

# Communications between Joseon Korea and Ming China through the Liaodong Region in the Early Fifteenth Century\*

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## 1. Introduction

The Liaodong Peninsular was a diplomatically and militarily volatile region during the dynastic transition from Goryeo to Joseon. The Goryeo King Gongmin 恭愍王 (r. 1351-74) and King Taejo 太祖 (Yi Seonggye 李成桂, r. 1392-98), the founder of the Joseon dynasty, tried hard to extend their states' power and influence into the region. Ming China (1368-1644) also tried hard to seize control of the region by expelling the remnant forces of Yuan China (1271-1368) to the north and by meddling in the Korean states. Hence, the Liaodong region vividly witnessed information collecting activities of Goryeo and Joseon as well as the Ming, and received much more attention in the two countries' relations than any other regions.

The tense relations between Joseon and the Ming in the early fif-

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\* This article is translated from the Korean manuscript originally published in the Quarterly Review of Korean History (역사와현실) 107, March 2018: 111-139.

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teenth century, even including possible military conflict of large scale, put the limitations on information collecting through official missions and individual translators as well as personal network. Consequently, both countries employed a variety of tactics to catch each other's moves regarding the Liaodong region. In the midst of reticence of official exchange of information, information collecting activities were continued because in Liaodong both countries had retained keen interests in expanding their power and influence therein.

Yi Bangweon 李芳遠 (later King Taejong 太宗, r. 1400-18) tried to bring stability to the relations with the Ming after purging of the hardliners against the Ming, such as Jeong Dojeon 鄭道傳 and Nam Eun 南闡. The Jianwen emperor 建文帝 (r. 1398-1402) of the Ming, beset with domestic troubles, also tried to stabilize the relations of the two countries. The official diplomatic exchanges and communications with the Ming increased during the reign of King Taejong especially over the issues of repatriation of prisoners of war and drifters as well as trade. As the time passed into King Sejong's reign, the Liaodong Military Command (Liaodongdusi 遼東都司, hereafter LMC) emerged as an important contact point with respect to those administrative affairs between the two states. When it comes to urgent interstate matters, both dispatched diplomatic messengers first to the LMC, from which they were transmitted to the respective court.

The importance of the Liaodong Military Command as a communication channel in the early Joseon-Ming relations has not gained much scholarly interest. Given the frequent frictions in their early years of relations, many studies have tended to focus on the conflicting nature of the Joseon-Ming relationship surrounding the Liaodong area.<sup>1</sup> In the same vein, a number of studies have explored the means of collecting and dealing with information on the potential adversaries under the fluctuating in-

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<sup>1</sup> For the conflicts between Joseon and the Ming surrounding Liaodong, see Bak Weon-hyo, *Myeongcho Joseon gwangyesa yeongu* 明初朝鮮關係史研究 [Study of the relations between the early Ming and Joseon] (Seoul: Iljogak, 2002); Kim Han-gyu, *Yodongsa* [Study of the Liaodong history] (Seoul: Munhak gwa Jiseongsa, 2004); Nam Eui-hyeon, *Myeongdae Yodong Jibaejeongchaek yeongu* [Study on the control policy over Liaodong during the Ming era] (Chuncheon: Gangweon daehakgyo chulpanbu, 2008).

terstate circumstances, in particular, Joseon's information-gathering activities against the Ming.<sup>2</sup>

The tensions and disputes between Joseon and the Ming did not preclude their official and/or informal communication and exchange because both needed information about each other. Information collecting in pre-modern times relied heavily on human resources. Then, human contact and exchange, if official or secretive, was essential. Thus, Joseon and the Ming managed to maintain human contact and exchange to obtain necessary intelligence about each other even during the tumultuous times of their relations. With this in mind, the article explores changing methods of communication and exchange through Liaodong between Joseon and the Ming in the context of shifting relationships between the two countries after the founding of Joseon in 1392. By so doing, I believe, this approach will enable us to chart the simultaneity of confrontation and communication in international relations of Northeast Asia at that time.

## 2. Joseon's Information Collecting and Communication with the Ming in Its Early Years

At its beginning years, Joseon had been embroiled in a series of diplomatic conflicts with the Ming while subscribing to a policy of *sadae* 事大 (serving of the great). In order to detect the circumstances and moves of the Ming, the Joseon court had made continuous effort to collect related intelligence. Ever suspicious of Joseon, the Ming too had paid close attention to Joseon's moves in the Liaodong and Jurchen regions. Conventionally,

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<sup>2</sup> For the information-gathering activities in early Joseon, see Lee, Kyu-chul, "Joseon chogi daeoe jeongbo sujip hwaldong eui silsang gwa byeonhwa" [Realities and changes of the foreign information-gathering activities in early Joseon], *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 65 (2007); Lee, Kyu-chul, "Joseon chogi daeoe jeongbo eui sujip hwaldong gwa bogo gyengno" [Foreign information-gathering activities and its reporting channels], *Gunsa* 65 (2007); Kim Gyeongnok, "Joseon sidae daejungguk oegyo munseo wa oegyo jeongbo eui sujip-bojon chegye" [Diplomatic documents sent to China in the Joseon era, and the system for collecting and preserving foreign information], *Dongbuka yeoksa nonchong* 25 (2009); Gu Doyeong "16 segi Joseon dae Myeong sahaengdan eui jeongbo sujip gwa jeongboryeok" [Information-collecting capabilities of the Joseon envoys to the Ming in the sixteenth century], *Daedong munhwa yeongu* 95 (2016).

communications between the two states, except the official diplomatic missions, had been restricted but they had used a variety of intelligence-gathering resources to know each other.

The Liaodong region had become a venue of serious information-gathering activities by both the Ming court and the Joseon court, the second of which had inherited the late Goryeo's strategy towards the region. Since a great number of Goryeo people still resided in the region even after its demise, the Joseon court tried to expand its influence on them. On the other hand, ever since its inauguration the Ming had made an aggressive inroad into the region on the grounds that the Yuan forces still remained a real military threat on its northern frontier including Liaodong. Simultaneously, the Ming had much concern for the Joseon's interest in the region and worried about a possible military expedition by Joseon. As a matter of fact, the Joseon court considered sending an army into Liaodong to protect its interests there in good part because it viewed Liaodong as the most immediately accessible borderland to monitor the Ming's activities.

