

Qing China's Foreign Relations and Their Modern Transformation¹⁾

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Preamble

The aim of this article is to survey from a fresh perspective foreign relations and the diplomatic order in East Asia and their vicissitudes, centred on late-Qing China, in the second half of the nineteenth century. The advance of the West into East Asia at this time changed the existing order in East Asia and created a new system. Up until now this has been understood in general terms as the formation of a “treaty system” as a result of the “Western impact.”

A pioneering figure in the development of this mode of understanding was Hosea B. Morse and his writings in the 1910s (Morse 1910, 1918). Morse was an American who was for many years employed at the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, which were controlled by the British and acted, so to speak, as a treaty guardian that clamped down on any illegalities in trade. As a result of a person like Morse having researched modern China's foreign relations for the first time, there took root the notion of drawing a sharp distinction between the modern and premodern periods in modern China's foreign relations, using treaties and the rule of law as benchmarks.

Several decades later, details of circumstances on the Chinese side came to light through the use of collections of late-Qing diplomatic documents such as the *Chouban yiwu shimo* 籌辦夷務始末 (Account of Qing Management of Barbarian Affairs) and *Qingji wajiao shiliao* 清季外交史料 (Historical Documents of Chinese Diplomacy during the Late Qing Period), but at the same time the awareness of China's premodernity became even more pronounced. What appeared at this stage was an emphasis on “tribute” (*chaogong* 朝貢), one of China's institutions in its dealings with other countries, and it was treated as the antithesis of the “treaty system.”

The dichotomic and contrastive view of “treaties” and “tribute” that is commonly seen still today was a product of the above process. Deeply

ingrained in this perspective is the view that would understand either treaties or tribute as a given and as separate self-contained entities.

In recent years, it is true, fresh ideas have been evolving, such as the differentiation of tribute in the Ming and Qing dynasties and a focus on the *hushi* 互市 of the Qing (e.g., Iwai 2007), the latter of which literally means “foreign trade.” However, the actual state of affairs has been clarified for only quite limited aspects of the Qing, and it is still unclear how these tie in with the situation in the latter part of the nineteenth century. How were the institutions and diplomatic order going back to the eighteenth century transformed through changes in relations with the West? In the following I shall sketch the situation regarding this question on the basis of the current level of research in Japan, and I hope to provide a premise for considering the formation of an international order in East Asia from the twentieth century to the present day.

1. “Tribute” and “Treaty”: A Theoretical Summation and Premises

The “Treaty System” and the “Tribute System”

As was noted above, in past research it has been normal to posit a binary distinction between “tribute” and “treaty.” Let us begin by considering why this pattern of thinking took root.

Of these two, it is “treaty” that serves as an incontrovertible premise. During the Republican period, when the study of modern Chinese history began, treaties were a basic premise in actual relations and the administration of diplomacy between Western powers and China. “Treaty system” was also a term used in this context, and originally it was not a scientific notion. It was John K. Fairbank (1953, 1968) who used it as an operational concept in the study of history.

It was only after the position of “treaties” in this sense had become established that the phenomenon of “tribute” was conceptualized. Because they were premised on “treaty” and “treaty system,” “tribute” and “tribute system” are no more than their conceptual opposites and cannot be concepts corresponding to historical realities. Because Western research was originally based on this way of thinking, it remains unable to escape from it even when attempts are made to rethink the realities of “treaty” and “tribute” (Mancall 1984; Hevia 1995).

As has long been pointed out in criticism of this schema, it lacks in insight for gaining a grasp of the relationship between the individual and

the whole, and it has been deduced directly from a small number of examples without any intermediate procedures. For this reason there are, for example, many respects in which the spatial range of tribute, its temporal changes, and changes in the realities of China's relations with other parties have been overlooked or misunderstood. In short, when one looks at the actual historical facts, there is just too much that cannot be explained by means of this framework. However, this criticism did not necessarily become mainstream.

The "Tribute Trade System" and the Focus on Hushi

When these circumstances are borne in mind, the value of the thesis of the "tribute trade system" propounded by Hamashita Takeshi becomes clear. By moving away from the logic and context of research on diplomatic history, in which treaties inevitably become a point of reference, and placing an emphasis on the analysis of economic phenomena, he proposed to relativize treaties and shed light on the maintenance and development of the structure of the existing order, which had until then not necessarily been visible (Hamashita 1990, 1997, 2008). As a result, our point of view underwent a 180-degree turn and the way of thinking that we now take for granted became possible.

