

# Joseon's Dual Approach toward the Jurchens and the Regulations for Boundary Jurchens in the Early Seventeenth Century\*

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## Introduction

Since its establishment, Joseon (朝鮮, 1392-1910) maintained close relations with the Jurchens (K. *yeojin* 女眞). Such relations were basically formed as Joseon granted titles and stipends to Jurchens who settled down in Joseon territory. By the reign of King Myeongjong (明宗, r. 1545-1567), barbarians residing near the Six Garrisons (K. *yukjin* 六鎭) along Joseon's northern border were referred to as the Boundary Jurchens (K. *beonho* 藩胡) and they were recognized as a buffer against threats from the north by the “deep-dwelling” barbarians (K. *simcheo yain* 深處野人).<sup>1</sup> Regardless of their proximity to its borders, Joseon continued to regard all Jurchens as potential threats that required military precautions.

From the sixteenth century, Jurchens began to come less frequently to Joseon and stopped altogether after the Japanese Invasions between

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<sup>1</sup> Han Seong-joo, 2010, “Joseon jeongi dumangang yuyeok yeojin beonli beonho ui hyeongseong gwa seonggyeok” [The Formation and Characteristics of ‘Jurchen Fence · boundary Jurchens’ in Tumen River Basin], *Hanguksa hakbo* 41, 163-201.

1592 and 1598, commonly known as the Imjin War.<sup>2</sup> Jurchens thereafter started to invade Joseon's borderlands along the Amnok (C. Yalu) and Duman (C. Tumen) Rivers, causing tension to persist in the areas as Joseon responded by launching punitive expeditions.<sup>3</sup> Around the time, Joseon was also on edge upon learning that Nurhaci (努爾哈赤, 1559-1626) of the Jianzhou Jurchens had been unifying other Jurchen tribes north of the Duman and Amnok Rivers while Joseon had been preoccupied with the Imjin War.

A change thus occurred in Joseon's interactions with the Jurchens. In 1595, Joseon sent Shin Chung-il (申忠一, 1554-1622) as a delegate (差官) to handle Nurhaci's request to negotiate.<sup>4</sup> Although it was an unofficial, one-time affair, the negotiation not only managed to appease Nurhaci's resentment against Joseon but also decreased attacks from the Jurchens including the Wenhewei tribe (溫河衛).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Joseon sought to stabilize its borderlands by suppressing the boundary Jurchens

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<sup>2</sup> Park Jung-min, 2014, "Imjin waeran gwa yeojinin 'raejo' ui jonjeon" [The End of the Imjinwaeran and Jurchen Mission to Hanyang], *Manju yeongu* 18: 7-34.

<sup>3</sup> Kim Soon-nam, 2010, "Joseon jungjongdae ui bukbang yain guchuk" [The Joseon Dynasty's Strategy of Pushing Back the Jurchens Militarily during the Reign of King Jungjong], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo* 54: 53-88; Kim Soon-nam, 2011, "Joseon jeongi 5jin beonho donghyang ui chui" [Beonho(藩胡) Chieftains under the Five Garrisons during Early Joseon], *Yeoksawa silhak* 46: 71-101; Jungsoo Jang, 2013, "Seonjodae daeyeojin bangeo jeollyak ui byeonhwa gwajeong gwa uimi" [The Transformation and Significance of Defense Policy toward Jurchen Tribes During Seonjo's Reign], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo* 67: 169-213; Han Seong-joo, 2015, "Imjin waeran jeonhu yeojin beonho ui joseon chimgu yangsang gwa Joseon ui daeung bunseok" [Aspects of Invading Joseon by Boundary Jurchens, and Responses of Joseon in the before and after of the Imjin War], *Dongyang sahak yeongu* 132: 101-45; Park Jung-min, 2019, "Onhawi ui seryeok hwakdae wa Joseon ui daeung" [Growing Power of Wenhewei and Joseon], *Manju yeongu* 28: 179-205.

<sup>4</sup> Jungsoo Jang, 2016, "16segi mal-17segi cho Joseon gwa geonju yeojin ui bachu gyoseop gwa Sin Chung-il ui yeokhwal" [The Behind-the-Scenes Negotiations between Joseon and Jianzhou Jurchen and Role of Shin Chung-il: 1595-1619], *Hanguk inmulsa yeongu* 25: 133-83.

<sup>5</sup> Park Jung-min, 2018, "Imjin waeran ijeon onhawi ui geojuji geomto" [Study of the Residing Place for Onha-Wi, before the War with Japan (1592-1599)], *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 109: 305-38; Lee Jae-kyung, 2018, "Myeongjong-Seonjodae amnkgang bangmyeon yeojinjok jipdaedul gwa Joseon" [Joseon Dynasty and the Jurchens of the Yalu River Valley in Late 16th Century], *Hanguk munhwa* 83: 265-307.

around the Six Garrisons who had betrayed Joseon.<sup>6</sup>

Near the end of King Seonjo's reign (宣祖, r. 1567-1608), Joseon's policy toward the Jurchens was shaken to its core as the Hülun (扈倫) began to target the boundary Jurchens.<sup>7</sup> The Hülun chieftain Bujantai (布占泰, ?-1618) invaded Joseon's borderlands and soon demanded to be bestowed a title. In response, Joseon attacked a Hülun fortress in Geontoe (件退) across from Jongseong (鍾城) in far northeast Joseon, but suffered a crushing defeat. Joseon was forced to adjust its defense position and made peace with the Hülun by accepting its demand for the Joseon government to bestow titles to it.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, in its report to the Ming (明, 1368-1644), Joseon claimed that the Jianzhou Jurchens (K. *geonju yeojin* 建州女眞) had been behind the incident. This prompted Nurhaci to not only explain his position to Joseon and the Ming public office in Liaodong (C. *Liaodong yamen* 遼東衙門), but to use the occasion as an excuse to attack Bujantai.<sup>9</sup> In 1607, Nurhaci defeated the Hülun forces in Ogalam (烏碯巖) and conquered the areas adjoining the Duman River.<sup>10</sup> With the Hülun in check,

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<sup>6</sup> Jang, "Seonjodae daeyejin bangeo jeollyak ui byeonhwa gwajeong gwa uimi"; Jungsoo Jang, 2016, "Seonjodae mal yeojin beonho rotun ui geonju yeojin gwibu wa Joseon ui daeung" [Submission of Boundary Jurchen, Lotun to Jianzhou Jurchen at the End of King Seonjo's Reign and Joseon's Response], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo* 78: 7-49.

<sup>7</sup> Holon (忽溫) and Holoan (忽剌溫) in historical sources from the Joseon period are transliterations of the Hülun (扈倫). The Hülun is a term that often refers to a confederation of four Jurchen tribes, but in historical sources from the Joseon period, it specifically refers to a tribe called the Ula (烏拉) that belonged to the Hülun confederation. The leadership of the Ula was from the main line of descent of the Nara (納喇) clan which linked the leadership of all tribes in the confederation. Refer to Jungsoo Jang, 2019, "Seonjodae mal Joseon ui daemyeong 'nojeong' bogo wa geu yeopa" [Circumstances of Jurchens in the Tumen River Basin in the Late Reign of King Seonjo and Joseon's Reporting to the Ming], *Myeongcheongsa yeongu* 51: 65-70.

<sup>8</sup> Jang, "Seonjodae daeyejin bangeo jeollyak ui byeonhwa gwajeong gwa uimi"; Han Seong-joo, 2016, "Joseon seonjodae huban holaon bujantai ui chimip yangsang" [The Invasion Aspect of Holraon Bujantai in Joseon Late Seonjo], *Yeoksawa gyeonggye* 100: 271-300.

<sup>9</sup> Jang, "Seonjodae mal Joseon ui daemyeong 'nojeong' bogo wa geu yeopa."

<sup>10</sup> Park Jung-min, 2014, "Nurhaci ui dumangang yuyeok jinchul gwa Joseon ui beonho sangsil" [Advance to the Tumen River Basin of Nurhaci and Lose the Boundary Jurchens of Joseon], *In-mungwahak yeongu* 43: 179-206; Han Seong-joo, 2016, "Nurhaci ui Dumangang yuyeok beonho chimtal gwa Joseon ui daeung gochal" [A Study about the Nurhaci's Invasion to the Boundary

Nurhaci went on to claim jurisdiction over the boundary Jurchens and completely changed the circumstances. Unlike its lukewarm reaction toward Joseon's report thus far, the Ming public office in Liaodong took Nurhaci's side so that the boundary Jurchens ended up officially falling under the Jianzhou Jurchens' control. Joseon thereby lost its influence over the Boundary Jurchens.<sup>11</sup>

As such, Joseon's policy toward the Jurchens encountered a turning point near the end of King Seonjo's reign due to the Hūlun and the Jianzhou Jurchens. Joseon had no choice but to acknowledge the Jianzhou Jurchens' jurisdiction over the boundary Jurchens and the Jurchens stopped coming to Joseon. With the boundary Jurchens' absence, Joseon had to devise a new policy toward the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun. And its separate negotiations with the two forces relied on the regulations that used to be applied to the boundary Jurchens.

Few studies have been devoted to how the transition of Joseon's policy toward the Jurchens went through in the early seventeenth century. This is because most studies tend to examine how Joseon's external relations were changed by the Japanese Invasions (1592-1598) and the Manchu Invasion (1636-1637). Perhaps such studies have been searching for the cause behind the change only within the rise of the Qing dynasty (清, 1636-1912) rather than tracing how Joseon's relations with the Jurchens changed over the long term.<sup>12</sup> In other words, most studies have focused

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 Jurchens in Tumen River Basin, *Response of Joseon*, *Manju yeongu* 22: 127-63.

<sup>11</sup> Jang, "Seonjodae daeyojin bangeo jeollyak ui byeonhwa gwajeong gwa uimi"; Nam Eui-hyeon, 2014, "16-17segi Dumangang byeongyeong jidae yeojin ui seongjang gwa gukje jilseo ui byeonhwa deung yeojinjok tonghap gwajeong eul jungsimeuro" [Growth of the Jurchens (女眞) in the Tumen River (豆滿江) in 16th and 17th Centuries and Changing International Order], *Myeongcheongsa yeongu* 41: 67-106.

<sup>12</sup> Representative studies include Inaba Iwakichi, 1933, *Kōkaikun jidai no mansen gakari* [Manchu-Joseon Relations during King Gwanghaegun's Reign], Tokyo: Osaka yago shoten; Yi In-yeong, 1954, "Cheongjo ui heunggi" [The Rise of the Qing Dynasty], in *Hanguk Manju gwangyesa ui yeongu* [A Study on Korean-Manchu Relations], Seoul: Eulyu munhwasa. On the rise of the Qing dynasty, refer to Hong Sung-ku, 2009, "Cheongsa gongjeong ui cheongjo heunggisaseosul banghyang" [The Qing History Project's Guideline on Describing the Rise of the Qing Dynasty], in *Junguk yeoksa hakgye ui cheongsa yeongu donghyang: Hanguk gwallyeon buya reul jungsimeuro*

on how Joseon reacted to an external situation called the Ming-Qing transition when its relations with the Qing had in fact been formed more gradually, first with the Jurchens, then with the Later Jin (後金, 1616-1636), and finally the Qing.<sup>13</sup> Joseon's dual policy in the early seventeenth century based on the regulations for boundary Jurchens served as a stepping stone to establishing diplomatic relations with the Later Jin.

