# Of Parts and Wholes: Reading Sangpil Jin's *Surviving Imperial Intrigues: Korea's Struggles for Neutrality Amid Empires, 1882-1907*

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Sangpil Jin has done a service to the field in writing the first monograph in English on the attempts to establish Chosŏn 朝鮮, and later the Han Empire 大韓帝國, as a neutral state after the models of Switzerland, Belgium, and Bulgaria. While accounts of these various proposals are available in existing publications in English, Korean, and Japanese, as is apparent from Jin's bibliography, Jin's work places all of them together in a single work to form a narrative history of the question of Korean neutrality over the twenty-five years from 1882 until the Second Hague Peace Conference of 1907. In so doing, Jin invites readers to consider the history of Korean foreign relations from a distinctly extra-regional, international perspective uncommon in diplomatic histories of the period. It is this reframing that is perhaps the most interesting and intriguing contribution Jin presents to a subject that already boasts decades of scholarship in multiple languages.

In the Introduction, Jin explains the aims of the work, provides a rather brisk literature review, enumerates his research questions, and dis-

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* Korean words and phrases are romanized in McCune-Resichauer, Chinese in pinyin, and Japanese in Hepburn.

cusses the broad array of primary source materials upon which he has created his narrative, including diplomatic documents, newspapers, diaries, and the like from Korea, Japan, China, Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, the United States, Italy, and the Netherlands. Jin seeks to determine who made what neutralization proposals, when, where, and how. He also aims to identify the factors that led to the ultimate failure of these proposals and to make comparison with European cases to further delineate the conditions that engender successful neutralization strategies. The answers to these empirical questions, Jin maintains, will enable him to challenge two positions in the existing literature: 1) Korean neutralization was ultimately impossible because there was insufficient international interest, and 2) The governments of Chosŏn and the Han Empire were passive actors in international diplomacy.

Jin proceeds with six chapters detailing the dozens of neutrality discussions and proposals. Each of these chapters is conceived in terms of rivalries between powers that sought to dominate Chosŏn and the Han Empire, starting with the Sino-Japanese rivalry of 1882-1885, the Anglo-Russian rivalry of 1885-1887, the Sino-Japanese rivalry of 1887-1897, the Russo Japanese rivalry of 1897-1903, and finally, the Russo-Japanese rivalry of 1903-1907. He ends the work with a concluding chapter that summarizes the previous chapters and makes reference to more modern neutrality proposals for a future unified Korea and other smaller states that may consider the story of Korean neutrality as a tutorial in policy pitfalls.
This typology is curious in that it tends to undermine Jin's assertion that the Chosŏn state was active itself in creating neutralization proposals; the book is wholly structured around the agendas of Qing, Japan, Britain, and Russia, rather than any particular plan the Chosŏn state may have had in mind. The chapter titles alone provide some insight into the international character of the neutrality question, as well as Jin's approach. Chosŏn neutrality in the 1880s was primarily a concern of foreign governments and intelligentsia. Chapter 2 well illuminates the international quality of the calls for Chosŏn neutrality in this period with accounts of the many proposals from Inoue Kowashi 井上毅, Gustave Boissonade, Inoue Kaoru 井上馨, Enomoto Takeaki 榎本武揚, Paul Georg von Möllendorff, Herman Budler,

the British and French governments, and even some Japanese newspapers. What is clear from this chapter is that a full understanding of the Chosŏn foreign policy environment requires not only an understanding of the regional security issues of the day but also of the global geopolitics of late nineteenth-century imperialism. Here Jin does well in showing that indeed the level of international interest in Chosŏn neutrality was quite high, even if the Chosŏn government itself did not show much interest in such policy options at the time. This is among the more successful chapters of the Jin's work as it is empirically robust, well-paced, and informative in that it is just not that common that diplomatic histories pay much attention to potential Chosŏn neutralization.

