

often provided accounts of dynastic founders, but Tang Gaozu (r. 618–26) and Tang Taizong (r. 627–49) go unmentioned. Zhang’s accounts do not cite his own experiences as an official, and he does not comment on institutions such as the equal-field system (*juntian zhidu* 均田制度) and the examination system. One might interpret their absence as part of Zhang’s idiosyncracies, but in Zhang’s time the personality-driven *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 still dominated the genre and perhaps influenced Zhang’s choices of what to write and what to leave out.


Rothschild’s prose has a breezy, conversational style, which echoes, in a way, the *biji* genre’s informality. His exposition, studded with exclamation marks and comparisons with contemporary Chinese and American cultures, will appeal to many. Rothschild had a gift for rhymed translations, and his renditions of medieval Chinese read smoothly.

At times, though, the monograph would have benefited from a firmer editorial hand. “Parlay” (to maneuver an asset to advantage) is consistently misspelled as “parley” (a conference between adversaries) (33, 36, 60, 83). What on one page is translated as “Filial Sentiment” (62) and as “Filiality” on the next one (63) is the same term, *xiao* 孝, seen in the same tenth-century encyclopedia, *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽. Rothschild uses too many redundant constructions, such as “volatile and mercurial” (28), “bloodthirsty and savage” (77), “coarseness and utter lack of refinement” (148), “animalize or bestialize” (153), as well as purple passages, to wit, “an acquisitive donkey who covets wealth and rank” (39) and “a fetid cesspool at the base of history’s ravine” (72). Many will use this work to learn more about Wu Zhao, but the index misses many references to her, especially in the book’s latter two-thirds. Most troubling, however, is the decision to set the translations in nine-point italic font. Ostensibly, the book aims to make accessible a voice from medieval China, but this format sabotages this goal and distances unnecessarily the reader from the historical source. The problem weighs especially in the longer translated passages. Harry Rothschild and Zhang Zhuo deserve better.

These issues aside, *The World of Wu Zhao* will soon become a staple in Tang dynasty historiography. Rothschild’s last work adds a fascinating perspective on what remains a vital yet understudied period, and scholars and teachers undoubtedly will make extensive, productive use of the book in the years to come.

## *Boundless Winds of Empire: Rhetoric and Ritual in Early Chosŏn Diplomacy with Ming China*

By Sixiang Wang. Columbia University Press, New York, 2023. 424 pp. \$140.00 (hardcover), \$35.00 (paperback).

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The relationship between Chosŏn Korea and Ming China cannot properly be understood from the perspective of any general framework, such as the “tributary system”; rather, it must be appreciated on its own terms, based on the choices made by both

sides. This is what Sixiang Wang convincingly argues in his engrossing, in-depth study of Chosŏn Korea's diplomacy towards its neighbor. At the center of his study is Chosŏn's diplomatic strategy: its aim, its means, and how it was implemented in practice.

Chosŏn pursued "a strategy of engagement that could preserve Korean royal authority and limit Ming claims, all without provoking conflict" (17). The core of this strategy "was to shape empire and how Korea related to empire" (273); Wang understands empire in terms of Ming claims to universal authority, rather than territorially. For this purpose, Chosŏn employed a range of rhetorical and ritual techniques. Especially important for Wang are "two main rhetorical modes," autoethnography and the imperializing mode. The autoethnographic mode involved the self-representation of Korean agents based on their appropriation of Ming imperial symbols, while the imperializing mode "exhorted imperial agents to behave according to their professed values" (18–19). Thus, on the one hand, Koreans created and maintained an image of Chosŏn that the imperial center valued, for example as a "country of propriety and righteousness." On the other hand, they tried to define and determine the proper conduct of the imperial center (Ming) towards Chosŏn. To show how this worked in practice, Wang focuses on the people at the frontline of diplomacy, the envoys. He explores their activities by investigating a wide range of sources, from official records to poetry collections.