Apart from Byung-kuk Suh's study that closely examined Joseon's negotiations with the Jurchens during King Seonjo's reign and Ku-jin Kim's study on Jurchen tribes that came into contact with Joseon, previous studies on Joseon's external relations tended to revolve around the rise and fall of the Ming and Qing dynasties.<sup>14</sup> Byung-kuk Suh discussed in detail the boundary Jurchens' voluntary and involuntary breakaway from Joseon but limited the study's temporal scope to the first half of the Joseon era. As a result, the study fails to cover Joseon's relations with the Jurchens during the period between the boundary Jurchen system's collapse near the end of King Seonjo's reign and the beginning of Joseon's negotiations with the Later Jin.<sup>15</sup> Sung-kyun Kim's study that reviewed Joseon's overall relations with the Jurchens and the Manchus between the reigns of King Seonjo and King Injo also failed to cover the period when Joseon maintained separate relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens

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[A Study on Qing History Research Trends in China: Focusing on Research Involving Korea]  
Seoul: Dongbuga yeoksa jaedan.

<sup>13</sup> Jungsoo Jang, 2017, "Byeongja horan ijeon Joseon ui dae Hugeum (Cheong) bangeo jeollyak ui surip gwajeong gwa geu silsang" [The Progress and Reality of Joseon's Defense Strategy Making against the Late Jin(Qing) before The Second Manchu Invasion(1636-1637)], *Joseon sidaesa hakbo* 81: 51-54.

<sup>14</sup> Suh Byung-kuk, 1970, *Seonjo sidae yeojin gyoseopsa yeongu* [A Historical Study on Negotiations with the Jurchens During King Seonjo's Reign], Seoul: Gyomunsa; Kim Ku-jin, 1984, "Joseon jeongi dae yeonjin gwangye wa yeojin sahoe ui siltae" [Joseon's Relations with the Jurchens and the Reality of the Jurchen Society During the First Half of the Joseon Dynasty], *Dongyanghak* 14 : 513-21; Kim Ku-jin, 1988, "13-17c Yeojin sahoe ui yeongu: Geum myeolmang ihu Cheong geomguk ijeon kkaji yeojin sahoe ui jojik eul jungsimeuro" [A Study on the 13-17th Century Jurchen Society: Focusing on the Jurchen Social System Between the Fall of the Later Jin and the Establishment of the Qing], Doctoral dissertation, Korea University.

<sup>15</sup> Suh Byung-kuk, 1990, "Joseon jeongi dae yeonjin gwangyesa" [Joseon's Relations with the Jurchens during the First Half of the Joseon Dynasty], *Guksagwan nonchong* 14: 118-47.

and the Hūlun.<sup>16</sup>

Research on Sino-Korean relations advanced to the next level in the 1990s when major studies were published on Joseon's early relations with the Qing.<sup>17</sup> Such studies made it possible to construct detailed causal explanations about Joseon's relations with the Later Jin as well as the Ming and Qing dynasties. Empirical approaches on Joseon's policy toward the Jurchens, on the other hand, experienced something of a setback. The tendency to examine changes in Joseon's external policies in association with the rise of the Qing dynasty naturally forced the discussion of the boundary Jurchens to the periphery. Research on relations with the Jurchens during the first half of the Joseon era came to be classified as part of the history of the northern tribes while relations with the Qing during the second half of the Joseon era came to fall under the history of Sino-Korean relations. The Japanese and Qing invasions that took place in between have been considered separate research topics, making it difficult to gain an overall grasp of how relations with the Jurchens changed throughout the entire Joseon period.

As notable studies on the Jurchens as a 'protective fence' (K. *beonli* 藩籬) or 'screen' (K. *beonbyeong* 藩屏) came out in the late 2000s, new findings on Joseon's relations with the Jurchens emerged.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the concepts of the boundary Jurchens and the deep-dwelling Jurchens became clarified.<sup>19</sup> More details were uncovered about how Nurhaci and

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<sup>16</sup> Kim Sung-kyun, 1978, "Joseon junggi ui daeman gwangye" [Relations with the Manchus during the Mid-Joseon Period], *Baeksan hakbo* 24: 3–44.

<sup>17</sup> Choi Ho-gyoon, 1995, "Joseon junggi dae yeonjin gwangye ui yeongu" [A Study on Relations with the Jurchens During the Mid-Joseon Period], Doctoral dissertation, Sungkyunkwan University; Choi So-ja, 1997, *Myeong Cheong sidae jung-han gwangyesa yeongu* [A Study on Sino-Korean Relations During the Ming, Qing Dynasties], Seoul: Ehwa Womans University Press; Kim Jong-won, 1999, *Geunse dong Asia gwangyesa yeongu* [A Study on Modern East Asian Relations], Seoul: Hyeon; Han Myung-gi, *Imjin waeran gwa hanjung gwangye* [The Imjin War and Sino-Korean Relations] (Seoul: Yeoksabipyeong, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Chong Da-ham, "Joseon chogi yain gwa daemado e daehan beonli beonbyeong insik ui hyeongseong gwa gyeongchagwan payeon" [Creating Chosŏn's Suzerainty over Jurchen and Tsushima and the Dispatch of Kyŏngchagwan (敬差官)], *Dongbang hakji* 141 (2008): 221–66.

<sup>19</sup> Kim, "Joseon jeongi 5jin beonho donghyang ui chui"; Adam Bohnet, 2015, "Debating Tumen

Bujantai targeted the boundary Jurchens and how Joseon reacted near the end of King Seonjo's reign.<sup>20</sup> Delving into Joseon's relations with the Jurchens between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries revealed that a sense of crisis hit Joseon when the Jianzhou Jurchens took over the boundary Jurchens. In retrospect, this fact supports the existing view that Joseon's relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens had remained relatively amicable from King Seonjo's reign until the first half of King Gwanghaegun's (光海君, r. 1608-1623) reign.<sup>21</sup>

Despite such progress made through research, there are still questions that need to be answered. A closer examination is yet to be done on how Joseon specifically handled the crisis once the Jianzhou Jurchens gained control over the Hūlun and conquered the areas along the Duman River. Explanations are yet to be given on exactly how Joseon interacted with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun or how the dynamics changed after Nurhaci went his own way by incorporating the Hūlun and establishing the Later Jin.

Bearing such questions in mind, this paper covers changes that occurred in the early seventeenth century when Joseon's border policy regarding the Jurchens became replaced by its diplomatic policy toward the Later Jin. The paper will first examine the changes in Joseon's relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun to explain why Joseon adopted a dual approach based on the regulations for boundary Jurchens. It will then examine how such regulations were applied and how they became nominal after the Jianzhou Jurchens consolidated the Hūlun. This should

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Valley Jurchens during the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," Korean Studies 39: 23-44; Seong-joo Han, 2018, *Joseon siade beonho yeongu* [A Study on Boundary Jurchens During the Joseon Period] Paju: Kyungin munhwasa.

<sup>20</sup> Jang, "Seonjodae daeyeojin bangeo jeollyak ui byeonhwa gwajeong gwa uimi"; Park, "Nurhaci ui Dumangang yuyeok jinchul gwa Joseon ui beonho sangsil"; Han, "Nurhaci ui Dumangang yuyeok beonho chimtal gwa Joseon ui daeung gochal"; Han, "Joseon Seonjodae huban holaon Bujantai ui chimip yangsang."

<sup>21</sup> Kim, *Geunse Dong Asia gwangyesa yeongu*, 39; Han, *Imjin waeran gwa hanjung gwangye*, 228-229; Noh Ki-shik, 2001, "Manju ui heunggi wa Dong Asia jilseo ui byeondong" [The Rise of the Manchus and Changes in the East Asian Order], *Jungguksa yeongu* 16: 13-14.

be able to offer clues as to how Joseon's relations with the Jurchens morphed into its relations with the Later Jin and the Qing.

## **Joseon's Agreement with the Hūlun and the Formation of Regulations for Boundary Jurchens**

After subjugating the boundary Jurchens along the Duman River near the end of King Seonjo's reign, the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun demanded that they should be bestowed with the titles and the stipends that the Joseon government used to offer the boundary Jurchens. Joseon officially refused and instead reported the situation to the Ming office in Liaodong, hoping that the Ming government would intervene. Yet, Joseon knew that the odds of receiving help from the Ming government were low, which is why it continued to engage in negotiations with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun from behind the scenes.

Such negotiations signified a change in Joseon's relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun. Despite being pressured by them, there was almost no prospect for Joseon to revive its system of the boundary Jurchens. Joseon had bestowed government positions and stipends so that the boundary Jurchens would serve as a buffer against the deep-dwelling barbarians such as the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun.

Joseon could no longer maintain its previous policy toward the Jurchens when the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun were quoting the regulations for boundary Jurchens although they were not the boundary Jurchens under Joseon's control. At the time, the Jurchens were accustomed to taking such an approach with Joseon or the Ming and had no reason to look for alternatives. For Joseon, stipends were not a new expense and even if the government had to spend a bit more on stipends, the cost would have been worth it in terms of eliminating the threat to its border. Besides, titles and stipends were a good excuse to form amity with the 'barbaric' Jurchens as a measure of containment.<sup>22</sup> The demand for titles

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<sup>22</sup> On the Hūlun's demand for titles, the Minister of Public Works Yun Hyeong mentioned in the

had in fact been aimed at receiving stipends or gaining profits from trade so Joseon was able to reach an agreement with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hülun without much trouble.

Joseon thus switched from adopting individual policies for different Jurchen forces to a dual policy toward the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hülun and referred to the regulations it used to apply to the Boundary Jurchens. Such regulations remained in use to a certain degree until Joseon devised a unified policy toward the Jurchens and thereafter became forced to newly establish relations with the Later Jin founded by Nurhaci.

In 1605, the Hülun chieftain Bujantai became the first deep-dwelling Jurchen to be bestowed with a title from the Joseon government. The same year he was given the title *Cheomji jungchubusa* (僉知中樞府事), a senior third-ranked officer of the Joseon government agency called *Jungchubu* (中樞府), Bujantai asked for one hundred more titles to be granted to each of the generals under his command.<sup>23</sup> The titles were subsequently issued in the fifth lunar month of the following year along with three thousand rolls of cloth as their stipend, on one condition.<sup>24</sup> Referring to *hyangguk giseong* (向國之誠), which was the idea of showing sincerity toward one's country, Joseon asked Bujantai to return one Joseon abductee for each title. In Joseon, this exchange was construed as the king's gesture of benevolence toward the barbarians.

Previously, Nurhaci had also cited the regulations for the "northern Boundary Jurchens" in his request for a Joseon government position. The

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ninth lunar month of 1603 that "the loose rein policy is a good plan that doesn't reject a king who approaches and doesn't pursue one who leaves. Considering the circumstances our enemies are in nowadays, however, it seems quite clear that they won't be satisfied with such a policy and will seek friendly relations, which is why I've dared to offer my opinion." ("羈縻之術 本是帝王 來不拒去不迫之長策 而以今日賊情觀之 羈縻不已 終至講和 明者視之 有若觀火 特臣僚不敢先發耳" from *Seonjo sillok* [Veritable Records of King Seonjo], vol. 166, the third day of the ninth lunar month in 1603 (Year 36 of King Seonjo's Reign). This comment shows how complicated the situation was and implies that while forming friendly relations with deep-dwelling Jurchens couldn't be justified, it could be portrayed as an extension of the loose rein policy in order to relieve tension.

<sup>23</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 190 the twenty-ninth day of the eighth lunar month in 1605.

