

Book Reviews

Remaking the Chinese Empire: Manchu-Korean Relations, 1616–1911. By Yuan-chong Wang. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018. Pp. xiii + 285. \$55.00.

The interactions between late imperial China and its surroundings have become an increasingly intriguing academic topic in recent years. The rise of the so-called New Qing History School, for example, reminds us that the diverse relationships between China and the non-Chinese world cannot be simplified to the “tributary system,” no matter how the term is defined. At the same time, new studies have revealed the “tributary system” to be much more sophisticated and fluid than previously thought. Yuanchong Wang’s *Remaking the Chinese Empire* (*Remaking* henceforth) demonstrates the sophistication and fluidity in its exploration of the most representative bilateral “tributary” relationship: that between Qing China and Chosŏn Korea.

Nevertheless, the book’s ambition goes beyond an account of Sino-Korean relations in the early modern period. Rather, the key concern of the book could be summarized as such: How, by incorporating Korea into its cosmology, did Qing China shape and reshape its own identity and its relations with the world? In other words, this book is not merely a diplomatic history (though the subtitle may suggest so) but a thorough investigation of the development of China’s world view, the practices of such a world view, and its rise and fall from the early seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century. From this unique angle, *Remaking* urges us to rethink a puzzle: What made China China? While it may sound cliché, the puzzle is far from being solved. The approach the author suggests is to look at China’s interactive, identity-building “outward” instead of its identity search “inward.”

With the establishment of an independent Manchu regime, the Qing began a consistent campaign to construct its legitimacy in a world governed both by Inner Asian and East Asian ideologies. To win the support of the Inner Asian people, the Manchu allied with the Mongols (and through them the Tibetans) and adopted the most popular faith in the steppe region, the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism. However, proving legitimacy in East Asia, where the neo-Confucian dichotomy of “civilized vs barbarian” was a fundamental political discourse, was more difficult. *Remaking* focuses on this effort. The Qing strategy here, Wang demonstrates, was to create (or even coerce) intimate yet hierarchical relations with Chosŏn Korea, a self-claimed “little China.” By doing so, the Manchu, previously regarded by most Confucian scholars as uncivilized, recast themselves as a new leader of the civilized world. The idea of China was completely renegotiated in the process. In the late

nineteenth century, the Chinese world order, along with the state itself, faced fatal challenges from European and Japanese colonial powers. Both the Qing and Chosŏn made efforts to adjust their relationship to adapt to a newly imposed system of international law. The failure of these efforts transformed their bilateral relationship from a hierarchical one to one between two equal sovereign states, which eventually led to the collapse of the Chinese empire. In that sense, we should probably say that China was “remade” not once but twice: first by the Manchu rule of the Middle Kingdom, then by the intrusion of global colonialism. Each time, Korea played an extremely crucial and delicate role.

In my view, what makes Wang’s book stand out among many studies of the Sino-Korean relationship is its powerful discussion of three subjects: the Zongfan 宗藩 principle, the power of discourse/ritual, and the Chosŏn model. None of these three are convenient conceptual tools that scholars, especially those in the field of international relations, normally choose to use. They perhaps point to the author’s theoretical orientation: instead of adopting popular and familiar frameworks, we need to historicize such an important relationship in its own discursive context. Of course, as Wang clearly points out, the Manchu-Chosŏn relationship began and ended with military conflicts. It was no doubt a power politics involving war, coercion, negotiation, and accommodation, like any other interstate relationship. However, we also need to realize that it was the intellectual sources—ideological principle, ritual practices, and historical precedents—which eventually justified, solidified, and exemplified this relationship in particular, as well as the inter-polity order in late imperial East Asia in general. If there were indeed some distinguishing features in the “Chinese world order,” we need to pay serious attention to these “soft power weapons.”