But it cannot be denied that the excessive criticism of the overemphasis of "treaty" relations resulted in too much importance being attached to "tribute" relations and an exaggerated significance, beyond that warranted by the historical facts, being attached to either economic or political aspects. Particularly problematic with respect to tribute and other relationships was the conceptualization of tribute relations as the framework of the diplomatic order's structure without reconstructing individual, specific realities. For this reason the end result was no different from that in the case of Fairbank except that the direction of the thinking was reversed. While speaking of "tribute," both ways of thinking could not but turn into forms of logic that permitted the existence of historical facts that could not be explained by this concept and conversely forced numerous historical facts into their conceptual framework regardless of actual realities.

When one reflects on these shortcomings, the first point that needs to be reconsidered is the nature of tribute relations and treaty relations as actual realities. The origins of the individual relationships expressed by the words "tribute" and "treaty" and associated changes need to be struc-

turally analysed and delineated in accordance with the passage of time.

There already exists a superb treatment of these issues in which it is said of tribute relations that “they did not constitute a single system in their totality.... They represented a bundle of separate bilateral relationships” (Banno 1973: 76, 78). Here I shall accordingly use this expression to essay an explanation. The realities of what has in the past been described in terms of the relationships in a “tribute system” or “tribute trade system” can be outlined in the following manner.

The Qing dynasty founded by the Manchus was not a traditional Chinese dynasty, but a régime that had ruled over nomadic tribes in the north. There existed first of all relationships in this quarter. When the Qing replaced the Ming, a traditional Chinese dynasty, and came to rule over China, it took over the existing tribute relations with neighbouring countries more or less as they were. In addition, because it removed restrictions on trade, which had been the main reason for the deterioration of law and order in border regions during the Ming, there were countries that entered into trade relations with the Qing.

In each case, however, a “bilateral relationship” was established “separately” in accordance with each situation, and originally there were no links between these individual relationships. But because the other party on the Chinese side was a single individual—the Qing emperor—it looked as if these relationships were all “bundled” together.

During its period of growth, the guiding principle of Qing rule was to leave existing local institutions untouched whenever possible while making improvements to the previous government’s method of rule, and the above manner in which it formed relationships with neighbouring regions could be said to have been a manifestation of this stance. Although the Qing adopted a single stance, when viewed from the other party’s provenance and subsequent history, and using the contemporary Chinese terms, its numerous “bilateral relationships” can be broadly divided into the three categories of *fanbu* 藩部, *shuguo* 屬國, and *hushi*.²⁾ *Fanbu* signified Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang 新疆 (Chinese Turkestan). Korea, Ryūkyū 琉球, Siam, Vietnam, etc., which performed rites of tribute, came under the category of *shuguo*, or “dependency.” *Hushi* referred to trade unmediated by intergovernmental relations or ritual ceremonies, and the Qing’s relations with Western countries and Japan corresponded to this category.

The Development of Hushi and the Occasion for Change

It is only when we take the above circumstances into account that it becomes possible to establish the position of treaties. Initially treaty relations, which began with the Anglo-Chinese Nanking Treaty of 1842, existed only in the category of *hushi*. In other words, the Nanking Treaty was nothing more than a modification of China's "bilateral relationship" with Great Britain and a realignment of one of many *hushi* relationships. It did not have any immediate effect on other "bilateral relationships," nor did it completely alter the category of *hushi*, and still less could this treaty stand in opposition to the category of "tribute" as a whole, create friction with it, and bring change to it.

To start with, the Qing's perceptions and notions of treaties were different from those of the West at the time or of us today. The Chinese knew that treaties were binding, and this was especially so since they had succumbed to military force when concluding them. But they did not regard treaties as a guiding principle that governed foreign relations as a whole in the spirit of equality and mutual benefit.

Hushi was, especially from the second half of the eighteenth century, also referred to as *yiwu* 夷務, or "barbarian affairs." Trade was a means to win over "outer barbarians" (*waiyi* 外夷) who refused to submit to the Qing. Therefore, treaties were nothing other than a continuation of "barbarian affairs," since they were for the Qing nothing but a means of patching up currently strained trade relations and once again restraining and regulating the actions of Western nations (Banno 1970: 10–13; Okamoto 2007a: 106).