Chapter 5, especially from page 127, and Chapter 6 are the strongest of the entirety of the book. It is clear that Jin understands the overall narrative of the multiple neutralization attempts from 1900 onward in considerable depth. He succeeds amply in supporting this narrative with a strong selection of primary source materials concerning the various failed attempts to neutralize the Great Han Empire in the context of the growing tensions preceding the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Chapter 6 is something of a gripping read as the Korean imperial court makes one attempt after another to illicit international support for neutralization that all ultimately fail in the face of Russian and Japanese incursions into the territory of the Han Empire in 1903 and 1904. Among the most fascinating of these overtures is that of Yi Hanŭng 李漢應, chargé d'afaires of the Korean legation in London (pp. 175-182). Yi made a detailed proposal to the British Foreign Office in 1904 in which he directly linked stability in East Asia with stability in Europe. Noting the friendly relationships between Russia and France and between Britain and Japan, Yi suggested that war between Russia and Japan could potentially sour Anglo-French relations in Europe. He proposed that an Anglo-French alliance and British guarantees of Korean territorial integrity could counteract Russo-Japanese hostilities over Korea and maintain global geopolitical stability. The conceptual diagrams Yi provided to the British to illustrate these dynamics, while not entirely easy to understand, are well-worth a careful read for anyone interested in the geopolitical thinking of the Korean imperial government in the early twen-

tieth century.

Despite the very many strengths of Jin's work in the chapters summarized above, Chapters 3 and 4, in which Jin explores the neutrality proposals of the period from 1885 to 1897, are problematic. While Jin is able to show convincingly that other states were interested in Chosŏn neutrality, he has some trouble demonstrating just how interested the Chosŏn state itself was in pursuing neutrality in the 1880s. In Chapter 3, the 1880s Korean neutrality proposals Jin considers are from Kim Yunsik 金允植, Yu Kilchun 俞吉濬, Kim Okkyun 金玉均, and Owen Denny, in his capacity as an advisor to the Chosŏn government. Jin competently summarizes Yu's famous proposal but Yu held no post in the Chosŏn government at the time and the political environment was such that he was in no position to have his views heard. Kim Okkyun was in a far worse position as he was in exile in Japan, had recently avoided an assassination ordered by King Kojong, and was facing the prospect of deportation. Under these circumstances, he briefly proposed Chosŏn neutrality in an open letter to Li Hongzhang, published in the *Tokyo nichi nichi shimbun* 東京日日新聞, that appears to have been as much a policy proposal as it was a bald attempt to court Li in a bid to save his very recently threatened life.[1] Like Yu, Kim was in no position to have his policy proposals heard. Jin tells us that while Owen Denny was in the employ of the Chosŏn state in the late 1880s, he explored neutrality, but once Jin provides the details on the Denny proposals, they only suggested that various groupings of foreign states guarantee Chosŏn territorial integrity. Jin refers to these collectively as "Denny's neutralization plan" even though, in Jin's own telling, they make no reference to neutrality (pp. 77-79).

The most noteworthy figure in Jin's spread of 1880s Chosŏn neutrality proposals is Kim Yunsik, whom Jin dubs the "pioneer" of Chosŏn neutralization (p. 61). Kim is well-known for his staunchly pro-Qing 清 sympathies so the assertion that he was a pioneer of Chosŏn neutrality, and, by

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[1] Yi Kwangnin, "Haeje," in *Kim Okkyun, Kim Okkyun chŏnjip* (Sŏul: Asea Munhwasa, 1980), xi-xii. For the text of Kim Okkyun's letter, see Kim Okkyun, Kim Okkyun chŏnjip (Sŏul: Asea Munhwasa, 1980), pp.151-152.

extension, that he must have advocated severing the Chosŏn relationship with Qing, is nothing less than arresting, if not wholly stunning, to any student of the diplomatic history of the period. Jin acknowledges Kim as "a well-known member of the pro-China faction" but also suggests that Kim had his doubts about Chosŏn diplomatic isolation because he considered establishing diplomatic relations with the United States (p. 61). Jin cites a page from Kim's essay "Origin of the Tianjin envoy appointment" (*Ch'ŏnjin pongsa yŏn'gi* 天津奉使緣起) in support of this assertion. However, Kim wrote this text in 1892, at least seven years after the time period Jin is considering and ten years after Chosŏn actually concluded a treaty with the United States. He was not so much exploring possibilities in this text as he was summarizing Qing proposals from the late 1870s.[2] Rather than chafing against Qing influence, Kim was repeating Qing policy points. Jin also suggests that Kim "insisted that Korea not be a vassal of China" and cites two pages from Kim's *Ŭmch'ŏngsa* 陰晴史 (p. 61). This passage does not appear to contain such an insistence. It is a transcript of a conversation between Kim Yunsik and Liu Xianglin 劉薌林, director of the Tianjin Arsenal. Liu asks Kim general questions about Korean history, the compilation of official histories, whether or not common people or the king in Chosŏn have copies of Chinese histories. There is also a highly critical discussion of the Meiji reforms and cultural changes in Japan. It is a wide-ranging and fascinating discussion but it lacks material on Yun's opinions about the Chosŏn-Qing relationship.[3] This may be the result of a typo in the citation but the result is that the reader is unable to understand the context in which Kim may have made this statement. It is upon this unstable foundation that Jin asks the reader to accept that Kim Yunsik's "…newfound doubts about the effectiveness of the tributary system in protecting Korea against foreign invasion led him to embrace neutrality" (p. 62). And yet, there is no discussion of what these doubts might have been or how they may have led Kim to drop his devotion to Qing and take up the cause