<sup>24</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 199, the ninth day of the fifth lunar month in 1606.

request was, however, officially denied because he had already received a title from the Ming government.<sup>25</sup> At the time, the Jurchens under Nurhaci's control were given food and other economic benefits when they visited Manpojin (滿浦鎭) in Joseon, but they had never been granted titles from the Joseon government. What had caused Joseon to take such a different approach toward the Jianzhou Jurchens?

Around the fifteenth century, there were many Jurchens who had received titles from both the Joseon and Ming government.<sup>26</sup> Their number, however, gradually decreased over time so that beyond the mid-sixteenth century, Joseon government positions granted to the Jurchens were given almost exclusively to the boundary Jurchens. Moreover, as Joseon grew closer with the Ming through the Imjin War, Joseon began to grow a bit more cautious in its approach toward the Jurchens. The Jianzhou Jurchens were sharing a border with the Ming and Manpojin, their point of communication with Joseon, so they were not quite out of the Ming's sight.

The Hūlun, on the other hand, was geographically distant from the Ming. This was why unlike the Hada (哈達) and Yehe (葉赫) tribes, the Hūlun were unable to engage in direct trade with the Ming. They instead had to trade in places like Kaiyuan (開原) and Liaoyang (遼陽) through the Yehe or Jianzhou Jurchens and they had lost contact with Joseon since the sixteenth century. Compared to the Jianzhou Jurchens or the Hada and Yehe tribes, it was therefore difficult for the Hūlun to secure the economic capacity necessary to grow powerful. Their relative proximity to Joseon was perhaps why Bujantai approached Joseon once he became the Hūlun's leader.

At this point, it seems necessary to examine the Hūlun, referred to as the Ula (烏拉) in Qing records. They reached their prime under Bujantai's rule and clashed with Joseon when they advanced into areas around the Duman River. Unfortunately, records like *Qing taizu shilu* (清太祖實

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<sup>25</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 142, the twenty-third day of the tenth lunar month in 1601.

<sup>26</sup> Han Seong-joo, 2011, *Joseon jeongi sujik yeojinin yeongu* [A Study on Jurchens Bestowed with Titles During the First Half of the Joseon Dynasty], Seoul: Kyungin munhwasa, 117-152.

錄), the Veritable Records of Qing Taizu authored from the Jianzhou Jurchens' perspective, offer few details about the Hūlun.

A testimony by Yi Nan (李難, ?~?) in *Deungnok Yucho* (騰錄類抄), on the other hand, is one of the most detailed descriptions about the Hūlun from an outsider's perspective.<sup>27</sup> Yi Nan was a Joseon soldier stationed in Donggwanjin (潼關鎮) of Jongseongbu. In the eighth lunar month of 1603, he became a captive and was held by the Hūlun for nearly four months. Upon his return, he gave a detailed testimony about what he had observed while being held captive, which offers clues about the Hūlun's interactions with the outside. According to Yi Nan, Bujantai had revealed his desire to obtain a title from Joseon.<sup>28</sup> His interest was not in becoming a government official but rather in using the title as a means to officially initiate trades with Joseon.

Yi Nan's testimony also indicates that the Hūlun frequently went to the border of the Ming to make trade deals. How should this be understood, considering how far away the Hūlun had been from the Central Plains? According to a statement by the Ming's Liaodong Governor Zhang Tao (張濤, 1560-1618), Nurhaci had constantly sought valuables like silk and sable fur produced by "the Jiangyi" (江夷) in the northeast.<sup>29</sup> Jiangyi translates to 'river barbarians', a term used to refer to the Hūlun. The Hūlun were also called the Ula, which refers to a large river in Manchuria. Freshwater pearls and sable fur produced by the Hūlun were distributed in Kaiyuan by the Hada to their south and by the Yehe to their north. In order to monopolize profits from dealing such items, Nurhaci replaced the Hada and Yehe as their broker, eventually causing pearls and sable furs to be supplied to Liaoyang instead of Kaiyuan.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> On Yi Nan's testimony, refer to Jang, "Seonjodaec mal Joseon ui daemyeong 'nojeong' bogo wa geu yeopa," 67-74.

<sup>28</sup> *Deungnok yucho* (騰錄類抄), vol. 14 (byeonsa 邊事), the twenty-second day of the fourth lunar month in 1604.

<sup>29</sup> *Chouliao shuohua* (籌遼碩畫), vol. 2, Discussions on the barbarian movements in the northeast (dongbei luqingyi 東北虜情議).

<sup>30</sup> Mitamura Taisuke, 1972, *Shinchō zenshi no kenkyū* [A Study on China's Pre-Qing History], Kyoto: Toyoshi kenkyukai, 174-177.

Zhang Tao's statement suggests that the Hūlun engaged in trade with the Ming through the Hada, Yehe, or Jianzhou Jurchens without directly establishing relations with the Ming. This may be why it was easier for Joseon to grant Bujantai's request for a title as opposed to Nurhaci's.<sup>31</sup> Even if bestowing a title did end up opening a channel for trade with the Hūlun, it was unlikely to affect Ming's interests. This is the reason why Joseon refrained from immediately reporting to the Ming about the Hūlun attack it suffered. Only after Joseon learned of Nurhaci's involvement in the attack did it report the fact to the Ming. Besides, Jongseong, one of the Six Garrisons where the Hūlun traded with Joseon, was quite far from Manpojin that was more exposed to the Ming.

These were the circumstances under which Joseon began to apply the regulations for boundary Jurchens to the Hūlun. The relationship, however, unfolded rather erratically. The Hūlun was a powerful Jurchen confederation but lacked diplomatic experience due to its distance from Joseon or the Ming. Even after receiving a title from Joseon, Bujantai failed to keep the agreement not to plunder the boundary Jurchens. This was what set him apart from Nurhaci who had far more experience in interacting with outsiders and became the reason why many of the tribes Bujantai had initially won over eventually left to submit themselves to the Jianzhou Jurchens instead.

Bujantai was a typical warrior. Yi Nan's impression of him was that he looked "quite burly and rough."<sup>32</sup> A report drafted in 1605 by the Pyeongan Provincial Army Commander (K. *Pyeongan byeongsa* 平安兵使) Seong Yun-mun (成允文, 1542-1629) quoted the words of a Jurchen who had described Bujantai as a dauntless, fierce man.<sup>33</sup> Other historical records from around the same time also indicate that Bujantai was known as a gallant yet relatively simple-minded figure.

Nurhaci, on the other hand, was known for his craftiness. King

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<sup>31</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 210, the sixth day of the fourth lunar month in 1607.

<sup>32</sup> *Deungnok yucho*, vol. 14, the twenty-second day of the fourth lunar month in 1604.

<sup>33</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 189, the sixteenth day of the seventh lunar month in 1605.

Seonjo once mentioned that although Nurhaci was paying tribute to the Ming unlike Bujantai, he was still “evil” for harboring different intentions.<sup>34</sup> This indicates that while years of experience in trading with the Ming had taught Nurhaci to be courteous to the Ming and Joseon, they hadn’t been enough to mask his ambitions from the king of Joseon.

Meanwhile, Bujantai lacked diplomacy from having remained in relative isolation. Official histories such as *Manzhou shilu* (滿州實錄) and *Qing taizu shilu* (清太祖實錄) describe him as a highly imprudent character. For instance, his initial tactic was to place pressure on Joseon’s border in order to obtain a title. And he continued to be hasty enough to repeatedly make demands for a title whereas Nurhaci did not ask again once his request for a title was denied.<sup>35</sup>

In some ways, however, Bujantai’s disposition made it easier for Joseon to negotiate with the Hūlun. Joseon had been facing the dilemma of having to stop its frontier from being attacked without giving the impression that it was succumbing to aggression. Bujantai’s impatience ultimately worked in Joseon’s favor. According to the stipulations set forth by the Hamgyeong (咸鏡) Provincial Army Commander (K. *Bukbyeongsa* 北兵使) Kim Jong-deuk (金宗得, 1554-?) in the seventh lunar month of 1605, Bujantai was bestowed the title of *Cheomji jungchubusa* on the condition that he defects to Joseon.<sup>36</sup> In other words, Joseon adopted the same policy it had applied to the boundary Jurchens by taking advantage of Bujantai’s eagerness to secure a title from Joseon through whatever means necessary.

Stipends paid to the Hūlun were also determined according to the regulations for boundary Jurchens. In the eleventh lunar month of 1605, during a discussion on whether titles could be bestowed to the Hūlun or not, Yi Si-eon(李時言, 1557-1624) the then Hamgyeong Provincial Army

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<sup>34</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 187, the twenty-ninth day of the fifth lunar month in 1605.

<sup>35</sup> *Sadae mungwe* (事大文軌), vol. 46, the twentieth day of the eleventh lunar month in 1605, Letter from the King of Joseon to the Governor of Liaodong (遼東巡撫) and the Liaodong Regional Commander (遼東總兵).

<sup>36</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 193, the seventeenth day of the eleventh lunar month in 1605.

Commander, advised Yu Bi (柳斐, 1566-?), the Magistrate of Jongseongbu in charge of negotiations with the Hūlun, that “stipends and attire should always be determined by the regulations for boundary Jurchens who render meritorious services.”<sup>37</sup> Around the fifth lunar month of 1606, Joseon declared that stipends for the Hūlun would be determined according to the regulations for boundary Jurchens, which were also referred to as traditional regulations.<sup>38</sup> Joseon’s Border Defense Council (K. *bibyeonsa* 備邊司) also stated that “since they have been granted titles, they are like the boundary Jurchens to us.”<sup>39</sup>

Joseon’s policy therefore was to treat the Hūlun like the boundary Jurchens. And Bujantai made no objections, perhaps because he had been ignorant of the formalities and protocol or didn’t pay much attention to them. His purpose in seeking a title was mainly to receive stipends and initiate trade with Joseon so there was no reason for him to take issue with formalities when he had already achieved his purpose.

Joseon was aware of this and took advantage of it during negotiations. When court officials were unable to arrive at a consensus on whether to accept Bujantai’s request for one hundred titles to be additionally bestowed to the generals under his command, King Seonjo said that “their demands will be endless so we should deal with each depending on the situation at hand... We need to lure the enemy with dozens of titles so that we can keep a loose rein on them.” The reality was that Joseon wasn’t powerful enough to reject Bujantai’s demand, but King Seonjo stressed that his responsibility as ruler was to coax “the animals” instead of trying to teach them a lesson.<sup>40</sup>

Joseon thus internally justified the issuance of titles to the Hūlun as part of their loose rein policy called *Gimichaek* (羈縻策). The cloth to be bestowed with each title was practically an annual tribute paid to the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 199, the twelfth day of the fifth lunar month in 1606.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 190, the twenty-fifth day of the eighth lunar month in 1605.

Hūlun, but it was officially called a stipend to justify the cost.

In the process, Joseon took advantage of Bujantai's inexperience in foreign affairs to implement the regulations for boundary Jurchens in its agreement with the Hūlun. The stipulations to their agreement were drafted in Korean, possibly to evade the Ming's attention, and added the Ming era name *Wanli* (萬曆) at the end to defend Joseon's loyalty to the Ming in case the Ming ever happened to take issue with the agreement.

Joseon's relations with the Hūlun were based on the regulations for boundary Jurchens, but its nature was different. Joseon's loose rein policy toward the Boundary Jurchens was to "embrace those who come and not cling to those who leave."<sup>41</sup> In other words, the relations were unilateral rather than mutual in nature. Joseon's agreement with the Hūlun, however, included stipulations on repatriation, mutual non-aggression in borderlands, and trade. Titles and stipends were given as a formality for a mutual agreement that practically recognized the Hūlun as a political entity.