Zongfanism

With John K. Fairbank’s groundbreaking volume, *The Chinese World Order*, the term “tributary system” (and its many variations) became a handy concept to refer to the regional order in pre- and early modern East Asia. It is only recently, thanks to pioneer studies by James Hevia, Peter Perdue, Hamashita Takeshi 濱下武志, and others that scholars have become increasingly aware of the limitations of the term. It often reduces, twists, and ignores the complexities, richness, and mutuality of interstate interactions, which were neither just about tribute nor a system. Along the same lines, *Remaking* also rejects this not-so-handy-after-all term and endorses a more vigorous concept of “Zongfan,” an indigenous term slowly but gradually gaining attention among a newer generation of East Asia scholars.

As many studies have pointed out, Zongfan as a political concept derived from the structure of family genealogy in an ideal Confucian world. In the context of

imperial China, “*zong*” refers to the royal lineage of the monarchy and “*fan*” to the “clan(s) of the royal family who established outposts on China’s borders” (p. 4). Together, the two characters defined a mutually recognized, hierarchical, kinship-style political order implemented in the emperor’s domain, or “all-under-Heaven.” Within this realm, China, or the Middle Kingdom or Celestial Dynasty, was a superior power (*zong*) while other polities were its inferior supporters (*fan*). The question is: What, or where, could be included in “all-under-Heaven”? Was “China” tantamount to “all-under-Heaven,” as many Confucian scholars during the Qing suggested?

There is no easy answer. Before the late nineteenth century, China was not a territorial entity defined by clear-cut or abstract boundaries. But nor was it borderless. The governing power of the Chinese emperor, or Son of Heaven, did not go beyond these borders, yet he was the ultimate source of political legitimacy (at least from the ritual perspective) for the monarchs who ruled Korea, Vietnam, Ryukyu, and others. To better understand this ambiguous situation, Wang suggests we see the Chinese empire in two dimensions. There was China as a “territorial empire,” where the Son of Heaven ruled through his administration (ministers, governors, and military commanders). There was another China as a “political-cultural empire,” where the Son of Heaven imposed his ritual and cultural dominance through diplomatic institutions such as the Ministry of Rites. Chosŏn Korea was in the second category, the Korean king had full autonomy to rule the country, while at the same time serving as a subordinate supporter to the Chinese emperor.

By contemporary standards, this kind of political institution, which Wang calls “Zongfanism,” looks similar to imperialism or chauvinism. For this reason, some scholars in the field insist that Qing’s acts towards Chosŏn proved “Chinese imperialism” in the region. However, the differences between Zongfanism and imperialism, Wang argues, are salient. The Zongfan relationship had to be acknowledged and constructed mutually as opposed to imposed unilaterally. While the legitimacy of a subordinate monarch relied on the superior monarch, the latter also needed the former’s endorsement to justify his superior position. When a new Chinese dynasty replaced an old one, the new ruler desperately needed support from his surroundings to demonstrate his “Mandate of Heaven.” It was the case during the Yuan-Ming transition (when Ming China and newly found Chosŏn Korea established the Zongfan relationship to mutually justify their rules), and it was the case during the Ming-Qing transition.

Once Nurhaci, the leader of the Jianzhou 建州 Jurchen, established Houjin 後金 in 1616 (a rebel regime which would later adopt the title “the Great Qing”), the new power tried hard to prove it was the true possessor of the “Mandate of Heaven.” One of the strategies was to create a new bilateral relationship under the Zongfan framework with the Chosŏn, the most reliable Ming ally, which, like the Ming, viewed

the Jurchen as inferior “barbarians” (*yi* 夷). Through two invasions, the Qing first coerced the Chosŏn to acknowledge a relationship of “brotherhood” in 1627 and then, in 1636, forced the latter to renounce the Ming and swear allegiance to the Qing. In both wars, Qing requests were for neither territory nor mere economic profits, but first and foremost for superior political status in the network of Zongfan relations. What the Qing acquired through these wars was more than symbolic. By forcing Chosŏn (and later other polities) to recognize the Qing emperor as the true Son of Heaven, the Qing essentially portrayed itself as the new ruler of the Middle Kingdom. That is to say, several years before its conquest of the Ming in 1644, the Qing had already remade its identity via a Confucian Korea: transforming from “barbarian” to “civilized,” and from a periphery regime to leader of a new “China.”

