

A Review of *Chōsen ōcho no tai Chū bōeki seisaku to Min Shin kōtai*

Foreign Trade of Joseon during the Early 17th century: A New Perspective and its Limitations

Chōsen ōcho no tai Chū bōeki seisaku to Min Shin kōtai 朝鮮王朝の対中貿易政策と明清交替 [The Joseon Dynasty's Policies of Trade with China and the Ming-Qing Transition], by Tsuji Yamato 辻大和. Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 2018, 216 pp., ¥ 8,000, ISBN: 978-4-7629-6050-5 (paperback)

A Significant Study of Joseon's Trade Policies with China during the Early 17th century

Despite the recent decline of research in the field of Korean history in Japan, it is worth noting the publication of a study analyzing the trade policies Joseon adopted toward China during the Ming-Qing transition. Tsuji Yamato's *Chōsen ōcho no tai Chū bōeki seisaku to Min Shin kōtai* builds on his doctoral dissertation, "Jūshichi seiki zenhan ni okeru Chōsen no tai Min Shin bōeki seisaku" (Joseon's Policies of Trade with Ming and Qing during the Earlier Half of the 17th century 一七世紀前半における朝鮮の対明清貿易政策) and looks at the history of foreign trade between Joseon and China. The author, a rising scholar who received his doctorate in Joseon's trade policies with Ming and Qing during the 17th century from the Department of Korean Studies of the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology at the University of Tōkyō in 2015, has been actively conducting research on Joseon's trade policies with China. Let us first take a look at the book's table of contents given below:

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As the table of contents above show, the book is based on the author's doctoral dissertation, which looked at the transformation of the trade policies Joseon adopted toward Ming and Qing during the earlier half of the 17th century. Tsuji focuses on this particular moment marked by the Ming-Qing transition, seeing it as when the groundwork of the international environment surrounding Joseon up until the 19th century was laid.

In his survey of the previous literature on Joseon's trade with Ming and Qing, Tsuji concludes that research on trade that took place during Joseon's diplomatic missions to import needed items such as silver and medicinal ingredients as well as on trade conducted along the borders still warrant more detailed investigation. As a study addressing this gap in research, this book narrates the development of Joseon's trade policies towards Ming during the early 17th century by looking at chronicles such as the Veritable Records of Joseon, Ming, and Qing, as well as diplomatic documents.

Joseon's Trade with China between the Imjin War and the Manchu Invasion of 1636

This section will overview the contents of each chapter. Chapter 1 looks at how Joseon conducted trade with Ming after the Imjin and Jeongyu Wars (the Japanese invasions of 1592 and 1597) and details the background behind Joseon's differing attitudes toward trade through both the Junggang Foreign Trade Market (*Junggang-gaesi* 中江開市) and the diplomatic missions to Yanjing (*yeonhaengsa* 燕行使). After the Imjin and Jeongyu Wars, Joseon's trade with Ming took place through three channels: the Junggang Foreign Trade Market at the border between Joseon and Ming, imperial envoys sent by Ming, and Joseon's diplomatic missions to Ming. While Joseon took a passive stance

toward the Junggang Foreign Trade Market, requesting Ming to abolish it three times, it actively engaged in trade during its diplomatic missions, evident in the way Joseon imported ingredients for gunpowder and exported silver through the comings and goings of envoys.

Tsuji reasons that Joseon's respective passive and active attitudes toward the Junggang Foreign Trade Market and trade via diplomatic missions had to do with the economic benefits Joseon enjoyed from the traditional tributary trade system (*jogong muyeok*). In other words, trade via Joseon's diplomatic missions was exempted from tax by Ming, while trade by way of officially sanctioned markets for foreign trade (*gaesi* 開市) not only proved disadvantageous to Joseon merchants but also risked leaking confidential information. In 1613 (the 5th year of the reign of King Gwanghae), Joseon abolished the Junggang Foreign Trade Market while continuing tributary trade with Ming through diplomatic missions. Tsuji argues that Joseon did not particularly benefit from officially sanctioned private trade (*hosi* 互市) that actively took place near China.

In Chapter 2, Tsuji examines Joseon's resumption of foreign relations with Japan after the Imjin and Jeongyu Wars and how the Joseon-Ming relationship influenced Joseon-Japan trade. Joseon signed the Giyu agreement in 1609 (the founding year of the reign of King Gwanghae) with Tsushima island and officially recommenced trade with Japan at Dongnae. At this point, Joseon-Japan trade took the four following forms: the tribute and gift exchange (*bongjin hoesa* 封進回賜), state-led trade (*gongmuyeok*), the market at the Japanese trading house (*waegwan*), and smuggling. After Joseon and Japan resumed relations, Joseon prohibited the Japanese from residing at the Japanese trading house, limited the market's schedule, and regulated the circulation of products prohibited by Ming. Ming, on its part, sent officials to Dongnae to survey Joseon-Japan relations.

