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# The Qing Dynasty's Response to the Question of "Tributary States" from the 1840s to the 1860s\*

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## Introduction

The Opium Wars and the entry of the Qing Dynasty(1636-1912) into an unequal treaty system were so shocking that they have been called the "collapse of the Heavenly Dynasty" (天朝).<sup>1</sup> However, the Qing did not in fact lose its hegemonic position as above in the traditional world order of East Asia. Both the unequal treaty system and the tributary system co-existed for some time in East Asia. The real question is how the Qing's relationship with Western powers gave rise to conflict with its neighboring states. It is thus necessary to investigate the nature of the suzerainty that the Qing claimed over its neighboring countries, a topic that has received scant attention in research to this point.

The question of whether the relationship that the Qing had with its neighboring countries, including Joseon, operated merely formal and ceremonial or contained substantial authority over these states was a seminal

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\* This translated article is a revised and supplemented version of Dong-uk Lee, 「1840-1860년대 청조의 '속국' 문제에 대한 대응」, 『중국근현대사연구』(June, 2020) 86: 1-30.

<sup>1</sup> Mao Haijian, *Tianchao de beng huai: Apian zhanzheng zai yanjiu* (Beijing: Shenghuo·Dushu·Xinzhi Sanlian Shudian, 2005).

issue in the foreign relations of the Qing in the late 19th century.<sup>2</sup> From the late 1870s, the Qing claimed suzerainty over Ryukyu, Vietnam, Joseon, and several other countries, resulting in wars with France and Japan. In the early 20th century, it then claimed sovereignty over Tibet and Outer Mongolia, resulting in confrontations with Britain and Russia. There has been continuous debate on whether Chinese suzerainty was “in all but name or ‘worthy of the name’” in the premodern East Asian order.<sup>3</sup> This debate is directly related to the view of Qing interventionist policy in Joseon as either strengthening traditional suzerainty or as a modern imperialist policy. The essence of this debate is whether tributary states or vassal states were sovereign states in the modern sense or dependent states. Whether Qing intervention in the Joseon question was an illegitimate violation of sovereignty or a legitimate act of a suzerain state against a dependent state is related to the aforementioned question.<sup>4</sup> This paper attempts to determine the nature of the suzerainty that existed in premodern East Asia in terms of lawful international sovereignty.

In this respect, it is necessary to take note of recent research on Korea-China relations focusing on the doctrine of vassal state autonomy (屬國自主論). Okamoto Takashi points out that the idea that “Joseon was a Qing vassal state, but its internal governance and diplomacy was autonomous” was a convenient explanation that allowed each country to emphasize the concepts of vassal state or autonomy according to its needs.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Bang Hyangsuk et al., *Han-Jung oegyo gwangye wa jogong chaekbong* (Goguryeo Yeongu Jaedan, 2005); Dongbuka Yeoksa Jaedan, *Han-Jung-Il hagye ui Han-Jung gwangyesa yeongu wa jaengjeom* (Dongbuka Yeoksa Jaedan, 2009); Lee Dong-uk, “Cheongmal gukjebeop beonyeok gwa ‘beonsok’ gwallyeon gaenyem ui hwakjang,” *Jungguk geunhyeondaesa yeongu* 80 (2018): 2–3; Son Seong-uk, “Choegeun Junggukhak gye ui geundae Han-Jung gwangyesa yeongu, 2007–2016,” *Dongyang hak* 69 (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Wang Yuanzhou, *Xiao zhonghua yishi de shanbian* (Minzu Chubanshe, 2013), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Gu Seon-hui, “Geundae Han-Jung-gwangyesa ui yeongu gyeonghyang gwa jaengjeom bunseok,” in *Han-Jung-Il hakgye ui Han-Jung-gwangyesa yeongu wa jaengjeom*, ed. Dongbuka Yeoksa Jaedan (Seoul: Dongbuka Yeoksa Jaedan, 2009), 187–236; Lee Dong-uk, “Cheongmal gukjebeop beonyeok,” 2–3.

<sup>5</sup> Okamoto Takashi, *Zokkoku to jishu no aida: Kindai Shin-Kan kankei to Higashi Ajia no meium* (Nagoya: Nagoya University Press, 2004).

He takes the starting point of this theory of vassal state autonomy as the 1866 French Expedition to Korea and the 1871 United States Expedition to Korea, and traces the process of the transformation of Qing-Joseon relations from this point. However, he fails to fully apprehend the triangular relationship between Joseon, the Qing, and the West given that he dismisses explanations for the origin of the so-called "theory of vassal state autonomy". On the other hand, while Korean historians have begun to critically reinterpret the theory of vassal state autonomy, their research has not paid adequate attention to the modalities from the 1840s to 1860s.<sup>6</sup> This article will thus pay special attention to the period when the Qing went through the First Opium War (1839-1842), the Second Opium War (1856-1860), and the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) without any enthusiasm for intervening in conflicts between its neighboring countries and the Western powers. In particular, it will focus on the changes in the way the Qing responded to conflicts between its neighboring states and the Western powers before and after the Second Opium War, and the flexibility of the Qing in terms of utilizing the concept of suzerainty.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, the Qing did respond to requests from Joseon and Ryukyu to mediate with the Western powers, a departure from their policy before 1840. During the Qianlong reign (1735-1796) and the Jiaqing

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Kim Hyeon-cheol, "Geundae Hanguk ui 'jaju' wa 'dongnip' gaenyeom ui jeongae: 'Sokbang jaju' eseo 'jaju dongnip' euro," *Geundae Hanguk ui sahoe gwahak gaenyeom hyeongseongsa* 2, eds. Ha Yeong-seon and Son Yul (Seoul: Changbi, 2012), 171–200; Yu Ba-da, "19 segi huban Joseon ui gukje beopjeok jiji e gwanhan yeongu" (PhD diss., Korea University, 2016); Kim Hyeon-jong, "19 segi geundae Han-Jung gwangye ui byeonyong – jaju wa dongnip ui sai," *Dongyang sahak yeongu* 140 (2017): 223–270.

<sup>7</sup> For earlier research on Qing policy towards Joseon in this period, see Sin Seung-ha, "Cheonggye Jungguk joya ui Joseon munje insik: Munho gaebang eul jungsimeuro," *Sahakji* 7 (1973): 119–42; Gweon Hyeok-su, *Geundae Han-Jung gwangyesa ui jaejomyeong* (Seoul: Hyeon, 2007); Jiang Bo, *Yang rao zhong de tianchao: Xifang qinrao chaoxian yu qing zhengfu de yingdui* (Master's diss., Shandong University, 2016); Son Seong-uk, "'Woegyo' ui gyunyeol gwa mosaek: 1860–70 nyeondae Cheong-Jo gwangye," *Yeoksa hakbo* 240 (2018): 525–70. In particular, Sin Seung-ha's work diachronically examines the perceptions of the Joseon question inside and outside of the Qing government after the Opium Wars. On the other hand, Min Du-gi deals with information gathering activities and perceptions of Joseon in relation to the first and second opium wars from the 1840s–60s. See Min Du-gi, *Sigan gwa ui gyeongjaeng* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2001), 119–42.

reign (1796-1820), the Qing dynasty had refused several times to intervene in conflicts among vassal states or between vassal states and neighboring countries, espousing the idea of “*yi shi tong ren*” (一視同仁, equal treatment).<sup>8</sup> As such, even after its defeat in the Opium Wars, the Qing attempted to intervene in conflicts among Joseon, Ryukyu, and the Western powers.