In the nineteenth century, Wang shows, Zongfanism was severely questioned and challenged by a new set of norms. Western colonialism brought international law to Asia, a novel world order based on the assumption that all sovereign states were equal and independent. Zongfanism was hardly compatible with the new world imagination and organization. Chinese politicians made great efforts to accommodate the Zongfan principle with the new norm, trying to save China by securing the Zongfan order in international law terms. However, Western and Japanese diplomats refused to view Korea as simultaneously a sovereign country and a subordinate state (*shuguo* 屬國) of China. Chinese efforts fell into a “legal quagmire” (p. 124) and eventually failed. When Korea became “independent” after the Sino-Japanese War, the Confucian world order in East Asia completely collapsed. The “political-cultural” dimension of the Chinese empire diminished. “Losing Chosŏn,” hence, directly led to the birth of China as a “modern” nation-state regulated by international law.

Power of Ritual and Discourse

Without downplaying the role of physical power (e.g., military and trade) in the making of the bilateral relationship, Wang pays great attention to discursive powers such as ritual, political rhetoric, and the format of writing. For the Qing empire, he argues, “Chosŏn was a politico-cultural frontier,” which was “invisible and existed only in an intellectual sense within the Chinese world” (p. 184). One of the biggest contributions of the book is to prove in detail that these “intellectual” powers, unlike many believe, actually mattered a lot. They were as concrete and comprehensive as material powers in constructing the hierarchical order in East Asia. Scholars cannot simply ignore them as symbolic and having no practical meaning.

Studying China’s external relations relies on reading diplomatic archives and documents. While most historians focus on the content of these texts, few investigate in-depth the communication channels and written formats, missing a critical

part of the “hidden transcript.” Early negotiations between the Manchu regime and the Chosŏn prove more revealing when we can decipher the non-textual messages embedded in their exchanges. For example, in 1619, Nurhaci sent a letter to the Chosŏn king directly for the first time. His seal, in Mongolian characters, read, “Emperor Tianming of the Houjin.” Following the Zongfan norm, the Korean king refused to regard Nurhaci as an equal sovereign. To avoid replying to him directly, the king appointed a provincial governor to write back. Pretending not to know Mongol characters, the king instructed the local official to address Nurhaci as the “assistant general of the Jianzhou garrison” (p. 23). Another fascinating example concerns the format of “honorific elevation.” In formal diplomatic letters, characters like “Heaven” and “Emperor” had to appear on the top of a new line above “king” and the rest of the text. From 1627 to 1636, when the Manchu and Chosŏn established an “elder brother vs younger brother” relationship, the Manchu ruler’s title appeared below “Heaven” but equal to the Chosŏn king’s in letters from both sides. After 1636, when the Chosŏn surrendered to Hongtaiji, who now claimed to be the emperor of the Qing, official letters placed the Manchu ruler’s title on the same level as “Heaven” and higher than the Chosŏn king’s (pp. 35–40). This seemingly small gesture indicated a significant change of political status in a patriarchal world order. While the Manchu regime rose to become the centre, a father figure (*zong*) in the relationship, the Chosŏn was belittled to subordinate from a peer to a son figure (*fan*) in the hierarchy.