The fact that the Hūlun made their demands for titles and stipends via letters hints at how they perceived the regulations for boundary Jurchens. Before the Hūlun, Nurhaci had also sent multiple letters to Joseon since 1595. The wording was unrefined, but he mainly used the title *Jianzhou* (K. *geonju* 建州) he had received from the Ming court and bore the official mark of the Jianzhou Left Guard (C. *Jianzhou zuowei* 建州左衛).<sup>42</sup> The two to the three letters sent by the Hūlun were cruder than those from Nurhaci.

Bujantai sent his first letter immediately after the battle in Geontoe in the fifth lunar month of 1605. Joseon court discussions over the letter indicate that having won the battle, Bujantai exuded confidence as he

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<sup>41</sup> *Seongjong sillok* [Veritable Records of King Seongjong], vol. 217, the ninth day of the sixth lunar month in 1488.

<sup>42</sup> Nurhaci used a variety of titles. In documents from 1595 to 1596, he used *zhu* (主) and then referred to himself as *wang* (王) in 1605 and 1607. He also used *nūzhiguo* (女直國) in a document from 1596 and thereafter used the expression *jianzhouguo* (建州國).

asked to be given a title.<sup>43</sup> When Jeong Chung-sin (鄭忠信, 1576-1636) visited the Hūlun the following year, Bujantai apparently mentioned a letter he once sent to demand that Joseon provide him with cloth.<sup>44</sup> The letter Bujantai mentioned may have been referring to his first letter to Joseon or some other letter, but in any case, it confirms that Bujantai had made demands for a title and stipends.

His letter from the seventh month of 1605 was also sent for the same purpose.<sup>45</sup> Joseon referred to the letter as a personal letter (K. *saseo* 私書) because it was too crude to be recognized as an official document. The titles of the sender and the recipient as well as an official mark or a seal were missing from the undated letter. Perhaps it was to be expected since Bujantai had never had any official intercourse with Joseon or the Ming up until then. Nevertheless, the letter must have come across as extremely sloppy to a state like Joseon that emphasized administrative documentation.

Despite their lack of formality, Bujantai's letters carry a significant implication. A letter is bound to have a sender and a recipient and therefore implies that the two were in a mutual relationship. Joseon records indicate that a reply was sent to Bujantai, possibly by a local government official. Joseon had received explicit demands before from the boundary Jurchens, but none of them had sent letters demanding to be granted a title and stipends. This in turn suggests that the regulations Joseon applied to the boundary Jurchens had been specious.

Joseon and the Hūlun began to hold more serious negotiations after the battle at Geontoe in 1605. The agreement they arrived at the following year was typical in that it was made through negotiations but different in that it adopted the regulations for boundary Jurchens. Unfortunately, it turned out to be useless. The Hūlun thereafter continued to subjugate the Boundary Jurchens and create tensions in Joseon's borderlands.

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<sup>43</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 187, the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month in 1605.

<sup>44</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 199, the ninth day of the fifth lunar month in 1606.

<sup>45</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 189, the seventh day of the seventh lunar month in 1605.

Joseon kept referring to the agreement to stop the Hūlun but to no avail. The regulations for boundary Jurchens therefore only proved to be politically useful for Joseon in terms of internally justifying its agreement with the Hūlun.

Joseon nevertheless continued to engage in economic trades with the Hūlun. In exchange for receiving stipends from Joseon, the Hūlun offered marten fur. This practice went on until King Gwanhaegun's reign and was later adopted for the Jianzhou Jurchens.<sup>46</sup> These relations with the deep-dwelling barbarians such as the Hūlun and the Jianzhou Jurchens mimicked diplomatic relations, but they were justified through the implementation of the regulations originally meant for the boundary Jurchens who were no longer part of Joseon.

## Negotiations with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Implementation of Regulations for Boundary Jurchens

Around the time the aforementioned agreement was being made, the Jianzhou Jurchens' growing influence had pushed their border to adjoin that of Joseon, prompting Joseon to seek change in its relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens. In fact, Joseon already had experience in negotiating with them prior to its negotiations with the Hūlun. Although the negotiation had been a one-time incident involving Manpojin, communication between Joseon and the Jianzhou Jurchens grew frequent thereafter.

Joseon also came into contact with the Jurchens at the upper reaches of the Amnok River. Around 1594, Joseon opened a market at Gaeulpajjin (加乙坡知鎮) in Samsu County to prevent attacks from the Jurchen tribe Wenhewei (溫河衛). In 1600, when the Jurchen chieftain Lotun (老土, ?~?) near the upper Duman River submitted himself to the Jianzhou Jurchens before returning to Joseon's border, Joseon opened a market at

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<sup>46</sup> *Gwanhaegun ilgi* [Daily Records of King Gwanhaegun], vol. 114, the first day of the fourth lunar month in 1617.

Musanjin (茂山鎭) to appease Lotun.<sup>47</sup> As Lotun and his people fell under Nurhaci's influence, Joseon and the Jianzhou Jurchens came to share a border across a wide area that included Manpo, Gaeulpiji, and Musan.

Yet, Joseon maintained its stance about keeping its relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens unofficial. It continued to trade with them in its borderlands but kept political interactions with them to a minimum. Joseon's intention was made apparent when it denied Nurhaci's request for a title in 1601. In other words, Joseon struggled to comply with the Ming's ban on forming friendly relations with the Jurchens so that it wouldn't get caught up in diplomatic problems with the Ming.

Joseon's way of interacting with the Jianzhou Jurchens or the Wenhewei was different from the way it treated the boundary Jurchens at the Six Garrisons along the Duman River. While Joseon didn't form friendly relations with the Jurchens who received titles from the Ming government, it did interact with the Jurchens who were beyond the Ming's influence. As such, it reported all matters involving the Jianzhou Jurchens to the Ming office in Liaodong but mentioned nothing about the threats it received from the Hūlun or the troubles it was experiencing with the boundary Jurchens.

To Joseon, Nurhaci's ascent was a reality and a potential threat to its borderlands. The Joseon court gathered information about his movements through various channels. The Jurchens who defected to Manpojin were a source of valuable intelligence that allowed Joseon to plan ahead. Joseon thus remained in contact with the Jianzhou Jurchens in an unofficial capacity. For instance, it provided aids to the Jurchens in Manpo from 1601 to at least 1613. Each year food was given to hundreds or

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<sup>47</sup> As Joseon decided to open markets for trade with the Jurchens in Manpo, Gaeulpaji, and Musan, the status of those locations became promoted from a *bo* (保) guarded by a *manho* (萬戶) to a *jin* (鎭) guarded by a *cheomjeoljesa* (僉節制使). See Kim Soon-nam, 2010, "Joseon jeongi Manpojin gwa Manpo cheomsa" [The Manpo Garrison and Manpo Cheomsa during Early Joseon], *Sahak yeongu* 97: 59–60; Park Jung-min, 2016, "Joseon junggi mujang Choi Ho ui bukbang hwaldong" [Choi Ho's Activity as a Military Commander in the Northern District during Middle Joseon Dynasty], *Baeksan hakbo* 10: 98–99; Jang, "Seonjodae mal yeojin beonho rotun ui geonju yeojin gwibu wa Joseon ui daejeung," 37–40.

even thousands of the Jurchens in Manpo who were suffering from famine. It was a gesture of compassion, but political forethought was involved as well.

In 1601, Nurhaci sent his deputy Mangralhap (忙刺哈, ?-?) to Manpojin to convey his desire to receive a title from Joseon. The Joseon Second Deputy Commander (K. cheomsa 僉使) in Manpo turned down the request on the grounds that Nurhaci had already received the Ming title *Longhu jiangjun* (龍虎將軍).<sup>48</sup> Nurhaci then sent a letter asking to borrow grains instead of receiving a title. This request had to do with the widespread famine across Joseon's western and northern borderlands as well as Inner Manchuria.<sup>49</sup> The Jurchens kept coming to the edges of Pyeongan and Hamgyeong provinces, begging for food.<sup>50</sup> Joseon government and military officials stationed along the border had to provide food so as to prevent plundering.

Nurhaci's request for a Joseon title had therefore been motivated by a famine that was threatening his rule. In principle, the shortage of food was supposed to be relieved in the Ming's borderlands, but the amount had not been enough to support the surging Jurchen population. In 1601, Nurhaci faced a serious food shortage as he conquered the Hada, one of the two major clans among the Haixi Jurchens. The incorporation of the Hada not only caused a surge in population but a conflict with the Ming because the Hada was well known as a pro-Ming clan. This is why Nurhaci couldn't rely solely on the Ming to overcome the famine.

At the time, Nurhaci was governing a large population across an expansive territory. However, such a population and territory had been acquired too rapidly before an economic foundation could be prepared.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 142, the twenty-third day and the twenty-eighth day of the tenth lunar month in 1601.

<sup>49</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 142, the twenty-third day of the tenth lunar month in 1601.

<sup>50</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 144, the twentieth day of the twelfth lunar month in 1601.

<sup>51</sup> The Jianzhou Jurchens struggled with the matter of controlling population growth. When Jianzhou Jurchen chieftains pressed Nurhaci to dispatch troops to the Yehe because of an issue involving an old Yehe maiden, he apparently said "even if we do win, how do you propose we feed all the newly acquired people and livestock? We have no grains stocked. ... Our existing people will

Nurhaci thus had no choice but to turn to the Ming or Joseon for food and believed that a title from Joseon could guarantee a stable supply of food.<sup>52</sup> As he brought the Jurchen tribes around Mount Baekdu under his control, a larger portion of his territory came into contact with that of Joseon. And since he had already negotiated with Joseon before, he must have been somewhat optimistic about the possibility of receiving a title.

Joseon, on the other hand, had no reason to go against the Ming by bestowing a title upon Nurhaci. Yet, it could not turn a blind eye on the Jurchens' food shortage out of concern that they might resort to plundering. Moreover, it was difficult to completely ignore Nurhaci's request when he was constantly expanding his power. Joseon therefore refused to establish official relations by bestowing a title but agreed to supply a limited amount of food. Nurhaci gained what he was ultimately seeking, which is probably why he didn't make any further requests for a title. Despite the financial expenses to supply food, Joseon's solution was effective in preventing conflicts with the Jianzhou Jurchens and left Nurhaci with no reason to be hostile against Joseon.

Meanwhile, Joseon reported to the Ming office in Liaodong about the demand for food it had received from the Jianzhou Jurchens. Although the actual message Joseon sent remains unavailable, the Ming office's reply hints at what the message had conveyed. Joseon had sent a message to a Ming Assistant Regional Commander (C. *canjiang* 參將) in Zhenjiang (鎮江) to inform him that Jurchens were turning up in the border area of Pyeongan province and to ask the general for help in preventing such Jurchens from using military force.<sup>53</sup> The Governor (C. *xunfu* 巡撫) Zhao Ji (趙楫, ?~?) and Regional Commander (C. *zongbing* 總兵) Li

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 all starve to death." *Manwen laodang* (滿文老檔), the sixth lunar month of 1615.

<sup>52</sup> Later on, Nurhaci described Joseon's bestowal of titles to the Hūlun as an edict (勅書), which confused both Joseon and Ming. See Sadae *mungwe*, vol. 46, the eighteenth day of the ninth lunar month in 1605 (Letter from the Liaodong Regional Commander to the King of Joseon). The word *edict* must have referred to titles, indicating that the demand for titles by the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun was actually about the profits to be gained from the titles.

<sup>53</sup> *Yimun deungnok* (吏文騰錄), vol. 10, the first day of the second lunar month in 1602 [The reply a Assistant Regional Commander in Zhenjians in Jingang (鎮江) sent to the king of Joseon].