In this respect, it is important to take note of the argument of Lee Yeong-ok that “how the Tianchao [Heavenly kingdom] managed crises needs to be understood beyond the conceptualization that Tianchao faced aggression merely due to corruption and perceived weakness”.<sup>9</sup> While Lee’s focus is mainly on the domestic arena, his argument can also be applied to the Qing’s foreign relations. The hegemonic claim of the Heavenly Dynasty was made possible because the emperor exerted his influence not only in Qing but also in the neighboring countries. That is, the Qing adhered to the traditional perception that guarding the emperor lies in the For Barbarians, namely its neighboring countries.<sup>10</sup> As such, Qing

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<sup>8</sup> He Xinhua, *Zuihou de tianchao: Qing dai chaogong zhidu yanjiu* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2013), 33–43. He describes the foreign policy of the Qing dynasty as “non-interference in the internal affairs of vassal states,” “non-intervention in wars among neighboring countries,” “Xing mie ji jiu” (興滅繼絕, restoring the fallen and joining the disconnected), and “En xu hou yang” (恩恤厚養, sympathy and nurture for the needy), and evaluates it as a passive defense policy contributing to the stability of the regional order by not intervening in wars among neighboring states. However, considering that the Qing dynasty conquered continental Asia and fought the wars against Vietnam, Myanmar, and the Gurkha during the Kangxi and Jianlong years, this argument makes selective use of historical materials in order to glamorize the “Tianxia zhixu” (天下秩序, world order) of the Qing period. The reality was that the Qing dynasty made choices on whether or not to intervene in the matters of a vassal state according to actual national power and both external and internal circumstances. It conducted a flexible foreign policy in the spirit of “Congsu cong yi” (從俗從宜, conform to local custom) and “Yin su er zhi” (因俗而治, rule by custom), while at the same time arbitrarily using the traditional concepts of “Yi shi tong ren” (一視同仁) and “Xing mie ji jiu” (興滅繼絕) as justifications for intervention.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Yeong-ok, “1840 nyeondae Cheongjo ui punggyeong,” in *Dong Asia gukje gwangyesa*, ed. Kim Jun-yeop Seonsaeng Ginyeomseo Pyeonchan Wiwoenhoe (Seoul: Ayeon Chulpanbu, 2010), 399.

<sup>10</sup> “Gu zhe tianzi shou zai siyi; tianzi bei, shou zai zhuhou” (古者天子守在四夷; 天子卑, 守在諸侯. In ancient times, defence of the son of heaven was against the four barbarians; when he was weak, his protection lay in the hands of the lords and barons). “Zaogong 23rd year,” *Zuozhuan*; “Tianxia you dao, shou zai siyi, yi xiu dezheng, yi huai bu fu” (天下有道, 守在四夷, 宜修德政, 以懷不附

intervention between Joseon / Ryukyu and the Western powers after the Opium Wars can be seen as its crisis management in diplomacy. With these in mind, I will chart the changing attitude of the Qing regarding both the traditional tributary relations in East Asia and the concept of suzerainty while examining the background against which the theory of vassal state autonomy emerged, particularly in terms of the crisis management policy of the Qing. This approach will show that the flexibility and variation of Qing foreign policy was entwined with its own domestic situation, its interpretation of the Western international order, and the changes in the relationship between the Qing and the Western powers.

## The Qing Policy towards Joseon after the Treaty of Nanking

In April 1844, the Daoguang Emperor appointed Keying (耆英), the Governor-General of the two Guang, as imperial commissioner to assume full charge of foreign affairs. The position was normally called the Minister and Commissioner Extraordinary of the Trade and Foreign Intercourse of the Five Ports or Minister of Commerce of Nanyang.<sup>11</sup> From this time until the establishment of the Zongli Yamen (總理亞門 Office of Foreign Affairs), the Governor-General handled diplomatic relations between the Qing government and the Western powers. In a way, this was an extension of the traditional diplomacy in which the Shengjing jiangjun (盛京將軍, the Manchu General of Mukden) handled affairs related to Joseon while the governor of Fujian handled those related to Ryukyu and the Governor-General of the two Guangs handled those related to Siam (暹羅) and the Western countries.

Unlike envoys from the tributary states, who could enter Beijing and directly and engage with the Ministry of Rites (*libu*, 禮部), negotia-

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There is a way in the world; defend against the four barbarians, and rightfully deliver good governance, then there will be no regret to be attached to it). "Chenshi chuan, Fuzi ji," *Hou Han Shu*.

<sup>11</sup> Quan He Xiu, "Wan qing duiwai guanxi zhong de 'yige wajiao liang zhong tizhi' xianxiang chuyi," *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi* 19, no. 4 (2009): 76.

tions with the Western powers took place at a local level, with the Governor-General of the Two Guang holding the position of imperial commissioner. This meant that the negotiation process in disputes between the Western powers and tributary states, such as Joseon and Ryukyu, was rather cumbersome. On the other hand, when Joseon or Ryukyu consulted the Ministry of Rites, the latter submitted the matter to the throne. If the emperor accepted the petition, the Minister of the Trade of the Five Ports negotiated with the representatives of the Western powers and then reported the result to the emperor. If the emperor agreed, his decision was conveyed to the Ministry of Rites which then informed Joseon or Ryukyu of the result. Consequently, the Ministry of Rites was in charge of the exchange of official documents, a typical traditional diplomacy.

Between 1845 and 1847, at the request of Joseon and Ryukyu, the Qing conducted negotiations with representatives of Britain and France on three occasions. These three cases illustrate the attitude of the Qing towards conflicts between Joseon / Ryukyu and the Western powers. In 1845, the British warship HMS *Samarang* appeared in Joseon waters and began to survey the coast in attempts to persuade local officials to trade with the British. The *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* recorded Joseon's response:

Kim Dohui, Left State Councillor, presented an official letter stating, "That is, the behavior of Westerners is hard to fathom. In the year of Imjin [1832] of the late king [Sunjo, r.1800-1834], a British ship came and anchored in Hongju. Although it quickly left, the event was reported at that time to the Ministry of Rites [of the Qing dynasty] for consultation. Some time later, in the year of Gyeongja [1840], their ship again came to Jeju Island and anchored there, but because it disappeared as suddenly as it had come and the matter became very cumbersome, it was laid aside without discussion. This time, as it is difficult to predict the intent of the barbarians compared to the year of Imjin, and information gathered during the preliminary investigation suggests that it was accompanied by a translator from the Qing state, it won't do without any precautions. It is appropriate, therefore, to transmit a request for con-

sultation to the Ministry of Rites, following the precedent of the year of Imjin, via the envoy sent to receive the calendar, and to make a request to promulgate by imperial decree that the port [番泊所] of Guangdong is forbidden land [禁斷之地]". It was done accordingly.<sup>12</sup>

The precedent of the Imjin year in the above quotation refers to an incident in 1832 when Lord Amherst made a demand for trade with Joseon. The Joseon government refused and notified the Qing of the incident, an action which earned the praise of the Daoguang Emperor. In the 1845 incident with HMS *Samarang*, the Joseon government again sent a letter to the Ministry of Rites and emphasized its refusal to trade with the Western powers on the grounds that Joseon had insufficient resources for trade with foreigners and it was geographically too close to the Qing. If the Western powers came and caused civil unrest in Joseon, it would affect the Qing state.