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[2] Jin cites Kim Yunsik, *Kim Yunsik chŏnjip 2* (Sŏul: Asea Munhwasa, 1980), 515 but the material concerning the United States to which he is most likely referring is on pp.513-514.

[3] Kim Yunsik, *Ŭmch'ŏngsa* (Sŏul: Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, 1971), pp.94-95.

of Chosŏn neutrality.

Kim Yunsik's supposedly pioneering adoption of neutrality comes to the fore during the Kŏmun-do 巨文島 Incident in which Britain occupied Kŏmun Island, a part of Chosŏn territory, in 1885-1887. Jin writes that German consul general Otto Zembsch reported that Kim expressed interest in neutralization during their discussions of the British occupation. Unfortunately, there do not seem to be any statements from Kim himself, only Zembsch's characterization of the position of the Korean government and that of Möllendorff (pp. 62-63). In fact, Zembsch points out that the Chosŏn government did not make an explicit neutrality proposal, despite Kim's references to Belgium as a potential model, and that it was his own assessment that Chosŏn would like to neutralize but would not do so for fear of damaging its relationship with Qing. Even the Belgium reference appears to center on the guarantees of territorial integrity rather than neutrality *per se*.[4] While this is certainly interesting, it is not enough to establish that Zembsch's perception was correct. Western diplomats were not especially skilled in understanding the positions and decisions of the Chosŏn government in this period so one must exercise great caution in accepting their observations at face value, especially without the benefit of confirmation through Chosŏn sources.[5]

After his discussion of Zembsch's assessment that Chosŏn wished to neutralize, Jin presents a Chosŏn document from June 1885 in which, he asserts, "Finally, Korea officially expresses its intentions to neutralize…" (p. 63) but this interpretation is worthy of further consideration. Jin's translation of the document reads, in part, "In the event of conflicts amongst other countries, Chosŏn has to remain neutral, by neither lending its territory to any country nor permitting a temporary occupation of its territory…" (p. 63) The choice of the word "neutrality" for the term *kugoe chi pun* 局外

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[4] Kim Uhyŏn, "P. G. Möllendorff ŭi Chosŏn chungniphwa kusang," *P'yŏnghwa yŏn'gu 8* (1983), pp.76-77.

[5] Joshua Van Lieu, "The Politics of Condolence: Contested Representations of Tribute in Late Nineteenth-Century Chosŏn-Qing Relations," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 14 (2009), pp.83-115.

之分 is questionable.[6] It does not appear that Kim meant to convey that Chosŏn was declaring itself a neutral state in the manner of Switzerland or Belgium but rather a disinterested party, an outsider in a particular dispute, namely the Anglo-Russian tensions over the British occupation of Kŏmun Island. Jin did not mention that this passage was the concluding portion of a longer document that reviews the particulars of the Kŏmun Island occupation, the Chosŏn contention that the occupation is illegal, and the Chosŏn refusal to approve it. The conflicts to which the Chosŏn government is referring are those which might arise between Britain and other states in opposition to the occupation, specifically Russia. Chosŏn wanted no part in this fight and so made a public statement to explain that it did not support the occupation. The point of this document is not to declare that Chosŏn had become a neutral state but rather to inform the treaty powers that it was not in collusion with the British. We may note that the United States government also adopted a policy of neutrality in regard to the Kŏmun Island occupation, a posture that did not indicate that the United States had declared itself a neutral power.[7]