This point remained unchanged even during the *Arrow* War, which dealt a more severe blow to the Qing than had the Opium War, and in the Tientsin Treaties of 1858 and the Peking Conventions of 1860, which were more oppressive and comprehensive than the Nanking Treaty. In other words, the conclusion of treaties was nothing more than a revision and continuation of existing *hushi* relationships and barbarian affairs and could fall only under this category. Such at least was the subjective thinking of the Chinese.

But during the 1870s changes arose. Treaties, which had been confined to the category of *hushi*, broke free from this restriction and extended to and affected the category of "dependencies." This was occasioned by the emergence of Meiji 明治 Japan, which lay in the immediate vicinity of Qing China. Treaties began to have a real effect in the 1880s, which

was a period when notions and ideas about the diplomatic order changed, leading to a shift in the diplomatic order itself, and it prepared the way for the coming new age. Next, I wish to ascertain this process with reference to some more concrete historical facts.

2. Meiji Japan and the Shift in the Notion of “Dependency”

The Emergence of Japan and the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Amity

After the *Arrow* War ended in 1860, relations between China and the West developed favourably. The Qing displayed a stance of respecting treaties, and in response Western nations expected treaty provisions to be implemented. But this relationship lasted for only about ten years, and gradually both sides began to push their conflicting interests to the fore. The dawn of this new age was symbolized by the beginnings of the Qing's relations with Japan, which had experienced the Meiji Restoration.

For Qing China, Japan was not a new country that it was encountering for the first time. It had consistently been an important trading partner since before the seventeenth century, and it is clearly stated in the *Jiaqing huidian* 嘉慶會典 (Jiaqing Edition [1818] of the Collected Statutes) that Japan was a *hushi* country. Therefore, when Japan proposed the initiation of treaty negotiations, the opinion was voiced that a treaty should be concluded with Japan in line with precedents provided by treaties with Western nations, which had similarly been *hushi* countries, and a treaty was in fact concluded accordingly. Consequently one would be justified in regarding the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Amity signed in 1871 as the application of the practice of concluding a treaty as a realignment of *hushi*, such as had taken place with countries of the West.

But in the case of Japan this was not the full story. For the Chinese, the situation in nearby Japan, which like China had been opened to the outside world through external pressure from the West, could not be ignored. From the 1860s, Japan had been attracting attention as a military threat, especially in the eyes of Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 and others aiming to introduce Western technology. Their attitude was also influenced by historical facts such as the *wokou/wakō* 倭寇 (lit. Japanese pirates) and Toyotomi Hideyoshi's 豐臣秀吉 invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1598.

The Qing accordingly tried to use the binding force of a treaty to ensure that Japan would not turn against China or, more specifically, would not use military force to invade China's coastal regions or the Korean

peninsula. This was the Qing's prime objective in concluding the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Amity. This is best illustrated by the statement in Article 1 that "territorial possessions of either country" (*liangguo suoshu bangtu / ryōkoku shozoku no hōdo* 兩國所屬邦土) are inviolable. A Chinese official who participated in the treaty negotiations declared that this article was "put in for the sake of Korea" (*wei Gaoli er she* 爲高麗而設) (Wang 1981: 72; Sasaki 2000: 15–31), and among the "territorial possessions" (*suoshu bangtu* 所屬邦土) that would be inviolable *bang* 邦 soon came to be interpreted as "dependencies" and *tu* 土 as China (and Japan) proper (*neidi* 內地). Such intents and interpretations were, of course, of no concern to the Japanese (Okamoto 2011).³⁾

In this fashion, treaties, which had originally been no more than realignments of individual *hushi* relationships, began to have an influence also on the category of "dependencies." This was also the result of a rising sense of the need to defend China's border regions in response to the increasingly confrontational stance being taken by other countries towards China. At the time, Xinjiang had broken away from Qing rule as a result of a jihad being waged by the Muslim population, and Ili (Kuljia) had been occupied by Russia. Owing to these circumstances, the Qing was compelled to become even more concerned about the security of its border regions, and its main potential enemies in this regard were Russia, with which it shared a land border in the north, and Japan, from which it was separated by sea in the southeast.

Sure enough, it was not long before a crisis broke out. This was the Japanese military expedition to Taiwan in 1874. The Chinese offered resistance, citing the inviolability clause in the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Amity, but it was of no avail, and so in order to make a stand against Japan the Qing launched a full-scale maritime defence (*haifang* 海防) programme. Under the supervision of Li Hongzhang, the Superintendent of Trade for the Northern Ports (*beiyang dachen* 北洋大臣), the building of the Beiyang Navy began in earnest.