Ritual and ceremony performed by the Chosŏn court also helped to promote the centrality of the Qing regime. In February 1637, the Chosŏn king capitulated to Hongtaiji after his second invasion. The Qing built an altar at Samjŏndo for the new emperor to receive the Chosŏn king’s surrender. During the ceremony, the king knelt down three times and each time bowed his head to the ground three times before Hongtaiji. It was this highly ritualized performance, according to Wang, which “marked the official establishment of the Zongfan relationship between the Qing and Chosŏn” (p. 41). Moreover, it signalled that the Qing had adopted a whole set of Zongfan institutions from Ming China in order to create its own identity in the world. Two years later, in 1639, under the Qing’s order, the Chosŏn king erected a stele at Samjŏndo to “honour the virtues” of the Qing emperor. Inscribed in three languages—Chinese, Manchu, and Mongolian—the stele aimed to cement the hierarchical relationship between the two powers. The text referred to the Qing as the “big country” or “upper country” while the Chosŏn was the “small country” or “a faraway country” (pp. 46–48). From the ritual perspective, it seems that the Qing, not Chosŏn, was more desperate to construct its own legitimacy. In this instance, political recognition unfolded in rituals, making ritual a form of political power. From the ceremony episode, we can better understand why in the late eighteenth century, the Qing court initially requested the first British envoy to China, Lord Macartney,

to perform the same ceremony for Emperor Qianlong, a ritual later infamously simplified as “kowtow.”

There again the Confucian worldview and rituals were firmly rejected by Western style diplomacy at a time when both the Qing and Chosŏn were venerable in terms of physical powers. In the late nineteenth century, the formalistic ritual was perhaps the only glue holding their gradually detached conventional connection. Qing officials still tried to use it to prolong their nominal dominance of Chosŏn, even borrowing new institutions from the West. Aside from establishing a Western-style diplomatic department (Zongli yamen 總理衙門), signing bilateral treaties with Korea and instructing the Korean king to build diplomatic ties with the United States, the Qing sent Yuan Shikai 袁世凱, a young military officer, to station in Korea as a Qing representative. To demonstrate to the West and Japanese delegates that his status was not that of a “diplomat,” Yuan adopted an English translation of his title: “his imperial Chinese majesty’s resident.” Such a translation, in an odd way, analogized Korea’s status to that of a European protectorate or even colony in south Asia or Africa (p. 179). It indicates nothing but the discrepancy between the rhetoric of Zongfanism and that of colonialism. After all, Zongfanism never went beyond the “political-cultural” dimensions of the Chinese empire, unlike colonialism. Although in the late Qing, some Chinese intellectuals discussed “provincializing Chosŏn” and turning Korea into one of China’s “prefectures and counties,” such a proposal never gained much interest, let alone real support.

The Chosŏn Model

One point is clear: the Qing’s identity and ideological construction was constantly under a variety of assaults. A key challenge throughout the Qing period was that the Manchu were not “Chinese,” neither ethnically nor culturally. Therefore, one of the main tasks of the Qing court was to argue that being “Chinese” was neither about ethnicity nor “culture” (language, dress, and hairstyle), but, first and foremost, about political legitimacy. As long as a ruler successfully demonstrated he was “the chosen one” by Heaven, who endorsed Confucian ideology, he *was* Chinese. Chineseness did not have to be exclusive. Qing rulers’ strategy from Shunzhi to Yongzheng was to eliminate the civilized-barbarian (*hua-yi* 華夷) distinction and prove that the Qing had the Mandate of Heaven. The next emperor, Qianlong, however, had a different strategy. In contrast to his predecessors, he actually promoted the civilized-barbarian distinction, but portrayed the Manchu as the civilized while others barbarians. In either ideological campaign, Chosŏn’s role was unparalleled. For this reason, Wang argues, there was always a “Chosŏn model” in the making of Qing’s world view.

