per shaman. Gradually, non-shaman commoners became taxed as well so that each household had to pay one bolt of hemp each year, which came to be referred to as *sinsepo* (神稅布). *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 29, 22<sup>nd</sup> of ninth month 1517, entry no. 2.

<sup>60</sup> People in Gapsan County at the time claimed it was difficult to fill the government assigned quota because although sable fur, weasel fur, and birch bark were produced in Yeongan Province, the amount was meager. Also, it was almost impossible to procure the goods from the Jurchens across the border, particularly sable fur because the price for one sheet amounted to one ox. The county therefore asked for the quotas on sable and weasel fur to be reduced and for tax payment with birch bark to be reassigned to the counties of Bukcheong and Hamheung. *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 40, 1<sup>st</sup> of third month 1474, entry no. 3.

<sup>61</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 40, 17<sup>th</sup> of third month 1474, entry no. 2.

ince was probably because at some point between 1459, the fifth year of King Sejo, and 1465, the eleventh year of King Sejo, a large reduction was made to the quota of Pyeongan Province during the reign of King Sejong. In particular, the fifth year of King Sejo was when four out of the five counties that mainly produced fur in Pyeongan Province became abolished. With the exception of Wiwon County, the abolition of the counties Yeoyeon, Jaseong, Muchang, and Uye<sup>62</sup> would have made it difficult to produce sable and weasel fur in those areas and certainly not enough to satisfy the quota fixed during the reign of King Sejong.<sup>63</sup> As such, the fur quota for those areas in Pyeongan Province would have been adjusted earlier than that of Yeongan Province. The fur quota assigned to other areas of Pyeongan Province became officially removed in 1477, the eighth year of King Seongjong. For the next three years from 1478, the ninth year of King Seongjong, the areas of Ganggye, Wiwon, Isan, Byeokdong, Changseong, Sakju, Uijubecame exempt from their quotas for sable, weasel, tiger, and lynx fur so that the people could recover their normal production levels.<sup>64</sup>

While Pyeongan Province struggled with its fur production, Yeongan Province caused even more problems in producing the fur it was supposed to present to the central government. The areas that specialized in fur production in Yeongan Province were five garrison forts, which did not include Giljumok or Buryeong County.<sup>65</sup> The central government would urge the local magistrates at the five garrison forts to secure their assigned quota and those magistrates would in turn place pressure upon the people. The problem was that sable fur, the most crucial item, was produced in Jurchen territory. People under pressure from their local magistrates in Yeongan

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<sup>62</sup> According to the *Geographical Appendix to the veritable records of King Sejong*, the counties Yeoyeon, Jaseong, Muchang, Uye, and Wiwon were governed by the local administrative agency *Ganggye dohobu* of Pyeongan Province.

<sup>63</sup> Kim, "Joseon Jungjongdae cui bukbang yain guchuk," pp. 56-57.

<sup>64</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 81, 24<sup>th</sup> of sixth month 1477, entry no. 2.

<sup>65</sup> According to the *Geographical Appendix to the veritable records of King Sejong*, the counties Gapsan and Gyeongseong were part of Giljumok, Hamgil Province.

Province had no choice but to offer iron farming tools and oxen in order to acquire sable fur. This eventually led to an even bigger problem. The Jurchens used the farming tools they had obtained with sable fur to improve their weaponry. They managed to extract the iron from those farming tools to replace their arrowheads previously made out of antlers. The Joseon government was aware of such circumstances at the time, which is why some proposed that the five garrison forts should be exempt from presenting sable fur.<sup>66</sup>

The five garrison forts in Yeongan Province thus received exemption earlier than Pyeongan Province from supplying sable fur to the central government for fifteen years since 1474.<sup>67</sup> When that period drew to an end in 1489, the twentieth year of King Seongjong, the time came to decide whether the exemption should be extended or not. The king hence sent an inspector to Yeongan Province to investigate whether sable fur was being produced at the five garrison forts. His intention was to find out whether the people in those areas still had to resort to trade with the Jurchens in order to secure enough supplies for the central government.<sup>68</sup> The inspector's findings indicated that sable fur was being produced in the areas. However, its subpar quality was what had prompted exchange with the Jurchens.<sup>69</sup> As a result, *Hojo*, the Ministry of Revenue, decided not to extend the exemption and people at the five garrison forts had to go back to supplying the originally required amount of fur.<sup>70</sup>

Regardless of the government-imposed quotas, sable and weasel fur had been in demand since the early fifteenth century. What triggered its trade in the sixteenth century was its inclusion in the list of tributary items to the Ming court, which required an amount impossible for Joseon to procure on its own. Joseon would have been able to domestically secure enough for government purposes or rewarding bureaucrats and prominent

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<sup>66</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 52, 2<sup>nd</sup> of second month 1475, entry no. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 225, 22<sup>nd</sup> of second month 1489, entry no. 6.

<sup>68</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 225, 28<sup>th</sup> of second month 1489, entry no. 2.

<sup>69</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 228, 30<sup>th</sup> of fifth month 1489, entry no. 1.

<sup>70</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 230, 1<sup>st</sup> of seventh month 1489, entry no. 9.

figures. Yet, the fur produced in Joseon was too thin to suffice as tributary items for the Ming court.<sup>71</sup> This was the reason why Joseon had to rely on the Jurchens beyond the mid-fifteenth century to obtain good quality sable and weasel fur.<sup>72</sup>

The Jurchens were willing to make the trade only for the oxen, horses, and ironware they desired from Joseon. The trade of sable and weasel fur picked up steam as the popularity of luxury goods in Joseon rose early on during the reign of King Seongjong. By the time King Yeonsangun (r. 1494-1506) took the throne, there was someone who even made a skirt out of sable fur.<sup>73</sup> While King Jungjong (r. 1506-1544) ruled Joseon, the wives of merchants came to publicly don sable fur that was technically allowed only to the wives of officials above the senior third rank.<sup>74</sup> Luxury goods had settled down as a part of everyday life by then. That drove the demand for more expensive, better quality sable fur. It was thus inevitable for the trade of sable fur to flourish between Joseon and the Jurchens in the sixteenth century.

