

A STUDY ON ORIGIN OF NORTHERN LEARNING IN 18TH CENTURY IN KOREA

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Trends of social thought are closely related to history background, cultural tradition, as well as actual demands of the then society. Though Northern Learning that means learning northwards from China was not the mainstream in 18th century in Korea, it brought very great influence in the process of development of Korean modern society. About Northern Learning, the academia paid more attention to study its contents and characteristics, while the root cause of the thought has not been discussed more. Based on analyzing historical data mainly from *Yeonheongrok*, travel records of Korean tribute officials to China in 18th century, the article discusses its origin, as well as explores the concept of the gap between barbarians and Chinese of Northern Learning, from which Sino-Korean relations in the period will be observed.

CHANGES OF KOREAN SOCIETY

Although Korea came out of the war at last after Qing replaced Ming in China, internal contradictions in its society were intensified instead of being relieved. Firstly, the government shifted the burden of the war on to farmers. Taxation bore so hard on the laboring people that peasant's struggles continually broken out in different places

beginning from 1720s'. Secondly, contradictions within the *yangban* literati were deepened again. Factional strife (*dangjaeng*) became more and more seriously. Before Manchu invaded Korea in 1627 and in 1636, the conflicts existed mainly between Easterners (*Dongin*) and Westerners (*Seoin*), while after Korea was subject to Qing, Struggles became very complicated, from strife between Westerners and Southerners (*Namin*) to collision between Pure Party (*Cheongdang*) and Turbid Party (*Takdang*) among Southerners, and then to conflict between Old Doctrine (*Noron*) faction and Young Doctrine (*Soron*) faction among Westerners. Besides, there were the literati Purge happened in 1721 and 1722 (*sinim sahua*) as well as Lee-injoa's Revolt in 1728¹. Thirdly, as handcrafts and commerce being gradually developed since 17th century and foreign trades being increased, tradesmen and handicraftsmen were more activity. As a new class, they were oppressed by conservative group, while also constituted a kind of challenge to Korean traditional agricultural communities.

In 1649, Hyojong acceded to the throne. During his reign (1649-1659), he did try to take punitive actions against Qing. It did not come true of course, but government gave anything to work for military facilities under this plan. In 1654 and 1658, as a vassal state of Qing, Korea also was forced to send troops fighting against Russia together with Qing troops. In 17th century Korean national treasury was bankrupt and the populace was sinking deeper into dire circumstances.

Facing this society, some envoys began to have serious reflection. They censured those who held political power and intend to bring about changes in the political and social order. It was noted that just in this period western culture and learning began to be brought into Korea from China by some tributary officials to Beijing. Many Western Learning books in Chinese and occidental implements came to Korea continually, which evoked a warm response from many out-of-power

¹ See Lee Byeongdo 李丙燾, *An Outline of Korean History* (韓國史大觀), Xu Yucheng(tran.), Taipei: Zhengzhong Bookstore, 1961. pp.274-367; Lee Seongmu 李成茂, "Reexamination on History of Struggles among Political Parties in Late Joseon Dynasty"(조선 후기 당쟁사에 대한제설의 검토), in *Treatises on Korean History* (國史館論叢), 1998, pp.81, 143-181.

scholars to critic the existing order. Those led to the birth of *Sirhak*, Practical Learning. The major concern of the *Sirhak* scholars was to illuminate the history and contemporary workings of political, economic, and social institutions rather than to be doctrinaire. In 18th century, *Sirhak* gradually emerged as Yi dynasty's dominant school of thought.

At the same time, there was a favorable turn of the political situation. In 1724, Yeongjo (1724-1776) acceded to the throne. For being so tired with Factional strife, he practiced "police of impartiality" (*dangpyeongchchaek*) as a measure addressed to the alienation of all segments of the elite in Yi society. The police continued under Cheongjo (1776-1800). Not only that, Yeongjo and Cheongjo also sought ways to develop local economy and culture. During these two long reigns, many kinds of contradictions tended to relax with a consequent social stability, which provided advantageous conditions to birth of new thought for thinkers.