Joseon also requested an imperial edict to the department responsible for administering the ships of the Western powers so that Joseon could remain safe and peaceful under the protection of 'the principle of prohibition'.<sup>13</sup> The Daoguang Emperor accepted Joseon's request and instructed Keying to investigate the case and to persuade the British not to go to Joseon.<sup>14</sup> This principle was repeated in an imperial speech about the incident.

That Joseon submitted itself to the Tianchao as a vassal and has kept itself strictly within the law and institutions of vassalage is not comparable to the other states. *After the conclusion of the treaties, the English barbarians need to observe all their regulations. Yet why did they go*

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<sup>12</sup> Heonjong (憲宗), *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Seoul: Guksa Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> "Consultation requesting the prohibition of the traffic of British barbarian ships" (請禁斷英夷船來往咨), in Guksa Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe, ed., *Dongmun hwigo*, vol. 4, 'Wonpyeonsok' (原編續) pyomin ryuk sanggukin (譯民六上國人).

<sup>14</sup> Wen Qing et al., eds., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 74 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2008), 2936–37.

*to the vassal state of the Tianchao and stir up trouble? ... Instructions shall be given to Keying to make detailed inquiries with the English envoy about this incident; to question whether the ship allegedly seen by Joseon was indeed sent by the English barbarians and what the intentions of their leader were, and to make every effort to subdue them without fail in the right words, “and to submit themselves of their own accord by persuading them surreptitiously;” and by making them hereafter duly observe the treaties and live in peace with each other, and by ensuring that their warships will not ever again intrude into Joseon’s territory and make commotion, express the Tianchao’s intention to keep vassal territories peaceful.*<sup>15</sup>

Here, rebuking Britain for breaching the treaties it had made with the Qing, the Daoguang Emperor issued an order to ensure that the British observe these treaties and not go to Joseon. It is thus clear that the Daoguang Emperor understood “the principle of prohibition” as being the treaties between the Qing and Britain.

In requesting the application of “the principle of prohibition,” Joseon showed such a degree of awareness of the Western powers, stating that “as our small country, leaning towards the eastern fringe, we do not know the circumstances of the farthest west and north of these barbarians, but from what we have heard, they are solely engaged in trade and always reside in the midst of the sea of Guangdong, in places such as Macao.” Joseon knew through the frequent dispatch of envoys that the Opium War had broken out because of British demands for trade and that the Qing had eventually accepted this demand. However, it did not seem to have a detailed understanding of the content of the treaties between Britain and the Qing. The Joseon envoys of 1844 reported that “the open market, which previously existed only in Guangdong, has been expanded to four other places, and there is peace both at home and abroad as

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<sup>15</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 74, 2936–2937 (italics added).

before."<sup>16</sup> Joseon appears to have requested that it should not be included in the areas open to trade with the Western powers.

In 1864, *Wanguo Gongfa* (萬國公法, literally "Public Law of Nations"), was published. It was the first book to introduce Western international law into China. As such, it seems unlikely that the Qing in the 1840s had a high level of understanding of the Western international legal system or the new international order that would later be called the "treaty system." Still, both sides had an obligation to observe the terms of the treaties that had already been signed. The preamble to the Treaty of Hoomun-Chae (虎門條約, Treaty of the Bogue) referred to the Treaty of Nanking (南京條約) as "a treaty of perpetual peace and friendship" (萬年和約). Then, it stated that the "articles shall be binding, and of the same efficacy as though they had been inserted in the original treaty of perpetual peace and friendship."<sup>17</sup> The treaty was thus perceived as one that bound both parties to the observance of the articles within it. The Daoguang Emperor expected that the Westerners would be to some extent constrained by the treaties, making Joseon safe and secure.

However, in the series of treaties concluded with Britain, America, and France beginning with the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, there was no reference to matters concerning Joseon and Ryukyu. Only in the Treaty of the Bogue was the following article included:

After the five ports of Canton [廣州], Fuchow [福州], Amoy [廈門], Ningpo [寧波] and Shanghai [上海] are opened, English merchants shall be allowed to trade only at those five ports. They shall not they repair to any other ports or places, nor will the Chinese people at any other ports or places be permitted to trade with them. If English merchant vessels, in contravention of this agreement, and of a proclamation of the same to be

<sup>16</sup> Min Du-gi, *Sigan gwa ui gyeongjaeng*, 122–127.

<sup>17</sup> “凡此條款實與原議萬年和約無異，兩國均須專一奉行，切不可稍有乖違，致背成約。”“五口通商附粘善後條款” [General regulations under which British trade is to be conducted at the five ports of Canton, Amoy, Fuchow, Ningpo, and Shanghai]. Wang Ticya, ed., *Zhongwai jiu yuezhang huibian*, vol. 1 (Sanlian Shudian, 1957), 33.

issued by the British plenipotentiary, repair to any other ports or places, the Chinese government officers shall be at liberty to seize and confiscate both vessels and cargoes. And should Chinese people be discovered clandestinely dealing with English merchants at any other ports or places, they shall be punished by the Chinese government in such manner as the law may direct.<sup>18</sup>

The historical evaluation of the treaties signed by the Qing has focused largely on the opening of the five ports and the unequal terms imposed by the Western power. In the treaties of Nanking and the Bogue, the Qing opened the five ports and agreed to pay reparations for war expenses. It also approved the ceding of Hong Kong to the British, the creation of concessions, the application of 5 percent agreed tariffs, unilateral consular jurisdiction, the right of anchorage for warships in normal ports, and most-favored-nation treatment. Through the treaties of Wanghsia (望廈) and Whampoa (黃埔), it guaranteed the right of foreign ships of war to freely navigate the coastal waters of China and to dock at any of its ports to protect their commercial interests.