## 2. The Role of Magistrates in Fur Trade

Although fur trade with the Jurchens grew beyond the late fifteenth century, the beginning of such trade in Joseon can be traced back to an earlier period, especially in terms of sable fur. Yet, the private trade of fur had been forbidden in Joseon until the mid-fifteenth century. In 1423, the fifth year of King Sejong, the *Gongjo panseo*, the Minister of Works, became indicted by *Saheonbu*, the Office of the Inspector-General, for attempting to engage in the trade of sable fur. Apart from the goods required for submission to the central government, the minister was caught and arrested for trying to pilfer and privately trade forty-four bolts of ramie and hemp fab-

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<sup>71</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 87, 16<sup>th</sup> of fifth month 1538, entry no. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *The veritable records of King Myeongjong*, vol. 4, 6<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1546, entry no. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *The Diaries of King Yeonsangun*, vol. 46, 8<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1502, entry no. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 17, 6<sup>th</sup> of second month 1513, entry no. 5.

ric as well as sixty sheets of sable fur.<sup>75</sup> There were also cases where interpreters were caught trying to take fur with them on their way to Beijing on official duty, one of which was Jo Sung-son in 1477, the eighth year of King Seongjong.<sup>76</sup>

Fur trade continued to be officially banned in Joseon in the sixteenth century. In reality, however, it flourished under the lead of magistrates who were assigned to the northern border areas of Joseon. Even before fur trade grew, there were already signs of their involvement in matters related to sable fur. During the reign of King Sejong, a magistrate reportedly acted in the interests of those who bribed him with sable fur.<sup>77</sup> One magistrate was even caught making an explicit demand for sable fur to the Jurchens, which was precisely what happened to Bak Yang-sin in 1476, the seventh year of King Seongjong.<sup>78</sup> In 1485, the sixteenth year of King Seongjong, the magistrate of Hoeryeong (會寧) County Kim Ja-bun was flogged a hundred times for receiving three sheets of sable fur as a bribe from a Jurchen.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, magistrates, especially those assigned to the five garrison forts of Yeongan Province, considered it all too natural to acquire goods from the Jurchens such as fine horses, silks, pearls, and sable fur. Won Jung-geo is said to have been denounced by an envoy for purchasing too many goods from the Jurchens while serving as a military governor in North Yeongan Province, enough for his horses to collapse to death from carrying them back to his home in Wonju.<sup>80</sup>

Yet, magistrates in border areas were the ones mainly responsible for spurring trade at the time because they urged locals to trade with the Jurchens to be able to fill the quota of sable and weasel fur assigned by the central government. It was considered a felony for a village to fail in securing its allotted amount of sable fur, which may sound like an exaggeration, but

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<sup>75</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 22, 18<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1423, entry no. 2.

<sup>76</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 79, 12<sup>th</sup> of fourth month 1477, entry no. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 62, 17<sup>th</sup> of twelfth month 1433, entry no. 2.

<sup>78</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 74, 6<sup>th</sup> of twelfth month 1476, entry no. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 185, 10<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1485, entry no. 4.

<sup>80</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 228, 28<sup>th</sup> of fifth month 1489, entry no. 3.

the consequences were grave, especially during the reign of King Yeonsangun. Hence, as much as the magistrates were aware of the harmful effects of fur trade with the Jurchens, they had no choice but to urge and compel people to engage in it.<sup>81</sup> The reality of Yeongan Province was that when the magistrate's urging became unbearable, people would take their iron farming tools and pots and exchange them for fur with the Jurchens.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, the rarity and commercial value of sable fur caused magistrates at the northern border regions to desire the profits it could raise. They pursued sable fur in the hope of creating an extra source of income, but this sometimes became problematic when they abused the Jurchens in the process. An example of this would be an incident in 1522, the seventeenth year of King Jungjong, caused by a second deputy commander (*cheomsa*) named Do Seo-rin who served at the garrison fort Donggwangjin.<sup>83</sup>

One type of abuse Joseon magistrates would inflict upon the Jurchens were to force them into selling sable fur.<sup>84</sup> In those instances, the magistrates took advantage of government property for such transactions. A *cheomsa* at the garrison fort Hyesanjin named Kim Geuk-dal was charged in 1529, the twenty-fourth year of King Jungjong, for purchasing sable fur with oxen.<sup>85</sup> The problem was that he used government property to purchase oxen and secretly traded them with the Jurchens for sable fur and silk.<sup>86</sup> In 1563, the eighteenth year of King Myeongjong, there was rumor that people were performing labor usually meant for oxen in rice paddies because magistrates stationed at border areas had depleted the oxen to purchase fur goods.<sup>87</sup>

Another reason Joseon magistrates abused the Jurchens had to do

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<sup>81</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 6, 16<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1508, entry no. 1.

<sup>82</sup> *The Diaries of King Yeonsangun*, vol. 29, 4<sup>th</sup> of fourth month 1498, entry no. 1.

<sup>83</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 44, 13<sup>th</sup> of fourth month 1522, entry no. 3.

<sup>84</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 62, 17<sup>th</sup> of seventh month 1477, entry no. 1.

<sup>85</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 66, 24<sup>th</sup> of sixth month 1478, entry no. 3.

<sup>86</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 67, 8<sup>th</sup> of second month 1479, entry no. 2.

