The Jingbao as Late Qing China’s News Medium and Its Reports on Korean Affairs

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ABSTRACT

Court gazettes, referred to collectively as Jingbao, constituted an influential news medium in late Qing Chinese society. This article will first investigate the Jingbao’s nature and characteristics as a business-oriented transformation of the Chinese court gazette tradition by focusing on the role played by private printing houses in the production process of the Jingbao, which will provide us with a rare glimpse of late Qing China’s print culture and the social conditions surrounding it. As an influential precursor in China of the modern newspaper, which is often thought to be of Western origin, the Jingbao informed not only various sections of the Chinese public, but in the 19th century also served as an important source of information for the foreign press. Moreover, the contents of the Jingbao often furnish information that is difficult to find elsewhere, for instance with regard to Sino-Korean relations and departures from formal procedures in contacts with Korea, which are examined in some detail in this article.

Keywords: baofang, Chosŏn Korea, Dichao, Jingbao, Qing China, the tribute system, titang

Introduction

In late Qing China, different versions and editions of court gazettes that reported court business and administrative affairs on a daily basis were widely circulated. They were published for profit by a dozen business-oriented private printing houses in Beijing, and they usually possessed in common the title Jingbao, literally meaning capital gazette, on their cover pages. They were circulated not only among central and provincial officials, but also educated Chinese people throughout the empire. I refer to them collectively as the Jingbao.¹ They contained only officially sanctioned documents that were released through the government office of the Neige (Grand Secretariat), without the addition of any editorial opinions or comments by the private publishers. This validates the authenticity of the documents carried in the Jingbao. The differences among the contents of various versions and editions of the Jingbao were the result of each private publisher selecting what it considered interesting and newsworthy items from the voluminous daily releases of court documents.

The court documents that the Grand Secretariat released daily were varied, and the Jingbao carried them largely in three sections: gongmenchao, shangyu, and zouzhe. Gongmenchao, literally meaning notes from the palace gate, was a court circular that contained very brief court announcements chiefly on audiences and
presentations. The contents of this section were furnished by cabinet ministers and scribes. The second section, shangyu, consisted of imperial decrees and rescripts announced by the emperor. A large portion of this section was devoted to reports on the appointments and transfers of officials in civil and military posts, and the many decrees and rescripts that were produced as the emperor’s responses to memorials and reports. The third section included memorials and reports that were written and presented to the throne by high-ranking bureaucrats in provincial governments, metropolitan departments, the censorate, and so forth. Among these three sections, the first section, gongmenchao, was extremely short, and almost all of the Jingbao pages were reserved for the decree and memorial sections. The memorial section was the largest (Mittler 2004, 187-207).

Notwithstanding its significance, the merits of the Jingbao as primary source material have been overlooked in the field of Chinese history. Nor does the field of Chinese journalism include a thorough study of the Jingbao. However, the Jingbao calls for far more academic attention than it has received to date. As an invaluable historical source filled with detailed daily statements and opinions on how the empire was actually governed, the Jingbao can offer new historical perspectives as well as renewed comprehension of the workings of the Qing Empire.

This article looks into the Jingbao as an influential news medium in late Qing Chinese society. First, it closely examines the Jingbao’s nature and characteristics as a business-oriented transformation of the Chinese court gazette tradition by focusing on the roles played by private printing houses in the actual production process of the Jingbao. A close examination of the production process will offer a rare glimpse into and a renewed understanding of late Qing print culture and press. This article then turns to the contents of the Jingbao and examines Sino-Korean tributary relations by reading the Qing court’s announcements and high-ranking Qing officials’ memorials that were selected and printed for public consumption in the Jingbao.