In the fourth year of the Hongwu reign (1371), when Liu Yi 劉益, a local warlord in Liaoyang Province yielded to the Ming authorities. The Ming court established the Office of Commissioner of Liaodong Guard (Liaodongwei zhihuishi si 遼東衛指揮使司), appointing him to its commissioner in charge<sup>3</sup> and making clear its strategy for extending power into the region.<sup>4</sup> In the meantime, in the fifth month of the same year a band of local generals like Hong Baobao, Ma Yanhui, and Badan rose in rebellion, and killed Liu Yi.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Naghachu 納哈出 (d. 1388), a powerful Mongol warlord, also began a military move.<sup>6</sup> Then, the Hongwu emperor

<sup>3</sup> *Ming Taizu shilu* [Veritable records of Ming Taizu] 61: 04/02/28 (壬午). All references henceforth from the *shilu* 實錄 (*sillok* in Korean) specify the book (*juan* 卷; *gweon* in Korean), followed by the date of the entry in reign year, month, day sequence. For example, "Ming Taizu shilu 61: 04/02/28" refers to *Ming Taizu shilu* book sixty one, year four of Ming Taizu's reign, twenty eighth day of the second lunar month.

<sup>4</sup> Yang Yang, *Mingdai Liaodong dushi* [The Liaodong Military Command in the Ming era] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1988), 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ming Taizu shilu* 65: 04/05/15 (丙寅).

<sup>6</sup> *Ming Taizu shilu* 66: 04/06/29 (庚戌).

洪武帝 (r. 1368-98) ordered that the Office of Commissioner-in-Charge of Stabilizing Liaodong Guard (Ding Liao duwei zhihuishi si 定遼都衛指揮使司) be established to command a network of local guards (*wei* 衛) across the Liaodong region.<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, in the tenth month of 1375, the office was renamed as the Office of Commissioner-in-Chief of Liaodong (Liaodong du zhihuishi si 遼東都指揮使司),<sup>8</sup> commonly called by its shortened name, the Liaodong Military Command (Liaodong dushi 遼東都司).

The Liaodong Military Command was bound to enter into military confrontation with the neighboring forces like the Mongols as well as Goryeo people. King Gongmin of Goryeo had already attempted several military excursions and his successor King Wu 禡王 (r. 1374-88) was ready to launch an expedition against Liaodong. In particular, much of the Liaodong region still reverberated the strong influence of the Mongols so the role of LMC was crucial in securing the Ming control over the region.

As it happened, the LMC could not increase its influence over the area by solely resorting to military means against its neighbors. Though the LMC was willing to get engaged in the military conflicts with Goryeo and Joseon, it also carried out non-military affairs like trade and administrative measures with them. For example, the Hongwu Emperor put the LMC in charge of conducting the affairs related to the trade of cows with Joseon.<sup>9</sup> The Ming's large-scale trade initiatives were conducted through the LMC.<sup>10</sup> Those early incidents anticipated the subsequent central role to be played by the LMC in conducting communications and exchange between Goryeo / Joseon and the Ming.

Goryeo had come into a number of diplomatic conflicts with the Ming to the point of having a military clash. Nonetheless, the relationship between the two states, though unstable, had been maintained through this communication channel in Liaodong. The conflict between Goryeo and the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ming Taizu shilu* 67: 04/07/01 (辛亥).

<sup>8</sup> *Ming Taizu shilu* 101: 08/10/27 (癸丑).

<sup>9</sup> *Ming Taizu shilu* 185: 20/09/20 (丁酉).

<sup>10</sup> *Ming Taizong shilu* [Veritable records of Ming Taizong] 32: 02/06/22 (t辛卯); *Ming Xuanzong shilu* [Veritable records of Ming Xuanzong] 28: 02/05/09 (丙申).

Ming had been intensified in that both states had wanted to extend power and influence over Liaodong, yet they had managed to keep a diplomatic relationship by exchanging official envoys and correspondences.<sup>11</sup> This pattern of the relations between Goryeo and the Ming had been carried into Joseon.

Joseon's first recorded communication with the LMC was to offer tribute horses. In the eighth month of 1392, the Joseon court ordered Director of the Office of Treating Guests Jeong Jawi 丁子偉 to send 1,000 tribute horses to Liaodong.<sup>12</sup> Again, in the eleventh month of the same year, the Joseon court ordered Director of the Provision Office Yi Eulsu 李乙修 to deliver 1,000 horses to Liaodong.<sup>13</sup> These events of horse trade show that the LMC was in a position to serve as a trade post when Liaodong had become the center for horse trade between Joseon and the Ming. As in the case of Goryeo, Joseon also utilized the horse-trade routes that had been opened between Goryeo and the Ming.<sup>14</sup>

When sending its envoys to the Ming, the Joseon court stressed that it had been owing to King Taejo's decision that the previous Goryeo armies had been averted from entering into Liaodong.<sup>15</sup> Through such a gesture, the Joseon court wanted to show that, different from Goryeo, it had neither

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<sup>11</sup> Jeong Dong-hun, "Goryeo sidae oegyo munseo yeon'gu" [Study on the diplomatic documents in the Goryeo era], Ph. D. dissertation, Seoul National University (2016), 537.

<sup>12</sup> *Taejo sillok* [Veritable records of King Taejo] 01: 01/08/27 (丙子). For the horse trade between the Ming and Goryeo and Joseon, see Kim Sunja, "Yeomal Seoncho Myeong gwaui ma muyeok" [Horse trade between the Ming and late Goryeo and early Joseon], In *Hanguk jungse Han Jung gwangyesa* [History of Korea-China relations in medieval Korea] (Seoul: Hyeon, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> *Taejo sillok* 03: 01/11/09 (丙戌).