The Chosŏn was the first Confucian subordinate country (*fan*) of the Qing. Once the hierarchical relationship was established, the Qing could claim its centrality in the Zongfan network. The Qing inherited and extended the Ming Zongfan institutions, including investing titles to the members of the royal families in subordinate states, imposing regnal calendars, tribute paying, envoy exchanges, and trade. It used the well-established Qing-Chosŏn relationship as a precedent for dealing with other states, which previously advocated for Ming authority, such as Ryukyu, Vietnam, and Siam. Chosŏn became a prototype in the early construction of a Qing-centred world order. During Qianlong's reign, the Qing status as a new China and a regional superpower was solidified. Emperor Qianlong launched a systematic campaign to redraw the division between the "civilized" and the "barbarian." In illustrations of "barbarians" issued and circulated by the Qing court, the image of a Korean Confucian official, wearing the Ming style of dress, appeared on the first page (pp. 82–83). This fascinating transition indicates that ideological adherence to Confucianism, an indicator of the "civilized" in the early Qing period, was no longer a sufficient condition to prove one's superior political status in the mid-Qing, at least in the eyes of Qianlong.

Moreover, the book also shows that the Chosŏn model could mean different things in different contexts. In the late nineteenth century, Qing ministers (notably Li Hongzhang 李鴻章) manufactured the US-Korean diplomatic relationship in order to confirm the Qing Zongfanism with Western treaty institutions. Despite eventual failure, the Qing did manage to let Chosŏn establish foreign relations with other Western countries in the following years and in the same fashion. The Chosŏn model became an attempt to continue Zongfanism in the last phase of the Chinese empire. Another example illustrates how the Chosŏn model was not always intended to include outsiders into the realm of the "political-cultural" China. During Kangxi's expedition to Taiwan in the late seventeenth century, the Zheng 鄭 regime in Taiwan proposed to follow the "Chosŏn model" and turn the island into a subordinate polity without adopting the Manchu hairstyle and dress. Emperor Kangxi rejected the proposal on the grounds that Chosŏn, unlike Taiwan, was "always a foreign country" (p. 56). In other words, the Qing emperor demarcated a clear-cut boundary to decide who could be excluded to the "territorial" dimension of the Chinese empire and who could not.

To conclude, *Remaking the Chinese Empire* is arguably the most comprehensive and sophisticated study on the Qing-Chosŏn relationship by far. The author skilfully and extensively employs multilingual archives and documents (Manchu, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) to compose an intriguing story. Although the introduction of the Zongfan institutions might be a little overwhelming for readers who are not familiar with the subject, the overall narrative is not only very easy to follow but

also pleasant to read. It certainly inspires, and paves the way for, further academic inquiries. For instance, what kind of empire was the Qing, compared to other Eurasian empires? And to what extent can we call Qing China an empire in the first place? Lastly, Wang portrays the Qing-Chosŏn relations as mutually constructed and Chosŏn as a proactive actor in creating its identity and protecting its benefits. The book spends a substantial portion to describe Chosŏn's agency in all phases of the bilateral interactions. Although this theme is regrettably not highlighted in this review, I would urge interested readers to discover the excellence of this part through their own reading.

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The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World. By Lynn A. Struve. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. Pp. x + 319. \$72.00.

During her long and distinguished career, historian Lynn A. Struve has immensely broadened our understanding of the experiences, ideas, and attitudes of educated Chinese during the Ming-Qing transition. One of her early essays probed the conflicting impulses to which a number of figures who reached maturity after 1644 were prone,¹ and in her later *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm* she brought together a riveting collection of personal testimonies by survivors of dynastic change.² In more recent years, Struve has turned her attention to the dream records left to us by witnesses to the trauma of the Qing conquest, publishing a series of fascinating articles on such hitherto little-known figures as Huang Chunyao 黃淳耀 (1605–1645), Xue Cai 薛棗 (1598–1665), and Zhang Maozi 張茂滋 (c. 1633–after 1651). This focus on dream experiences is a natural extension of Struve's research interests since, as she puts it in her new book, “dream-writing in general brings us closer than any other kind of writing to the subjective consciousness of the highly literate” (p. 12).

¹ Lynn A. Struve, “Ambivalence and Action: Some Frustrated Scholars of the K'ang-hsi Period,” in *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China*, ed. Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, Jr. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 321–65.

² *Voices from the Ming-Qing Cataclysm: China in Tigers' Jaws*, ed. and trans. Lynn A. Struve (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).