However, the Qing was not unilaterally giving way in these treaties. Although it approved the opening of the five ports, it prohibited trade in places other than these ports and detailed substantive methods through which to sanction foreigners in contravention of this provision. As a result, Joseon understood its territory as a forbidden land<sup>19</sup> where contact with foreigners was restricted. For their part, the Qing made clear to the British that Joseon was to be untouched and the British appeared to accept the request. Keying reported the outcome of negotiations with the British representative as follows:

*I asked them again the reason why, even though Joseon is a vassal of the Tianchao and they should duly observe everything [in the treaties], after*

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<sup>18</sup> Wang Tieya, ed., *Zhongwai jiu yuezhang huibian*, 33–34.

<sup>19</sup> Heonjong, *Joseon wangjo sillok*.

*the signing of the treaty, they again sent warships and went to Joseon to survey their mountains and waters and to demand trade. They answered that ... they have no intentions other than to allow the prince of their country to send these ships through all the seas to survey waterways, to set up sea marks, and to draw sea charts in order for merchant vessels to seek shelter from the winds. The ship which went to Joseon set sail from Hong Kong in April this year. Its name was reportedly HMS *Samarang* ... and it will go back to their own country and not return to Joseon again after finishing the survey ... They claimed that because they knew very well that discussions about trade would be of no avail, they would never happen. As I was worried about their sincerity, I once again made clear the content of the treaties, and over and over again made it understood in the right words in an indirect way. Their leader strongly asserted that his words were all true and there was no other intention behind them. Examining their circumstances and statements, they seemed trustworthy.*<sup>20</sup>

The Daoguang Emperor was satisfied with this report and issued an instruction to make another agreement with the British so that their warships would not cause any unrest in Joseon.<sup>21</sup> From the Western point of view, this would clearly have suggested that the Qing was claiming suzerainty over Joseon. For the Qing, preoccupied with extricating itself from military conflict and making an agreement with the British, it may simply have been an expedient response to Joseon's request.

Importantly, this expedience was the first example of the Qing dy-

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<sup>20</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 74, 2943–44 (italics added). On the other hand, Mary C. Wright claims that Keying said to the British: "As tributary states are not part of Qing, Qing cannot force Joseon to trade with other states. As tributary states are not independent states, they cannot try to trade on their own, either. At any rate, Joseon is so poor that the trade with Joseon would bring no profit." Mary C. Wright, "The Adaptability of Ch'ing Diplomacy: The Case of Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies* 17, no. 3 (1958): 369, quoted in Kim Han-gyu, *Han-Jung gwangyesa 2* (Seoul: Areuke, 1999), 822–23. The author tried to verify this statement, but no such content could be found in the materials suggested by the original author as the source of the citation.

<sup>21</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 74, 2945.

nasty defining both the extent of its suzerainty under international law and the scope of the sovereignty of Joseon / Ryukyu. Although the Daoguang Emperor and Keying did not intend it, the claim that the British demand for trade with Joseon was in breach of its treaty with the Qing signaled the superior status of the Qing that takes responsibility for the security of Joseon.

Having received assurances from the British that they would adhere to the terms of the treaty, the Qing attempted to expand the application of the treaty to conflicts between Joseon / Ryukyu and the Western powers. From 1843, France and Britain sent warships to Ryukyu and pressured the government to conclude a treaty with them and open up the islands to trade. Although the king of Ryukyu refused it, they made their stewards stay within the boundaries of Ryukyu and built a hospital. The king appealed for help to the Qing on the grounds that the country was too poor to open itself up to trade and being a vassal state of the Heavenly Dynasty, it could not conduct foreign relations with other countries. Despite these entreaties, Britain and France both established a footing on the territory of Ryukyu, which led to a number of incidents.<sup>22</sup>

The Daoguang Emperor stated, “Ryukyu is the most docile in submissiveness. Despite their frequent entreaties, if we do not put an end to their fear and commotion, control of other vassals will be lost.”<sup>23</sup> He then gave instructions to Keying to make the representatives of Britain and France aware that treaties should be observed and to persuade them to withdraw their remaining personnel from Ryukyu.<sup>24</sup> In his negotiations with the two countries, Keying received a promise from the French to withdraw all their personnel within a year, and he was optimistic about a British withdrawal.<sup>25</sup> The Qing based their demands on both the Treaty

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<sup>22</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 77, 3074.

<sup>23</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 77.

<sup>24</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 77, 3075.

of the Bogue and Article 2 of the Treaty of Whampoa.<sup>26</sup> However, while the French withdrew within a year as promised, the British did not. Consequently, Ryukyu had to again appeal to the Qing for help in forcing the British to leave.<sup>27</sup>

Both Joseon and Ryukyu called for the protection of the Qing according to its traditional role as the leader of East Asian World Order. The Qing, pointing out that trade between Western powers and Joseon / Ryukyu was in contravention of the treaties banning trade in places other than the five ports, tried to prevent incursions by the former into the latter. In addition, by keeping the neighboring states peaceful, it sought to preserve the dignity of the Heavenly Dynasty.

For the Qing, the only method of restraining the Western powers was to continually make them aware of the provisions of the various treaties they had signed.<sup>28</sup> However, these treaties already contained provisions that would allow the Western powers to circumvent their main articles. For example, Article 30 of the Treaty of Whampoa permitted warships to enter any port, not just the five ports open to commerce.

All French ships of war, in protecting the commerce of their country, shall receive friendly treatment in all the ports of China where they present themselves. These ships of war may procure there the diverse provisions that they will need, and if they have been damaged, repair them and buy for this purpose the necessary materials, all of these without the least opposition. It will be the same with regard to French merchant

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<sup>26</sup> "Henceforth the French and their families may move, reside and engage in commerce ... in the ports and places of Canton, Emoui, Fou-chou, Nin-po and Chan-hai. French ships may trade freely in the said ports, stay there, and circulate from one to the other, according to their convenience. But they are strictly forbidden to enter and carry out commercial dealings in any other port of China, as well as to practice clandestine sales or purchases on the coast. In the event of contravention of this Article, and subject to the exceptions mentioned in Article XXX, the cargo of the said vessels may be confiscated for the benefit of the Chinese Government." (unofficial English translation). For the Chinese text of the treaty (五口貿易章程: 海關稅則). See Wang Ticya, ed., *Zhongwai jiu yuezhang huibian*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 79, 3156–3157.

<sup>28</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 77, 3074.

ships, which as a result of major damage or for any other cause, shall be constrained to seek refuge in any Chinese port (unofficial translation).<sup>29</sup>

Between 1846 and 1847, French warships appeared twice on the Joseon coast to protest the execution of three French missionaries and demanded the conclusion of a treaty and trade agreement. Joseon considered France, like Britain, a “country that trades and navigates along the coast of the Qing under its control” and once again asked the Qing to “issue an order to the governor-general of the Two Guangs to prevent the French from causing unrest.”<sup>30</sup> The Qing instructed Keying to negotiate with the French who avoided mentioning their demand for trade and missionary work in Joseon and focused instead on the deaths of their three missionaries. They also insisted that they were merely discussing friendship with Joseon and would send warships to Joseon waters every year.<sup>31</sup> This response did not please the Daoguang Emperor but he could do little other than to instruct Keying “to give guidance to them and to urgently advise them to stop.”<sup>32</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the French changed tack and claimed that their warships were in Joseon waters solely to monitor trade, to draw nautical charts, and to search for the goods belonging to a vessel wrecked there earlier. Keying reported this to the Daoguang Emperor and suggested that he tell Joseon, “If in the future French warships arrive inside its boundary, it should treat them with courtesy.”<sup>33</sup> Just as the Qing had tried to use the articles of the Whampoa Treaty to include the territories of the vassal states, the French apparently changed their objectives so that they were not in conflict with the treaty. As long as the Qing interpreted the

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<sup>29</sup> For the Chinese text, see Wang Tieya, ed., *Zhongwai jiu yuezhang huibian*, 63.

