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The Attitude of the Chosŏn Dynasty Government toward Trade with  
Ming China at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century

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From the mid-sixteenth century on, while international trade in East Asia flourished on the whole, the Korean Peninsula route was interrupted by the Japanese invasion of 1592. Along with participating in the established tribute trade system, the Peninsula's Chosŏn 朝鮮 Dynasty began to engage in commerce with Ming China at the Korean-Chinese border. In 1594, the Chosŏn and Ming governments opened a market at Chunggang 中江, which was located in the suburb of Ŭiju 義州 on the outskirts of P'yŏngan-do 平安道, an outlet that operated until its abolishment in 1613. During this time, East Asian states also began to trade outside the tribute system. The present article discusses how the Chosŏn government looked upon such an international situation.

To begin with, the Chosŏn government did not welcome the Chunggang market and dispatched three messages urging its abolishment. The government preferred the tribute trade (*yŏn-haeng-sa* 燕行使), under which Korea imported the components of gunpowder from China and exported silver. The Chosŏn tributary missions paid no custom duties to the Ming authorities, while merchants at the Chunggang market were required to render tariffs on Ming imports. Moreover, the business arrangements at the Chunggang market were considered unfavorable to Korean interests; and finally, the market was assumed to pose a risk to national security.