<sup>14</sup> During King Gongmin's period, the Ming had attempted to attain horses from Jeju Island; in the next King U 禔王 (r. 1374-88)'s time, the Ming continued to demand tribute horses from Goryeo. King U and King Gongyang 恭讓王 (r. 1389-92) had tribute horses of 8,000 and 10,000 respectively delivered to Liaodong. When delivering a large herd of 10,000 horses, even divided into smaller groups of 1,000 horses, Goryeo must have faced a host of problems, such as travel routes and horse feed, which in turn necessitated further contacts with the Ming officials for the safe delivery of horses.

<sup>15</sup> *Taejo sillok* 01: 01/08/29 (戊寅): "遣前密直使 趙琳 赴京進表曰 權知高麗國事臣某言 伏惟小邦 自恭愍王無嗣 薨逝之後 幸眈子禍 冒姓竊位者 十有五年矣 迨至戊辰春 妄興師旅 將犯遼東 以臣爲都統使 率兵至鴨綠江 臣竊自念 小邦不可以犯上國之境 論諸將以大義 卽與還師 禍乃自知其罪 遜位子昌."

intention to confront the Ming nor military interest in Liaodong. Still, the founding leaders of Joseon did emphasize the revocation of the attack on Liaodong as an important rationale for King Taejo's accession to the throne.<sup>16</sup> They tried to make use of an attack on Liaodong as a leverage in handing the complex relationship with the Ming.

Another issue that brought Joseon and the Ming into contact in Liaodong was that of repatriation of war captives. In 1393, a Chinese person whom Jo On 趙溫, a Joseon field commander in the northwest region captured during his attack on Japanese pirates (*wakō* 倭寇) was repatriated to Liaodong.<sup>17</sup> From its beginning, Joseon made it a rule to repatriate Chinese prisoners of war, drifters, and transgressors back to the Ming via the LMC. However, despite its apparent stress on the official principle of noninvolvement in Liaodong, the Joseon court had an active interest in the region which was the indispensable passing route to its diplomatic missions to the Ming. For that reason, meeting local figures in the region was inevitable. Such contacts, done under the tense relations between the two countries, might trigger any diplomatic dispute by reason of the suspicious eyes of the Ming court.

In 1393, the Ming court questioned the Joseon's activities in Liaodong by dispatching the two envoys Huang Yǒngqī 黃永奇 and Cui Yuan 崔淵. The imperial edict pointed out the Joseon's activities in Liaodong as follows.

[The Joseon court] sent men to Liaodong and offered silk and gold and silver, pretending to conduct etiquette. Yet, the intent lied in luring our border generals. This was the second case of committing an act of offense.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Taejo sillok* 01: 01/07/17 (丙申); *Taejo sillok* 01: 01/07/18 (丁酉).

<sup>17</sup> *Taejo sillok* 03: 02/03/29 (甲戌): “西北面都巡問使趙溫擊倭寇于隨州獲寧海州人李唐信以獻命衣糧遣前判典儀寺事金乙祥管送遼東。”

<sup>18</sup> *Taejo sillok* 03: 02/05/23 (丁卯): “欽差內史黃永奇崔淵等奉帝手詔來上率百官迎于宣義門外前導至壽昌宮聽詔行禮詔曰... 一遣人至遼將布帛金銀之類假以行禮爲由意在誘我邊將此生釁二也。”

The edict expressed the suspicion with which the Ming court saw the Joseon court's offering of silk, gold, and silver to the Liaodong generals in the name of conducting etiquette. It is highly likely that the Ming court suspected the Joseon court of distributing a form of bribes to the generals, who might supply needed information in return. The Joseon court sent a memorial (*pyomun* 表文) to contend that offering gifts was an honest act of expressing courtesy and there was no ulterior purpose of winning over the generals.

In addition, the memorial promised to track down the fugitives from Liaodong to Joseon and to repatriate them back to Liaodong.<sup>19</sup> While admitting that the residents of Liaodong fled to Joseon, the Joseon court also vindicated that a great number of them had been the erstwhile Goryeo immigrants to Liaodong who had longed to return to their native land to rejoin their families. But, the Ming court believed that Joseon took interest in resettling Liaodong residents into its territory and approached the local officials at the LMC. Judging by the Ming responses to the incident, it seems to me that information gathering and spying on Liaodong by way of making a close tie with the Ming authorities in that region could be an important role of the Joseon diplomats during their mission.

Nonetheless, the tense relations between Joseon and the Ming did not necessarily exclude official communications that the two states wanted to maintain. In the sixth month of 1393, the LMC sent a battalion commander (*qianhu* 千戶) Gaokuokuochu 高闊闕出 to deliver to the Joseon court an official message (*ziwen* 咨文) of the Board of Rites (Libu 禮部) about payment for the price of horses Joseon had sent.<sup>20</sup> As it happened, official messages between the Ming court and the Joseon court were not always directly sent to each other but instead to the LMC first so that it could deliver

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<sup>19</sup> *Taejo sillok* 03: 02/06/01 (乙亥).

<sup>20</sup> *Taejo sillok* 03: 02/06/06 (庚辰): “遼東都指揮使司差千戶高闊闕出齎禮部咨來其咨曰洪武二十年二月二十八日禮部署部事儀部主事蓋霖等官將遼東都司實收過高麗節次解到馬數於奉天門奉聖旨爾禮部照依馬數將紵絲絛布差官運去給還他價欵此除欵遵外今將該給馬價段匹絛布差揮同知王鼎等管運前去計實收過馬九千八百八十八匹給紵絲絛布各一匹共運去各色紵絲絛布萬九千七百六十四匹紵絲九千八百八十八匹絛布九千八百八十八匹。”

them to each side. As such, the LMC mediated the two courts in times of their tense relations as in the case of King Taejo's era.

This pattern of intermediary communication via the LMC could be a substitute channel between the two governments when a rupture of direct communication between them happened. For example, because of the Hongwu Emperor's decree banning Joseon envoys from entering into the Ming territory, the congratulatory and gratitude missions sent by the Joseon court were stopped at Liaodong in 1393.<sup>21</sup> In order to submit the memorials to the Ming court, Joseon had no choice but to rely on the help of the LMC.<sup>22</sup> Still, the Joseon court did not remain helpless. A royal secretary Jo Eon 曹彦 was ordered to lead and return back those fugitives from Liaodong.<sup>23</sup> At that time, the Joseon court managed to send a message clarifying its position. Remarkably, like the messages from the Ming court to the Joseon court, the message from the Joseon court to the Ming Board of Rites was sent via the LMC. Again, the LMC served as a substitute channel of communication between the two countries.