The central chapters of the book examine Chosŏn's rhetorical and ritual diplomatic practices. The book is divided into four parts with two or three chapters each. Rather than a straightforward chronological account of diplomatic interactions, each chapter focuses on particular issue that is explored in detail. In the first part, Wang discusses the imperial tradition shared between Chosŏn and Ming China, illustrating the precedents that Korea relied on to engage its neighbor. Part Two focuses on diplomatic practices in the middle of the fifteenth century, focusing on the rise and reign of King Sejo (r. 1455–1468). In the third part, Wang discusses Chosŏn's "rhetoric of ecumenical belonging" (132), that is, its strategy to safeguard its status within the imperial zone of propriety, distinguished from the outer, "barbarian" zone. In the final part Wang examines the poetic exchanges between Ming envoys and Korean officials included in the *Brilliant Flowers Anthologies* (皇華集).

Each of the chapters is rich in theoretical insights and empirical detail. For example, Chapter 5 not only demonstrates that Korean envoys employed the imperializing mode of rhetoric and shows how they did so, but also describes in detail the workings of diplomacy between the two polities. Far from following a systematic tributary relationship, this diplomacy was messy, involving a wide range of actors with their own particular interests. Family connections at the imperial court could help Korean envoys. But the fact that multiple Ming agencies were involved in matters related to foreign envoys, and that these agencies were, as is the habit of bureaucratic agencies, fighting each other, complicated their diplomatic endeavors. Korean envoys thus had to be both skilled in the use of rhetorical techniques to convince the various Ming officials of the legitimacy of their position and well-informed about the inner workings of the Ming administration. This Korean drive towards acquiring as much information as possible about the neighbor led also to an information asymmetry between Chosŏn and Ming China: the former was much better informed about the latter than vice versa.

Throughout the book Wang returns to his critique of systemic explanations of Korean conduct. This includes explanations of Chosŏn's diplomatic behavior based

solely on a cultural factor, namely Neo-Confucianism. For example, he argues that Chosŏn's "selective accommodation" of Ming authority in ritual matters ought to be explained based on pragmatic policy choices rather than Neo-Confucian ideals (78–79). To be sure, Wang does not deny that these ideals mattered to Korean diplomatic actors; for instance, he notes the "commitment to Confucian principles" of a Korean official who accidentally drifted to China (156). But when analyzing Korean diplomacy, Wang emphasizes strategic motivations. While one could debate the relative importance of Confucian culture and whether Korean diplomats were indeed always this calculating in their activities, this approach provides many novel and important insights. It also gives Koreans agency, a point that Wang rightly stresses throughout his work. Koreans were not simply following a given script; they were writing their own. This agential side is also emphasized in the creation of the underlying diplomatic order itself. As Wang argues, "Chosŏn diplomacy worked not because it followed the tributary system's norms but because it helped create them in the first place" (171). This is a refreshing perspective that centers actual diplomatic practices. This perspective also makes it possible to observe the ritual interactions between the two polities more closely. While these rituals from a distance appear to be firmly regulated, almost to the point of being carved in stone, on the ground they were in reality often disputed and negotiated (see especially Chapter 7).

Wang thus contributes significantly to our understanding of Chosŏn–Ming relations. However, his characterization of these neighborly relations, including the following relations with the Qing dynasty, as "mostly bilateral" until the arrival of "third-party observers" in the nineteenth century (281–282) is surprising, since Wang himself shows that this was not the case: in Chapter 4 he broadens his usual bilateral perspective to provide an insightful discussion of the interactions between Chosŏn, Ming China, and the polities of the Uriyangqad and Jurchens to the north. The Chosŏn–Ming relationship was embedded in a wider web of relations that impinged on the interactions between the two polities. To this web one could add other actors, for example the maritime neighbors, Japan and Ryukyu. But, of course, no work can include every aspect of a topic; it is understandable that Wang mostly focuses his attention on the bilateral relationship itself, to explore it in detail.

In the conclusion, Wang asks whether Chosŏn's diplomatic strategy worked. Did rhetoric achieve anything? To answer this question, he briefly examines Ming military assistance to Chosŏn against the Japanese invasion at the end of the sixteenth century. Wang does not deny that for Ming China strategic factors mattered; but for him Chosŏn's appeal for help also played an important role in convincing Ming officials to intervene. The successful appeal was the fruit of two centuries of rhetorical and ritual strategies, which instilled in the Ming a sense of responsibility towards their neighbor. This is a persuasive conclusion to an exceptional work. Wang's stimulating and highly illuminating account should be read by anyone interested in Korea–China relations, the workings of empire, rhetorical strategies, or the history of diplomacy.