<sup>30</sup> “Report on the Activities of French Warships and the Reason for Consultation” (報佛蘭船來往緣由咨), in Guksa Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe, *Dongmun hwigo*, vol. 4, ‘Wonpyeonsok’ pyomin ryuk sanggukin.

<sup>31</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 78, 3112-14; 3121-22.

<sup>32</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 79, 3131.

<sup>33</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 79.

Whampoa Treaty as the treaty that applies to the territories of Joseon / Ryukyu, French warships would have the right to navigate the coastal waters of Joseon to protect their merchant ships and to enter its ports. As a result, Joseon was now obligated to provide friendly treatment to French warships.

Meanwhile, in the negotiations with Britain over Ryukyu, the British did not accept the claim that it was a vassal state of the Qing dynasty. They pointed out that as Ryukyu was also a vassal state of Japan, it could not be under the suzerainty of the Qing. In the end, Keying proposed, the power of the Qing could not reach Ryukyu in times of emergency so the passage of Western warships for trade and medical activity in Ryukyu would be open to the Ryukyu, whose government then should make strenuous efforts to limit the interactions of local residents with the British.<sup>34</sup>

After the coronation of the Xianfeng Emperor in 1851, Ryukyu on several occasions asked the Qing to intervene and secure the removal of the British missionary Bernard Jean Bettelheim who conducted medical activities there for several years.<sup>35</sup> Xu Guangjin, the imperial commissioner and Governor-General of the Two Guangs refused the Ryukyu's request. Why? Ryukyu could not hope to control the interactions between a mere doctor and the locals. Xu also argued that this was not a matter of necessity to negotiate with the British:

Generally speaking, the way to control barbarians is this: If you say a word, it should be implemented at all costs, so that the body politic is not damaged. If a note is sent out despite clearly knowing that it cannot be implemented, it will get slighted. Moreover, what is more worrying is that even if things that could be done were demanded afterwards, it would fall into the position in which they would purposefully make matters difficult.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 79, 3072.

<sup>35</sup> Jia Zhen et al., eds., *Xianfeng chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2008), 122; *Xianfeng chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 7, 296; *Xianfeng chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 15, 512.

<sup>36</sup> Jia Zhen et al., *Xianfeng chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 4, 135.

The policy of the Qing to “keep its neighboring countries peaceful” had begun as an attempt to control the Western powers but it ended up acknowledging the reality of their presence and influence.<sup>37</sup> By the 1860s, the Qing changed its position to the extent that “All the questions of politics and religion and prohibitory rules are autonomously determined by the king of that country.”<sup>38</sup> This new position appeared after the conclusion of the Treaty of Tientsin (1858) and the Convention of Peking (1860) and seems at first glance to contravene the policies of the Daoguang reigns. However, it was actually a continuation of existing Qing policy.

### The Treaty of Tientsin and the Emergence of “Vassal State Autonomy”

The Qing policy of dissuading the great powers from contacting Joseon / Ryukyu while demanding that these states have amicable relations with the great powers, was a consistent feature after the Second Opium War and even after the establishment of the Zongli Yamen (Office of Foreign Affairs) to deal with negotiations with the West. The Zongli Yamen continued to deter the great powers from going to Joseon while advising Joseon to get information about negotiations with the West through the Ministry of Rites. However, unlike the Daoguang reigns, the Zongli Yamen of the Tongzhi reigns stated that “though a vassal state, Joseon is a *de facto* autonomous state,” meaning that the treaties between the Qing and Western states did not apply to it.

The background of Qing’s forward-looking stance was the Second Opium War and the very change in the treaty system after the Treaty of

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<sup>37</sup> Until the early 1860s, with the exception of the Russian ship Pallada, no demands for trade and the conclusion of a treaty were made to Joseon. See Bak Cheon-hong, *Angnyeong-i chulmolhad-eon Joseon ui bada: Seoyang gwa Joseon ui mannam* (Hyeonsil Munhwa, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> 一切政教禁令，向由該國王自主。” “Statement of the Ministry of Rites Received by the Office of the Governor-General” (總署收禮部文), in Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 165.

Tientsin in 1858. Before the Second Opium War, the Qing had prohibited the Western powers from trade and commercial activities in regions other than the trade ports stipulated in the treaties, but the Second Opium War changed this situation. In the Treaty of Tientsin, the Qing conceded the right of the Western powers to travel, trade, and do missionary work within its borders.

### **Article 8**

The French who wish to travel to the cities of the interior, or to the ports where foreign ships are not admitted, may do so in complete safety, on the express condition of being provided with passports written in French and in Chinese, legally issued by diplomatic agents or French consuls in China, and countersigned by the Chinese authorities.

### **Article 13**

... effective protection shall be given to missionaries who travel peacefully in the interior of the country, provided with the regular passports mentioned in Article 8. No obstacle shall be brought by the authorities of the Chinese Empire to the recognized right of every individual in China to embrace Christianity, if he wishes, and to follow its practices, without being liable to any punishment inflicted for this fact (unofficial translation).<sup>39</sup>

Through the Treaty of Tientsin, as long as holding passports or permits, the Westerners could travel anywhere and continue their missionary work. Furthermore, the Qing could no longer claim that Joseon and Ryukyu were the areas closed to foreigners. As such, the Westerners soon began to apply for passports to travel to Joseon.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For the Chinese text, see Wang Tieya, ed., *Zhongwai jiu yuezhang huibian*, 105–07.

<sup>40</sup> "Memorial from the Office of the Governor-General" (總署奏摺), in *Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo*, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 30; "Note to France" (法國照會), in *Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo*, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 27.

If the Qing wanted to retain their role in “keeping its neighboring countries peaceful” and if Joseon continued to refuse contact with the Western powers, the Zongli Yamen had to find a new way of blocking the demands of Western powers. The Qing believed that Joseon was not included in the scope of the Tientsin Treaty.<sup>41</sup> The Zongli Yamen made it clear both to the Western powers and Joseon that “as all the articles of the treaty, concluded with France, and every clause of the treaties, concluded with other states, merely mention the land of China and do not refer to its neighbors, they have no relation at all with Joseon.”<sup>42</sup> By confining the scope of the treaties to the territory under the direct rule of the Qing, it placed Joseon outside the scope of the treaties.