Nevertheless, the role of the LMC as an agency for information exchange and gathering was limited according to the unsettling nature that the initial relations between Joseon and the Ming had displayed. Without officially established routes for obtaining information, the two countries sought for alternative means like espionage to know more about each other's moves especially in times of the heightened diplomatic conflicts. In the first month of 1394, the Ming court sent an official message of the Office of Left Military Governor (Zuojun dudufu 左軍都督府) carried by the imperial envoys Lu Tanai 盧他乃, Piao Delong 朴德龍, and Zheng Cheng 鄭澄. The official message included an interrogation report of Choe Dok'I 崔禿伊, whom the Ming authorities suspected as a spy dispatched by Joseon. In the report, Choe and others were quoted as confessing that they had engaged in collecting intelligence around the Ninghai Guard 寧海衛 in

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<sup>21</sup> *Taejo sillok* 04: 02/07/28 (辛未); *Taejo sillok* 04: 02/08/02 (乙亥).

<sup>22</sup> *Taejo sillok* 04: 02/08/02 (乙亥).

<sup>23</sup> *Taejo sillok* 04: 02/08/29 (壬寅).

Shandong and that they had spread a rumor of Joseon's impending attack against Liaodong.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding the question raised by the Ming, the Joseon court did not put forward any serious response, unlike other diplomatic issues with the Ming. It appears that the Joseon court actually dispatched the Choe squad for espionage activities, as officially claimed by the Ming envoys, and hence had little counterevidence to refute the Ming claim. Afterwards, the Ming further charged the Joseon court with the espionage activities by Jang Galmae 張葛買<sup>25</sup> and Ho Deok 胡德.<sup>26</sup> Though Choe, Jang, and Ho acted under different circumstances, according to the Ming authorities, all were considered part of Joseon's spying activity on the Ming.<sup>27</sup> In the end, the Joseon court dispatched Yi Bangweon (later King Taejong) in response to the Ming demand for sending a prince and presented a memorial clarifying the diplomatic questions raised by the Ming.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, the Ming relented and began to accept Joseon envoys coming through Liaodong.<sup>29</sup> Joseon sent again tribute horses to Liaodong<sup>30</sup> and repatriated Chinese residents and soldiers who fled from Liaodong.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the communications and exchanges through the LMC were restored.

At the same time, Joseon also saw the moves of the Ming in Liaodong with suspicion. The Joseon court decided to execute the Buddhist monk Juewu 覺悟 from Liaodong on the basis of his confession that he had been dispatched by the Ming authorities to spy on circumstances of Jo-

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<sup>24</sup> *Taejo sillok* 05: 03/01/12 (壬子).

<sup>25</sup> *Taejo sillok* 05: 03/02/19 (己丑).

<sup>26</sup> *Taejo sillok* 05: 03/04/04 (癸酉).

<sup>27</sup> For an analysis on those three incidents, see Lee, Kyu-chul, "Joseon chogi daeoc jeongbo sujip hwaldong eui silsang gwa byeonhwa" [Realities and changes of the foreign information-gathering activities in early Joseon], *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 65 (2007), 296-98.

<sup>28</sup> *Taejo sillok* 06: 03/06/07 (乙亥).

<sup>29</sup> *Taejo sillok* 06: 03/08/08 (乙亥).

<sup>30</sup> *Taejo sillok* 06: 03/08/21 (戊子); *Taejo sillok* 06: 03/09/05 (壬寅).

<sup>31</sup> *Taejo sillok* 07: 04/01/19 (甲寅); *Taejo sillok* 07: 04/02/22 (丙戌).

seon.<sup>32</sup> In the sixth month of 1398, a certain Ming prisoner of war Jin Song 金松, presumably a Joseon escapee from the Ming, fled to Joseon and revealed the invaluable information regarding Prince of Yan's (Yanwang 燕王: later Yongle Emperor) defeat of the Mongol armies in Liaodong. The Joseon court decided not to send Kim back to the Ming authorities and made him resettle in Korea.<sup>33</sup> The Joseon court was fairly selective in repatriating defectors from Liaodong because many of them could supply fresh information invaluable within the context of its precarious relationship with the Ming.

### 3. Improvement of the Relations and Communications between Joseon and the Ming

During the reign of King Jeongjong 定宗 (r. 1398-1400) and the early years of King Taejong 太宗 (r. 1400-18), the diplomatic communication between Joseon and the Ming had been hardly improved. At the time, the best source of information for Joseon was the soldiers from Liaodong who defected to Joseon in fear of military service during the rebellion led by Prince of Yan. In the third month of 1399, one soldier of Goryeo descent, affiliated with the Ming Dongning Guard 東寧衛, fled to Joseon and reported important information about Prince of Yan. According to him, the prince visited Nanjing to attend a memorial service of the late Hongwu emperor, declined the order of the Jianwen emperor to enter the city by himself, and returned to his principedom at Beijing to rally armies against the emperor.<sup>34</sup> One concern raised by the uprising by Prince of Yan was a possibility of the Ming Dingliao Guard's surrender to Joseon. Discussing this matter with Jeon Backyeong 全伯英, a director of the Office of Loyal Lectures (Gyeongyeon 經筵), Jeongjong worried about Joseon being embroiled with the Ming internal conflict in such case. Another director Gweon Geun 權近

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<sup>32</sup> *Taejo sillok* 07: 04/05/18 (庚戌).

<sup>33</sup> *Taejo sillok* 14: 07/06/10 (甲寅).

<sup>34</sup> *Jeongjong sillok* [Veritable records of King Jeongjong] 01: 01/03/01 (壬申).