When Ryūkyū, which used to pay tribute to Ming, was conquered by the Satsuma domain in 1609 (the first year of the reign of King Gwanghae), Ming toughened its stance against Japan and set out to restrict trade at the Japanese trading house in Joseon. The Ming emperor demanded that Joseon limit the number and entry of Japanese trading ships (*segyeonseon* 歲遣船) and regulate the Japanese staying at the trading house to effectively forestall smuggling. Simply put, Joseon during then was trading with Japan within the limits allowed by Ming.

The resumption of Joseon-Japan trade after the Imjin and Jeongyu Wars

in effect meant that the trade route connecting Japan with Ming through Joseon was reopened as well. Ming, however, while seeking to expand trade with Joseon, such as its efforts to vitalize commerce through the Junggang Foreign Trade Market, tried to suppress trade that took place separately between Japan and Joseon.

Chapter 3 uses the example of ginseng to demonstrate how Joseon actually handled exports during the early 17th century. Tsuji discusses the background and significance of Joseon's policies on the circulation of goods, particularly ginseng. Although Joseon sent ginseng along with the envoys on their missions to Ming, procuring sufficient ginseng for tribute proved difficult. The Ministry of Taxation (Hojo 戶曹) levied a tax of ginseng on each district town (*eup*), but in reality the towns were unable to meet their quota.

Such difficulties in procuring ginseng were related to the proliferation of ginseng exports to Ming through the Junggang Foreign Trade Market, which began in 1593 (the 26th year of the reign of Seonjo). Government offices of Joseon also traded in ginseng, and smuggling took place as well. In response, in 1604 (the 37th year of the reign of Seonjo) the Joseon government sought to regulate the ginseng trade by having the Ministry of Taxation require ginseng merchants to carry a permit issued by the Ministry of Taxation and the Gaeseong district. This policy aimed to secure enough ginseng to use for tribute while also continuing to engage in state-licensed private trade (*samuyeok*) of ginseng with Ming. Joseon's policies to control the ginseng trade stemmed from the diplomatic need to secure tributary goods while also dealing with the expansion of the ginseng trade with Ming during the late 16th century.

Chapter 4 traces the changes and consequent problems that occurred in trade between the years of 1621 (the 13th year of the reign of King Gwanghae) and 1637 (the 15th year of the reign of Injo) as Joseon's envoys used seaways to pay tribute. From 1622 (the 14th year of the reign of King Gwanghae) to 1627 (the 5th year of the reign of Injo), Joseon envoys to Ming left Seonsa port 宣沙浦 for Dengzhou 登州 in the Shandong peninsular. The route changed to one that passed through Mt. Seokda 石多山 before reaching Dengzhou in the 6th year of the reign of Injo; the following year, Ming demanded that the route be changed to one reaching Ningyuan 寧遠 in Liaoning province via Mt. Seokda. While traveling to and from Dengzhou to pay tribute, the envoys would buy and transport rice for military provisions at Dengzhou.

Several problems arose in this process. The town of Yeollo 沿路 suffered

under the pressure of serving as the point of embarkation; smuggling occurred among the envoys. Conflict arose between Ming and Later Jin when trade commenced between Joseon and Later Jin in 1628 (the 6th year of the reign of Injo). Mao Wenlong 毛文龍 displayed hostility toward Joseon's intermediary trade, raiding Joseon ships carrying the envoys or goods. The Joseon government in turn dispatched censors (*eosa* 御史) to the embarkation and disembarkation points to inspect the envoys' baggage in an attempt to resolve such issues. Ming also inspected the cargo the envoys brought.

Joseon did not disapprove of sending diplomatic missions to Ming by sea; in fact, efforts to adapt to this new change were made. The limitations of the maritime journeys instead arose from the fear officials harbored toward the sea, the financial pressure placed on the town of Yeollo, and diplomatic tensions including Ming's vigilance toward trade between Joseon and Later Jin, and raids by the Ming general.