<sup>87</sup> *The veritable records of King Myeongjong*, vol. 29, 7<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1563, entry no. 1.

with preparing offerings to present to their king. Magistrates would use that as an excuse to acquire more sable fur than necessary from the Jurchens. This was the reason a magistrate named Gang Wi at Mijeonjin, a commander at Hunyungjin named Kim Yi, and a military officer named Yang Hong at Hwangcheokpa were interrogated and dismissed in 1531, the twenty-sixth year of King Jungjong.<sup>88</sup> What magistrates specifically did was falsify their reports in order to protect their own interests. They would extort the Jurchens and force them to offer sable fur to the Joseon king. The magistrates would then falsely report that yellow sable fur was replaced with black sable fur to be presented to the king or send less to the central government than the amount of fur they actually acquired so as to pocket the margins. As a result, the Jurchens would get paid less for their goods and end up resenting Joseon magistrates. This was precisely what happened in an incident in 1538, the thirty-third year of King Jungjong, which involved a magistrate at Yuwonjin named Yun Ju. Such exhibition of greed and abuse by magistrates in border regions became commonplace in Joseon by the second half of King Jungjong's reign. To redress the situation, the Joseon court had military officials in border areas report to an inspector once they acquired sable fur from the Jurchens. And to review fur submissions in detail, an official would be separately appointed and temporarily sent as a special auditor to investigate and report to the inspector who would then assemble the auditor's findings and present them to the central government.<sup>89</sup>

These abuses Joseon magistrates inflicted eventually caused the Jurchens to commit revolts. In 1594, the twenty-seventh year of King Seonjo, some Jurchens living near the garrison fort in Onseong County revolted because they found it difficult to tolerate the excessive greed and abuse of Joseon magistrates in the area. Once, a magistrate of Onseong County named Jeon Bong handed some stale barley to an interpreter and made him distribute it to the Jurchens in the area. The Jurchens who unwillingly accept-

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<sup>88</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 72, 12<sup>th</sup> of twelfth month 1531, entry no. 2.

<sup>89</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 88, 24<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1538, entry no. 2.

ed the barley were charged with one sheet of black sable fur per mal (approximately 18 liters) of barley. And whenever Jeon Bong was working at his office, he would have fine quality sable fur on display in the front yard to remind the Jurchens of the quality of fur he expected from them. If a village failed to supply sable fur on time, people in that village would be arrested and severely punished. After years of such brutality, even the Jurchens who had defected to Joseon instantly decided to revolt.<sup>90</sup>

Because sable fur was rare,<sup>91</sup> Joseon magistrates at border areas also used it to advance their careers. To such magistrates, it was just another way to benefit from sable fur. In 1506, the first year of King Jungjong, Jeon O-ryun from Gyeongwon of Hamgyeong Province became appointed as the *moksa*, the magistrate, of Jeju Island. The man with a mediocre lineage had a military background but no commendable talent or insight. This is why royal scribes especially added a critical comment to the description about the appointment, stating that it had been earned through bribery with sable fur.<sup>92</sup> Jeon had in fact been indicted in 1516, the eleventh year of King Jungjong, for purchasing sable fur with oxen and horses while serving as a *cheomsa* at Manpojin.<sup>93</sup>

The end users of sable fur purchased and presented by such magistrates were high-ranking bureaucrats within the central government of Joseon. This is why royal scribes during the reign of King Myeongjong pointed out that the greed of high-ranking bureaucrats was as much to blame as that of magistrates in forcing people to cross the border and trade with the Jurchens. The magistrates who served bureaucrats well by bribing

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<sup>90</sup> *The veritable records of King Seonjo*, vol. 55, 16<sup>th</sup> of ninth month 1594, entry no. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Just how rare and expensive sable fur was can be gauged from the story about some people who presented sable fur as an offering and became recognized in the first year of King Jungjong's reign as a contributor to political restoration. The story is in fact mentioned as part of a comment Jo Gwang-jo made in November 1519, the fourteenth year of King Jungjong. Jo stated that there were five to six people including Choe Yu-jeong and Jang Han-gong who used sable fur to bribe their way to being recognized as a contributor to political restoration. *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 37, 9<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1519, entry no. 4.

<sup>92</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 1, 23<sup>rd</sup> of tenth month 1506, entry no. 4.

<sup>93</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 23, 3<sup>rd</sup> of first month 1516, entry no. 1.

them with sable fur were commended while those who failed to do so were denigrated. Even evaluation results on the performance of magistrates would depend on whether sable fur was offered or not. These circumstances naturally drove magistrates in border areas to mobilize their resources for the acquisition of sable fur.<sup>94</sup>

Military officials proved to be particularly problematic among the greedy, abusive magistrates. Most military officials assigned to a border region bribed high-ranking bureaucrats with sable fur.<sup>95</sup> There was a set amount of fur they would usually offer, which differed depending on their rank. For instance, the amount of fur officials with the titles *gweongwan*, *manho*, or *cheomsa* were expected to offer was different from what was expected of those with the titles *suryeong*, *busa*, *moksa*, *susa*, or *byeongsa*. Bureaucrats would thereby strive to have officials who offered bribes assigned to desirable posts. Royal scribes at the time considered a bureaucrat named Kim An-ro responsible for setting into motion such a self-interest-driven custom during the reign of King Jungjong. With recommendation from a bureaucrat, military officials were able to become immediately assigned to positions regardless of their rank. To ride on the back of a high-ranking bureaucrat guaranteed a fast track to a successful career. This, of course, served as an obvious excuse for such bureaucrats to elicit more bribes. A typical example was a magistrate of Jongseongjin named Yi Gwan who became appointed as *dongbuseungji*, the secretary at the royal secretariat *Seungjeongwon* in 1563, the eighteenth year of King Myeongjong. The reason Yi Gwan was able to rise to the position of royal secretary was because of Yi Ryang. Using oxen purchased for trade with the Jurchens, Yi Gwan purchased and presented fine horses and sable fur to Yi Ryang while he served as *gwanchalsa*, the governor, of Pyeongan Province. After Yi Ryang left to once more serve as a court official, Yi Gwan was able to rise to the senior third rank position of royal secretary.<sup>96</sup> Mean-

<sup>94</sup> *The veritable records of King Myeongjong*, vol. 4, 6<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1546, entry no. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Magistrates in border regions mostly bribed high-ranking bureaucrats with sable fur from the north, finely woven hemp from the south, and finely woven silk from the west.