Nonetheless, seen from the perspective of international law, the Qing’s argument for Joseon as an autonomous vassal state came to undermine Qing’s claims to suzerainty over Joseon. The French understood the argument of the Zongli Yamen to mean that “Joseon pays tribute to China, but all its state affairs are handled autonomously.”<sup>43</sup> Henry Wheaton, the author of *Elements of International Law*, which was translated into Chinese in 1864, explained that vassal states or tributary states, in other words, states having a feudal relationship with a particular state, were considered independent states, as long as their sovereignty was not affected by this relationship.<sup>44</sup> Following this perspective, the explanation of the Zongli Yamen amounted to a *de facto* declaration that while Joseon was tantamount to a nominal tributary state that “had received the calendar with reverence and paid tribute on occasion,”<sup>45</sup> this relationship

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<sup>41</sup> “Note to France,” in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Wen Qing et al., eds., *Tongzhi chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 47 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2008), 1995.

<sup>43</sup> “Note to France,” in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo., *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*.

<sup>44</sup> Henry Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 6th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1855), 51.

<sup>45</sup> “Memorial from the Office of the Governor-General,” in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*.

did not affect the sovereignty of Joseon in any manner. It was thus possible to argue that Joseon was an autonomous state not subject to the substantive jurisdiction of the Qing, that is, an independent state under international law.

In extant historical materials, the theory of vassal state autonomy was presented not by the Zongli Yamen but by Henri de Bellonet, the French chargé d'affaires in China. In 1865, the French minister Jules Berthemy requested several times both the issuance of route permits for French missionaries to Joseon, but the Zongli Yamen refused his request.<sup>46</sup> The Zongli Yamen explained, "Joseon has merely received the calendar with reverence and paid tribute every year. As China cannot force this state to accept the Christian religion, it is difficult to send a diplomatic note."<sup>47</sup> However, in July of the following year, Bellonet, after hearing the news of the 1866 French Expedition to Korea, sent a note to Prince Kung (or Gong) which declared that France would send a fleet to Joseon according to "the order of the French government" to inquire into the killings of the French missionaries and to conquer the country.<sup>48</sup> The final paragraph of the note is as follows:

The Chinese government has declared to me many times that it has no authority or power over Corea; and it refused on this pretext to apply the treaties of Tientsin to that country, and give to our missionaries the passports which we have asked from it. We have taken note of these declarations, and we declare, now, that we do not recognize any authority whatever of the Chinese government over the kingdom of Corea.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "Memorial from the Office of the Governor-General," in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*.

<sup>47</sup> "Memorial from the Office of the Governor-General," in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*.

<sup>48</sup> "H. de Bellonet (July 13, 1866) to Prince Kung (恭親王)," in Geundae Hanguk Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe ed., *Geundae Hanguk oegyo munseo*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Dongbuk Asia Yeoksa Jaedan, 2009), 193.

<sup>49</sup> "H. de Bellonet (July 13, 1866) to Prince Kung (恭親王)," in Geundae Hanguk Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe, *Geundae Hanguk oegyo munseo*, vol. 1, 193.

However, the Chinese translation of Bellonet's rather forthright official document in French softened his message somewhat.

The present Minister has requested several times your noble Yamen [the Qing Office of Foreign Affairs] to issue route permits to the missionaries to go to Joseon. Always evading responsibility, the Yamen stated that, *although Joseon has paid tribute, all the state affairs are handled autonomously* [自主] *and thus [Joseon] was not specified in the Treaty of Tientsin*. Now my country will wage war against Joseon, but again China cannot intervene. Because [China] has never interfered with that country.<sup>50</sup>

These two letters confirm that while the Zongli Yamen argued that the Treaty of Tientsin was not applicable to Joseon in issuing travel permit to the French, it was Bellonet who created the theory of vassal state autonomy. He further claimed that the Qing's denial of suzerainty over Joseon was simply to evade responsibility for Joseon. The Zongli Yamen made use of vassal autonomy to recommend that French missionaries not go to Joseon whereas Bellonet used it as a means to deny Qing suzerainty over the country.

The Zongli Yamen faced a dilemma in terms of the autonomy of Joseon. If Joseon was an autonomous state, the Qing had no business intervening in a dispute between Joseon and a third party. If not, then, the Qing had to take responsibility for the security of Joseon. In reality, the Qing was exhausted with the ensuing defeats in the Second Opium War and the Taiping, Nian, and Dungan Rebellions. As far as the Zongli Yamen was concerned, if the Western powers "manage to draw China into the affairs of Joseon, afterwards when they cannot satisfy their avaricious

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<sup>50</sup> Author's translation from the Chinese text (emphasis added). (再本大臣曾有數次 於貴衙門請發路照於傳教士 前赴朝鮮 均經推脫 據言雖高麗於中國納貢 一切國事 皆其自主 故天津和約 亦未載入 茲當本國於高麗交兵 自然中國亦不能過問 因與彼國原不相干涉也). "H. de Bellonet (July 13, 1866) to Prince Kung (恭親王)," in Geundae Hanguk Pyeonchan Wiwonhoe, *Geundae Hanguk oegyo munseo*, vol. 1, 193.

desire in Joseon, they will try to achieve it in China."<sup>51</sup> As such, it felt that it had to avoid any involvement in the conflict between Joseon and the Western powers.

This predicament placed the Zongli Yamen in a situation where "it would be awkward either to recommend or to prohibit the expedition to Joseon."<sup>52</sup> As such, the Zongli Yamen proposed to the French minister a "mediation between the two states" and recommended that before launching a war, he make inquiries as to whether the killing of Christians by Joseon had really occurred and whether any reasons could be found for the incident.<sup>53</sup> In this way, it neither disagreed with Bellonet's argument that "China cannot intervene in this matter, for in China's relations with Joseon, neither has interfered with the other,"<sup>54</sup> nor did it imply that the Qing would protect Joseon. It merely emphasized that "hostilities between the two countries would drastically affect the lives of people,"<sup>55</sup> which could be a more palatable choice for arbitration. The attitude of the Zongli Yamen was thus to maintain its neutrality in the Franco-Korean dispute and to try to mediate a reconciliation between the two countries.

For several months, however, Bellonet ignored the Qing's suggestion for mediation. Through the Ministry of Rites, the Zongli Yamen informed Joseon about the movements of the French and suggested that it be prepared for any eventuality.<sup>56</sup> Several more months passed without any response from the French minister, at which point the Zongli Yamen sent a new a note for secret consultation to Joseon in November 1866

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<sup>51</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Tongzhi chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 45, 1906.

<sup>52</sup> "Memorial from the Office of the Governor-General," in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*.

<sup>53</sup> "Note from the Office of the Governor-General to France" (總署發法國照會), in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 28.

<sup>54</sup> "Note from the Office of the Governor-General to France," in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 27.

