

XXXIX, Doc. No. 18

The King of Choson³⁸ [now communicates] with reference to the promotion of neighborly friendship and the repayment of great favors.

On the eighth day of the second month of Wan-li 23 [March 19, 1595], our official, Vice Minister Min Yo-gyong of the Board of Punishments, who had been sent [to China] as an envoy on the occasion of the winter solstice,³⁹ brought back a despatch from your country. [It reads:]

We reaffirm that every nation washed by the oceans is under the influence of China. We recall with nostalgia that our forefathers inherited the frontiers, expounded mutual trust and fostered harmonious relations, never remaining indolent in their efforts to strengthen lord-vassal relations and to be honored always by the maintenance of a position within the sphere of influence of the Middle Kingdom.

Despite our young age,⁴⁰ we have begun managing national affairs, busying ourselves with our duties day and night. Although we continuously remain reverent and exert ourselves, we fear that we will never be able to sustain the duties of our office.

Although all life is nurtured by Heaven and Earth, our lands are separated from one another in the north and south. There being no way of meeting each other in one hall, we are always concerned about you. Now, the tributary envoys dispatched in former years by our country were always able to meet your country's envoys in the capital [of China] and carry on intimate conversations. They received kind inquiries about us and obtained information about the administration of your country and about your land and products. They came back to inform us of these things. This was sufficient for us to know about your troubles. Having pondered over your affection and fulfilment of your duties to your neighbors, we were deeply grateful and roused to make further efforts.

For the past several years we have lacked ships. We have never for a moment forgotten our obligations to repay you by making voyages and presenting letters to your country.

We also note that in the eighteenth year of Wan-li [1590] a local official, "Yao-yu", and his group from T'ai-p'ing-shan [Miyako Islands], which belong to our country, were proceeding [to our capital] with the tribute of rice and cloth,

³⁸ King Sonjo, grandson of Chungjong and third son of Tokhung Taewon'gun. He was born on November 26, 1552, enthroned on August 3, 1567, and died on March 24, 1602. His posthumous name was Yon.

³⁹ The Korean envoy carrying a congratulatory memorial on the occasion of the winter solstice usually left Seoul in the 7th or 8th month of the year and came back from Peking in the spring of the following year.

⁴⁰ King Shō Nei of Ryukyu ascended the throne at the age of 25, upon the death of Shō Ei on January 11, 1589.

but they were abandoned to the mercy of the wind and drifted into a landing in a territory under your jurisdiction. Finding, upon investigation, that they were Ryukyuan, you showed them great sympathy and had your officials escort them to Liaotung, from there to be taken to the Capital [Peking]. They indulged in the provisions and shelter provided by the Imperial Commissioners from the Office of Tributary Affairs. They were soon sent to Fukien, where they obtained passage aboard a tributary ship and proceeded to come back to their country.⁴¹

They have reported on your great benevolence, which we have recorded in writing. All of us, from the king down to common men, have received this report with deepest gratitude. We shall engrave an account of your virtues on a stone tablet, and the whole country shall laud them always.

This is the year our tribute is due [to China], and we are especially sending Tei Rei, a *cheng-i tafu* [Japanese: *seigi taifu*; "senior official"], Envoy Mafutu, Interpreter Sai Kei, and others, to carry a memorial to the Capital and pay tribute.⁴² We pray you will forgive us for not sending any presents of value to you. We list below our presents, including silk and rare products, which will be carried by our envoys and presented to you as a little token of our sincerity.

Humbly we hope that your country's welfare will be maintained for ten thousand generations, as long as mountains and seas exist, and that the prosperity of our lands and yours, which constitute frontiers of China, will continue for a hundred million generations, as long as mountains and hills last. We express our feelings to Your Venerable Majesty in this letter; we earnestly hope that you will accept it for perusal.

We have received the above despatch and note that far and wide, wherever the name and influence of our Sovereign [the Chinese Emperor] extend under Heaven, there are communities and nations which are all subjects of our Sovereign. Together we look to the north [to the Imperial throne] and rule according to the Sovereign's wishes, and we shall be tied in the bond of brotherhood. Abundant blessings will be equally spread near and far.

Our country, however, is some three thousand *li* away from the Capital, and, as for your country, there is involved a windy and wavy seaway that takes several

⁴¹ In the 8th month of Wan-li 17 (1589), Korea repatriated some thirty Ryukyuan castaways, who had drifted to Chin Island in South Cholla Province two months earlier, under the care of the Korean tributary mission going to China on the occasion of the winter solstice. The Ming sent them back to Ryukyu under the care of the Ryukyuan tributary mission that happened to be returning home. See *Sonjo sillok*, XXIII, Sonjo 22/8/day of *wu-ch'en* (-1589); *Huang-Ming shih-lu*, under the date Wan-li 17/11/day of *hsin-hai* (-1589). They appear to have taken passage on board the ship of the Ryukyuan envoy, Ryō Ō, and arrived home in the summer of 1590. It was customary in China that one official from the Office of Tributary Affairs accompanied a tributary mission on its southward, overland journey to Fukien.