Chengliang (李成梁, 1526~1615) of Liaodong also received messages from Joseon and responded that a Ming government official would be sent to the Jianzhou Jurchens to make arrangements for them to come to the Ming's border instead of begging for food.<sup>54</sup>

In the fourth lunar month of 1602, the Liaodong Regional Military Commission (C. *Liaodong duzhihuishisi* 遼東都指揮使司) sent a message to assure Joseon that after talking to Nurhaci and conducting an investigation, it had found nothing to indicate that Nurhaci was trying to invade Joseon.<sup>55</sup> This message documented the initial inquiries Joseon had made along with the detailed records of what each office in Liaodong uncovered from their investigation. According to the message, Nurhaci had mentioned the fact that he took good care of Joseon people who invaded his territory before repatriating them and had asked for his goodwill to be compensated with grains. At the upstream of the Amnok River, Joseon had been distributing food vouchers in the form of a document similar to Records of Public Affairs. However, when food shortage grew severe, Nurhaci threatened to use brute force if necessary to secure food, which meant he could resort to plundering. After launching an investigation into the situation, the Ming office in Liaodong tried to reason with the Jianzhou Jurchens and threatened that the Ming could take military actions if they ever invaded Joseon. Nurhaci argued that Joseon used to provide food to the Jurchens living near the Amnok River, so they naturally followed the local government official's instructions and submitted their food vouchers for grains only to return empty-handed. On the surface, this incident was patched up through the Ming's mediation.

What is interesting about the Ming's aforementioned account of the incident is that titles are never mentioned by Joseon or the Jianzhou Jurchens. According to the Veritable Records of King Seonjo (*Seonjo sillok*

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<sup>54</sup> *Yimun deungnok*, vol. 10, the eleventh day of the second lunar month in 1602 [The reply the governor of Liaodong sent to the king of Joseon, the reply the regional commander of Liaodong (遼東總兵) sent to the king of Joseon].

<sup>55</sup> *Yimun deungnok*, vol. 10, the fourth day of the fourth lunar month in 1602 [The letter from the Liaodong Regional Military Commission (遼東都指揮使司) to the king of Joseon].

宣祖實錄), Nurhaci had demanded a title, which Joseon had understood as an excuse to profit from the adoption of the regulations for boundary Jurchens. Yet, Joseon mentioned nothing about a title in its report to the Ming. What's more important is that while Joseon was reporting the situation to the Ming office in Liaodong, it was still handing food out to the Jurchens in Manpojin. This fact can be confirmed from a 1613 report about food distribution in Manpo written by Jeong Sa-ho (鄭賜湖, 1553-1616), the then Governor (K. *gamsa* 監司) of Pyeongan province. The report states that the practice of food distribution had never been discontinued since it was introduced between 1601 and 1602.<sup>56</sup> As such, the purpose of Joseon's report wasn't to ask the Ming to stop the Jurchens' demand for food or gain the Ming's permission to interact with the Jurchens. The report was a diplomatic, preemptive measure that stressed the challenging position Joseon was in so as to avoid potential accusations from the Ming about separately engaging in exchanges with the Jurchens.

Regardless of titles, providing food aids at Manpo had already settled down as a custom that lasted until the reign of King Gwanghaegun. Manpo thereafter served as a place of negotiations between Joseon and the Jianzhou Jurchens. While Joseon cited the Ming's ban as an excuse not to form friendly relations with the Jurchens and submitted formal reports about the Jurchens to the Ming, it also secretly negotiated with the Jurchens to dodge threats. And this approach worked because the Jianzhou Jurchens had not been preoccupied with establishing friendly relations with Joseon.

Another interesting point is that while negotiating with Joseon in Manpo, Nurhaci sent several letters to Joseon. Since 1595, Nurhaci had attempted to establish friendly relations with Joseon via writings. Joseon responded through the second deputy commander stationed in Manpo. Nurhaci's early letters were unrefined. The letter Shin Chung-il delivered in 1596 bore the stamp mark of the Jianzhou Left Guard (*Jianzhou*

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<sup>56</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 22, the nineteenth day of the second lunar month in 1613.

*zuowei* 建州左衛) but Nurhaci referred to himself as “*Nuzhiguo jianzhouwei guanshu yiren zhizhu*” (女直國建州衛管束夷人之主 ‘Barbarian Master of the Yeojin State, the Supervisor of Jianzhouwei Barbarian People’). Although there was no state called *Nuzhiguo* yet, the name was paired with “*jianzhouwei*,” which meant the state was part of the Ming. Nurhaci also seemed to have qualms about using a derogatory phrase like “master of barbarians” to refer to himself.

The letters sent beyond 1605, however, proved to be starkly different. In the letter Nurhaci sent to the second deputy commander in Manpo in 1605, the character for leader (C. *zhu* 主) was replaced by the one standing for king (C. *wang* 王). The letter from 1607 named the King of Joseon as its recipient. Nurhaci used the title *Jianzhou dengchu difang guowang* (建州等處地方國王) in his letter from 1605 and *Jianzhou dengchu difang yiwang* (建州等處地方夷王) in his letter from 1607. Replacing “*Jianzhouwei*” with “*Jianzhou dengchu defang*” made it seem like Jianzhou was an area under Nurhaci’s control rather than a Ming garrison. The way Nurhaci described himself as a king or a barbarian king was still rather unrefined and his use of the terms “*Jianzhou dengchu*” (建州等處) and “*guo*” (國) hinted at a notable change in his view. Instead of the master of barbarians in *Jianzhouwei*, he wished to be regarded as the king of an independence force.<sup>57</sup>

These changes should be taken into consideration while reviewing the negotiations between Joseon and the Jianzhou Jurchens at the beginning of King Gwanghaegun’s reign. Nurhaci hinted at his intent to pioneer his own path and Joseon was aware of it. By the time King Gwanghaegun rose to the throne, Nurhaci had turned into a powerful man who not only merged the Hoifa and subdued the Hūlun but brought most of the boundary Jurchens along the Duman River under his influence.

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<sup>57</sup> According to Yi Si-bal’s report in the third lunar month of 1607, the letters in which Nurhaci referred to himself as king bore a stamp mark (*Seonjo sillok*, vol. 209, the twenty-first day of the third lunar month, 1607). It can therefore be assumed that his letters were drafted in the form of an official document although they no longer bore the stamp mark of the Jianzhou Left Guard (*Jianzhou zuowei* 建州左衛).

For a while, Nurhaci kept his true intentions to himself as he negotiated with Joseon. He must have been conscious of the possibility that Joseon could leak details about his movements to the Ming. Indeed, Joseon did report to the Ming about how Nurhaci was expanding his power by subjugating the tribes around him as well as how he had the audacity to call himself a king in a letter addressed directly to the King of Joseon. The solidarity Joseon had formed with the Ming by sharing such intelligence must have seemed threatening to Nurhaci, which was why he couldn't maintain a hard line toward Joseon or the Ming.

Around that time, Nurhaci began paying tribute to the Ming again.<sup>58</sup> This sudden resumption of a practice that had been discontinued for almost two years indicates that Nurhaci had grown aware of a change in the Ming's attitude and therefore felt the need to directly keep an eye on the Ming's local sentiment. He drastically increased the number of officials to be dispatched in order to directly check the Ming's reaction. The Ming was concerned about Nurhaci's gesture but unless he took military actions, it had no excuse to stop him from paying tribute or not reciprocate his courtesy.

Nurhaci simultaneously expanded trade with Joseon. In addition to negotiating at Manpo, he arranged the trade of marten fur with Joseon. On a trial basis, Joseon proposed that the regulations for boundary Jurchens be adopted, and Nurhaci agreed. Nurhaci quite faithfully complied with such regulations as he exchanged letters with the second deputy commander in Manpo and the magistrate of Hoeryeong (會寧).<sup>59</sup> For someone who had not long ago referred to himself as king and sent a letter addressed directly to the King of Joseon, this was a major shift in atti-

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<sup>58</sup> Nurhaci stopped paying tribute to the Ming for about two years from around 1606. He then resumed the practice from 1609 and personally took part in 1611. The Jianzhou Jurchens also seem to have paid tribute in the second lunar month 1615 (*Ming shenzong shilu* [Veritable Records of the Ming Emperor Shenzong], vol. 488, twelfth day of the tenth lunar month in 1611; *Ming shenzong shilu*, vol. 529, the eighteenth day of the second lunar month in 1615).

<sup>59</sup> Nurhaci corresponded with Joseon officials in Hoeryeong and Manpo before sending another letter to the king of Joseon in 1617 (*Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 133, the thirteenth day of the tenth lunar month in 1618).

tude but perhaps not a surprising one considering the wealth of experience Nurhaci already had in dealing with the Ming and Joseon. Nurhaci's priority was to amass financial resources through trade so the means of achieving his goal didn't matter much.

Meanwhile, in reaction to Nurhaci's expanding power, Joseon continued to build a system of military cooperation with the Ming. Yet, Joseon was also aware that doing so could upset its relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens, which is why it kept negotiating with them behind the scenes. Trade served as an unofficial channel of communication and a key to discouraging the Jurchens from attacking Joseon. To handle these contradictory approaches toward the Ming and the Jurchens, Joseon introduced the regulations for Boundary Jurchens just like it had done with the Hūlun. It also moved the place of trade with the Jurchens further north from Manpo to Hoeryeong to avoid the Ming's eyes.

In the second lunar month of 1608, right after King Gwanghaegun's enthronement, Nurhaci sent marten furs as an offering and asked for a favor in return. As soon as the Hūlun were driven away from the Duman River, the Jianzhou Jurchens made a detour around the river's north side and approached Joseon for trade. Joseon's Border Defense Council decided to "find out what their real intentions are by documenting and paying for the fur with cloth from the province's reserve as per the regulations on marten fur payments to the boundary Jurchens."<sup>60</sup> This description hints that for the first time, Nurhaci had brought fur to Hamgyeong province for the purpose of trade. Joseon's solution of referring to its regulations for boundary Jurchens to deal with the Hūlun was repeated at a larger scale with the Jianzhou Jurchens and was sustained throughout King Gwanghaegun's reign. It even lasted until after Nurhaci established the Later Jin and defeated the Joseon-Ming joint forces in the Battle of Sarhū (1619).

Trade thus became central to Joseon's relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Later Jin. Although there are no historical sources men-

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<sup>60</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 1, the seventeenth day of the second lunar month in 1608.

tioning the scale of such trade, speculations can be made based on the fiscal budget that had been allocated for paying stipends to Jurchens. Stipends were basically paid with cloth and the amount fluctuated depending on the circumstances.<sup>61</sup>

In the early seventeenth century, the stipend paid to the boundary Jurchens equaled the sum of what was paid to thirty officials with titles classified as *dangsanggwan* (堂上官). Apart from stipends, cloth was also supplied as payment for marten fur. The cloths provided as stipends were blue and red cloth procured from the Ministry of Revenue (K. *Hojo* 戶曹) and the Ministry of Defense (K. *Byeongjo* 兵曹) and whatever goods to be bestowed as awards were procured from within Hamgyeong province.<sup>62</sup>

The Hūlun's stipend amount was determined between 1605 and 1606. Those with titles classified as *dangsanggwan* received forty rolls (K. *pil* 疋) of cloth.<sup>63</sup> Joseon had bestowed one hundred titles called *Jeolchung janggūn* (折衝將軍), which was classified as a *dangsanggwan* of the senior third rank. That meant Joseon had to prepare a maximum of four thousand rolls, or eighty *dong* (同) in total but it negotiated the amount with the Hūlun.<sup>64</sup> Bujantai suggested that he be paid two thousand rolls, the equivalent of forty rolls each for fifty titles, and that an additional one thousand rolls, the equivalent of twenty rolls each for the remaining fifty titles, be provided for him to distribute among his men. Joseon turned down his suggestion and informed that it was willing to pay twenty rolls per title as per its traditional practice toward barbarians since the Japanese Invasions of 1592 to 1598.<sup>65</sup> In other words, Joseon drew the line at a total of two thousand rolls, which was less than Bujantai's demand for three thousand.