<sup>96</sup> *The veritable records of King Myeongjong*, vol. 18, 21<sup>st</sup> of fifth month 1563, entry no. 2.

while, the ones who suffered from this custom of bribing with sable and weasel fur were the soldiers stationed in the northern border regions.<sup>97</sup>

*Sanjangghan*, which refers a designated sable hunting family in the county of Ganggye, serves as proof of how brutally magistrates and commanders treated people in order to secure sable fur necessary for bribing bureaucrats. The reason *sanjangghan* became a subject of preoccupation was because of the sable fur quota assigned to the county.<sup>98</sup> The sable fur produced at Ganggye County was of a supreme quality and therefore used on the hat the king wore while tending to state affairs. The problem was that the county magistrate would demand a far greater supply of sable fur than what had to be presented to the central government. Kim Sun, who once served as *byeongmageoldosa*, the provincial military commander, of Pyeongan Province, selected thirty sable hunting families and designated them as *sangjangghan* while working as a *busa* at Ganggye County. The motive behind the designation had to do not with filling the assigned sable fur quota, but with securing more fur to bribe influential figures. A military officer named Yi Bal who later became the magistrate of Ganggye County added thirty more families to the register of *sanjangghan* and applied further pressure on them to capture more sables. Unfortunately, the abuse did not cease there. Yi Bal found fault with the submitted fur and thereby charged fines to be paid with hemp. That extra collection of hemp was used to purchase sable fur at markets in the capital city and present them to the central government. The sable fur ruthlessly collected from the doubled number of *sanjangghan* thereby completely fell into the hands of Yi Bal. Such practices under Yi Bal as well as his predecessor ravaged the lives of people in Ganggye County and led to its demise.<sup>99</sup>

As aforementioned, fur trade between Joseon and the Jurchens was driven by Joseon magistrates stationed at the northern border regions and developed into a source of various issues. Bilateral trade to satisfy the

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<sup>97</sup> *The veritable records of King Myeongjong*, vol. 16, 9<sup>th</sup> of sixth month 1554, entry no. 1.

<sup>98</sup> After the fur quota was reduced in the eight year of King Seongjong, Pyeongan Province must have at some point been ordered to pay tax with sable fur again.

<sup>99</sup> *The veritable records of King Myeongjong*, vol. 28, 2<sup>nd</sup> of eighth month 1562, entry no. 1.

needs of both sides should have been mutually beneficial, but the Joseon society instead continued to become sucked into a labyrinth.

## IV. The Outcome of Fur Trade

### 1. The Drain of Oxen, Horses, and Ironware

According to *negative regulations* (*geumjejo*) included in the *Grand Code of State Administration* (*Gyeongguk Daejeon*), sable fur and lynx fur were among the list of goods banned from being traded across the borders of Joseon. The regulations specified that “anyone who secretly trades banned items will be sentenced to one hundred flogs and three years of punitive labor,” and “selling such items at ports or guesthouses in the Yanggye districts was banned as well.”<sup>100</sup> In fact, the reason Kim Wu, who also went by as Huicheongun, was indicted by the Office of the Inspector-General in February 1409, the ninth year of King Taejong, was because he got caught secretly trading sable fur. At the time, Kim Wu had started in a new position at Ganggye. He secretly entrusted an interpreter traveling to Liaodong with 50 sheets of sable fur and 16 geuns (approximately 9.6 kilograms) of yellow beeswax so as to purchase two bolts of silk damask with ten sheets of sable fur and ten bolts of plain silk with twenty sheets of sable fur. However, by the time the interpreter returned to Ganggye County, Kim Wu had become replaced from his position. The interpreter thereby sent the silk purchased from Liaodong along with the remaining sheets of sable fur to Kim Wu and handed the yellow beeswax over to the county’s authorities. This prompted the county authorities to make an inquiry to the governor (*gamsa*) of Pyeongan Province since the goods Kim Wu smuggled across the border for sale had been items banned from trade outside Joseon.<sup>101</sup> Yet, regardless of the ban on trading sable fur, there were people in the border areas of Pyeongan Province who still made their living by selling sable

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<sup>100</sup> *The Diaries of King Yeonsangun*, vol. 32, 15<sup>th</sup> of fifth month 1499, entry no. 3.

<sup>101</sup> *The veritable records of King Taejong*, vol. 17, 22<sup>nd</sup> of second month 1409, entry no. 2.

fur and ginseng.<sup>102</sup>

The vibrant trade of fur with the Jurchens in the sixteenth century led to a drain of oxen, horses, and ironware from Joseon. As luxury goods began to grow popular early on during the reign of King Seongjong, the demand for sable and weasel fur rose in Joseon. To satisfy that rising demand, Joseon had to exchange corresponding volumes of oxen, horses, and ironware.<sup>103</sup> The continually increasing demand for sable fur drove up its price and attracted a swarm of people to North Yeongan Province in the hopes of profiting from the sale of sable fur.<sup>104</sup>

The items those people offered in exchange for sable fur were oxen, horses, and ironware, which is precisely what the Jurchens desired from Joseon. The acquired oxen, horses, and ironware were used in farming, or in some cases, to improve weaponry. According to a testimony by Seong Dal-saeng, who survived a Jurchen raid on the Joseon fort Josanbo in 1491, the twenty-second year of King Seong-jong's reign, each Jurchen possessed around three hundred sheets of sable and weasel fur.<sup>105</sup> This meant they could afford to engage in trade with people who brought iron farming tools and pots from Joseon. Desperate to escape harassment from magistrates, someone all the way from Onseong even came to exchange two hoes for two sheets of weasel fur.<sup>106</sup>

While people in the border areas of Joseon sought sable fur to make tax payments, profiteers sought it for a different purpose. They went from one garrison fort to the next along the border with loads of cotton and conspired with local interpreters to acquire ironware and oxen, which they traded at every opportunity with the Jurchens for sable and weasel fur. Such fur would be brought back to Seoul where it was sold at higher prices.<sup>107</sup> The price for one sheet of sable fur was ten bolts of cotton in 1502,

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<sup>102</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejong*, vol. 62, 26<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1433, entry no. 2.