(1352-1409) also agreed with him.<sup>35</sup> Such being the case, the Joseon court accepted the defectors from the Dingliao Guard and kept collecting information about the civil strife between the Jianwen emperor and Prince of Yan.<sup>36</sup>

The civil strife in the Ming brought about a turning point in expanding its communication with Joseon. Due to the complex domestic turmoil, the Jianwen emperor did not afford to make confrontation with foreign countries like Joseon; rather, he sought for aid from Joseon. Hence, he granted the imperial mandate (*gaoming* 誥命) and official seal (*yingxin* 印信) declined by the Hongwu emperor to normalize the relations between the two countries.<sup>37</sup> A Ming request for 10,000 horses in the summer of 1401 was accepted by Joseon,<sup>38</sup> making it possible to conduct large-scale trade in the Liaodong region between them. Joseon's horses and Ming's payment for them were all transacted in Liaodong.

At the time, the Ming envoys, dispatched to Joseon to handle the horse trade affairs such as transportation and payment, were Zhu Mengxian 祝孟獻, Vice Minister of the Court of Imperial Stud (Taipusi 太僕侍), and Lu Yong 陸顥, a secretary from the Board of Rites (Libu 禮部).<sup>39</sup> Following the envoys' arrival, the Ming court sent the two figures, Song Hao 宋鏞 and Xiang An 相安 from the Directorate of Education (Guozijian 國子監) to talk about the price for horses. The price for horses was paid in 90,000 bolts of silk and cotton cloth, including medicinal materials, all of which were shipped in 150 wagons drawn by 300 horses and oxen.<sup>40</sup> Even if trade with the Ming had been conducted sporadically through Liaodong since

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<sup>35</sup> *Jeongjong sillok* 04: 02/05/17 (辛巳).

<sup>36</sup> *Jeongjong sillok* 05: 02/09/19 (庚辰).

<sup>37</sup> *Taejong sillok* [Veritable records of King Taejong] 01: 01/03/06 (乙丑).

<sup>38</sup> *Taejong sillok* 02: 01/09/01 (丁亥).

<sup>39</sup> *Taejong sillok* 02: 01/09/01 (丁亥).

<sup>40</sup> *Taejong sillok* 02: 01/09/15 (辛丑). When Zhu Mengxian came to know that the Joseon court wanted more of the horse price, he promised to report the matter to the Ming court as soon as he would arrive at the LMC (*Taejong sillok* 02: 01/12/14 (戊辰)). Thus, in the early years of King Taejong, the Ming set a precedent to make official use of the LMC as an intermediate point of communication between the two countries after a period of rupture in their relations.

the declining years of Goryeo, such a large-scale horse trade, done in response to the Ming request after its internal warfare, opened a path to a better relationship between Joseon and the Ming. Thus, after a period of tension the Liaodong region became important in terms of international trade and diplomatic communication between the two states.

Another central issue between Joseon and the Ming was the problem of runaway soldiers and refugees who fled from Liaodong to Joseon. From the start of Taejong's rule, an increasing number of Liaodong soldiers and residents of Goryeo descent flowed into Joseon to avoid starvation, military service, and the turbulent condition caused by the military struggle between the Jianwen Emperor and Prince of Yan.<sup>41</sup>

As for the ethnic Goryeo refugees from Liaodong, Joseon took a conciliatory measure by resettling them in the southern provinces. In 1402, Jeong Hon 鄭渾, a commissioner for the northwest region, proposed that Goryeo people who had fled to Liaoyang and returned be relocated to the southern three provinces (*hasamdo* 下三道) for military service because, when allowed to stay around the Amnok (Ch. Yalu) River, they were likely to return to Liaoyang. Taejong accepted his proposal and ordered them to resettle in those provinces.<sup>42</sup> In fact, since 1399 the refugees from Liaodong had been given food and resettled in the southern provinces.<sup>43</sup>

Joseon was eager to accommodate the refugees from Liaoyang and resettle them within its territories not only because they had been originally its subjects, but also because they were an important source of information related to the ongoing internal conflicts between the Jianwen Emperor and the Prince of Yan. In 1402, a Liaodong soldier Zhu Jing 朱景 and others fled to Euiju 義州 and reported that the Jianwen Emperor's armies entered

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<sup>41</sup> For the problems of refugees from Liaodong (*mansangun* 漫散軍) in the early years of Joseon, see Bak Weonho, *Myeongcho Joseon gwangyesa yeon'gu* [Study on the relations between the early Ming and Joseon] (Seoul: Ilchogak, 2002), 145-50.

<sup>42</sup> *Taejong sillok* 03: 02/02/04 (丁巳).

<sup>43</sup> *Taejong sillok* 03: 02/03/14 (丁酉): “分置遼東逃來人等於江原道及東北面初遼東人男女九十名逃來義州又民一百五十戶乘桴越江到泥城云燕軍大興衛領軍楊大人棄城降于燕故畏而逃來上令議政府分置之給糧又移西北面各州安置己卯年以後向國逃來人於下三道各州給糧。”

the area while attacking the armies of Prince of Yan. Thereupon, Taejong dispatched Yu Gwisan 庾龜山, Director of the Office of Royal Provisions (Naejasi 內資寺), to Euiju to explore the state of affairs surrounding the Ming.<sup>44</sup> Shortly thereafter, some groups of Goryeo refugees from Liaodong fled to Euiju and Yiseong and reported that the armies of Prince Yan were overwhelmingly victorious.<sup>45</sup>

The intensified conflicts within the Ming made it hard for Joseon to send official envoys or to exchange letters with the LMC. The most needed information about the latest developments within the Ming could not be obtained through the official channels of communication. As a result, the recent information supplied by the soldiers and residents from Liaoyang was highly valued by the Joseon court. Now that the border city of Euiju was closest to the Ming in obtaining any valuable information about it, the news from the mouth of those fleeing from Liaodong could be substantially updated to grasp recent developments.