After the Qing's recovery of Xinjiang, the conflict with Russia continued regarding possession of Ili, but they settled their differences in the Sino-Russian St. Petersburg Treaty of 1881 and their relationship gradually stabilized. This meant that now the Chinese could not help becoming exceedingly conscious of the threat in the southeast. But unlike the case of Russia, with which the Qing shared a border, there were dependencies in the surrounding region. Thus, how to deal with these dependencies became the issue.

Negotiations about the “Disposition of Ryūkyū”

This problem manifested yet again in the Qing’s relations with Japan, this time in negotiations concerning the “disposition of Ryūkyū” (*Ryūkyū shobun* 琉球處分). The above-mentioned Japanese military expedition to Taiwan had also been part of plans being pursued by the Japanese government to make the Ryūkyū kingdom submit to Japanese rule, and Japan had succeeded in having castaways from the island of Miyako 宮古 recognized by the Qing as Japanese subjects. Then, in 1875 Japan ordered Ryūkyū to suspend the sending of tribute to the Qing and put pressure on Ryūkyū to terminate its relations with the Qing. These moves came to the knowledge of the Qing authorities in 1877, just when He Ruzhang 何如璋, the first Chinese minister to Japan, took up his post.

He Ruzhang counselled his own government to take a tough line with Japan in order to have it withdraw its demand for the suspension of Ryūkyūan tribute to the Qing. In response, Li Hongzhang advised the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門 to restrict itself to protesting to the Japanese government without relaxing China’s negative stance towards the Japanese measures. He Ruzhang followed these instructions and in October 1878 lodged a protest with the Japanese government. But the Japanese, offended by the wording of the protest, further hardened their stance and in March of the following year carried through with the abolition of the Ryūkyū kingdom and the establishment of Okinawa prefecture in its place.

Foregoing research has already analysed in detail the above train of events, clarifying in the main China’s irresolute decision-making process (e.g., Nishizato 2005). But the Qing’s policy and objectives were in fact clear-cut and consistent, aiming as they did for the continued existence of its “dependency,” the Ryūkyū kingdom. It was simply that it could not decide on its thinking and methods for realizing this objective without going to war.

In May to July 1879 the former U.S. president Ulysses S. Grant visited China and Japan and urged the two countries to settle their differences, and this led to a resumption of negotiations between China and Japan. Japan proposed the cession of the islands of Miyako and Yaeyama 八重山 among the Ryūkyū Islands to China in return for a revision of the provisions of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Amity in a way that would favour Japan, and negotiations continued sporadically. But here too the Qing refused to the last to yield in its demand for the restoration of its “dependency,” the Ryūkyū kingdom, a demand which the Japanese were unable

to accept. The Chinese too were only halfhearted about revising the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Amity, and consequently negotiations foundered and were not brought to a conclusion until the Sino-Japanese War in 1894.

Ryūkyū and the Concept of “Dependency”

Although the Qing referred to Ryūkyū as a “dependency,” it was not a dependency in the modern Western sense as defined in international law. The offering of tribute established a ritual hierarchical relationship with the Qing, and the party offering the tribute was called a “dependency.” As a rule, the Qing did not interfere in the internal or external affairs of such a dependency.

This remained unchanged during the period when Ryūkyū was being incorporated into Japan, and there were no changes in the general attributes of a “dependency.” What became noticeable at this time was a perspective that linked the Qing’s relationship with a “dependency” to security. The reason that the Chinese set great store on the continuing existence of Ryūkyū was not necessarily that Ryūkyū was itself important. They were concerned rather that if the “dependency” of Ryūkyū ceased to exist and fell into the hands of a hostile nation, a similar situation might spread to other “dependencies.” Of particular importance were the “dependencies” with which China was connected by land, namely, Vietnam in the south and Korea in the east.

As was noted above, Qing foreign relations were made up of coexisting bilateral relations, and its relations with dependencies were no exception. Originally, the Qing’s relationships with each dependency had been separate and not necessarily interconnected. But once this problem concerning Ryūkyū arose, these individual bilateral relationships began to become interconnected through the unifying concept of “dependency.” Not only did the preservation of its dependencies become an important issue for the Qing, but it also provided the occasion for an integrated approach to its foreign relations.