ADJUSTMENTS OF QING'S POLICY TO KOREA

Although Korea was subjected to Qing and became Qing's tributary nation after the war in 1637, the emperor of Qing knew that was forced by military power rather than by moral strength as Ming did. In that time, Korea also remained faithful to Ming and hostility to Qing. So at the beginning, Qing was so guarding against Korea that holding the Prince as a hostage to stay in Shenyang and punishing Korean ministers who fight for the Manchu for many times, by which it could control Korea and attack Ming without trouble back.

In 1644, Qing came into Beijing and completed his establishment as the ruler of China. Considering the general situation having settled, the Empire began to have a generous and proper treatment of conquered Korea. The government not only returned the sons of the King and amnestied Choi Myeonggi 崔鳴吉, Kim Sanghyeon 金尚憲 etc., the ministers who refused to submit to the Empire, but also remitted Korean year's tribute for many times. In 1645, as it was a great distance from Korea to Beijing, Qing put Korean three regular

tribute embassies in New Year's Day (*ueonjo* 元朝), winter solstice (*dongji* 冬至) and imperial birthdays (*seongjeol* 聖節) together under the title of *ueonjo*² to show its kindness, from which to reduce their conflicts and to create its image of good moral and propriety.

At the beginning of Kangxi period, without the stability in border areas, Qing's policy to Korea was a combination of moral suasion and punishment. There were still conflicts between two nations since some Korean peasants slipped into Northeast of China to dig Ginseng as well as they have disputed on the boundary question. By the middle of Kangxi Emperor, with the War of Three Feudatories (*san-fan*) being over; the capture of Taiwan being achieved, treaty with Russia being safely bound and Galdan's troops at Jao Modo near the Kerulen River being defeated, the united multi-ethnic entity was formed in Qing Dynasty at last. Therefore, the Empire began to focus on economic development and cultural construction. The government encouraged the domestic policy of equal between Manchu and Han, while at diplomacy it was pursuing a policy of mollification. To Korea, the Empire was especially civil and kind. For instance, in 1698, when Qing knew there was a famine all over Korea, it sent Tao Dai, Vice-Minister of Personnel, to offer condolences with more than 110 ships carrying 10 thousand Dan rice. At the same time, Qing government also admitted Korea to buy 20 thousand Dan rice from China and hurried to transport the rice by road in order to help Korea overcome the crisis³. In 1717, since Kangxi Emperor knew that the King, Sukjong had eye disease, he sent Akedun brought Chinese medicine, Kongqing 空青 to convey his concern⁴.

² *Veritable Records of Injo* (仁祖實錄), vol. 46, An entry dated 18 February 1645(二十三年二月辛未条), Seoul: National Institute of Korean History,1987. All of the regular tribute embassies to the Qing were put together under the title of the winter solstice, which was also called yearly tribute in *Records of the Office of Interpreters* (通文館志).

³ "Draft History of the Qing Dynasty·Biography of Joseon" (清史·朝鮮列傳), in *Materials on Historical Facts About Korea Found in Chinese History Books 2*: Yangji, Yangbian University Press, 1996, pp.524-525.

⁴ *Veritable Records of Sukjong* (肅宗實錄), vol.60, An entry dated 11 October 1717(四十三年十月辛卯条).

From late Kangxi to Qianlong reign, the government showed more kindness to Korea, especially for dealing with Korean embassies, not only put them in the first place of all foreign embassies⁵, but also arranged them to meet with Qianlong, similar to personal interview by the Emperor. In March, 1778, an embassy of thanks for imperial grace and explanation arrived in Beijing, when Qianlong came to Fangzetao 方澤壇 to sacrifice, he “just ask Korean tribute envoy and associate envoy with a translator to meet with”⁶. In June, when Qianlong visited ancestral graves in Shenyang, Korea sent a tribute mission of courtesy to visit. In this time, Qianlong talked with the Korean envoy directly⁷. In 1790, the embassy of congratulations and thanks for imperial grace arrived in Rehe to celebrate the Emperor’s birthday, the Emperor especially talked about Jeongjo’s children in personal interview of the envoy⁸. Qing tried to control Korea by moral.