In a confusing turn, Jin then concedes that in reality, the document "…contained no specific wording about neutralization" (p. 64) even though his analysis and translation make that very assertion. And in the next paragraph he maintains that Kim "…could not explicitly call for Korean neutralization" because of the Chosŏn tributary relationship with Qing (p. 64), even though Jin characterized the June 1885 document above as an official expression of the intent to neutralize, sent formally to all the treaty powers. If, as Jin states, Kim could only speak about neutralization privately with Zembsch for fear of Qing ire (p. 64), why was he able to make this public announcement to the entire diplomatic community of Seoul? Moreover, when Kim sent this June 1885 announcement to all the treaty powers,

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6 The text can be found in a variety of locations, including a copy Kim Yunsik sent to Qing representative Chen Shutang 陳樹堂. See, Asea Munje Yŏn'guso, *Ku Han'guk oegyo munsŏ: Ch'ŏngan* 1 (Sŏul: Koryŏ Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 1970), pp.261-262.

7 Yur-bok Lee, *West Goes East: Paul Georg von Möllendorff and Great Power Imperialism in Late Yi Korea*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p.123.

the Qing government itself was among the recipients. And the Qing government, moreover, did not object.[8] It did not object because it was not objectionable; it was not a declaration of Chosŏn neutrality.

To get a sense of Kim Yunsik's understanding of the Chosŏn relationship with Qing, we might engage in a closer reading of his "Origin of the Tianjin envoy appointment" that Jin sighted earlier as evidence of Kim's supposed explorations of diplomatic alternatives to Qing. Kim Yunsik wrote this piece while in exile in Myŏnch'ŏn 沔川 as the introduction to his 1892 text *Tianjin transcripts* (*Ch'ŏnjin ch'odam* 天津草談), a collection of transcripts of the conversations he had had with Qing officials while he was an envoy in Tianjin in 1881-1882. The essay recounts the geopolitical developments of East Asia in the 1860s and 1870s that led the Chosŏn court to appoint him as an envoy, nominally to oversee the dispatch of several dozen Chosŏn students to Tianjin to learn weapons manufacturing techniques and foreign languages. The primary theme of the essay is that Chosŏn and Qing had entered into a new cooperative diplomatic relationship so as to face new geopolitical challenges that were rapidly moving beyond the capabilities of the old security arrangements. This introduction shows that even into the early 1890s, Kim maintained that a close relationship with Qing, not neutrality, was the key to Chosŏn security.[9]

Chosŏn, Kim explained, had really only had formal relations with two states; it "served" (*sa* 事) Qing to the north as a tributary state and to the east it had amicable relations (*t'ong* 通) with Japan. As western powers imposed themselves upon Qing and Japan, both "respected their international law" (遵其公法) as the only way to defend themselves in an increasingly hostile security environment. After Japan established relations with western states, in Kim's telling, the emperor abolished the Tokugawa Shogunate, assumed personal rule, and adopted western methods in gover-

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[8] Asea Munje Yŏn'guso, *Ku Han'guk oegyo munsŏ: Ch'ŏngan* 1 (Sŏul: Koryŏ Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 1970), pp.261-263. A recent Korean translation of these documents can be found here: Yi Yŏnse, Nam Tonggŏl, and An Chŏnghŏn, ed. and trans., *Yŏkchu ku Han'guk oegyo munsŏ*: *Ch'ŏngan* 3 (Inch'ŏn: Inch'ŏn Taehakkyo Inch'ŏnhak Yŏn'guwŏn, 2019), pp.130-136.

[9] Kim Yunsik, *chŏnjip* 2, pp.512-515.

nance, manufacturing, and all other interests of the state. Japan thereby absorbed the Liuqiu 流求 Kingdom and expanded into Hokkaido 北海道, becoming known as an "East Asian power" (*Tongyang kangguk* 東洋强國). After Chosŏn rejected the Japanese announcement of the imperial restoration, Kim explained, Japan sent warships to Kanghwa 江華 Island whereupon the Chosŏn court had no choice but to allow a treaty opening Chosŏn ports to Japan. Russia as well was on the move, establishing a port and a military presence at Vladivostok. Chosŏn thus faced threats all around.[10]