<sup>103</sup> This was also discussed by Kim Han-gyu. See Kim, *Yodongsa*, p. 545.

<sup>104</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 57, 14<sup>th</sup> of seventh month 1475, entry no. 2.

<sup>105</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 255, 13<sup>th</sup> of seventh month 1491, entry no. 4.

<sup>106</sup> *The veritable records of King Seongjong*, vol. 57, 14<sup>th</sup> of seventh month 1475, entry no. 2.

<sup>107</sup> *The Diaries of King Yeonsangun*, vol. 29, 17<sup>th</sup> of fourth month 1498, entry no. 1.

the eighth year of King Yeonsangun.<sup>108</sup> In 1508, the third year of King Jungjong, it took one ox to buy one sheet of sable fur.<sup>109</sup> By 1516, the eleventh year of King Jungjong, a sheet of high-quality sable fur cost one horse.<sup>110</sup> At Bukpyeongwan, the quarters for Jurchen envoys, a sheet of sable fur could be bought with four arrowheads in 1525, the twentieth year of King Jungjong.<sup>111</sup> And the price for one sheet of sable fur in 1538, the thirty-third year of King Jungjong, reached up to two hundred bolts of cotton.<sup>112</sup>

Oxen and horses from Joseon were mainly traded at Manpojin for the Jurchens' sable and weasel fur. Since King Sejo abolished the four counties in the upper region of Amnok River, the garrison fort served the northernmost point along the northern border of Joseon and a destination for trade to the Jurchens.<sup>113</sup> In the sixteenth century, magistrates in the border regions of Joseon took the liberty of opening markets at Manpojin, so Joseon people continued to come and trade their oxen, horses, and ironware with the Jurchens.<sup>114</sup>

Although the drain of oxen and horses did not occur all across Joseon, the volume of the drain can be gauged from a story dating back to the reign of King Yeonsangun. In the eleventh year of his reign, King Yeonsangun claimed that the quality of sable fur being circulated in the domestic market was poor and ordered for twenty thousand sheets of sable fur to be purchased from Yanggye, the two border districts in Pyeongan and Yeongang Province. This was said to have drained all the oxen from the two provinces so that the locals had to use horses to plough rice paddies.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *The Diaries of King Yeonsangun*, vol. 46, 8<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1502, entry no. 2.

<sup>109</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 5, 23<sup>rd</sup> of second month 1508, entry no. 1.

<sup>110</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 25, 17<sup>th</sup> of fifth month 1516, entry no. 5.

<sup>111</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 52, 9<sup>th</sup> of first month 1525, entry no. 1.

<sup>112</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 88, 14<sup>th</sup> of eighth month 1538, entry no. 2.

<sup>113</sup> Kim Soon-nam, "Joseon jeongi manpojing wa manpo cheomsa" [Manpo Garrison and Manpo Cheomsa during early Joseon], *Sahakyeongu*, no. 97 (2010), pp. 60-61.

<sup>114</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 21, 13<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1514, entry no. 3.

<sup>115</sup> *The Diaries of King Yeonsangun*, vol. 60, 3<sup>rd</sup> of tenth month 1505, entry no. 3.

The exportation of oxen, horses, and ironware from Joseon turned into a source of various problems. Once in the hands of the Jurchens, the oxen and horses from Joseon helped advance the agricultural practices of the Jurchens while the ironware was used to upgrade Jurchen weaponry. Contributing to the acceleration of the Jurchen society's development came back as a threat to the border regions of Joseon.<sup>116</sup> What further aggravated the circumstances was the fact that Joseon's military strength had weakened in those regions. By 1508, the third year of King Jungjong, the number of cavalymen fell from one thousand to a mere forty to fifty because there was almost no oxen or horses left after they became heavily consumed by trade with the Jurchens during the latter half of King Yeonsangun's reign.<sup>117</sup> Weakened military power made it impossible for Joseon to actively carry out its military policy. After the Jurchens were driven away from the Joseon border in 1524, the nineteenth year of King Jungjong, for trespassing on the four abolished counties, Joseon was unable to subjugate the Jurchens when they later brutally murdered a magistrate of Manpojin, the northernmost point of Joseon.<sup>118</sup> This ultimately caused an even graver problem, which was that people in Yeongan Province increasingly fled to Jurchen territories to escape the burden of having to fill the sable and weasel fur quota.

## 2. Runaways from Yeongan Province

As fur trade between Joseon and the Jurchens thrived in the sixteenth century, it generated drifters from Yeongan Province. At the time, people in Yeongan Province had no choice but to engage in fur trade to fill the quota assigned by the central government. And those driven to exhaustion from the obligation began to flee to Jurchen territories.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 25, 1<sup>st</sup> of sixth month 1516, entry no. 1.

<sup>117</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 5, 23<sup>rd</sup> of second month 1508, entry no. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Kim, "Joseon Jungjongdae eui bukbang yain guchuk," pp. 79-83.