At the time, Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾, the former Chinese minister to Great Britain and France, had returned from Europe, and he submitted a proposal to call upon the ministers of the Western powers in China to “protect” (*baohu* 保護) the “small country” of Ryūkyū and make it “independent” (*zizhu* 自主) in accordance with the *Wanguo gongfa* 萬國公法 (the Chinese version of Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law*). While this proposal failed to gain the approval of Li Hongzhang, who

considered Western nations to be indifferent to this issue (e.g., Nishizato 2005: 506–517), there appeared in this proposal the concepts of “protection” and “independence” based on international law in contrast to the notion of “dependency.” In this case, neither “protection” nor “independence” implied anything more than the continuing existence of Ryūkyū as a dependency. But subsequently, during the 1880s, the meaning of these terms changed in connection with the all-important dependencies of Vietnam and Korea.

3. The Question of Vietnam: “Dependency” and “Protection”

The Origins of the Problem

In the early 1860s France began in earnest to subjugate Indochina, and once it had annexed Cochinchina in the south, in the 1870s it turned its forces on the north. Following a military campaign against the Nguyễn government, the Franco-Vietnamese Saigon Treaty of 1874 (or Second Treaty of Saigon) was signed in March 1874. Article 2 referred to “la souveraineté du Roi de l’Annam et son entière indépendance vis-à-vis de toute puissance étrangère,” while Article 3 stated that “En reconnaissance de cette protection, Sa Majesté le Roi de l’Annam s’engage à conformer sa politique extérieure à celle de la France,” and it opened the way for the colonization of Vietnam.

But the treaty did not lead to an immediate clash with the Qing, which regarded Vietnam as a dependency. Although the Qing was aware of the treaty’s content, it declared merely that Vietnam was “originally a Chinese dependency” and did not take any further action. The French too made no attempt to challenge the use of the term “dependency” even though they of course knew that there existed a relationship between Vietnam and the Qing such that the former was a “dependency” of the latter. So long as it did not conflict with French interests and remained a ritual relationship—or, more specifically, so long as the Qing did not interfere in Vietnam and its army did not enter the country—France was able to tolerate this relationship.

But in the late 1870s Qing troops entered the Tonkin region around Hanoi to suppress rebel forces, and this led to a worsening of the confrontation between France and China (Mochiduki 2009). The French considered this action on the part of the Qing to contradict the provisions of the Second Treaty of Saigon, which had provided for French “protection” of

Vietnam, while the Qing responded to these French moves by reasserting that Vietnam was its own “dependency.” A letter sent to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Zeng Jize 曾紀澤 (the Marquis Tseng), the Chinese minister to France, on 10 November 1880 was the first expression of this position by the Qing (Cordier 1902: 243). There thus began the difficult Franco-Chinese negotiations over Tonkin.

Negotiations and War

The French refused to yield in the face of Zeng Jize's continued protests to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and prospects for a compromise remained dim. Meanwhile, on 25 April 1882 French forces occupied Hanoi, whereupon Qing forces from Guangxi 廣西 and Yunnan 雲南 provinces invaded Tonkin. As military tensions rose, Frédéric-Albert Bourée, the French minister in Beijing, began negotiations with the Qing government in October of the same year. In late November he reached an agreement in Tianjin 天津 with Li Hongzhang to demarcate their respective spheres of influence in Tonkin and exchanged a memorandum with him consisting of three articles.

But this did not resolve the dispute between the two countries. The French government headed by Jules Ferry, inaugurated in early 1883, rejected this memorandum and recalled Bourée. On 25 August France signed the Franco-Vietnamese Hué Treaty of 1883 (Harmand Treaty) directly with the Vietnamese government, and in this treaty Vietnam was clearly designated a French “protectorate” (*protectorat*). In response, the Chinese hardened their stance. In Tonkin itself Qing forces were defeated in the battle for Son Tây in late 1883 and in the battle for Bắc Ninh in March of the following year.

In order to effect a breakthrough in this difficult situation, Li Hongzhang entered into negotiations with Commandant François-Ernest Fournier, a personal friend of his, in Tianjin and reached an agreement with him on 11 May 1884. But owing to a succession of misunderstandings, the armies of the two countries clashed in Tonkin, and France and China entered into a state of all-out war. The French prevailed at sea, while the Chinese gained the upper hand on land. In 1885 moves initiated by Robert Hart, Inspector General of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, bore fruit, with a peace protocol being signed by France and China in Paris on 4 April, and on 9 June the Sino-French Tientsin Treaty of 1885 (Patenôtre Treaty), ending the war, was concluded.