CHANGES OF KOREAN EMBASSIES’ IMAGE TO QING DYNASTY

In fact, it was a great shock for Korea when Qing replaced Ming in China. Korea had been admiring Ming Dynasty as soon as Yi Dynasty was established, not only adopted the *sadae* (“serving the great”) policy towards Ming, but also did more to emulate Ming’s culture. Korean government put special emphasis on Chinese teaching, promoted literati to write by Chinese, and changed traditional

⁵ “于各國使臣班而首”, Seo Hosu(徐浩修), “Travel Records to Beijing”(燕行紀), in Im Gijong, ed., *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*(燕行錄全集), vol. 51, Seoul: Dongguk University Press, 2001, pp.16.

⁶ Chae Jegong(蔡濟恭), “Records of Bearing”(含忍錄), in Im Gijong, ed., *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.40, pp.380.

⁷ *Veritable Records of Jeongjo*(正祖實錄), vol.6, An entry dated 26 August 1778(二年八月癸未條).

⁸ Seo Hosu(徐浩修), “Travel Records to Beijing”, in Im Gijong, ed., *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol. 51, pp.16-17.

costumes according to Ming's styles as well as accepted Zhuxi's Neo-Confucian literati that were popular in Ming as official philosophy. For this sake, Ming praised that "Korean people knew more Chinese Classic and History, while its culture was so similar to China, which other nations were not available"⁹. Being very proud of it, Korea always professed itself "the Little China". What's more, Korea also had many thanks Ming's troop for helping it to defeat Japanese invasion of 1592. So, Korean submission to Qing in 1637 was just forced by Qing's militant power. In Korean opinion, Qing was still barbarians as Nvzhen 女真 had been before. Korea remained adopting Ming's chronology instead of Qing's across the nation¹⁰ since they missed Ming and also suffered pain very much for its end. In 1699, Gang Seon, the envoy of embassy of thanks for imperial grace and annual tribute felt so sad when he saw collapse of Yongping, a great town in Ming Dynasty on the way to Beijing¹¹. He wrote in his travel record to Beijing: "I am so regretted not visiting China in heyday of imperial Ming Dynasty in my life, while now I am just gripping my wrists more to make the courtesy call and genuflection in the barbarian court"¹², through which his mixed and helpless emotions can be imagined.

Accordingly, though Korea sent tribute missions to Qing regular and irregular as it did to Ming Dynasty, the missions were called *yeonhyeong*, coming to Beijing instead of *jocheon*, coming to the heaven court, while their travel records to China were also normally named *yeonhyeongrok* instead of *jocheonrok*. In then Korean heart, Ming dynasty was their imperial court and Ming's culture represented Chinese culture that they admired. Thus the end of Ming enhanced

⁹ *Veritable Records of Ming Taizu*(明太祖實錄), vol.76, Taipei: the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica.No.1, pp. 1400-1401.

¹⁰ "官文書外，雖下賤無書清國年號者"，see *Veritable Records of Sukjong*, vol.3, An entry dated 4 April 1675 (元年四月壬辰条).

¹¹ "皇明文物只有廢城頽樓，只令人感愴"，see Gang Seon(姜銑), "Travel Records to Beijing"(燕行錄), in Im Gijong, ed., *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.28, pp.521.

¹² "吾之生後，恨未見皇朝全盛之時，而今來拜跪于戎狄之庭，只增扼腕"，see Ibid. pp. 532-533.