<sup>119</sup> Kawachi Yoshihiro shed light on the impoverished circumstances the people of Yeongan Province were under at the time. See Kawachi Yoshihiro, "Chūsō Meisō jidai no chōsen to

A record on 1516, the eleventh year of King Jungjong, offers a glimpse into this departure of people from Yeongan Province. According to the record, fur trade involved human trafficking in which the Jurchens would lure or take Joseon people worn out by cold and hunger or too young to travel on foot and secretly trade them. Meanwhile, there were people from Joseon who crossed over to Jurchen territories of their own accord. Some who were old and lazy slipped into Jurchen territories, choosing to believe the devious words of the Jurchens that life in their society was easier than in Joseon.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, the Jurchens who lived near Joseon garrison forts were not executed but only flogged for trafficking Joseon people.<sup>121</sup> Since the consequences were less severe than expected, the Jurchens would have found it worth the risk to continue engaging in human trafficking.

Despite such instances of being taken away by the Jurchens, there were more people from Yeongan Province who voluntarily crossed over to Jurchen territories to escape the burden of having to procure excessive amounts of fur. In Hamgyeong Province, tax payment with fur was imposed on the *bongjok* of soldiers at the time. *Bongjok* (奉足) referred to common farmers who served as aides to men performing their military duty so that such men could maintain a minimum level of living while they served.<sup>122</sup> The purpose of the *bongjok* system was to ensure that a continued, stable number of commoners served in the military. In Hamgyeong Province, however, the *bongjok* were forced to perform all sorts of labor usually carried out by petty officials. This was because there were no petty officials serving at government offices in the Yanggye districts, which left no *bongjok* available to aid commoners serving in the military. The dual burden of having to perform labor duties and simultaneously offer goods

joshin” [Joseon and the Jurchens During the Reign of King Jungjong and Myeongjong], *Chōsengakuhō*, no. 82 (1977), p. 83.

<sup>120</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 21, 13<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1514, entry no. 3.

<sup>121</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 46, 28<sup>th</sup> of first month 1523, entry no. 2.

<sup>122</sup> Lee Jee-woo, “Joseon chogi bongjokje eui chui wa siltae” [The Development and Reality of Early Joseon’s Bongjok System], *Gyeongnam sahak*, no. 5 (1989).

like fur as tax payment caused the *bongjok* to bolt.<sup>123</sup> When a *bongjok* ran away, the head of the *bongjok*'s household would instead be held responsible for supplying the amount of fur originally assigned to the *bongjok*.<sup>124</sup> Men performing military duty started to refuse being assigned with a *bongjok* to help during their absence. The heads of households ran away to avoid the burden imposed by a runaway *bongjok* in the family. The run-aways aware of the rumor that there were no labor duties in the Jurchen society made their way to Jurchen territories. And people who fell captive to the Jurchens did not wish to return to their hometowns.<sup>125</sup> Such were the circumstances in Yeongan Province during the sixteenth century.

Fur was, of course, not the sole source of problems that drove people in Hamgyeong Province across the border into Jurchen territories. Grain loans called *hwanja* was also something that increased the burden people suffered from. Around the time, people in the Yanggye districts were forced to take out grain loans from the government. Although most people did not wish to take out *hwanja*, they had to at least make a relative take it out. The problem would arise when the time came to pay back the loaned grain. People couldn't afford to keep and serve, so they had to separately purchase grains to pay back the *hwanja*. In lean years, they had to hire themselves out to the Jurchens living near garrison forts in order to survive one day at a time. Amid such hardships, rumors spread among people in the Yanggye districts that life was easier in Jurchen territories where food and clothing were aplenty. People who figured living in Jurchen territories would be better than suffering in Joseon relocated with their family members. Moreover, Jurchen tribes were situated fairly close to the border regions of Joseon, usually fifteen to thirty kilometers or one to two days of travel away. Jurchen villages were typically comprised of twenty to thirty houses, and with no forts surrounding them, they did not appear to be ene-

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<sup>123</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 60, 21<sup>st</sup> of third month 1528, entry no. 2.

<sup>124</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 25, 17<sup>th</sup> of fifth month 1516, entry no. 5.

<sup>125</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 60, 21<sup>st</sup> of third month 1528, entry no. 2.

mies of Joseon.<sup>126</sup>

The fact that assigning an excessive amount of fur had driven people out of Hamgyeong Province was mentioned in a report on civil affairs the province's governor Min Je-in submitted to the king in 1540, the thirty-fifth year of King Jungjong. In his report, Min Je-in stated that people troubled by the fur quota kept running away from the counties of Gapsan and Samsu in Hamgyeong Province. The statement was supported by a detailed account of the population remaining in those counties and the number of runaways. The remaining number of household heads in Gapsan County as well as the garrison forts nearby was 270 after 77 ran away, while 559 *boin* (*bongjok*) ran away on an annual basis, leaving a total of 486 in service. As for Samsu County and its nearby garrison forts, 212 heads of households remained after a total of 61 ran away each year and the annual number of *boin* who ran away was 182, which left a total of 238 *boin* in the area. The fur quota assigned to the two counties was as follows. Gapsan County had to present a total of 150 sheets of sable fur, 20 to the king and 130 to the central government, in addition to 271 sheets of weasel fur. Samsu County had to offer 20 sheets of sable fur to the king as well as 90 sheets to the central government, amounting to a total of 110 sheets of sable fur apart from 249 sheets of weasel fur. These annual quotas were assigned while many in the two counties fled to the Jurchen territories to escape the duties, taxes, and loan payments.<sup>127</sup>

Fur trade between Joseon and the Jurchens in the sixteenth century eventually weakened Joseon's military power along its northern border and forced its people to depart to Jurchen territories. On the other hand, this contributed to the growth of the Jurchen society, one that no longer consisted of barbarians.

### 3. Change in Relations with the Jurchens

The shape of Joseon's relations with the Jurchens ultimately changed due

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<sup>126</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 61, 21<sup>st</sup> of fourth month 1528, entry no. 1.