At the time, a Joseon official named Jeong Chung-sin was working

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<sup>61</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 189, the sixth day of the seventh lunar month in 1605.

<sup>62</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 164, the twelfth day of the seventh lunar month in 1603.

<sup>63</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 192, the twenty-sixth day of the tenth lunar month in 1605.

<sup>64</sup> One *dong* (同) amounted to fifty rolls of cloth.

<sup>65</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 199, the twelfth day of the fifth lunar month in 1606.

at the forefront of the negotiations. He argued that the matter of stipends would be critical in determining the Hūlun's attitude thereafter. If Joseon had no choice but to pay the Hūlun stipends, it would be beneficial for Joseon to grant its request. Governor Yi Si-bal (李時發, 1569-1626) and Provincial Army Commander Yi Si-eon of Hamgyeong province agreed with Jeong's argument for the sake of stabilizing Joseon's frontier. Bibyeonsa thereby reconsidered the matter, stating that "it would not be the first time to pay a stipend of forty rolls if we take into account our traditional rule on paying the boundary Jurchens." Joseon ultimately decided to accede to Bujantai's request for three thousand rolls of cloth.

The stipend Joseon paid Nurhaci would have been similar or higher. This precedent with the Hūlun must have affected Joseon when it chose to implement the regulations for boundary Jurchens in its relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens. After subduing the Hūlun, Nurhaci claimed that the rolls of cloth paid to the Hūlun should be given to him instead, but once the Hūlun recovered its power to a certain degree, it asked for the permission to trade in Joseon's borderlands again. Joseon thus engaged in the trade of marten fur with both sides and its scale gradually increased. Also, apart from the cloth they received as stipends, the Hūlun requested for additional cloth to make official robes, which some estimate to have amounted up to five thousand rolls, or one hundred *dong* per year.<sup>66</sup>

Records confirm that marten fur trade with the Jianzhou Jurchens took place in Joseon's Hamgyeong province in 1614, and particularly in the seventh month, four hundred sheets of marten fur were supplied to the province.<sup>67</sup> This was five times more than what was traded in 1608 and the amount rose to five hundred sheets by the second lunar month of 1619.<sup>68</sup> In addition, other various furs such as red fox fur and squirrel fur appear to have been traded so that in 1616, 2,800 rolls, or 56 *dong* of

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<sup>66</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 25, the fourteenth day of the second lunar month in 1610.

<sup>67</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 75, the eighth day and the sixteenth day of the second lunar month in 1614; *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 80, the nineteenth day of the seventh lunar month in 1614.

<sup>68</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 137, the twenty-fourth day of the second lunar month in 1619.

cloth collected as tax-in-kind was spent on acquiring fur.<sup>69</sup> While it is uncertain whether stipends were sufficient enough to cover the cost of purchasing furs, the amount must have been considerable. Records indicate that in 1620, the Jianzhou Jurchens were provided with four thousand rolls of cloth as stipends.<sup>70</sup>

While negotiations may have taken place in Manpo, Joseon continued to conduct trade and pay stipends in Hoeryeong. In 1617, Nurhaci sent a letter asking whether stipends could be paid in Manpo instead of Hoeryeong but Joseon refused to make the change. According to the discussions held at the Border Defense Council, the reason was because “Manpo is not far from the Central Plains, which means Joseon could be in trouble if Manpo becomes breached.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, Joseon had insisted on trading in Hoeryeong where its activities would stay out of the Ming’s sight. As much as Joseon went on expanding its area of contact with the Jianzhou Jurchens, it still wished to handle matters related to titles and stipends from behind the scenes.

Even as Joseon actively engaged in negotiations with the Jianzhou Jurchens, it took precautions. It shared with the Ming the everyday interactions and food distribution it conducted in Manpo so that they wouldn’t become the source of diplomatic problems. And in Hoeryeong, it adopted the regulations for boundary Jurchens to bestow titles and stipends to the Hūlun and engage in trade with them but chose not to report anything to the Ming. This dual approach toward the deep-dwelling Jurchens helped relieve military tensions and brought temporary stability to Joseon’s borderlands. The approach wasn’t, however, a lasting solution because it could be altered at any moment due to internal dissent, the Ming’s intervention, or failure to maintain a balance between the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun.

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<sup>69</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 106, the twenty-eighth day of the eighth lunar month in 1616.

<sup>70</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 148, the first day in the first lunar month of 1620.

<sup>71</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 114, the first day in the fourth lunar month of 1617.

## The Jianzhou Jurchens' Incorporation of the Hūlun and the Demise of the Regulations for Boundary Jurchens

The previous sections have covered how Joseon's policy toward the Jurchens began to focus on the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun in the early seventeenth century. These so-called deep-dwelling barbarians subjugated most of the independent Jurchen tribes spread across the mid-to-upstream areas along the Amnok River, Mount Baekdu, and the Duman River, many of which resided in Joseon's borderlands. Among such independent Jurchens were what Joseon called the boundary Jurchens who were considered a buffer between Joseon and the deep-dwelling barbarians. The Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun made inroads into that buffer, came face to face with Joseon, and complied with the regulations for boundary Jurchens for a while in order to negotiate with Joseon.

Joseon reported to the Ming office in Liaodong that its borderlands were under pressure from the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun and that the two groups were interconnected through marriages. The reports garnered little attention, but they weren't entirely meaningless because they gave the Jianzhou Jurchens the impression that Joseon could always form an alliance with the Ming. And keeping the Ming court informed about the Jianzhou Jurchens' movements implied that Joseon had no choice but to interact with them. In other words, despite the Ming ban on forming relations with the Jianzhou Jurchens or the Hūlun, Joseon had shared its predicament with the Ming court to cite border stability as an excuse for negotiating with the Jurchens. The Ming court had believed that Joseon's reports were reliable, which meant it had no reason to interfere with Joseon's negotiations to a certain degree. Hence, by the time Joseon was done reporting to the Ming, its interactions with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun had grown routine and trade with them had increased.

The regulations for boundary Jurchens that Joseon had adopted for the Hūlun were also adopted for the Jianzhou Jurchens, enabling Joseon to continue trading with both groups until the early years of King Gwanghaegun's reign. Nurhaci and Bujantai were, however, rivals. In

Nurhaci's eyes, Bujantai seemed to behave like an erratic child, but in reality, he was still the leader of a traditionally powerful tribe within the Jurchen society. The two men were like oil and water so they would repeatedly clash, reconcile, and grow apart. For this reason, Joseon kept a close eye on their relationship.

Since 1605, Bujantai eagerly subdued boundary Jurchen villages along the Duman River and came face to face with Joseon as he established a small temporary fortress in Geontoe near Jongseong.<sup>72</sup> Bujantai dominated the areas around the Duman River for a while until his power weakened rapidly from being defeated in a battle at Mount Ogalam in 1607. Nurhaci, on the other hand, took the opportunity to take over a clan nearby called the Hoifa and was hugely successful in targeting the tribes of the Donghai Jurchen. He went on to capture the fortress *Ihan alin i hoton* (宜罕阿麟城) near the Hülun capital.<sup>73</sup> Bujantai thus lost his footing along the Duman River and became cut off from Joseon for a while.

Joseon was apparently pleased with the Hülun's defeat because regardless of applying the regulations for boundary Jurchens to their relations, they had still been a threat to Joseon. According to Nurhaci, messengers came from Hoeryeong, Jongseong, and even Manpo to show their gratitude for defeating the Hülun in the battle at Mount Ogalam.<sup>74</sup> The exact context behind such messages remains unknown but to some degree, it seems to support Nurhaci's claim that he helped Joseon by sub-

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<sup>72</sup> Around 1609, the Jianzhou Jurchen troops took control of *Geontoe sibe*. Sibe is a Mongol term that refers to a fortress (Ferdinand D. Lessing, *Mongolian-English Dictionary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960), 694) and is marked as “時排,” “恃排,” or “時伐” in historical sources from the Joseon period. The term was often used around the six Joseon garrisons in the north. Geontoe sibe was a fortress the Hülun built across from Jongseong to use as a base in targeting the boundary Jurchens and the Six Garrisons. In 1605, Joseon attempted to destroy it to avenge the fall of Donggwanjin to the Hülun but failed. The Hülun thereafter continued to use it whenever they were targeting boundary Jurchens around the Tumen River or negotiating with Joseon.

<sup>73</sup> *Qing taizu shilu* [Veritable Records of the Qing Emperor Taizu], vol. 3, the first day of the ninth lunar month in 1608.

<sup>74</sup> *Sadae mungwe*, vol. 48, the sixth day of the seventh lunar month in 1607 (The letter from the governor of Liaodong to the king of Joseon).

duing Bujantai.<sup>75</sup>

In the third lunar month of 1607, Joseon prepared a guideline for the next potential communication with Nurhaci after the battle at Mount Ogalam. The Border Defense Council pointed out that it was inappropriate for Joseon commanders at the border to say that they would “propose to [Ming] China that Nurhaci be commended.”<sup>76</sup> Historians at the time also mentioned how it was “wrong for border officials to be relieved by the Hūlun’s defeat and to send spies so that they [the Hūlun and the Jianzhou Jurchens] may destroy each other.”<sup>77</sup> These comments suggest that Joseon even attempted to tactically take advantage of the conflict between the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun. They also suggest that Joseon people in the Six Garrisons and other border areas had been somewhat in favor of the Jianzhou Jurchens.

After the Battle of Mount Ogalam, Joseon’s relations with the Hūlun were severed for almost two years. Joseon instead began trading marten fur with the Jianzhou Jurchens and paid them with cloth according to the regulations for boundary Jurchens just like it had done with the Hūlun. It was around this time when Joseon began paying stipends to the Jianzhou Jurchens. The relations, however, soon became threatened. A rumor spread among the Jianzhou Jurchens that the Ming would soon join forces with Joseon to attack them.<sup>78</sup> The rumor in Joseon was that an attack from the Jianzhou Jurchens was imminent.<sup>79</sup> These two rumors had actually been spread by the Ming. Once the Jianzhou Jurchens were perceived as a genuine threat, the Ming chose to drag Joseon in to place pressure on the Jianzhou Jurchens. These circumstances rapidly iced the relations between Joseon and the Jianzhou Jurchens.

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<sup>75</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 209, the twenty-first day of the third lunar month in 1607.

<sup>76</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 209, the twenty-eighth day of the third lunar month in 1607.

<sup>77</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 210, the second day of the fourth lunar month in 1607.

<sup>78</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 7, the seventh day of the eighth lunar month in 1608; *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 11, the eighteenth day of the twelfth lunar month in 1608.

<sup>79</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 25, the first day, the eighth day, and the eleventh day of the second lunar month in 1610.