In Chapter 5, Tsuji outlines Joseon's trade policies with Later Jin starting from 1628 (the 6th year of the reign of Injo). After concluding a pact with Later Jin in 1627 (the 5th year of the reign of Injo), Joseon sent tribute to Later Jin in response to their demands. Later Jin then demanded that Joseon open officially sanctioned markets for trade, resulting in the establishment of the Uiju 義州 and Hoeryeong 會寧 markets. Commerce at these markets, however, did not thrive as intended: the goods the envoys from Later Jin tried to sell and Joseon's merchants wanted to buy did not always match, high prices deterred Joseon's merchants from purchase even they did, and Joseon's merchants could only sell what the envoys from Later Jin requested. Consequently, envoys from Later Jin traded inland at Hanseong 漢城 and Pyeongyang 平壤 instead during their visits. Joseon passively engaged in trade with Later Jin within its borders, but later sent merchants to accompany envoys to Later Jin.

Joseon either met or did not meet the demands of Later Jin. When Joseon's merchants were placed at a price disadvantage while trading at the officially sanctioned markets, Joseon set out to negotiate the diplomatic terms to protect them. On the other hand, even if Joseon merchants were caught deceiving envoys from Later Jin, Joseon did not necessarily take the trouble to police them and even urged the harvesting of ginseng across the border. Trade with Later Jin continued in spite of the many undesirable consequences. The passive attitude Joseon assumed largely lay in the international situation at that time. All in all, Joseon traded with Ming, Later Jin, and Japan, becoming one of

the largest trading windows in East Asia. Goods and crafts from Later Jin, Ming, and Southeast Asia were imported into Joseon while ginseng was exported out to Ming and Japan.

Finally, Chapter 6 examines the trade policies Joseon adopted toward Qing between 1637 (the 15th year of the reign of Injo) and 1644 (the 22th year of the reign of Injo). After surrendering to Qing during the Manchu Invasion of 1636 (the 15th year of the reign of Injo), Joseon was obligated to sever relations with Ming, regularly send envoys to Qing, and send hostages including the crown prince to Shenyang. The tributary system during then also meant that Joseon was to offer local specialties and pay an annual tribute to Qing. Meanwhile, the Hoeryeong market and rules governing it were established in the 16th year of the reign of Injo.

Joseon and Qing traded through other channels as well. The Shenyang Residence 瀋陽館, where the crown prince of Joseon resided, frequently served as a window through which Joseon's goods were exported to Qing. In addition, some of the envoys sent from Joseon engaged in trade under the guise of being part of the efforts Joseon was making to repatriate the hostages in exchange for a price. The king of Joseon clamped down on such acts of trade.

Joseon had officials belonging to Shenyang Residence, military officials of the Pyeongan province, and the team of envoys and interpreter-translators dispatched from the capital travel to and from Qing. Judging from the fact that Joseon strictly regulated the number of horses transporting the goods, however, Joseon does not seem to have been overly eager to expand trade with Qing. Smuggling took place among Joseon's officials and the people living along the border. The Joseon government prohibited officials from possessing tobacco and silk (*cheongpo* 青布), hoping to deflect any suspicion from the Qing government of being involved in smuggling with Ming.

Between 1637 (the 15th year of the reign of Injo) and 1644 (the 22nd year of the reign of Injo), trade between Joseon and Qing is noteworthy in its diversification, which included common tributary trade, officially sanctioned markets for foreign trade such as in Hoeryeong, and trade through Shenyang Residence. Trade through Shenyang Residence in particular was possible by the officials from Joseon who resided there to take care of affairs and escort the crown prince, or by the officials who traveled to Shenyang to regularly deliver goods from the Pyeongan province.

Reexamining the Classification of Trade during the Joseon Dynasty

As I have summarized in the previous section, this book examines how Joseon's policies on trade with Ming developed between the 1590s and the 1640s. Tsuji argues that Joseon preferred to engage in trade by partaking in the tribute system and sought to abolish the Junggang Foreign Trade Market, an alternative form of trade with Ming. The size of the diplomatic missions to Ming expanded as Joseon envoys started traveling by sea. Trade with Later Jin (Qing) began in 1628 (the 6th year of the reign of Injo) and was initially conducted through officially sanctioned markets for foreign trade. After surrendering to Qing during the Manchu Invasion of 1636, Joseon discontinued trade with Ming starting from 1637 (the 15th year of the reign of Injo) and traded only with Qing. Joseon and Qing traded through tributary trade, officially sanctioned markets for foreign trade, and the Shenyang Residence; in other words, Joseon's trade with Qing was conducted through at least three additional routes compared to that with Ming.

The book is also Tsuji's attempt to analyze the background behind Joseon's trade policies during the early 17th century, when the dynastic transition from Ming to Qing was taking place in China. Although a large amount of research has been done on Joseon's foreign relations with China, Tsuji judges that much on the subject of trade has yet to be resolved. To obtain precious goods such as silver and medicinal ingredients from Ming, Joseon engaged in trade during diplomatic missions (*sahaeng muyeok*) as well as along the borders. Previous research has illustrated the policies Joseon used to regulate this trade. In short, Joseon implemented foreign trade policies to efficiently oversee the expanding silver trade with Ming and Qing within the boundaries of tributary trade.