<sup>127</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 94, 3<sup>rd</sup> of eleventh month 1540, entry no. 2.

to fur trade between the two during the sixteenth century. From its foundation up to the reign of King Seongjong in the mid-fifteenth century, Joseon's policy toward the Jurchens was to avoid physical clashes as much as possible. Joseon maintained domestic control in order to solidify its border defense while granting the economic requests the Jurchens made to keep them from causing disturbances in border regions.<sup>128</sup> Since the reign of King Taejong, Joseon set up a trading post to facilitate the Jurchens in obtaining the goods they needed.<sup>129</sup> In addition, whenever the Jurchens came to Seoul to present their harvest to the Joseon court, gifts were bestowed in return basically to avoid clashing with the Jurchens.

The Jurchens' purpose for maintaining relations with Joseon was primarily economic. During the fifteenth century, they sought to acquire daily necessities from Ming China or Joseon. This was why they traveled to Seoul and paid their respects to the king of Joseon. Since they couldn't come empty-handed, they brought their most commonly produced local goods as harvest offerings,<sup>130</sup> which happened to be fur and fine horses.<sup>131</sup> In return, Joseon would bestow goods the Jurchens needed such as rice, beans, fabric, or paper.<sup>132</sup> Another means through which the Jurchens were able to procure daily necessities was to take their fur and fine horses and trade them at the few trading posts or horse markets operated by the Joseon or Ming government.<sup>133</sup> Although there were limits set on the volume of exchange allowed at such posts or markets, they did help avoid physical clashes.

The quantity and quality of goods secured from paying respects or

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<sup>128</sup> Kim Soon-nam, "Joseon chogi eui bibyeon daechaek eui surip gwa sihaeng: Jaesangeup gukbang jeonmunga eui hwalyakeul jungsimeuro" [A Study on the Border Defense Policy and the Minister-level National Defense Experts in early Choson Dynasty], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo*, no. 45 (2008), pp. 58-59.

<sup>129</sup> *The veritable records of King Taejong*, vol. 11, 10<sup>th</sup> of fifth month 1406, entry no. 2.

<sup>130</sup> *The Diaries of King Yeonsangun*, vol. 42, 26<sup>th</sup> of first month 1502, entry no. 6.

<sup>131</sup> In the case of horses, the Ming dynasty had forbidden Joseon and the Jurchens from trading the horses each other.

<sup>132</sup> Lee, "Daeyeojin: Muyeok dae yain gyoseop jeongchaek baegyeong."

<sup>133</sup> Kim, *Yodongsa*, pp. 548-49.

engaging in trade was not enough to satisfy the Jurchens' needs. Hence, yet another way for the dissatisfied Jurchens to obtain more daily necessities was to randomly pillage the border regions of Joseon or Liaodong in Ming China. They were capable of pillaging whenever and wherever they wished. This was why the Jurchens continued to intrude into the border regions of Joseon since the dynasty's foundation and up until the sixteenth century.

Meanwhile, the circumstances surrounding the Jurchens' relations with Joseon started to change since the mid-fifteenth century. The trade of fur between them flourished and the price of fur skyrocketed due to the surge in demand for sable and weasel fur in Joseon. Ming China also preferred the fur supplied by the Jurchens to the extent that their attendance at the Ming court was denied without offering at least one fine horse and thirty sheets of black sable fur.<sup>134</sup>

As the marketability of their sable fur became recognized, the Jurchens were able to trade it to obtain necessary goods. They no longer had to be tied down by their relations with Joseon, but they were not about to immediately abandon it either. The Jurchens would come to Seoul and trade fur at Bukpyeongwan where they lodged. In principle, fur trade was not allowed within the quarters, but it was overlooked in reality. Staff members at the quarters like the keeper would bury banned items such as arrowheads or ivory for making bows in front of a Jurchen lodger's door as agreed beforehand and pick up the fur the lodger would leave behind. Joseon merchants would also rendezvous with the Jurchens at a hilltop meeting point on their way back home to sell banned items.<sup>135</sup> Such illicit transactions carried risks but the Jurchens weren't necessarily at a disadvantage because selling their fur at a high price allowed them could purchase whatever they desired.

By the mid-sixteenth century, however, the Jurchens grew reluctant about traveling to Seoul. The foremost reason was because they felt the

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<sup>134</sup> *The veritable records of King Sejo*, vol. 40, 3<sup>rd</sup> of eleventh month 1466, entry no. 1.

<sup>135</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 52, 9<sup>th</sup> of first month 1525, entry no. 1.

trips were no longer economically beneficial. What the Joseon court paid for the sable fur they brought was less than the price they were traded at home. The usual reward was equivalent to the market price of the lowest quality fur, leaving the Jurchens with no reason to travel all the way to Seoul.<sup>136</sup> The Jurchens were typically required to offer eight sheets of sable fur whenever they visited Seoul, but they could not profit more through such visits than what they could make from sales at border regions. Furthermore, Joseon's treatment toward the Jurchens grew less courteous by 1531, the twenty-sixth year of King Jungjong. The Joseon court would occasionally grant the title of *gyeomsabok*, or cavalry bodyguard, to especially talented Jurchens or those from a stronger Jurchen tribe, but this practice nearly disappeared by 1531. King Jungjong was, of course, aware that the Jurchens had grown reluctant about traveling to Seoul, but he did not make any gestures other than ordering the court to fairly appraise and pay for the goods they brought.<sup>137</sup>

The drop in the frequency of the Jurchens' visits to Seoul during the reign of King Jungjong can be confirmed through mentions about relations with the Jurchens in Joseon's historical records. During the mid-fifteenth century when King Seongjong reigned, Joseon maintained good relations with the Jianzhou sanwei, the three Ming commanderies populated by the Jurchens in the Jianzhou area. Each commandery visited Joseon once on average every year during the reign of King Seongjong<sup>138</sup> while the Udige tribe made a total of seventy-one visits over the same period.<sup>139</sup> However, between the second and tenth year of King Jungjong's reign, only five visits by the Jurchens are mentioned in *Jungjong sillok*, or the *Annals of King Jungjong*.