At around the same time, Kim continued, Annam 安南, Burma (Myŏnjŏn 緬甸), and Liuqiu all fell to hostile powers while Chosŏn seemed wholly unaware. All three states, he maintained, had only had relations with a single foreign state: Annam concluded treaties with France, Burma concluded treaties with Britain, and Liuqiu was a tributary state to Japan (服事日本). As France, Britain, and Japan became increasingly threatening and openly hostile, Annam, Burma, and Liuqiu had no treaties with other countries and so were unable to call upon another state for aid. These developments, Kim recounts, caused no small alarm at the Qing court since all three had been Qing tributary states.[11] This portion of Kim's argument is central to Jin's claim that Kim had decided that Qing could no longer be relied upon to guarantee Chosŏn security. Indeed, the collapse of three other tributary states, one after the other, does seem to be an indication that paying tribute to the Qing court in the nineteenth century was no guarantee that Qing forces would appear to defend against foreign invasion. While Kim does not deny that there were no Qing interventions to save these states, he does not suggest that Qing weakness was the real problem:

> In each of these three cases, a Qing tributary state cast off the old and took pleasure in the new, bringing disaster and defeat upon itself. Qing wanted to help and defend them but in reality only sighed that the whip was not long enough. Also, it would have

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[10] Kim Yunsik, *chŏnjip* 2, pp.512-513.

[11] Kim Yunsik, *chŏnjip* 2, p.513.

> been difficult to intervene in remote regions or overseas in the absence of treaty obligations. Moreover, there was no real harm [in the fall of these states] to the greater calculus of Qing [security] so [the Qing court] could not vigorously contest [these developments].
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> 蓋此三國皆清國通貢之國棄舊悅新自取禍敗清國雖欲救護實有鞭長不及之歎且在約外不便過問海外荒服又無損於清國之大計故不能力爭[12]

Kim begins by blaming Annam, Burma, and Liuqiu for having cast off the old, for having forsaken their old relationships with the Qing court in favor of the charms of newer relationships with the states that would eventually destroy them. A closer, more loyal relationship with Qing, in this formulation, served as the foundation of national security. Qing could not directly intervene without the justification of treaty obligations and, moreover, these countries were just not that important to Qing security so their continued existence as independent states was ultimately of no concern to the Qing court. The Qing court did, however, wish to help but in reality only lamented that "the whip was not long enough." This turn of phrase is a direct allusion to the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuo chuan* 左傳). In 594 BCE, the state of Chu 楚 laid siege to Song 宋. Song asked the state of Jin 晉 to intervene on its behalf. The Marquis of Jin wanted to help but a minister of the Jin court, Bo Zong 伯宗, dissuaded him, arguing that "despite its length, the whip does not reach the horse's belly" (雖鞭之長不及馬腹).[13] Bo Zong here maintains that even though the Jin state was powerful, its power was not sufficient to challenge Chu over the siege of Song and so advises the Marquis of Jin to wait for a more opportune moment. The Jin

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12 Kim Yunsik, *chŏnjip* 2, p.513.

13 Feng Lihua and Liu Hao, eds, *Jingjiao zuoxiu* (Shanghai: Huiwentang, 1911), 11:11a-11b; Kwŏn Sangno and Chang Tobin, eds. *Kosa sŏngŏ sajŏn* (Sŏul: Hagwŏnsa, 1961), p.537; Stephen Durant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaburg, trans. and eds., *Zuo Tradition: Zuozhuan 1* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2016), pp.676-677.

whip was long but not long enough to reach the belly of Chu. Qing, like the state of Jin, wanted to intervene, but France, Britain, and Japan, the modern equivalents of the ascendant state of Chu, were too powerful to be confronted directly. As the Marquis of Jin finally decided to leave Song to its fate, Qing decided that Annam, Burma, and Liuqiu were not important enough to justify major military confrontations.