Tsuji's review of the literature on this subject is based on the previous perspective that sees trade between China and Joseon mainly as taking the form of tributary trade. Hence his conclusion that Joseon ultimately constricted further development of the country's trade by engaging in it only within the boundaries of tributary trade, even when Joseon was surrounded by a more than adequate environment to actively engage in trade during the early 17th century. Joseon's king received investiture from the emperors of Ming and Qing, and regularly sent envoys to Qing each year. In other words, Joseon's politics were heavily influenced by Ming and Qing. As Tsuji states, he chose to focus the

Ming-Qing transition period during the earlier 17th century as it was when the foundations of the international environment surrounding Joseon up to the 19th century were being formed.

Historians have long viewed the international order during the Joseon period as a tributary system, regarding this framework as an extremely useful methodology for research. Nevertheless, this view has been criticized since the 1990s, and more than a few problems of this argument have been raised in relation to Joseon. Japanese historians, however, have continued to use the tributary system framework to analyze the Joseon dynasty while employing the tributary trade framework to analyze Japan. Tsuji also chooses to apply the tributary trade framework to early 17th century Joseon in this book. A more multifaceted examination, however, should be done as to whether Joseon's trade with China at that time can indeed be analyzed through the lens of tributary trade. The term "trade" should also be academically explicated. Trade refers to the buying and selling of goods between states and can be categorized as state-led trade (*gongmuyeok*), state-licensed private trade (*samuyeok*), and smuggling, or tributary trade and trade at officially sanctioned markets for foreign trade. Whether trade with Ming and Qing took place within state control or beyond it warrants a closer look.

For a state to exercise sole control over the entire system of foreign trade it engages in, it must in turn be able to control the whole process spanning the production, circulation, and selling of goods. For this power to extend beyond domestic commerce and reach the domain of foreign trade, the state should be able to control its borders. However, it is difficult to argue that the borders Joseon shared with Ming and Qing were under complete control. Only a few of the border-crossings or related incidents were grasped by the state. Thus historians can only resort to general or rough analyses of what took place at the borders given the nature of the historical sources. Still, "trade" as an academic terminology should be clearly defined. Tributary trade refers only to the goods Joseon was given in response to the visits and tribute Joseon made as a vassal state. In reality, however, Joseon's trade with China was less about the gifts it received in payment for the tribute it paid but encompassed the sanctioned buying and selling of goods throughout the entire diplomatic missions it sent. To put it differently, the gifts Joseon received were not part of the buying and selling mediated by money or goods but political benefits bestowed by the emperors of Ming and Qing. On the other hand, trade during the diplomatic

missions (*sahaeng muyeok*) refers to the wide spectrum of buying and selling that took place during the diplomatic visits of the envoys. While the trade premodern Japan engaged in with China based on entry permits (*gamhap*) was without doubt a form of tributary trade, trade during diplomatic missions appears to be the more accurate description of the form of trade Joseon partook in, given that it was not about the gifts and benefits bestowed in response to tribute but referred to the diverse buying and selling of a variety of goods for profit by officials and merchants accompanying the envoys.

In addition to state-regulated trade during diplomatic missions, Joseon's trade with China also took other forms that aimed to make profit. These include the unofficial dealings made by envoy members who were part of the diplomatic mission, as well as the trade carried out with Chinese people by crossing the border. The three types of trade Tsuji describes would have been better explained had he moved beyond the framework of tributary trade and instead classified trade with China during the Joseon dynasty as trade during diplomatic missions (*saheang muyeok*), trade at officially sanctioned markets for foreign trade (*gaesi muyeok*), and trade in Shenyang Residence (Simyanggwam-*muyeok*).

Trade Policies of Joseon during the 17th century?

The book's agenda as per the author is to address the four tasks of research on the subject of trade that nevertheless remain in the otherwise extensive work previously done on Joseon-China relations during the 17th century. The first task is the dearth of clear research on the difference between tributary trade and trade through officially sanctioned markets for foreign trade; the second is the almost nonexistence of any research on trade with Ming after the envoys traveled by sea starting from the 13th year of the reign of King Gwanghae, notwithstanding the recent proliferation of research on maritime exchange between Joseon and Ming; the third is the absence of research on Joseon's trade policies concerning Later Jin; and the fourth is lack of clear analysis regarding the influence Joseon-Ming relations during the early 17th century had on trade.