Korean pride as “the little China”. For Qing barbarians, they emphasized that Chinese culture had been just existed in Korea. Pak Jiwon (1737-1805) who came to Rehe as a tribute officer in 1790 wrote in the beginning of his *Diary in Rehe*: “When Qing has ruled China, the system in China becomes barbarian. Just our nation around thousands miles land that demarcated with Yalu River from Qing persists Chinese system, which means Ming imperial is still existing in the east of Yalu River”¹³. That was Korean thought of Chinese Centralism¹⁴. We can see so many words that missed Ming and despised Qing in Korean travel records to Beijing from early Qing dynasty to the beginning of 19th century, which expressed their basic idea that “despising Qing as barbarians”. However, some changes had also been taken place by the late 17th century. We can find that there was less and less bad review of Qing, while praise words appeared more and more in *yeonhyeongrok*. That reflected the shifts of envoys image to Qing Dynasty, from which Korean Northern Learning came into being.

There were about two stages on Korean praises of Qing Dynasty. The first stage was in the late 17th century, not very long from Qing replaced Ming. Compared with Ming officials, the envoys found that Qing officials were more uncorrupt. As we known, the bureaucratic had been lax by the end of Ming Dynasty; officials of various ranks tried their best to pursue personal interests, about which Korean envoys felt deeply in Ming period. They always suffered being asked payoff by local officials in their way to Beijing. Jo Jeup (1568-1637) who went to Beijing in 1623 had exclaimed how great envoys brought

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“清人入住中國，而先王之制度變而為胡。環東土數千里畫江而為國，獨守先王之制度，是明室尤存于鴨水以東也”，see Bak Jiwon(朴趾源), *Diary in Rehe*(熱河日記), Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Press, Zhu Ruiping, Annotation ed., 1997, pp.1.

¹⁴ See also Jeong Okja(鄭玉子), *A Study on History in Late Joseon Dynasty*, Seoul: Iljisa, 1993, pp.75; Son Seungcheol(孫承喆), “On Opposition between Joseon’s thought of Chinese Centralism and Japanese view of Chinese and Babarians”, in *Japanese Studies*, 1997,(11), pp.87-106.

to pay for presents¹⁵. Hong Ihan (1568-1637), one of the famous Korean three anti-Qing ministers kept faith with Ming Dynasty, but when he came to Beijing in 1624, he was so pained with Ming's bureaucratic corruption¹⁶. Nevertheless, this situation had changed since Qing dynasty established. We found less similar contents in *yeonhyeongrok* early in Qing Dynasty. Pak Sedang (1629-1703) was sent to Beijing as the attendant secretary of annual tribute embassy in 1668. He had no praise of Qing Dynasty in his record, but talked about "corruption and cheat of Hans' convention", which might exercise some influence on his later opposite to Korea continuing to use Ming's chronology¹⁷. Seo Munjung (1634-1709) who had come to Beijing in 1690 praised "Qing had not insatiable desires and the people were essentially good". He wrote in his travel record: "In 1636, when Korean envoys just arrived in accommodation, the attendants were stampeded into snatching before the envoys had their meals by the department of Honglu-si. There were no limits of using money in that time. Welcome and send-off feasts were canceled, but exchanged for money. Officials below Director of the Board of Rites often sent the envoys money for the purchase of ginseng etc., for which the then social condition might be deduced. However, the situation has not absolutely been occurred by recently. Didn't it show there had been better than Ming Chinese?"¹⁶ From this we can see in the stage Qing won upon some envoys mostly by its incorruptions.

The second stage was mainly reflected in tribute envoys realizing social prosperity under Qing's rule and the traditional Chinese cultural

¹⁵ See Jo Jeup(趙濶), "Travel records to China", in Im Gijong, ed., in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.12, pp.360.

¹⁶ See Hong Ihan(洪翼漢), "Hwapo's Navigation Records to China"(花浦朝天航海錄), in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.17, pp.210, 212

¹⁷ See Pak Sedang(朴世堂), "Seogye's Travel Records to Beijing"(西溪燕錄), in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.23, pp.391.