Had Kim Yunsik concluded here, it would not be hard to agree with Sangpil Jin that Kim had decided that Qing could no longer be relied upon for Chosŏn security. While Kim tried to excuse the Qing court for allowing Annam, Burma, and Liuqiu to fall, his allusion to the ancient state of Jin shows that he did not think that Qing had the military strength or the political will to intervene in these cases. Kim did not, however, end his narrative here. Unlike Annam, Burma, and Liuqiu, Chosŏn shared land and maritime boundaries with the three Qing provinces of Jilin 吉林, Liaoning 遼寧, and Heilongjiang 黑龍江. So important were these provinces to Qing security, Kim writes, that the Qing court considered Chosŏn territory to be just as important as its own. The Qing Commissioner for Northern Ports Li Hongzhang sought to avoid Chosŏn suffering the same fate as Annam, Burma, and Liuqiu and so sent letters to Yi Yuwŏn 李裕元, a high Chosŏn court official, and Yi Ch'oeŭng 李最應, King Kojong's 高宗 uncle and high Chosŏn official, in an effort to encourage the Chosŏn court to pursue a two-part foreign policy: be close to Qing (*ch'in-Ch'ŏng* 親淸) and ally with the United States (*yŏn-Mi* 聯美).[14] These are well-known policy proposals that also appeared in the 1881 *Chosŏn ch'aengnyak* 朝鮮策略, composed by Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 but a product of Li Hongzhang and his staff.[15] Kim summarizes the Qing argument on the benefits of Chosŏn remaining close to Qing as follows:

> Our country serves Qing [as a tributary state] and [both states] have maintained these protocols for hundreds of years. Now that

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[14] Kim Yunsik, *chŏnjip 2*, p.514.

[15] Hwang Chunhŏn, "Chosŏn ch'aengnyak" in *Susinsa kirok*, ed. Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe (Sŏul Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, 1958), pp.160-161.

> the ban on maritime travel has been lifted and our country is an independent state among the myriad states of the world, Qing does not lightly interfere in our domestic governance or foreign relations. And yet our country is often dim concerning international relations; were it not for Qing help and encouragement, we would surely fall into blunder. Therefore, if both states, [Qing in] the center and [our country in] the east, resolve to become even closer and to take every opportunity to discreetly help one another, like members of the same family without difference, then [together we] can stop the contempt of foreigners. This is the benefit of being close to Qing.
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> 我國服事淸國自有數百年相守之典禮然海禁旣開我國亦以自主立於萬國之中則內治外交淸國不便干涉而我國素昧交際若無淸國勸助則必隨事失誤故中東兩國須加意親密隨機暗幫如一室無間則亦可以禦外人之侮此親淸國之利也[16]

These are hardly the words of a Chosŏn diplomat wishing to severe ties with Qing and declare neutrality. To be clear, Kim is summarizing the Qing case for Chosŏn and Qing maintaining a close relationship but in the context of the earlier portions of the document in which he adheres closely to the Qing analysis of Chosŏn geopolitical challenges, it seems clear that Kim himself has adopted this position. We might also do well to keep in mind that this is a text written in exile. King Kojong sent him into exile for his steadfast opposition to Chosŏn overtures to Russia at the expense of the relationship with Qing.[17] Rather than a pioneer of Chosŏn neutrality, Kim was a man who firmly believed that tributary states who abandoned their obligations to the Qing court met with disaster and that a tight relationship with Qing was the key to a robust Chosŏn-Qing joint defense against foreign incursion.

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[16] Kim Yunsik, *chŏnjip 2*, p.513.

[17] Yurbok Lee, *West Goes East*, p.119, p.136.

This somewhat extended consideration of Kim Yunsik's position on the Chosŏn-Qing relationship demonstrates the dangers of neglecting contexts, both within and without individual documents. A focus on Kim's discussion of the benefits of allying with the United States in this text, with neither a careful reading of the text in its entirety nor reference to the time and place of its composition, seems to have led Jin to conclude that Kim's adherence to the Qing line was weakening. Similarly, any reading of the Zembsch communications, which contain no statements from Kim Yunsik himself, must be undertaken with the understanding of who is actually speaking. Or when considering the message Kim Yunsik sent to the treaty powers in June 1885, it is critical to consider not just the portion of the text that could be construed as a declaration neutrality but rather the document as a whole and in context, including whatever reactions it may have elicited from its recipients.