Before long, a Ming general from Liaodong leading 5,000 soldiers arrived at the border of Joseon and requested for permission to cross the river to capture the runaway soldiers. Upon receiving the report, Taejong initially suspected that the militarized refugees, whom he had already accepted, originally came from Goryeo. Yet, as the Ming general enumerated such names as Yi Hwasang, Kim Jadamni, Impalsilni,<sup>46</sup> Yi Jeoni and others, the Joseon court informed the Ming general that no man in the list had been found in Joseon and promised their return whenever capturing them.<sup>47</sup>

Just two days after the Joseon court's reply to the Ming general, Ham Yeongeon 咸英彦, a Joseon battalion commander at Euiju had an audience with Taejong, reporting that a battalion command of the Dongning Guard (Dongningwei 東寧衛) Impallsilli 林八刺失里 with 3,000 households re-

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<sup>44</sup> *Taejong sillok* 03: 02/03/13 (丙申).

<sup>45</sup> *Taejong sillok* 03: 02/03/14 (丁酉).

<sup>46</sup> Impalsilni 林八失你, a Jurchen chief, may well be identical with Impallsilli 林八刺失里 in the *Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty (Joseon wangjo sillok 朝鮮王朝實錄)*. By and large, it was common that names of many Jurchens were written differently in Chinese characters.

<sup>47</sup> *Taejong sillok* 03: 02/04/03 (乙卯).

volted against the Ming and pronounced his intention to submit to Joseon.<sup>48</sup> It is possible that the Taejong feigned his ignorance about Impallalsilli's rebellion against the Ming when he replied to the Ming general because he might already have had the report of the rebellion even before meeting with Ham Yeongon. Being aware of it or not, Taejong did not let the Ming general know about the presence of Impallalsilli. Afterwards, Taejong accepted Impallalsilli's submission to the Joseon court.

While allowing for the protection of the refugee armies (*mansangun* 漫散軍) led by Impallalsilli, Taejong chose to provide the Ming with the information about another refugee armies. He did inform the Ming envoy Zhu Mengxian that the refugee armies had raided against the border area of Joseon. The king, however, instructed the Joseon translator Choe Un 崔雲, sent to the Ming authorities, to report the information about the refugee armies as follows.

When you make it to the Dingliao Guard (Dingliaowei 定遼衛), just say that the refugee armies encamped themselves around the Poju area but their next movement is unknown. If the people of Liaodong (i.e., the Ming authorities) would want to raise armies and attack them, tell them that the mountains and rivers in the Poju area sits perilous without allowing the large armies to access it.<sup>49</sup>

Although informing the Ming authorities of current whereabouts of the refugee armies, the king ordered Choe to assure the Ming authorities in Liaodong that they are mobile beyond the grasp of the Ming armies due to rugged landscape. Reading between the lines, it seems that Taejong had no mind to provide accurate information about the refugee armies.

What is more, knowing that Impallalsilli had revolted against the

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<sup>48</sup> *Taejong sillok* 03: 02/04/05 (丁巳): “義州千戶咸英彥入見李彬使英彥詣闕且啓英彥自遼東還言路見本國人劉仁伯言東寧衛千戶林八刺失里率三千餘戶而叛河指揮姚千戶等率一千五百餘兵追逐盡爲八刺失里所殺衆首路岐又多殺瀋陽開原兩衛軍馬渡鋪州江口欲附朝鮮若不計入願爲農事於此地以居。”

<sup>49</sup> *Taejong sillok* 03: 02/04/16 (戊辰): “汝去定遼衛但言漫散軍來屯鋪州等處不知其指向遼東人若欲領兵討之汝言鋪州等處山水深險大軍不可往也。”

Ming authorities and the Ming armies had chased him, the king decided to accept his group. The king would provide Impallalsilli and his refugee armies with protection as opposed to the Ming armies. The Joseon court was being thrown into a debate with respect to whether to return Impallalsilli and his refugee armies to the Ming authorities or not.<sup>50</sup> Eventually, the claim to accept them as the country's own subjects prevailed and they were regrouped and resettled in the southern provinces.<sup>51</sup> The decision seems to be influenced in good part by the unstable internal conditions of the Ming. The way Impallalsilli was treated by the Joseon court points to the state of tension between Joseon and the Ming in the military matters surrounding Liaodong.

However, when the hitherto uncertain conditions were settled with the victory of Prince of Yan (later the Yongle Emperor), the attitude of Joseon changed drastically. In the ninth month of 1402, the translator Gang Bang'u 康邦祐 reported that on the thirteenth day of the sixth month Prince of Yan had triumphed, followed by the suicide of the Jianwen emperor, and ascended the imperial throne on the seventeenth day of the same month. Gang also reported that Yu Shiji 俞士吉, a censor of the Censorate (Duchayuan 都察院) and Wang Tai 汪泰, a vice minister of the Court of State Ceremonial (Honglusi 鴻臚寺) had left for Joseon with an ascension decree of the Yongle Emperor.<sup>52</sup> Joseon most likely obtained this news through the LMC which renewed its bridging role between the Joseon and the Ming court in their communication.

In the twelfth month of the same year, the Joseon court sent out an order across the country that runaway soldiers from Liaodong be tracked down in order to be deported. That was a preemptive measure prior to the new Ming court under the Yongle Emperor.<sup>53</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Joseon court ordered the minister of the Ministry of Punishment (Hyeongjo 刑曹)

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<sup>50</sup> *Taejong sillok* 03: 02/05/08 (庚寅).

<sup>51</sup> *Taejong sillok* 04: 02/09/17 (丁酉).

<sup>52</sup> *Taejong sillok* 04: 02/09/28 (戊申).

<sup>53</sup> *Taejong sillok* 04: 02/12/13 (壬戌).

Jin Euigwi 陳義貴 to arrest Impallalsilli and send him back to Liaodong.<sup>54</sup> In the third month of the next year, the court ordered the assistant minister of the State Council (Uijeongbu 議政府) Hwang Geojeong 黃居正 to compose a memorial (*jubon* 奏本) to let the Ming court know about the deportation of the refugee soldiers.<sup>55</sup> After the ascension of the Yongle emperor, the Joseon court did not disturb the Ming request for sending back runaway soldiers to Liaodong any longer and became transparent in reporting accurate information about them to the Ming. Sending back Impallalsilli and other refugees, the Joseon court set a defining precedent for handling the future cases of Liaodong soldiers and residents who would flee to Joseon. Obviously, after the Yongle Emperor came to power Joseon did not take any more strategic interest in Liaodong as a land for its advancement.