¹⁶ "丙子年使臣入來，時鴻臚寺賜宴。使臣未到床前，館夫等爭入攫取。上下馬宴則折銀以給，禮部尚書以下送銀請買人參等物，並銀持去至再至三，無複限節，當時國事推此可知。近年則絕無是事。寧謂不如諸夏之無也耶？" Seo Munjung(徐文重), "Travel Records to Beijing"(燕行日錄), in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.24, pp.215.

inheritance of Qing court. Jeong Taehwa (1602-1673) who was sent to Qing as the envoy in 1649 and 1662 left his records respectively. Being different from what he had seen in 1649, in the way of embassy to Beijing in 1662, he had not only observed the prosperity of China, but also felt warm when he met the Han ethnical officials¹⁷. In 1691, when Lee Chim, the envoy of annual tribute and thanks for imperial grace embassy came back Korea and was received by the King, he said:” I have come to China for many times, people are richer than before.”¹⁸

Since 18th century there were more and more records about prosperities of Qing society. Seo Hosu (1736-1799) who was sent in 1790 wrote what he saw and thought in the way to Beijing in his record. He had missed Ming Dynasty when he passed battlefields in the war between Ming and Qing, but the briskly trade market, fertile farmland and stability of people’s life there shocked him so much that he realized that Qing had benefited from Chinese though it was barbarians before, from which he exclaimed there had been no boundaries in genius between Chinese and barbarians¹⁹.

Actually, after moving into the Central Plain Qing not only followed Ming’s system but also honored Confucianism and practiced Confucians politics in order to consolidate its government. Many Korean tribute envoys to China had realized it. Lee Jun who was sent in 1656 had noticed “the little Emperor, Kangxi tried his best to learn Chinese and often was surprising us by his knowledge when holding the court.”²⁰ At the end of 17th century when Seo Munjong arrived in Beijing, he said, Qing “had used Ming’s all kinds of rites” and “its

¹⁷ See Jeong Taehwa(鄭太和), “Travel Records in 1662”(壬寅飲水錄), in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.19, pp. 395.

¹⁸ Seo Munjung, “Travel Records to Beijing”, in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.24, pp.226.

¹⁹ See Seo Hosu, “Travel Records to Beijing”, in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.51, pp.479-480.

²⁰ Lee Jun(李濬), “Travel Records to Beijing”(燕途紀行), in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.22, pp.156.

official system was as same as Ming's"²¹. In 1715, when Lee Goangjoa, the vice-envoy of thanks for imperial grace as well as annual tribute embassy came back from Beijing, he said to King Yeonjo:" Though Qing is barbarian race, people are very civilized. The system and culture are all as same as those of imperial Ming, while its practices are easier."²²That reflected his identity of Qing's inheritance of Chinese culture and appreciation of its abandonment of trivial formalities, which were agreed to by Song Yeonmyeong, the then Left Minister of the State Council. He said:" Qing will not be ended quickly since its regulations are simple and people are not complaining."²³ Thought Seo Hosu had bias to image that "the pragmatic scholar-officers in Qing society now are just followers of Gu Yanwu and Zhu Yizun", but he did realize Qing had been focus on cultural education and held Confucians in esteem.²⁴Lee Ga (1737-1795) who was sent to Beijing in 1777 as the vice-envoy of thanks for imperial grace as well as annual tribute embassy found that Qing not only granted Korean tribute envoys the national treatment as Ming did, but also inherited Chinese system, which could not be ignored as barbarians.²⁵

Witnessing the prosperous of Qing society and its following of Ming's system, as well as impressing Qing's such kindness for Korean envoys, though the image of Korean tribute officials to Qing Dynasty still was shackled by traditional ideas, it had been changed a lot. Hong Daeyong (1731-1783), a pioneer of Korean Northern Learning, impressed on changes of Chinese society under the rule of Qing for what he saw and hearing when he was sent to Beijing in 1765. He wrote in his travel records to China:" The area that Qing has ruled is not only including territory in Ming Dynasty, but also broadened northwest to

²¹ Seo Munjung, "Travel Records to Beijing", in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.24, pp.215.

²² Veritable Records of Yeongjo(英祖實錄), vol.47, An entry dated 14 February 1738(十四年二月丙申条).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See Seo Hosu,"Travel Records to Beijing", in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.51, pp.488.

²⁵ Lee Ga(李士甲), "Travel Records to Beijing"(燕行記事), in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.53, pp.154-160.