⁴² Tei Rei's mission, carrying a memorial dated Wan-li 21/12/26 (February 15, 1594), probably started on its voyage in the spring of the following year. In those days tribute was due every two years, and Wan-li 22 was a year in which tribute was due.

days to cross to reach the southern boundaries [of China]. Therefore, it would be over six thousand *li* to the Capital. Thus our country and yours are separated from each other by a distance of ten thousand *li*. Unless each of us personally pay a visit to the Capital for a meeting there, there will be no way for us to meet and have personal intercourse.

Only our envoys can travel back and forth, and they meet one another occasionally and talk about the lands and customs of their respective countries. By this means, we gain knowledge on these matters, and console each other against anxiety. We share your thoughts on these matters. The affection and faith with which you have sent us this despatch have impressed us and intensified our gratitude.

We recall that in the 18th year of Wan-li [1590], your countrymen drifted to our coast in a ship. Upon examination we found that there was no ulterior motive on their part, and it was indeed natural for us to have compassion for them as we do for our own men. Therefore, we dispatched our officials to escort them to Liaotung and report to the Ming about them, seeking their passage home to their native land.

Looking back, we note that although it was to refrain from conducting private relations that our country has not sent a despatch to inquire after the conditions of your country, it was also due to the fact that our territory is not close to yours and it is difficult to be prompt in such an undertaking.

Now we have been honored to receive a letter, accompanied by a gift of silk in two colors, which inquired in detail after our situation and expressed appreciation [for the good treatment of the castaways in Korea]. Even in a trivial matter such as that involving horses and oxen which trespass the marked boundaries during the breeding season, punishment is always inflicted upon a person who dares to capture the animals and does not return them to their owner. How much more reason, then, should there be for us to refrain from seizing and retaining those [castaways] whose country, together with ours, looks up to our Sovereign for His righteousness and dignity. Thus we are ashamed to receive an expression of your appreciation. Yet, how gratifying it is to learn of your good will manifested in your welcome letter. We are unable to find words to express our gratitude.

We are entrusting our official Ki Cha-hon, envoy to the festival of the winter solstice [in China], with our inferior local products listed below, and if, during the course of his mission to the Capital, he happens to meet your country's envoys, he is to hand the presents to them. For the past two years, we have tried to do

this, but our envoys have met none of your envoys yet, and we are afraid that it might be difficult to accomplish it even now.⁴³

We send our wish, from ten thousand *li* away, for your continued good health. Writing this letter, we cannot help feeling a lingering affection for you. Thus we send this reply. We pray you will accept it for perusal. Let this despatch be given to the addressee.

It is now stated [that the presents are as follows]:

White linen	20 bolts	White floss silk	20 bolts
Ginseng	20 <i>chin</i>		
Despatch to the Country of Ryukyu			
Wan-li 25/8/6 [September 16, 1597]			

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The King of Choson, having received repeated inquiries, makes this reply in appreciation of your sincerity.

We note that on Wan-li 28/2/3 [March 17, 1600], our official Han Tug-won, envoy for the festival of the winter solstice, came back from the Capital [Peking] with a despatch from your country.⁴⁴ [It reads:]

⁴³ There is a Korean despatch to Ryukyu dated Wan-li 24/8/19 (September 11, 1596), in *Sadae mun'gwe* (Representative Documents Exchanged with China), Vol. XVII. This despatch was taken to Peking by Second Minister Pak Tong-nyang of the Board of Personnel at the time of his mission for the winter solstice, but it was not handed to a Ryukyuan tributary mission in China. It was a reply to the Ryukyuan king's despatch brought by Tei Rei's mission and handed to Min Yo-gyong, Korean envoy to the festival of the winter solstice, in the Hui-t'ung-kuan (Audience Hall) in Peking in 1594. Min took it home to Seoul in the following year. A new despatch in reply from Korea was taken to Peking by Ki Cha-hon, the Korean envoy for the winter solstice festival of 1597, and it was dated Wan-li 25/8/5 (September 15, 1597). This despatch was almost identical to the one of 1596.

⁴⁴ This despatch from Ryukyu is found in *Sadae mun'gwe*, XXXV. The first half touched upon the repatriation of the Miyako castaways, repeating expressions of appreciation, and also mentioning that the Korean king's despatch dated Wan-li 25/8/6 (September 16, 1597) (Vol. XXXIX, Doc. No. 18, above) had been received and brought home by Kin Shireki, an interpreter acting as senior clerk, who went to China in 1598.

Quoted in the present document is a summary of the latter half of the above despatch. The original reads as follows:

"This is again the year our tribute is due, and we are therefore dispatching Senior Clerk Tei Dō, Envoy Yu Bigyoku, and Interpreter Sai Chōshin to proceed to the Capital to present tribute. They will also carry some of our local products and a despatch to be handed to your country's envoys who might be in the Capital; we send them as a token of our concern.

It is our desire that, living together under Heaven, both you and we shall perform our duties, however light the burden, of being faithful ministers assisting the Celestial Dynasty. We note that we are receiving the great Imperial bounty, and it is a long-established principle that we should rule so as to contribute to each other. This is why we have exchanged, over a long period, communications and inquiries with our friendly neighbors. This is nothing but the greatest duty of small children [like us].

We also note that a message has been received from Shichitōzan [Islands], which belong to