In the eighth lunar month of 1608, the Border Defense Council proposed that an interpreter be dispatched to the Jianzhou Jurchens to determine whether there was any truth to the rumored attack and obtained permission to do so from King Gwanghaegun. The person the Border Defense Council had in mind for the mission was Ha Se-guk (河世國, ?-1622), an interpreter in Manpo with plenty of experience in trading with the Jianzhou Jurchens.<sup>80</sup> Trade was possible without having established official relations so it could serve as a good excuse in trying to ascertain the counterpart's situation.<sup>81</sup> Joseon could also offer to satisfy the Jurchens' financial needs, which could help relieve tension in its borderlands. In any case, the fact that the Joseon court had considered sending an interpreter suggests that Joseon had stopped interacting with the Jianzhou Jurchens altogether by then.

Negotiations with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun resumed in 1609 when the two groups came to Joseon's border asking for stipends almost at the same time. In the ninth lunar month of 1608, Nurhaci had accepted Bujantai's offer to make peace and gave him his daughter's hand in marriage. Although he'd been responsible for driving Bujantai into a corner, Nurhaci had chosen to patch up their relationship while he had the upper hand instead of eliminating Bujantai. Perhaps he knew that it would've been impossible to conquer the Hūlun all at once and was satisfied with what he had achieved by that point. And once they made peace, the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun reached out to Joseon.

The Jianzhou Jurchens came to Hoeryeong and the Hūlun to Jongseong to attempt negotiations. They claimed that they had come to pay tribute, but Joseon believed that they'd come to check on where they stood with Joseon. In the first lunar month of 1609, King Gwanghaegun

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<sup>80</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 7, the thirtieth day of the eighth lunar month in 1608.

<sup>81</sup> A diplomatic letter the governor of Liaodong sent to Joseon in the second lunar month of 1610 regarding the reopening of a market in Junggang mentioned that "distinguishing the Chinese and the barbarians is originally about territorial borders but engaging in trade is really about communication" (*Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 25, the fourth day of the second lunar month in 1610). The comment was about Ming's relations with Joseon but can be understood as an acknowledgement that trade could serve as a means for minimal communication.

inquired whether he should grant the Hamgyeong provincial army commander's request for guards and weapons, and ordered for troops in the south to be prepared to be sent up north if an emergency happened.<sup>82</sup> While the Border Defense Council worked on a defense plan, it mentioned the fact that the Hūlun was rebuilding its makeshift fortress in Geontoe and stressed that Joseon should be prepared in case they come to the border asking for food. The description that "the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun have strong armies, making them the most powerful among the tribes" hints that Joseon was still wary of the Hūlun's strength.<sup>83</sup> If the two groups were in solidarity, most in Joseon were likely to consider it as a cause for concern.

A further glimpse into Joseon's situation can be gained from the Border Defense Council appendix drafted in the fourth lunar month of 1609 to report "the enemy's movements" to the Ming envoy Xiong Hua (熊化, 1581-1649). The appendix consisted of five sections. The first and second sections detailed threats from Nurhaci. The third section informed how Nurhaci made peace with Bujantai by giving his daughter's hand in marriage. The fourth section explained how Joseon ended up giving titles and stipends to the Hūlun. The fifth section notified that Joseon was now receiving demands for cloth separately from Nurhaci and Bujantai.<sup>84</sup> Considering that the document had been part of a report to a Ming envoy, it hints that Joseon had indeed been negotiating with the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun in some way.

The real threat to Joseon was the Jianzhou Jurchens. Joseon was aware of how the Battle of Mount Ogalam had unfolded and anticipated that Nurhaci would eventually subjugate Bujantai one day. The Hūlun was unlikely to be an immediate threat since the Border Defense Council had already agreed to grant them stipends in the third lunar month of 1609, and even if they ended up going to war, Joseon believed it had a

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<sup>82</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 12, the eighteenth day in the first lunar month of 1609.

<sup>83</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 12, the twenty-first day in the first lunar month of 1609.

<sup>84</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 15, the twenty-first day in the fourth lunar month of 1609.

seventy to eighty percent chance of winning. Nurhaci, on the other hand, pretended to faithfully comply with the regulations for boundary Jurchens, but his ambition set him apart from Bujantai in the eyes of Joseon.<sup>85</sup>

What stands out from the Border Defense Council's notes was that Joseon had agreed to give stipends to the Hūlun. Yet, the report to Xiong Hua in the fourth lunar month of the same year merely mentioned that they hadn't been paid at the time. In other words, Joseon relayed to the Ming the demands it received from the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun as well as the outcomes but omitted the details of what happened in between. Such omissions can also be spotted in Joseon's reports about the barbarians' movements. Internally, Joseon had justified its negotiations with the Jurchens as part of its loose-rein policy to stabilize its borderlands, but it habitually left out details that might be problematic in the reports it submitted to the Ming.

Another notable aspect is that the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun posed threats in different ways. Whenever the Hūlun made requests for stipends, they were overbearing. It was the same when Joseon gave them stipends in 1609 and Bujantai continued to behave crudely thereafter so that Joseon's relations with the Hūlun were always unstable.<sup>86</sup> Nurhaci, on the other hand, was relatively cordial. His attitude could, of course, change depending on the circumstances, but he was certainly not as impetuous as Bujantai.

Joseon was nevertheless rather vigilant of Nurhaci's prudence. When Bujantai's envoy once came to inform him of the fall of *Dongwanjin* (潼關鎮), one of Joseon's six northern garrisons, Nurhaci told the envoy that the Hūlun should stop causing troubles by attacking

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<sup>85</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 14, the tenth day of the third lunar month in 1609.

<sup>86</sup> In the third lunar month of 1609, Bibyeonsa concluded that Bujantai was being pretentious (*Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 14, the tenth day of the third lunar month in 1609). And in 1611, Joseon requisitioned troops from all over the country on account of a military threat from the Hūlun and sent them to its northern border [*Gyebon deungnok* (啓本騰錄), the tenth day of the tenth lunar month in 1611].

Joseon.<sup>87</sup> Fearing that Bujantai's actions might jeopardize his relationship with Joseon, Nurhaci immediately sent a messenger to Manpo to relay what he'd just discussed with Bujantai's envoy. The news was then passed on to the Joseon court through the Pyeongan Governor's report. This incident shows that Nurhaci's disposition and diplomatic skills were different from those of Bujantai. Yet, Joseon had been wary of Nurhaci's submissive attitude because it believed he was hiding his true intentions.

Joseon even anticipated that Nurhaci would soon turn into a source of great distress. In particular, Jang Man (張晩, 1566-1629), the governor of Hamgyeong province, expressed his concern about the power Nurhaci was wielding around the Duman River. Jang Man was well-informed on Jurchen affairs, which is why he suspected that Nurhaci's growing power would lead to the formation of an army.<sup>88</sup> According to an urgent report he submitted to the king, Nurhaci had secured five to six thousand troops from gathering the boundary Jurchens and even if they went on an expedition, Nurhaci was so confident that it would be impossible for Bujantai to take their absence as an opportunity. The Defense Border Council agreed with Jang Man's assessment and believed that once Nurhaci finished consolidating all the tribes around him, he would come after Joseon.

Unlike the impulsive Bujantai, Nurhaci paced himself as he took over the forces around him one by one, adding to Joseon's suspicion of him as a potential threat. What Joseon needed in order to stabilize its borderlands was an ally strong enough to counter the Jianzhou Jurchens. It couldn't expect the Ming to help nor was it in any condition to come up with a plan to fortify itself, which is why it turned its eyes to the Hūlun. The Hūlun were equally threatening to Joseon's border but with conciliation, they could be the contender to check the Jianzhou Jurchens.

In the early days of King Gwanhaegun's reign, Joseon raised little

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<sup>87</sup> *Sadae mungwe*, vol. 46, the seventh lunar month of 1605 (The letters from the king of Joseon to the governor of Jiliao, the governor of Liaodong, the regional commander of Liaodong, Brigade Commander in Zhenjiang, and the Liaodong regional military commission).

<sup>88</sup> *Gwanhaegun ilgi*, vol. 23, the nineteenth day of the twelfth lunar month in 1609.

objection to giving large quantities of cloth to the Hūlun to maintain peace along its border. Despite the Hūlun's menacing demeanor and the belief that it had a better chance of winning if it were to go to war with them, Joseon decided that preventing the Hūlun from falling under the Jianzhou Jurchens' control should be its priority. Joseon needed the Hūlun to stop Nurhaci from gaining more power, which meant it had to maintain friendly relations with them instead of hoping for them to perish.

When the troops of the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun confronted each other at Mount Ogalam, the Border Defense Council mentioned the need to keep a close eye on changes in either side's forces.<sup>89</sup> Regarding the battle's outcome, a historical essay expressed wariness by mentioning that "Nurhaci's army won't proceed further south until the Hūlun falls. [However,] If the two enemies fight each other, the Hūlun will be defeated and Nurhaci will grow stronger. How could that be beneficial for us?"<sup>90</sup> In other words, Joseon had believed that the two Jurchen groups' rivalry could help maintain peace in its borderlands.

The way Joseon took advantage of the Hūlun was similar to how the Ming would later use the Yehe to keep the Jianzhou Jurchens in check. Before Nurhaci entered the scene, the Yehe were a threat to the Ming's border. Yet, once Nurhaci emerged as an even greater threat, the Yehe became essential to defending the Ming's border. In the same sense, the Hūlun were a potential enemy to Joseon, but could turn into a useful ally when the Jianzhou Jurchens were growing powerful.

The person who particularly highlighted the Hūlun's strategic worth was Jang Man. In discussions on whether Joseon should return to being on friendly terms with the Hūlun, Jang Man submitted an eager memo on why it was essential to be on good terms with them.<sup>91</sup> Jang presumed that the rumor about Nurhaci's solidarity with Bujantai was true but suspect-

<sup>89</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 209, the twenty-eighth day of the third lunar month in 1607.

<sup>90</sup> *Seonjo sillok*, vol. 210, the second day of the fourth lunar month in 1607.

<sup>91</sup> Jang Man, *Nakseojip* (洛西集), vol. 2, Memo (疏劄) recommending peace with the Hūlun (請許忽溫和劄).

ed that Bujantai had conceded temporarily. He stressed that since Bujantai still had considerable power, it would be beneficial for Joseon to remain on good terms with him. Jang also suspected that Nurhaci was instigating conflict between Joseon and the Hūlun and believed that Joseon should support the Hūlun so that they could sustain a rivalry with the Jizhou Jurchens. He hence urged the Joseon court to positively consider the Hūlun's proposal to negotiate if they sent an envoy.

Of course, Jang Man was not suggesting that Joseon should grant the Hūlun's wishes unconditionally. He proposed that Joseon should actively take advantage of their vulnerable situation by waiting for them to court Joseon before granting their wish and then demanding progress on unresolved matters such as the unfinished repatriation of Joseon people. In the second lunar month of 1610, Jang submitted a report to warn about unreasonable economic demands from the Hūlun. At the time, the Hūlun were asking for extra cloth apart from that paid as stipends under the pretense of making official robes for those with the title called *baekjang* (百將). Jang Man argued that it will be difficult to match all of the Hūlun's demands aimed at increasing the volume of trade and therefore proposed that all of them should be turned down except for rewards in exchange for repatriation. He nevertheless predicted that it would be difficult not to allow trade when Joseon was already issuing titles and Bibyeonsa agreed with his prediction.<sup>92</sup>

Under such circumstances, Joseon implemented the regulations for boundary Jurchens as a formality in its relations with the Hūlun, but their actual application was a different matter. In reality, Joseon frequently resorted to stopgap measures whenever it was pressured by the Hūlun. It also eventually agreed to provide the extra cloth they had demanded for official robes so that the volume of cloth it paid to the Hūlun amounted to five thousand rolls, or one hundred dong each year. Joseon didn't cave in immediately to the request for extra cloth though because the magistrate of Jongseongbu had initially conveyed his refusal to the Hūlun en-

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<sup>92</sup> *Gwanhaegun ilgi*, vol. 25, the fourteenth day of the second lunar month in 1610.

voy Šolonggo (小弄耳).