Clearly the four tasks Tsuji presents are indeed gaps in previous research. At the same time, his approach to the tasks should be more meticulously examined. As I have mentioned before, the book deals with the period of

Ming-Qing transition between the late 16th century and the mid-17th century. The author looks at trade policies during the international situation of this period by comparing common tributary trade and trade at officially sanctioned markets and also by looking at specific items such as ginseng. Of course, such an approach has its merits. The question I would like to ask here, however, concerns the approach the author has chosen as his basic premise: in terms of premodern East Asian history, is it possible to delineate the realms of politics, economics, and trade in Joseon at that time beyond the current division into political history, economic history, and institutional history as a historical methodological practice?

In analyzing Joseon's trade policies with Ming during the early 17th century, summing up and providing a detailed analysis of the economic system, trade system, their procedures, related incidents, and policies would probably be the convenient approach. That is to say, focusing on trade policies usually leads to consideration of the economics, but also the international situation, politics, and institutions during that time as well. However, the separation of politics, military affairs, and diplomacy during the Joseon period is untenable; if trade is considered a practice implemented by the state of Joseon, it is only natural to reason that the trade policies were also discussed and carried out as specific policies to pursue the country's interests in face of a changing international situation.

From this perspective, then, research on Joseon's trade policies must reflect the changes in the international situation, namely the transition from Ming to Later Jin to Qing during the earlier half of the 17th century, as well as the domestic changes within Joseon during the reign under King Gwanghae after the Imjin War, the Injo restoration, subsequent changes under the reign of Injo, and the Manchu Invasion of 1636. Joseon did not consider trade policies as a separate entity of state policies, but perceived trade as an important diplomatic issue in its foreign relations with Ming, Later Jin, and Qing, and respective policies were shaped through fierce discussions and arguments fought out among multiple political powers. Records of intense arguments over trade policies depending on the period and political stance are evident in the Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty, the basic primary source for researching this period. Tsuji's account, however, depicts Joseon as a monolithic entity deciding upon trade policies without any internal strife and implementing them with the cooperation of Ming, Later Jin, and Qing. It is important to remember that

this is not historically true. Such an account runs the risk of overly simplifying Joseon's trade policies under the reign of King Gwanghae and Injo.

In addition, there should also be a more careful approach to the changes that occurred in trade policies over time. Although Tsuji does divide this period to trace changes in trade policy accordingly—i.e., after the Imjin War, the reign under King Gwanghae, the period of the envoys' maritime travel, trade with Later Jin, and the Manchu Invasion of 1636—any division of a certain period must also take into account the dynamics between shifting political powers to provide a fuller historical account.

A Fresh Examination of Joseon's Trade Policies with China during Tumultuous Times

Such concerns aside, this book is a significant addition to its field in its effective overview of the changes in the trade policies Joseon carried out toward China during the early 17th century, a subject easily overlooked by historians. The study's broad scope encompassing trade during diplomatic missions, trade at officially sanctioned markets for foreign trade, and smuggling, as well as its detailed focus on items of trade during a period when the entities of trade between Korea and China changed frequently produces exceptional results. In particular, the sharp insight that grasps the changes in the route the envoys took, from land travel to maritime transport, and the meticulous examination of the number of ships and personnel that were involved; the systemic analysis of the details of the ginseng trade; and the analysis of trade relations with Later Jin during the transitional period between Joseon-Ming relations to Joseon-Qing relations are all significant achievements worth noting.

This book may serve as a crucial step in furthering research on trade between Korea and China during the Joseon period. Before that, however, the author may want to reexamine his approach to the international situation and foreign trade relations Joseon faced during the early 17th century and consider the fact that trade policies cannot be singularly extracted from Joseon's foreign policies in his future work. In times of historical upheavals, economic aspects are as important for state policies as much as they are for military affairs and politics. For Joseon, which had to recover and reestablish a war-torn state-ruling system after the Imjin War, adequately adapting to a rapidly changing international

state of affairs was crucial. The government had to stabilize a ruling system centered on the king while responding to the changes surrounding Joseon as well as reestablish the state's hereditary social status system. To that end, King Gwanghae normalized relations with Japan, sought to smooth foreign relations with the newly rising Later Jin, strengthened the authority of the crown, and implemented various policies to stabilize people's lives. After the Injo restoration, the Joseon government carried out policies to deal with the state's relations with Ming, Later Jin, and Qing, not without experiencing setbacks in the process and weathering the wounds of war during the Manchu Invasion of 1636. Nonetheless, Joseon was incorporated into the international world order centered on Qing and was able to maintain amicable relations with Qing on the outside while remaining loyal to Ming on the inside, thus augmenting its status as a civilized country and continuing to develop its culture.

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