<sup>55</sup> "Note from the Office of the Governor-General to France," in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Tongzhi chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 42, 1787.

and emphasized that ‘it should not ruin the affair (事機) by the slightest neglect’.<sup>57</sup> The Qing government confirmed that the French nationals were killed in Joseon and heard a rumor that Britain and the United States would retaliate against Joseon in coalition with France. This led the Qing to recommend to Joseon that it deal with Britain and the United States separately from France. Joseon informed the Qing of the outbreak of a war and the declaration proclaimed by the French fleet in October, 1866. The Zongli Yamen then sent a memorial to the emperor on how a reconciliation might be achieved between France and Joseon.<sup>58</sup>

On November 11, 1866, Bellonet sent a note which again strongly criticized Prince Kung. He also claimed that the Qing did not act in a neutral manner but tried to protect Joseon.<sup>59</sup> Prince Kung retorted that Bellonet had made a “false accusation against China” and broke off communications with Bellonet. He also circulated the correspondence with Bellonet to all the foreign legations in Qing.<sup>60</sup>

The Zongli Yamen also sent a series of memorials to the emperor expressing the hope that Joseon would settle its conflicts with France and the other great powers amicably. In doing so, it was sending an indirect signal to Joseon that it wished for a peaceful settlement of the situation.<sup>61</sup> By taking a more prominent role in the negotiations with France, the Zongli Yamen strove to maintain consistency within the framework of international law.

On the other hand, the head of the Ministry of Rites, Wan Qingli (萬青藜) conducted a series of secret meetings with Joseon.<sup>62</sup> He met Ryu

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<sup>57</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Tongzhi chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 44, 1838.

<sup>58</sup> “Joseon Envoy’s Statement of Gratitude on the Situation of Foreign Ships in the Last Year” (轉奏朝鮮謝恩使履陳上年洋船情形), in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, 1906.

<sup>60</sup> Wen Qing et al., *Daoguang chao chouban yiwu shimo*, 1909–1910.

<sup>61</sup> “Memorial from the Office of the Governor-General,” in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 48.

<sup>62</sup> On the “subject diplomacy” (人臣外交) between Wan Qingli and Joseon bureaucrats, see Son Seong-uk, “‘Woegyo’ ui gyunyool gwa mosack,” 531–544.

Hu-jo (柳厚祚), the investiture envoy for imperial audience of Joseon, in Beijing and secretly handed over a short note to give secret information including the movement of the French fleet. He also asked Ryu to make this backstage meeting remain absolutely confidential.<sup>63</sup> According to Wan, Joseon "should never go forward into the fight recklessly, but, instead, while fortifying their defenses, they should negotiate with the French with reason and logic."<sup>64</sup> Even if it was not possible to reason with the French, "Joseon must never come to China for troops" because "not only can China be of no help because of the long distance, but also it does not have the resources to send reinforcements."<sup>65</sup> He advised Ryu to send a request to China to mediate in the conflict. Above all, he stressed that as the French "have such a ferocious temper and arrogant belief in their military power that they will not stop if you do not win them over,"<sup>66</sup> the most important thing for Joseon was to "prepare countermeasures and make no imprudent attempts".<sup>67</sup> Wan went on to advise Joseon to conclude a treaty with France without any prohibition of Christianity. This treaty "should be treated as rules and regulations between Joseon and France and be formally presented in a memorial to the Qing."<sup>68</sup>

Not long after Ryu Hu-jo returned to Joseon, Han Mun-gyu (韓文奎), a Joseon counselor, visited Beijing with a communique from the Joseon government that details the *General Sherman* Incident. After deliv-

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<sup>63</sup> "Short Note sent by Minister Wan," in Han Eungpil, *Eoyang sulok*.

<sup>64</sup> "Short Note sent by Minister Wan," in Han Eungpil, *Eoyang sulok*.

<sup>65</sup> "Short Note sent by Minister Wan," in Han Eungpil, *Eoyang sulok*.

<sup>66</sup> "Short Note sent by Minister Wan," in Han Eungpil, *Eoyang sulok*.

<sup>67</sup> "Short Note sent by Minister Wan," in Han Eungpil, *Eoyang sulok*.

<sup>68</sup> "Short Note sent by Minister Wan," in Han Eungpil, *Eoyang sulok*. This was a somewhat different attitude from that of the Zongli Yamen, which made it clear that it was for Joseon to do its utmost to deal with the matter. Later on, when Joseon did not tell the Qing dynasty about the provisions of the Joseon-Japan Treaty of Amity, it did not rebuke the Joseon government nor quibble over this. It is clear that within the Qing dynasty, the Ministry of Rites took charge of rituals (典禮) and was concerned with the maintenance of "laws, regulations and institutions" (典章制度) between the Tianchao and vassal states. On the other hand, the main task of the Zongli Yamen was to deal with real international political issues.

ering the communique to the Ministry of Rites, Han visited Wan Qingli and delivered a private letter from Lee Heung-min, who had been sent as an envoy to Beijing in the previous year and had formed a friendship with Wan Qingli.<sup>69</sup> In this letter, Lee explained the execution of French missionaries and Christians, the burning of the General Sherman, and strong reasons against missionary work and trade. He then asked Wan Qingli to help Joseon.<sup>70</sup>

Wan noted that Lee's letter could not be concealed so he submitted the original text of the letter to the Grand Council.<sup>71</sup> Five days later, he presented a new memorial that contained an extraordinary proposal. He stated that Lee's letter was one that "could not be sent in an official document". The Joseon government had sent it to him in the form of a private letter.<sup>72</sup> As Lee would be expected to report Wan's reply to the king of Joseon, the Qing should also send a private letter to the Joseon government through Wan Qingli and Lee Heung-min. This letter should "enlighten Joseon in detail about the things that the country should prepare and the things that the country could not dare to ask in clear terms due to suspicion and fear."<sup>73</sup> Wan Qingli then presented a draft of a letter that was both a reply to Lee Heung-min and *de facto* advice addressed to the Joseon government.

In this draft, Wan, while praising Lee's loyalty, was quite frank in

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<sup>69</sup> Son Seong-uk, "Shijiu shiji chaoxian fu jing shi chen de 'huangdou jingyan'" (PhD diss., Peking University, 2015), 159.

<sup>70</sup> "Letter Sent by Lee Heung-min of Joseon to Wan Qingli" (朝鮮李興敏致萬青藜函), in Wen Qing et al., *Tongzhi chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 45, 1904.

<sup>71</sup> "Memorial to Grand Councillor Yixin and Others on the Letter by Lee Heung-min of Joseon" (軍機大臣奕訢等奏朝鮮李興敏函摺), in Wen Qing et al., *Tongzhi chao chouban yiwu shimo*, vol. 45, 1903.

<sup>72</sup> "Memorial Presented by the Minister of Rites, Wan Qingli, Reporting on the Copy of the Letter by the Envoy of Joseon, Lee Heung-min" (禮部尚書萬青藜奏報擬復朝鮮使臣李興敏書函摺), in First Historical Archives of China, ed., *Qingdai Zhong Chao guanxi dangan shiliao xu bian* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dangan Chubanshe, 1998), 358–359.