It is, of course, possible that mention of some visits could have been omitted from such official records. Yet it is more likely that fur trade with

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<sup>136</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 72, 9<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1531, entry no. 1.

<sup>137</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 72, 9<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1531, entry no. 2.

<sup>138</sup> Kim, "Joseon Seongjongdae cui geonju samwi," pp. 240-41.

<sup>139</sup> Kim, "Joseon Seongjongdae uljeokhapse daehayeo," pp. 57-58.

Table 1. Mentions of Jurchen Visits in the Annals of King Jungjong

Date of Visit	Jurchen Visitors
21 <sup>st</sup> of first month, 1507	Ten Jurchens including Sacha (撒察)
22 <sup>nd</sup> of twelfth month, 1508	Mangha (莽哈)
First month 1511	Mangha, Shede
Second month 1513	Liuwuyiwei (劉吾乙未)
First month 1515	Mangha

Joseon changed the circumstances surrounding the Jurchens in the sixteenth century, enough for them to reconsider their regular visits to Joseon as a means of securing daily necessities.<sup>140</sup>

As the Jurchens' visits grew sparse, some in Joseon suggested that the Jurchens should be required to pay their respects with horses instead of expensive sable fur.<sup>141</sup> During the first half of the Joseon dynasty, 120 Jurchens made formal visits to Seoul on bumper years and 90 on lean years. Each of those Jurchens were required to offer sable fur. However, some of them did not have enough sable fur to offer, so they had to exchange oxen, horses, or ironware with the Udige tribe to purchase it. These circumstances led to the suggestion of assigning a fixed number of fine horses for each Jurchen to present according to the title they were given from Joseon.<sup>142</sup>

Fur trade in the sixteenth century thus changed the traditional relations between Joseon and the Jurchens. Joseon allowed the Jurchens to pay their respects and satisfied their economic needs in order to avoid physical clashes with them in its border regions. As fur trade made it possible for the Jurchens to obtain necessary goods, there was less reason for them to visit Seoul and pay their respects to the king of Joseon. This in turn made it

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<sup>140</sup> Flourishing fur trade in the sixteenth century did not necessarily stop the Jurchens from raiding Joseon. When the Jurchens began to settle down during the reign of King Jungjong in areas that were once part of the four abolished counties, Joseon launched military operations to chase them away and it continued to experience conflicts with the Jurchens such as the brutal murder of Manpojin's second deputy commander.

<sup>141</sup> *The veritable records of King Myeongjong*, vol. 19, 25<sup>th</sup> of eleventh month 1555, entry no. 1.

<sup>142</sup> *The veritable records of King Jungjong*, vol. 21, 13<sup>th</sup> of tenth month 1514, entry no. 3.

increasingly challenging for Joseon to control the Jurchens, which partly explains why Ni Tangjie and the Jurchens living nearby the six Joseon garrison forts revolted against Joseon during the reign of King Seonjo.

## V. Conclusion

General Kim Jong-seo (1383-1453), who led the establishment of six garrison forts during the reign of King Sejong, suggested that fur goods would surely engender negative effectives and make it impossible for later generations to maintain the six garrison forts.<sup>143</sup> The general's comment was a testament to how much change fur trade brought to the societies of Joseon and the Jurchens, not to mention the issues it caused.

After remaining less advanced than Joseon until the mid-fifteenth century, the Jurchen society began to gradually develop thereafter. That development involved the spread of farming that permitted the Jurchen society to proceed to a stage beyond a semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural lifestyle. Oxen and iron farming tools became necessary for the Jurchens to boost agricultural production. Around the same time, the ruling class of Joseon became infatuated with luxury goods. In terms of fur, sable fur was the most rare and expensive and those produced in Jurchen territories were especially coveted because of their fine quality. Around the same time, sable fur became included in the list of tributary items Joseon had to offer to the Ming court.

It was under these circumstances that fur trade flourished between Joseon and the Jurchens. The Jurchen society's need for oxen and horses coincided with the Joseon society's need for sable and weasel fur. A major variable in fur trade was the magistrates serving in the northern border regions of Joseon. Such magistrates pushed people to secure good quality sable and weasel fur not only to fill the quota of fur assigned to each village by the central government, but to profit from the rarity and marketability of sable fur as well.

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<sup>143</sup> *The veritable records of King Myeongjong*, vol. 10, 29<sup>th</sup> of first month 1550, entry no. 1.

The vibrant trade of sable fur led to a rapid leak of oxen, horses, and ironware from Joseon. This helped the Jurchens achieve agricultural development but weakened the military strength of Joseon along its northern border. Moreover, people in the Yanggye districts of Joseon who increasingly found it difficult to endure the pressure from magistrates to procure sable fur began to run away to Jurchen territories. And when the Jurchens became capable of securing enough of necessary goods through trade, they no longer felt motivated to seek economic benefits from visiting Seoul and paying their respects to the Joseon court.

Fur trade between Joseon and the Jurchens thereby changed the traditional relations between the two in the sixteenth century. Without the capability to satisfy the economic needs of the Jurchens, Joseon eventually lost control over them. These developments eventually gave rise to a revolt by Ni Tangjie and the Jurchens residing around the six Joseon garrison forts during the reign of King Seonjo. In essence, it was a seemingly trivial factor like fur, more specifically sable and weasel fur, that became responsible for initiating political, economic, social advancements and forming a new historical phase in the sixteenth century for Joseon and the Jurchens.

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