Gansu, southwest to Burma and east to Mongolia. It has the vastest territory in Chinese history. The tribute nations are including Ryukyu that sends tribute embassy one time for two years, Annam for six years, Siam for three years, Sulu for five years, Lanxang for ten years. The embassies of West and Burma are irregular. Moreover, there are just two of 38 tribes in Mongolia having not submitted to Qing, while other 36 tribes have selected their scholars come to China to learn, as well as selected their soldiers to Qin garrisons. There are no limitations on market opening, board trade and marriage between Qing and Mongolia. It is really a united multi-ethnic entity.”²⁶

The Great Unity is the important idea of Chinese traditional world order. “Chinese-barbarian Unification” means to be unified under China, but then under Qing that was barbarians in the view of Korea and the scale of nation was bigger than Ming. So, how to despise Qing barbarian? Being affected by Qing great unity, Hong Daeyong also exhibited his gratitude for Qing’s favorable policy to Korea. For suspecting the hearsay that “China had more calamities and Chinese were stirred up”, he asked his Chinese close friends, Pan Tingjun, Yan Cheng for recent condition of Qing society. When they denied the hearsay clearly, he said with emotion:” Our nation is also been favored. Our requirements are always given priority”. He had plaint of great pressure that Chinese embassies had brought in Ming Dynasty, as well as appreciated benefits that Qing gave Korea, from which he thought there would be no limits on communicating with Chinese friends.²⁷He felt that Chinese culture still had been remained even under Qing’s rule after communicating with three scholars of Qiantang (Hangzhou), Pan Tingjun, Yan Chen and Lu Fei. He commented that three friends were Chinese descendants though they wore Manchurian

²⁶ Hong Daeyong(洪大容), “Damheon’sTravel Records to Beijing”(湛軒燕紀), in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.42, pp.146.

²⁷ See Hong Daeyong, “Damheon’sTravel Records to Beijing”, in *A Collection of Travel Records to Beijing*, vol.42, pp.214; vol.43, pp.91-92.

clothes. The Korean scholars did be far from them.²⁸ His respects did come into outwards part.

Besides Hong Deayong, Pak Jiwon (1737-1805), another important scholar of Northern Learning School, had to admit that the society was stable, people's life were rich and the culture was also advanced under Qing's rule and upheld learning from Qing after coming into Beijing in 1780 though he had strong Korean thought of Chinese Centralism that only Korea inherited Chinese culture. He was so impressed on "Chinese cities, palace and people still existing; articles used for discipline and improvements being remained; clansman of Chui, Lu, Wang and Xie having not moved; learning of Zhou Dunyu, Zhang Zai, Cheng Hao and Zhu Xi also being remained; as well as the perfect systems in Han, Tang, Song and Ming Dynasties having not been changed under Qing ruling"²⁹ that he further criticized Korean false pride and emphasized that Korea should learn from Qing instead of despising it in the preface of Pak Jega (1750-1815)'s work, *Discussion for Northern Learning*.³⁰

CONCEPT OF THE GAP BETWEEN CHINESE AND BARBARIANS OF NORTHERN LEARNING

As mentioned above, Korean Northern Learning was formed in the course of Korean tribute envoys to Beijing experiencing stability, prosperity and development of Qing society. Or rather it came from Korean envoys' breaking the idea of despising Qing as barbarians and their efforts to resolve contradictions between traditional ideas about Chinese-Barbarians and realities of Qing's social development. Therefore, analyzing concept of the gap between Chinese and barbarians of the Learning will understand the contents and its influence to Korean society well.

²⁸ Hong Daeyong, *Collection of Damheon's Works*(湛軒書), Seoul: Yang-udang, 1988, pp.322.

²⁹ Bak Jiwon, *Diary in Rehe*, pp.61.

³⁰ See also Bak Jega(朴齊家), *A Collection of Jinyu's Works*(貞葵集), Seoul: National Institute of Korean History, 1961, pp.380; Bak Jiwon, *Diary in Rehe*, pp.217-218.