After Jang Man finished serving as the Governor of Hamgyeong province, he again shared with King Gwanghaegun his views on circumstances at the northern border. He told the king that “the Hūlun is too preoccupied with recovering from the tremendous loss it suffered through the battle at Mount Ogalam so it won’t be able to target other countries for the time being.”<sup>93</sup> Jang Man further predicted that even if the Hūlun were to attack, the forces and fortresses in Hamgyeong province were completely prepared to stop it from advancing southward. Yet, he advised that the Hūlun envoy traveling back and forth to Jongseong should be treated well. This implies that while tension along its border was rising due to the Hūlun’s overbearing approach, Joseon hadn’t been acceding to all their demands out of fear.

The assessments Jang Man made during and after his time as the governor of Hamgyeong province were accurate. Although how discussions unfolded thereafter remains unknown, most in the Joseon government appeared to acknowledge the Hūlun’s strategic necessity. According to a report submitted by the Hamgyeong Provincial Army Commander, Šolonggo visited Joseon in the third lunar month of 1611, quite possibly for trade purposes.<sup>94</sup> He had visited in 1609 to negotiate stipends and in 1610 to negotiate for cloth to make official robes, so he’d been dispatched to Joseon for three years in a row.

Around the time, Bujantai was showing signs of defying Nurhaci to make a comeback. In the eighth lunar month of 1611, he distributed cloth to the Hūrha tribe (瑚爾哈) who were, Donghai Jurchen residing in Jakūta (扎庫塔) in exchange for their submission.<sup>95</sup> Most of the cloth he used to win tribes like them over must have been secured through the stipend he’d received from Joseon. And the nearby Donghai Jurchen tribes that submitted themselves to Bujantai again were the ones Nurhaci had tar-

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<sup>93</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 35, the eighteenth day of the eleventh lunar month in 1610.

<sup>94</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 39, the ninth day of the third lunar month in 1611.

<sup>95</sup> *Qing taizu shilu*, vol. 3, the nineteenth day of the eighth lunar month in 1611.

geted since 1610.

Similar instances can be found in the *Daily Records of King Gwanghaegun*. In the sixth lunar month of 1611, the Hamgyeong Provincial Army Commander Yi Si-eon reported information he'd gathered from a Jurchen in Musan named Hong Yi (洪耳) who said "about one hundred brave officers under Nurhaci's command ran away, making Nurhaci lay an ambush at all the Hūlun's main roads to apprehend them."<sup>96</sup> That same year, Jianzhou Jurchen troops went across a fortification called Asanbo (牙山堡) in Gyeongwonbu, Joseon and searched and plundered the boundary Jurchens in the area.<sup>97</sup> According to the *Manzhou shilu* (滿洲實錄), this happened around the time Nurhaci sent Abatai (阿巴泰), Fiongdon (斐揚敦), and Šongkoro Baturu (碩翁科羅巴圖魯) to target the Weji tribe (窩集部), a Donghai Jurchen tribe.<sup>98</sup>

These circumstances suggest that there were an increasing number of Jurchens who were trying to break free from the Jianzhou Jurchens' control. In the first lunar month of 1612, Joseon's Ministry of Rites (K. *Yejo* 禮曹) proposed for someone in Hamgyeong province to be sent to the Hūlun to provide them with official robes and obtained permission from King Gwanghaegun.<sup>99</sup> Joseon thus continued to covertly support the Hūlun and once the Jianzhou Jurchens resumed military activity around the Duman River, it sent a vice-minister to oversee the delivery of goods to the Hūlun.

In the second lunar month of 1612, when Yi Su-il (李守一, 1544-1632) was granted an audience with King Gwanghaegun after being appointed as the Pyeongan Provincial Army Commander, he said that "Nurhaci will surely make a move once he incorporates the Yehe and the Hūlun."<sup>100</sup> Yi Su-il was a veteran who had already served twice as the

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<sup>96</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 42, the nineteenth day of the sixth lunar month in 1611.

<sup>97</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 44, the twelfth day of the eighth lunar month in 1611.

<sup>98</sup> *Manzhou shilu* (滿洲實錄), vol. 3, the seventh month of 1611.

<sup>99</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 49, the nineteenth day of the first lunar month in 1612.

<sup>100</sup> *Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 50, the nineteenth day of the second lunar month in 1612.

Hamgyeong Provincial Army Commander and had twice conquered the Jurchens tribes including the Lotun. He too believed that as long as the Hūlun existed, the odds of Joseon being invaded by the Jianzhou Jurchens were low. In the ninth lunar month of the same year, Joseon's Chief State Councilor (K. *Yeonguijeong* 領議政) Yi Deok-hyeong (李德馨, 1561-1613) also mentioned during a court session that “the enemy is preoccupied with fighting the Hūlun so it won't easily attempt to invade our frontier.”<sup>101</sup>

The Hūlun's Vice minister Šolonggo once again visited Joseon in the eighth lunar month of 1612. According to the *Daily Records of King Gwanghaegun*, the number of “mounted barbarians” (K. *giho* 騎胡) who accompanied him on horseback at the time amounted to 116.<sup>102</sup> Judging from the fact that the governor of Hamgyeong province mentioned nothing else in his report, the purpose of Šolonggo's visit must have been trade as usual. The volume of trade, however, seems to have been quite large considering the size of his entourage.<sup>103</sup> This visit coincided with when Nurhaci raised troops to punish Bujantai and these circumstances hint at the possibility that Joseon had again secretly helped the Hūlun to stop the Jianzhou Jurchens from growing dominant.

Joseon saw the conflict between the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun as an advantage in defending its frontier. It implemented the regulations for boundary Jurchens to negotiate with both groups but secretly offered the Hūlun support to keep the more powerful Jianzhou Jurchens in check. The Hūlun's strategic worth to Joseon therefore increased as the Jianzhou Jurchens became more threatening. In other words, what Joseon feared the most was the two groups' integration.

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<sup>101</sup>*Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 57, the eighteenth day of the ninth lunar month in 1612.

<sup>102</sup>*Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 56, the eighth day of the eighth lunar month in 1612.

<sup>103</sup>Later, as Hong Taiji of the Later Jin was asking Joseon to expand trade, he mentioned that “Bujantai, the khan of the Ula (Hūlun), used to plunder your country, but once he made peace and paid tribute every year, he found that be it cows or hemp cloth, everything was available at the market installed every month” (*Injo sillok* [Veritable Records of King Injo], vol. 27, the seventeenth day of the ninth lunar month in 1632). Regardless of whether this comment was true, it does imply that the volume of trade between Joseon and the Hūlun used to be considerable.

Nurhaci took issue with Bujantai's disrespectful attitude and launched two massive attacks on the Hūlun in the ninth lunar month and the twelfth lunar month of 1612. The Jianzhou Jurchen troops slowly made inroads into the Hūlun's territory from the outside and finally captured their capital Ula i hoton (烏喇城) in the first lunar month of 1613. The Jianzhou Jurchens thus took over the Hūlun and their land while Bujantai managed to flee to the Yehe.<sup>104</sup> Nurhaci thereby eliminated a powerful rival to his east and was able to consolidate most of the Jurchens apart from the Yehe.

Joseon soon received news of the Hūlun's fall. Based on what a Jurchen told him, the Hamgyeong Provincial Army Commander Yi Si-eon sent word that Nurhaci had captured the Hūlun's capital and that Bujantai had escaped to the north.<sup>105</sup> Since Nurhaci had incorporated a powerful Jurchen tribe along the Duman River, he could thereafter focus on targeting the Yehe to his west. This signaled an end to the dual approach Joseon had maintained toward the Jianzhou Jurchens and the Hūlun between the end of King Seonjo's reign and the beginning of King Gwanghaegun's reign. Joseon would thereafter have to face a unified Jurchen state.

## Conclusion

Historical research has tended to divide Joseon's external relations into the first and second half of the dynasty. Tremendous change occurred through the 1592-1598 Japanese Invasions and the 1636-1637 Qing Invasion, causing Joseon to form tributary relations with the Qing instead of the Ming. The Ming and Qing dynasties are considered as part of Chi-

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<sup>104</sup>The *Qing taizu shilu* states that Bujantai broke a pledge, which is why Nurhaci used Bujantai's plundering the weiji as an excuse to justify attacking the Hūlun (*Qing taizu shilu*, vol. 4, the first day of the ninth lunar month in 1612). The tribe, however, was originally part of the Hūlun (Ula) before they became subjugated by Nurhaci, leaving a possibility for them to try to break away from the Jianzhou Jurchens if circumstances permitted them. Hence, Nurhaci's true intention was to completely incorporate the Hūlun (Ula).

<sup>105</sup>*Gwanghaegun ilgi*, vol. 63, the thirtieth day of the second lunar month in 1613.

nese history by those studying the history of Sino-Korean relations whereas Joseon's pre-Qing relations with the Jurchens are classified as part of the history of the northern tribes. Joseon's relations with the Qing have been recognized as an extension of Joseon's relations with the Ming, while Joseon's interactions with different Jurchen tribes in between have tended to be treated as part of the history of the Qing's rise. Overall, it still remains uncertain as to where Joseon's relations with the Jurchens fit into the picture, which is what this paper mainly seeks to explore.

Based on these views, Joseon is often portrayed as a passive participant in the transition from Ming to Qing rather than an active polity. Yet, when its western and northern frontiers faced tough challenges in the early seventeenth century, Joseon played a role. As it witnessed Nurhaci and Bujantai compete with each other and pillage the boundary Jurchens, Joseon recognized even before the Ming that the consequences could be serious. It therefore implemented the regulations for boundary Jurchens to justify its negotiations with the Jianzhou Jurchens behind the scenes as well as its friendly relations with the Hūlun. And it selectively shared with the Ming information about its interactions with each group. Joseon also attempted to keep the Jianzhou Jurchens' rise in check by secretly supporting the Hūlun.

Such a dual approach toward the Jurchens only lasted for six to seven years but proved to be an important stage in eventually transitioning into a relationship with the Later Jin. The regulations for boundary Jurchens were implemented because they suited the interests of both Joseon and the Jianzhou Jurchens and remained nominally in place even after the Jianzhou Jurchens merged with the Hūlun.

By the time Joseon's dual approach toward the Jurchens shifted to a single approach toward the Jianzhou Jurchens, Nurhaci established the Later Jin. The integration with the Hūlun brought the stability Nurhaci needed to advance west toward the Yehe. The regulations for boundary Jurchens that had been central to Joseon's dual approach toward the Jurchens survived the establishment of the Later Jin but eventually deteriorated when Nurhaci referred to himself as khan, just like he used to refer

to himself as king in his letters to Joseon. Such references in an official letter to the king of Joseon went directly against the regulations for boundary Jurchens, and yet, Nurhaci relied on such regulations as he continued to make demands for stipends. This placed Joseon in a new predicament of having to either give in to Nurhaci's demands or receive the Ming's assistance to resolve the matter.

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*Qing taizu shilu* 清太祖實錄 [Veritable Records of the Qing Emperor Taizu]  
*Yimun deungnok* 吏文騰錄  
*Gyebon deungnok* 啓本騰錄  
*Sadae mungue* 事大文軌  
*Deungnok yucho* 騰錄類抄  
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