As is evident from the above, the two sides agreed to resolutions to their conflict on three occasions. The first was the Li-Bourée Convention agreed to in late 1882, the second was the Li-Fournier Convention of 1884, and the third was the Treaty of Tientsin. A sure way to identify the crux of the conflict between France and China will be to examine the points of contention between them and the way in which they reached compromises on these issues.

The Concepts of “Protection” and “Dependency”

As has already been explained, the confrontation between France and China was exacerbated because of military action in Tonkin. The basis of the French position was the provision for “protection” of Vietnam in the Second Treaty of Saigon, while the Chinese arguments were founded on Vietnam’s relationship with the Qing as a “dependency.” Furthermore, because the French equated the provision for “protection” with turning Vietnam into a French “protectorate” while the Chinese sought to reinforce their relationship with their dependency by means of military protection, it became even more difficult for both parties to extricate themselves from their conflict.

An attempt to reach a compromise was made in the Li-Bourée Convention, which represented an agreement to in effect divide the right to protect Tonkin between north and south. But France, considering that this did not accord with the complete transformation of Tonkin into a protectorate, rejected the convention and put pressure on the Qing to make concessions by resorting to force of arms (Okamoto 2007b). Li Hongzhang, realizing that the tide was turning against China, gave up the idea of protecting Tonkin by military means and concluded an agreement with Fournier that nonetheless allowed China to continue viewing Vietnam as a dependency (Okamoto 2008). At the insistence of the Qing this condition was retained also in the Treaty of Tientsin, which brought the fighting between the two countries to an end (Okamoto 2009a).

In short, the point of contention was the protection of Tonkin, and it would be safe to say that as a result of the struggle between France and China Tonkin fell into French hands. But this alone is inadequate as an explanation. This protection of Tonkin was not a right that either side had possessed from the outset in a necessary and sufficient form. Prompted by the military action of the other side, both sides realized that they had to secure their right to the military “protection” of Tonkin, and France

sought to turn Tonkin into a protectorate while the Qing stressed the fact that Tonkin was a dependency.

It is the circumstances on the Chinese side that merit special attention. To start with, military protection was not an inalienable attribute of a dependency. As is evident in the case of Ryūkyū, “protection” did not necessarily mean military protection. Through the confrontation with France over Tonkin it came to be perceived that military protection was indispensable for a dependency, and there was a shift in the content of the concepts of “dependency” and “protection.”

But although the Qing had to give up the idea of military protection for Tonkin after 1884 as a result of the Li-Fournier Convention, it consistently refused to change its positioning of Vietnam as a dependency. In the eyes of the French, both the Li-Fournier Convention and the Treaty of Tientsin were agreements whereby the Qing “acknowledged its relinquishment of suzerainty” over Vietnam (Banno 1973: 366), but in spite of this the Qing itself was unable to abandon the notion of “dependency” (Okamoto 2009a). This was because there was also the question of Korea, which was unfolding at the same time.

4. The Question of Korea: “Dependency” and “Sovereignty”

“Dependent Sovereignty”

Korea exhibits a certain kind of parallelism with the above situation in Vietnam. In the mid-1870s both countries concluded treaties with other nations, and although the Qing was initially lukewarm about intervening, in the 1880s it suddenly switched to a policy of active intervention.

Comparable to the Second Treaty of Saigon in Vietnam is the Kanghwa Treaty, concluded between Japan and Korea in February 1876, although its provisions differed from those of the Second Treaty of Saigon. Article 1 states that Korea (i.e., the Joseon 朝鮮 Kingdom), being an “independent (or sovereign)” (*zizhu* [K. *jaju*, J. *jishu*] 自主) state, enjoys the “same” (*pingdeng* [K. *byeongdeung*, J. *byōdō*] 平等) right as Japan, and there is no reference to “protection.” This is because earlier Japan-Korea relations and Japanese advances into Korea at the time differed from the case of France and Vietnam, and for this reason the subsequent history of Korea and Vietnam did not take quite the same path either.

The Qing took the view that whether or not Korea concluded the Kanghwa Treaty with Japan was a matter to be decided on the basis of

its own “sovereignty” and not something in which the Qing could interfere, and so it raised no objections to the treaty. But when Japan carried through with its incorporation of Ryūkyū in 1879, a renewed sense of crisis mounted in China. This raised fears that the “dependency” of Korea might, like Ryūkyū, cease to exist, and the Qing heightened its vigilance of Japanese moves.