As seen above, the issue of defectors prompted communications between the LMC and the Joseon court. In particular, because of the increasing number of runaway soldiers and residents from Liaodong to Joseon in the aftermath of the internal conflicts within the Ming, the LMC made frequent contacts with the Joseon court in view of their repatriation. Joseon became convinced that the Yongle Emperor had a determined will to bring them back to the Ming and began to comply to the Ming's demand. The list of returnees included not only Liaodong soldiers and residents but also ethnic Chinese who had fled to Joseon or who had been captured by the Japanese pirates; all of them were to be shipped back to Liaodong.

By the sixth and seventh years of Taejong (1406 and 1407), the relations between Joseon and the Ming were stabilized with increased contacts and exchanges. To begin with, the administrative matters, centering on tribute trade and repatriation of prisoners of war, triggered more communications between Joseon and the LMC. In particular, the audience of the Joseon prince with the Ming emperor contributed much to the improvement of relations.<sup>56</sup> Since Liaodong was the inevitable passage of the Joseon

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<sup>54</sup> *Taejong sillok* 04: 02/12/23 (壬申).

<sup>55</sup> *Taejong sillok* 05: 03/03/22 (乙亥).

<sup>56</sup> *Taejong sillok* 13: 07/06/21 (癸卯); *Taejong sillok* 14: 07/09/07 (丁巳).

prince on his way to the Ming court, the two courts used the LMC as the communication channel in implementing varied necessary diplomatic and administrative measures.

As a matter of fact, to the Joseon court the LMC was the biggest source of information about recent changes and developments surrounding the interstate relations including those between the Ming and the Mongols. In 1409 the translator Jeon Eui 全義 returning from Liaodong reported that the Ming court had dispatched Haishou 海壽 to Joseon to crosscheck the intelligence that Joseon would raise armies to help the Tartars 韃靼.<sup>57</sup> In the next year, the translator Yi Jayeong 李子瑛 from Liaodong also reported that the Tartar armies had defeated Ming armies at the Kaiyuan and Jinshan areas but retreated after a failed raid against a northern gate of the LMC.<sup>58</sup> The translator Yi Yong 李龍 also reported that a Liaodong army of 10,000 strong, while moving to Beijing, had suffered a decimating defeat at a battle with the Tartars.<sup>59</sup> The translator Bak Mu 朴茂 also reported that the Tartar attacks had subsided and Liaodong people went back to their normal defense and life.<sup>60</sup>

Significantly, all these Korean translators collected important information about the Ming defenses and the military interactions with its neighbors in the Liaodong region by making use of both official and informal sources of information from the LMC. Thus, the LMC emerged as Joseon's most important site for information collecting activities.<sup>61</sup> Along this line, the Joseon court accelerated its personnel's information collecting activities in the LMC in order to know more about the Yongle Emperor's recent moves including his northern expedition, the military confrontations,

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<sup>57</sup> *Taejong sillok* 18: 09/11/18 (丙戌).

<sup>58</sup> *Taejong sillok* 19: 10/01/14 (辛巳).

<sup>59</sup> *Taejong sillok* 19: 10/01/16 (癸未).

<sup>60</sup> *Taejong sillok* 19: 10/02/06 (癸卯).

<sup>61</sup> Besides their official tasks, Joseon officials dispatched to the LMC were required to collect information about recent moves and developments concerning the Ming and other forces. For example, in 1410 (the tenth year of Taejong), the Joseon court ordered Jo Sadeok 曹士德, who escorted a Chinese captive from Japan to Liaodong, to gather information related to the Ming (*Taejong sillok* 19: 10/01/17 (甲申)).

and the Ming internal administration.<sup>62</sup> Besides, the court came to know via the Liaodong sources that the Japanese pirates had looted the Lushun area.<sup>63</sup>

Following Taejong, King Sejong 世宗 (r. 1418-50) also continued the information collecting activities through the LMC and understood such crucial developments as the movements of the Tartars against the Ming,<sup>64</sup> the response of the emperor to them,<sup>65</sup> and the results of military confrontations.<sup>66</sup> Remarkably, the Sejong era witnessed Joseon supplying military information on the Japanese pirates to the Ming via the LMC. In 1419, upon the ascension of Sejong, Joseon sent a punitive expedition against Tsushima Island, a stronghold of the Japanese pirates. Prior to the expedition, the Joseon court had provided the Ming with the recent movements of the Japanese. The original source of the information came from a certain Kim Deukgwan 金得觀, once a Chinese prisoner of war in Japan, who had fled to Joseon with the information about the Japanese impending raid to the Ming coast.<sup>67</sup> The Joseon court had debated over the methods of how to convey Kim's information to the Ming and decided to send him in person for reporting.<sup>68</sup>

In addition, the Joseon court repatriated 130 Chinese prisoners of war to Liaodong, who had been saved during the course of the expedition campaign as above.<sup>69</sup> Even though an official report of the expedition to the Ming has not been found, it is highly likely that during the repatriation procedure, some details of the expedition could have been reported to the LMC to explain how the 130 Chinese captives had been rescued by the Joseon armies, another example of the way important military information

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<sup>62</sup> *Taejong sillok* 28: 14/09/19 (己丑).

<sup>63</sup> *Taejong sillok* 30: 15/07/23 (戊午).

<sup>64</sup> *Sejong sillok* [Veritable records of King Sejong] 14: 03/12/12 (辛丑).

<sup>65</sup> *Sejong sillok* 16: 04/04/17 (癸卯).

<sup>66</sup> *Sejong sillok* 18: 04/11/07 (庚申).

<sup>67</sup> *Sejong sillok* 03: 01/01/13 (戊午).

<sup>68</sup> *Sejong sillok* 03: 01/01/15 (庚申).

<sup>69</sup> *Sejong sillok* 04: 01/07/21 (甲子).

was exchanged through the LMC between Joseon and the Ming.