We might also apply these concerns to Kim Okkyun's open letter to Li Hongzhang. How are we to understand the brief neutralization proposal in the context of a much longer letter, written in exile by a man nearly assassinated and facing deportation? And what of Kim's other open letter published in the same newspaper, written to King Kojong on the same themes of assassination, international relations, and Chosŏn security?[18] How were these letters received? Were they solitary a scream in the political wilderness or were there readers? In short, did they matter? Jin discusses three more Chosŏn neutrality proposals, albeit briefly, in Chapter 4. The reader encounters Kim Kajin's 金嘉鎭 proposal of 1890, dispatched in two sentences (p. 99). King Kojong himself makes a proposal in 1891, described in one sentence (pp. 99-100). Yu Kilchun makes a second proposal in 1894, presented in two sentences (p. 101). To be sure, these proposals, especially those from Kim Kajin and King Kojong, are important and more than worthy of our consideration but it is not easy to know what Jin would have the reader make of them when they appear and vanish with such velocity. The problem may be that the primary sources are scant or mute but

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[18] Kim Okkyun, *chŏnjip*, pp.141-148.

it would be of great interest to know more details about the proposals and the circumstances of their presentation and reception. Whatever the case may be, these brief encounters with proposals and sources, with parts but not wholes, with texts but not contexts, are a recurrent problem in Chapters 3 and 4 that undercut Jin's argumentation.

There is a technical critique I wish to make but I do so with some hesitation as I know from my own experience over the years in editing *The Journal of Korean Studies* and *Acta Koreana* that romanization is no easy matter, especially in a book-length work. The task is monumental in scale and yet requires a finely tuned attention to minute detail. Romanization in this book is meant to be in the Pinyin, Hepburn, and McCune-Reischauer systems for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean respectively but the text is riddled with romanization errors. Some of the more frequently appearing examples include Pak Yŏngho instead of Pak Yŏnghyo 朴泳孝, Eŏ Yunchung instead of Ŏ Yunjung 魚允中, and toggling between Joseon and Chosŏn 朝鮮. There are inconsistencies in the use of tone markers in pinyin as well as absent macrons in Hepburn. There are cases in the bibliography where romanization varies within a single entry, such as Daehan/Taehan 大韓. Pages 302-304 display many of these problems but there is not a page in the bibliography free romanization errors. While these errors and idiosyncrasies were not enough to prevent me from locating cited materials, they were tiresome and at times vexing. They are an unfortunate irritant to an otherwise very rich bibliography. It is my hope that in the felicitous event of a revised edition, these issues may be rectified.

Let us then return to the assumptions Jin wished to challenge with this work. There is no doubt that he is wholly successful in demonstrating that there was considerable international interest in Chosŏn and Han Empire neutralization across the whole of the twenty-five-year period under consideration. Indeed, this is one of the salient strengths of Jin's work and is valuable in demonstrating how important both regional and global rivalries were in framing the fate of Chosŏn at the end of the nineteenth century and the Han Empire at the turn of the twentieth. As for the question of Chosŏn interest in neutralization, however, this remains murky. Yu Kilchun was a clear and well-known proponent. Kim Okkyun was an unexpected

advocate but only under peculiar and deeply trying circumstances. Neither were members of the Chosŏn government at the time of their proposals. Kim Yunsik was interested in attaining guarantors of Chosŏn territorial integrity but his devotion to Qing makes it singularly unlikely that he would have called for a fully neutral Chosŏn state. Jin tantalizes with proposals from Kim Kajin, Kojong, and Yu Kilchun in the early 1890s, but there seems to be so little information on these initiatives that it is difficult to know how seriously the Chosŏn government took the idea. For the ten years from 1897 to 1907, however, Jin makes a convincing case for the active engagement of the imperial government in the final years before abdication of the Kwangmu 光武 Emperor. Jin has surely attained far greater richness in these chapter because the primary resources are more plentiful and revealing than the scanty materials upon which he had to depend for his account of the 1880s and early 1890s.

We may thus judge Jin as mostly successful. He has amply demonstrated the international aspects of the problem of Chosŏn neutrality and, while Chapters 3 and 4 were problematic, Chapters 5 and 6 were highly effective in making the case for an active Korean state. The literature review was brief, uncritical, and omitted the majority of the secondary sources in the bibliography so it is little difficult to claim that he has provided a significantly new perspective that may develop or overturn existing understandings. And yet, the very fact that Jin has collected and summarized such quantity of neutrality proposals in a single volume is remarkable in and of itself. In his conclusion, he includes a table listing all the proposals and their salient characteristics that stretches across ten pages (pp. 211-220). In this way, Jin has provided a valuable resource and something of a road map for future scholarship in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Korean diplomatic history. Jin's work is thus worthy of consideration by students and scholars of Korean diplomatic history.