Li Hongzhang, the Superintendent of Trade for the Northern Ports who had been entrusted with the task of dealing with the Korean question, decided to have Korea conclude treaties with Western nations. His aim was to draw the Western powers into Korea, thereby reining in Japan, and also to make Korea’s position explicit and have it recognized by other countries.

Korea’s position was that of a dependency of China but it was its own master, or “sovereign” (*zizhu*), with regard to both internal and foreign affairs. Let us call this “dependent sovereignty” (*shuguo zizhu* 屬國自主). This was something that the Qing had expressed repeatedly to Western nations since the 1860s, and initially it had emphasized Korea’s “sovereignty” so as not to become caught up in disputes between Korea and Western powers. This may also be considered to have been its reaction to the Kanghwa Treaty. But in the 1880s it began to place greater emphasis on Korea’s position as a dependency. In May 1882 the United States and Korea concluded a treaty in which the Korean king gave expression to this “dependent sovereignty,” and on this occasion the Qing took the view that “sovereignty” was no more than a nominal designation. When the Imo 壬午 Mutiny broke out in Korea several months later, the Qing dispatched troops to put down the rebel forces, and this action was based on this change in its stance.

The Fate of “Protection” and the Balance of Power

Of course, other countries were not persuaded by this logic and stance of the Qing. Both Japan and Western nations premised their thinking on Western-style international relations. Since *zizhu* was the translation of “independent” in the *Wanguo gongfa*, Korea had to be an independent nation (Okamoto 2012a). That a country could be both a dependency and “sovereign” (or independent) represented a form of logic that transcended ordinary understanding. This sort of bafflement naturally also arose with regard to the Qing’s military action in response to the Imo Mutiny.⁴⁾

It was not just Japan and the West that were puzzled. Korea itself,

deemed to be a “dependent sovereignty,” did not accept this treatment. Its relationship with the Qing in its capacity as a dependency of the latter was due merely to its performance of the rite of offering tribute, and as the Qing had previously declared, it had to be its own master in internal and external affairs. But the action taken by the Qing in response to the Imo Mutiny, for example, had been both an act of “protection” of the Korean government and also a form of intervention in Korea’s internal affairs. Chinese “protection” accompanied by intervention was a violation of Korea’s “sovereignty.” It was because of this that conflict began to arise between Korea and the Qing.

The Korean government did not possess the military wherewithal to defend Korea, and therefore it needed “protection” from internal disturbances and external enemies. If it were not to look to the Qing for protection, it would have to turn elsewhere. It was for this reason that it received assistance from Japan during the Gapsin 甲申 Coup of 1884 and concluded the Russo-Korean Secret Agreement in 1885 in an attempt to receive protection from Russia. The Qing resented these moves and, as in the case of Vietnam, regarded the notions of “dependency” and “protection” as inseparable.

There thus arose uncertainty about who should be responsible for the “protection” of Korea. Its status as a “sovereignty” failed to provide an answer, and while this brought instability to the region, it also had a mutually restraining effect and resulted in a sort of balance of power. This was a major reason for the fact that, unlike the case of Vietnam, where the situation developed into a confrontation between China and France and soon led to war, the Korean peninsula was able to enjoy ten years of peace from 1885.

The Sino-Japanese War and Korea’s “Independent Sovereignty”

This meant that the collapse of this mutual restraint and balance of power had the potential to destroy peace on the Korean peninsula. This is what happened in 1894, when the Donghak 東學 rebellion broke out. Realizing that it would be unable to quell the rebellion on its own, the Korean government sought military assistance from the Qing, and Li Hongzhang agreed to the Koreans’ request. According to the Chinese, this was a military intervention based on “the time-honoured custom of protecting dependencies” (*baohu shubang jiuli* 保護屬邦舊例) in response to a “sovereign” request from Korea. It was a measure that accorded with the

notions of “dependent sovereignty” and “protection” that the Qing had championed and represented a full realization of them.

But as is well-known, the Donghak rebellion and the dispatch of troops by the Qing led to the dispatch of troops by Japan and the start of the Sino-Japanese War. The justification used by Japan at the commencement of hostilities was the reference to Korea as an “independent (*zizhu*) state” in the Kanghwa Treaty. According to the Japanese, *zizhu* here did not mean “dependent sovereignty” but “independence,” and therefore it could not countenance Chinese “protection” of Korea—i.e., military intervention—justified on the grounds of Korea’s status as a “dependency” (Okamoto 2004).

Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War therefore resulted in the total negation of the Qing’s notion of “dependency.” Korea subsequently achieved complete “independent sovereignty” (*dongnip jaju* 獨立自主) and in 1897 became the Great Korean Empire. The Qing too accordingly no longer viewed Korea as a dependency and came to regard it as an equal “friendly state” (*youbang* 友邦), concluding a treaty with Korea in 1899 (Okamoto 2009b). The structure of the Qing’s former diplomatic order now had to undergo an overall change.

By Way of Conclusion: The Transformation of *Fanbu*

Having acknowledged Korea’s “independent sovereignty,” the Qing no longer had any need for relations with other countries as “dependencies.” Treaty relations, which had originally started out from the category of *hushi*, also had an impact on dependencies and eventually extinguished the category of “tribute.” Since *hushi* relationships had also all been replaced by treaty relations, any form of foreign relations other than treaties was no longer conceivable. But the changes did not stop here.

Moves by Western powers to partition China like “carving up a melon” (*guafen* 瓜分), which began around the same time with the German occupation of Jiaozhou (Kiautschou) 膠州 Bay in 1897, culminated in the Boxer Uprising in 1900 and the Boxer Protocol of 1901. Faced by this state of affairs, there arose not only among young intellectuals but also in the Qing government and among its leading figures a groundswell of opinion in favour of fundamentally reconsidering China’s hitherto system of rule. The reform movement became a tide that could no longer be held back, and there evolved the idea that China should actively become of its own accord a participant in modern international relations as an integral

nation-state, that is, the idea of Chinese nationalism (Yoshizawa 2003).

There now occurred the transformation of the *fanbu*, which had remained untouched. As Great Britain and Russia began to advance into the *fanbu*—i.e., Tibet and Mongolia—in the early twentieth century, Qing China felt an increasing sense of impending crisis and decided to alter its stance towards its rule of these regions. In the course of this process it reviewed the history of its “dependencies.” Because it had acknowledged their “sovereignty,” its “protection” had been inadequate and it had unavoidably forfeited its dependencies of Ryūkyū, Vietnam, Burma, and Korea, and there arose the perception that the *fanbu*, as integral parts of China (*shudi* 屬地), must not share the fate of these dependencies and be forfeited. It was for this reason that China switched from the hitherto system of autonomy for Tibet and Mongolia to a policy of extending its direct rule to these regions (Okamoto 2012b). The Tibetans and Mongols were dissatisfied with this state of affairs, and from around the time of the 1911 Revolution moves began to be made to break free from Qing China (Nakami 1979, 1980, 1994; Tachibana 2011). In inverse proportion to this, China's pursuit of integration of the *fanbu* also intensified.

This shift in China's diplomatic order has still not been completed. The frequent outbreaks of ethnic problems and border disputes still now in the twenty-first century are evidence of this. Therefore, in order to foresee the eventual outcome one must not rely solely on ideas and concepts such as “dependency,” “protection,” and “sovereignty” as defined in the twentieth century. A full grasp of the matter is impossible without also taking into account the transformation that took place in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Notes

- 1) The present article is a revised and enlarged English version of Okamoto 2010.
- 2) The term *fanbu* is taken from the “Fanbu zhuan” 藩部傳 of the *Qingshigao* 清史稿 (Draft History of the Qing), the term *shuguo* from the “Shuguo zhuan” 屬國傳 of the *Qingshigao*, and the term *hushi*, as mentioned below, from the *Jiaqing huidian* 嘉慶會典, while part of *hushi* is also covered by the “Bangjiao zhi” 邦交志 of the *Qingshigao*. While these three categories are thus based on terms found in historical sources, it should be noted that they are of course operational concepts posited to facilitate my analysis, and it is not necessarily the case that their referents were always strictly designated by these terms and informed with the meanings explained here.
- 3) This interpretation is found in a record of talks held with Mori Arinori 森有

禮, the Japanese minister plenipotentiary, on 24 January 1876. But the fact that the Qing presented this interpretation cannot be ascertained in Japanese sources recording the same talks (Okamoto 2011: 86–88).

- 4) There then emerged the idea of neutralizing Korea, advocated by Inoue Kowashi 井上毅 and others, but in the end nothing came of it. For details on the course of events and underlying factors, see Okamoto 2006.

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