Following the previous precedent of sending the crown prince Yangnyeong 讓寧大君 (1394-1462) during the era of Taejong, Sejong also planned to send his crown prince to Beijing to have audience with the emperor. Yet, the Xuande Emperor 宣德帝 (r. 1425-35) dispatched the imperial envoy Ruan Chi 阮赤 to the LMC to stop the visit of the Joseon crown prince to Beijing.<sup>70</sup> The magistrate of border town Euiju (Euiju moksa 義州牧使) Namgung Gye 南宮啓 reported the words of Ruan Chi.

Yun Bong 尹鳳 had returned to Beijing and reported that the crown prince of Joseon had departed for the Ming court on the twenty fifth day of the ninth month for audience. The emperor ordered that the audience be suspended and that Ruan Chi be dispatched to Liaodong with the imperial decree to be delivered to a Joseon translator there. The imperial decree arrived there but there was no Joseon translator waiting there. Then, Zhi Hui 指揮 and Fan Rong 范榮 (i.e., Ming envoys) were ordered to depart for the Joseon court with the imperial decree.<sup>71</sup>

The episode reveals that communicating the matter of urgent care was conducted through the LMC. The Ming court sent the urgent message of the emperor to stop the visit of the Joseon crown prince who had been reported to have already departed, assuming that the Joseon translator could receive the imperial message to be delivered to the Joseon court. It should be noted that the Ming court sent the urgent message to the LMC by taking it for granted that Joseon translator messengers were available there because by that time it had become customary for Joseon translators to conduct official businesses almost routinely at the LMC.

The eras of Taejong and Sejong witnessed that the LMC established itself as the locus of diplomatic communication and exchange between Jo-

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<sup>70</sup> *Sejong sillok* 38: 09/10/18 (壬申).

<sup>71</sup> *Sejong sillok* 38: 09/11/08 (壬辰): “尹鳳回到北京奏朝鮮世子爲朝見今九月二十五日發程帝勅世子停朝見令赤捧勅到遼東傳授朝鮮通事入來者火迫傳送有聖旨到此無朝鮮通事來到者傳授指揮范榮等出送。”

seon and the Ming. Both Joseon and the Ming sent urgent messages first to the LMC, from which they traveled through the inland channels of the respective country. Even though the translators and other officials from Joseon did not have their permanent offices at the LMC, Joseon officials were dispatched to the LMC with a variety of tasks, such as giving notice of parental funeral (chinsang 親喪) of Ming eunuch of Korean descent (hwaja 火者), explanatory missions (jiljeongwan 質正官), and trade. Besides, it was at the LMC that the Ming imperial decrees and messages were copied to be sent to the Joseon court<sup>72</sup> and information about impending or current missions were exchanged.<sup>73</sup> Important military information about invasions of neighboring forces and their defenses was also collected at the LMC and reported to the respective court. Accordingly, the detailed information about diplomatic missions of each country, such as date of departure from the capital, travel itinerary, size of mission, purpose of mission and summary of official decree and letter, was sent first to the LMC. That is how Joseon and the Ming continued diplomatic communication and exchange via the LMC throughout the fifteenth century.

#### 4. Conclusion

In its beginning years, Joseon came into frequent conflicts with the Ming surrounding the Liaodong and Jurchen regions. Joseon made strenuous efforts to collect information about the Ming's internal conditions and movements. On the other hand, the Ming held doubts and suspicions about Joseon and kept an eye on any development in those areas. Even though the official exchange of diplomatic missions was restrained, both countries made use of human resources and networks to collect information about each other. Even under their tense relations Joseon and the Ming continued to communicate to handle such matters as repatriation of war captives and shipwrecked people, and trade. In their communication and exchange, the

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<sup>72</sup> *Sejong sillok* 22: 05/11/05 (壬午); *Sejong sillok* 42: 10/11/04 (壬子).

<sup>73</sup> *Sejong sillok* 25: 06/09/23 (乙未).

LMC (Liaodong Military Command) emerged as the mediating center of the two countries. The diplomatic correspondences like official letters were sent first to the LMC before they traveled onwards through the domestic route of the respective country.

King Taejong devoted himself to the task of putting his court on good terms with the Ming court. In the meantime, the Jianwen Emperor refrained from antagonizing Joseon due to the troubled internal conditions. In fact, he sought for aids from Joseon in exchange of imperial mandate and official seal which had been denied to Joseon by the Hongwu Emperor. The issue of runaway soldiers and residents from Liaodong to Joseon contributed to the increase of communications between the two countries. Due to the civil war between the Jianwen Emperor and Prince of Yan, many people in the Liaodong region fled to Joseon. The LMC often made contact with the Joseon court to demand their return. The Joseon court, however, wanted to resettle them within its territory and tried to evade such demand by citing the difficulty of knowing their whereabouts. When the victorious Prince of Yan ascended the throne as the Yongle Emperor, the Joseon court was assured of the Ming's determined will and began to track down and repatriate the refugee soldiers and residents from Liaodong. Under these circumstances, the Chinese prisoners of war, captured by the Japanese pirates and salvaged by the Joseon authorities, were also to be returned back to the LMC.

From the era of Taejong onwards, the Joseon court and the LMC increased their communications to handle many issues of administrative nature, such as repatriation of fugitives and conducting tribute trade. The LMC played a crucial role in mediating the two courts in their communication. The urgent messages were sent first to the LMC so that they could be conveyed to the respective court through domestic routes. Even though Joseon's translators and officials did not reside at the LMC on a permanent basis, Joseon officials with varied tasks were dispatched in succession. It was at the LMC that the Ming imperial decrees and messages were copied to be sent to the Joseon court and information about impending or current missions was exchanged there. It became customary that the detailed information about diplomatic missions of each country, such as date of departure

from the capital, travel itinerary, size of mission, purpose of mission and summary of official decree and letter, was all sent first to the LMC. Moreover, important military information about invasions of neighboring forces and their defenses was collected at the LMC and reported to the respective court. Therefore, it can be said that the relationship between Joseon and the Ming was vitally improved in the fifteenth century when both countries had strong need to envision a new and constructive pattern of communication through the LMC.

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