<sup>73</sup> "Memorial Presented by the Minister of Rites, Wan Qingli, Reporting on the Copy of the Letter by the Envoy of Joseon, Lee Heung-min," in First Historical Archives of China, *Qingdai Zhong Chao guanxi dangan shiliao xu bian*, 358–359.

his views on the Qing-Joseon relocation. He acknowledged that he did not know whether the Qing could prevent Western ships from sailing to Joseon, but he stated that the Qing would never issue any document to Western ships allowing them to trade with Joseon.<sup>74</sup> He went on to say:

... do not look down on the opponent; if you win by good luck, do not become arrogant; by wreaking a momentary anger, do not strengthen the fighting spirit of the enemy; in order to take revenge on a nation, do not create a situation where it will make many nations its allies<sup>75</sup>...

Wan felt that it was better to treat the Western powers with hospitality. However, there still remained the problem of what to do in the event that they decided to invade. Wan admitted, "your country must evaluate the situation itself; it is not a thing that I can possibly know".<sup>76</sup>

These arguments were in keeping with the advice Wan had given in his short note to Ryu Hu-jo. He was consistent in advising Joseon not to make war with France but to find a peaceful compromise. It is not known whether Wan's letter was sent to Joseon. Only the draft of this letter exists,<sup>77</sup> and there is no historical material to verify how the Qing handled Wan's proposal or whether Joseon received the letter. Still, Wan's message clearly contained the official views of the Qing that Joseon should try to reach a compromise with the West.

In addition, Wan's advice was consistent with the Qing preoccupation with avoiding any entanglement in the conflict and its policy of *xishiningren* (息事寧人, end conflicts and let people live in peace).<sup>78</sup> This

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<sup>74</sup> "A Draft Reply to Lee Heung-min's Letter" (擬復李興敏函), in First Historical Archives of China, *Qingdai Zhong Chao guanxi dangan shiliao xu bian*, 359–360.

<sup>75</sup> "A Draft Reply to Lee Heung-min's Letter," in First Historical Archives of China, *Qingdai Zhong Chao guanxi dangan shiliao xu bian*, 359–360.

<sup>76</sup> "A Draft Reply to Lee Heung-min's letter," in First Historical Archives of China, *Qingdai Zhong Chao guanxi dangan shiliao xu bian*, 359–360.

<sup>77</sup> First Historical Archives of China, *Qingdai Zhong Chao guanxi dangan shiliao xu bian*, 359–360.

<sup>78</sup> Wan Qingli privately supported Joseon's policy of repelling the heterogeneous (*cheoksa*). He revealed this inclination in a communication with a Joseon envoy ("Bugsadamcho," *Yeonhaengnok*

policy was in essence the same as the strategy of keeping Joseon and Ryukyu peaceful that the Qing had adopted in response to previous requests for aid from them. At first, the Qing attempted to use the terms of the treaties it had concluded with the great powers; when this no longer proved effective, the Qing attempted to have Joseon and Ryukyu compromise with the Western powers. These strategies were designed to avoid getting the Qing embroiled in a direct confrontation with the West. Before the 1866 French Expedition to Korea, the Qing tried to dissuade the French from going to Joseon. However, after confirming the killings of the French missionaries, although emphasizing Joseon's autonomy in this matter, they sent the Joseon government a clear signal that they wanted Joseon to compromise rather than wage war against France.

This strategy continued until 1879 when the Qing adopted Ding Richang's (丁日昌) proposal and instructed Li Hongzhang (李鴻章) to suggest to Joseon that it open itself up to trade with the Western powers. Ding argued that the situation in East Asia was such that Joseon could not close its doors and defend itself. For its part, the Qing dynasty could not prevent the Western powers from demanding trade with Joseon. As such, it was better for Joseon to ensure its own security by concluding treaties of friendship with the Western states.<sup>79</sup> He Ruzhang (何如璋) also proposed to Li Hongzhang that Joseon should strengthen its relationships with foreign countries to avoid the situation in which Vietnam found itself.<sup>80</sup> These proposals were in essence a policy of "control of the barbarians through the barbarians" (以夷制夷), or playing off the Western powers against each other. Here, it is possible to see traces of the Daoguang reigns when the Qing had advised Joseon to treat the Western powers

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*jeonjip*, vol. 78). However, in the draft letter, he reveals only that he does not wish Joseon to clash with other states or China to get involved in them. Although the letter took the form of a private letter (私信), this seems due to the secret diplomacy between the two governments. The short note to Ryu Hu-jo can also be understood in this context.

<sup>79</sup> "Memorial of Former Fujian Governor Ding Richang" (前福建巡撫丁日昌奏), in *Yangwu yundong*, vol. 2, 395.

<sup>80</sup> "Li Boxiang's Argument for Trade between Joseon and Other States" (上李伯相論主持朝鮮與各國通商書), in *He Ruzhang, He Ruzhang ji* (Tianjian: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 2010), 109.

amicably if they were unable to deter them. From the Opium Wars until the early 1880s, Qing policy towards Joseon was quite consistent.

## Conclusion

The policy of the Qing towards Joseon in the late 19th century is usually understood as having changed from a non-interventionist or *laissez-faire* policy before the 1880s to a policy of intervention. This perception stems from previous researches that set the 1860s as the starting point for the change in the foreign policy of the Qing and focused mainly on the archives of the Zongli Yamen as historical source materials. It has been influenced by the argument, put forward by the Zongli Yamen, that because Joseon was a *de facto* autonomous state, the Qing could not intervene in its internal matters.<sup>81</sup> This view has been compounded by the Qing's *laissez-faire* attitude towards the 1866 French Expedition to Korea and the 1871 United States Expedition to Korea.

This paper marks the starting point for the change in the Qing-Joseon relations as the 1840s. The most essential factor for the shift in the Qing's policy towards Joseon was the diplomatic and military intervention of the Western powers in East Asian international relations. In this context, I contend, to understand how the traditional Qing-Joseon relations had transformed in the new system of international relations in the period, what should not go unnoticed is the changing status of the Qing that strove to preserve its established hegemonic position in East Asia against the Western powers from the Daoguang reigns (1820-1850) onwards. That is to say, the diplomatic capacity of the Qing to react to the intrusion of the Western powers into the regional order of East Asia had great bearing on its policy towards its neighboring states including Joseon. This paper explores one important Qing strategy that acknowledged the autonomous status of Joseon between the 1860s and the 1880s

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<sup>81</sup> "Memorial from the Office of the Governor-General" (總署奏摺), in Zhongyang Yanjiu Yun Jindai Shi Yanjiu Suo, *Qing ji zhong ri han guanxi shiliao*, 30.

while emphasizing the independent status of Joseon under the Heavenly Dynasty-the Qing-in the 1840s. The seemingly contradictory posture as above does display the flexibility of the Qing diplomacy in efforts to couch the traditional relationship between the Qing and Joseon in terms of treaties and international law reset by the Western powers in the 19th century.

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