1 I capitalize jingbao when referring to private printing houses’ publications but I do not capitalize it when referring to the title of these publications. Different versions and editions of the jingbao are scattered in fragments inside and outside China. The Jingbao collection housed at the British Library in London deserves to be regarded as the best collection in the world. The British Library holds a large quantity of original jingbao versions and editions published, with the common title jingbao printed on their cover pages, by different private printing houses during the mid- and late-19th century. Its collection exceeds more than one hundred boxes and bound volumes. I chiefly refer to this collection, calling it the Jingbao and noting a publishing house’s name in parentheses. Besides the Jingbao, the British Library also possesses a vast amount of Shangyu zoubao, a transcribed version of court gazettes with no indication of its publishing house’s name, which I also refer to. My third Jingbao reference is a reprint collection printed in Beijing in 2003 by Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin. This reprinting contains the Jingbao issues originally published between 1882 and 1911 in its 163 volumes. In addition, I refer to English translations of a considerable portion of the Jingbao printed regularly on the pages of the Shanghai-based British newspaper, The North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette, from the early 1870s to the early 1900s. I have also consulted annual collections of this British newspaper’s translations during these decades, which were annually published under the title Translation of the Peking Gazette (abbreviated as TPG).
From the Dichao to the Jingbao

The Dichao and the Roles of the Titang

It has been generally agreed that the newspaper was originally an innovation of the West and that it was introduced into China in the late Qing period. Another opinion regards the appearance of the newspaper in China as an outgrowth of Chinese tradition. This second opinion argues that the newspaper originated in China, as can be seen in the institutionalization of the press dating back to ancient dynasties. This opinion regards the Jingbao as the direct successor of the printing tradition of the Dichao (Capital Reports or Metropolitan Gazette, also called the Dibao). According to some historians of Chinese journalism, the origin of the Dichao goes as far back as the 7th century, making it the world’s oldest newspaper (Wang 1924, 13; Williams 1928, 9). Some other scholars even push the Chinese court gazette tradition to times as early as the Han dynasty in the 1st or 2nd century (Lin 1968, 4; Ocko 1973, 37).

Dichao is a traditional generic name for a court gazette that was circulated widely before the late Qing period. Di indicated the lodging used by each provincial government’s delegate stationed in the capital, who was called titang (Superintendent of Courier Post). Chao referred to a transcribed copy of a court document. In the publication of the Dichao, the titang acted as a kind of capital liaison officer, taking charge of transcribing court documents and dispatching them to his province through the post-relay system (yizhan) (Britton 1933, 9).

The Dichao tradition continued into the Qing dynasty, and the roles of the titang were clearly described in the Qing Collected Statutes (DaQing huidian, hereafter DQHD), which functioned as a guiding principle of daily administrative activities. The Qing Collected Statutes assigned to each titang the duty of maintaining a printing house for the purpose of producing and delivering copies of the Dichao to the provincial government which each titang served. In the section on the Board of War, which was in charge of postal arrangements for the delivery of court documents to the provinces, including the Dichao, the Qing Collected Statutes elucidates the roles of the titang concerning the production and delivery of the Dichao. It begins with the sentence that “the number of the titang should be sixteen.” It continues:

There should be a titang from each of the different provinces of Zhili, Shandong, Shanxi, Henan, Jiangnan, Jiangxi, Fujian, Zhejiang, Hubei, Hunan, Shaanxi and Gansu, Xinjiang, Sichuan, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan and Guizhou, as well as one from the Grand Canal. The governor-general or governor of each province should submit the names of the military jinshi and those expectants awaiting nomination to captaincies to the Board in order to fill the titang position. If there is no qualified candidate, military juren degree holders may be recommended (DQHD, 51: 16).

My reference for the Qing Collected Statutes is Qinding DaQing huidian (Taibei: Zhongwen shuju, 1963).
The *Qing Collected Statutes* then explicitly lays down the roles of the *titang* concerning the management of a printing house:

Each *titang* should establish a printing house (*baofang*). He should go in person to the *Liuke* (Six Departments in Grand Secretariat) to transcribe those imperial decrees and rescripts promulgated by the throne and those reports and memorials submitted to the throne for printing and delivery to his province. With regard to the memorials for transcription that were approved or given further instructions by the emperor, the government office dealing with this matter should make a copy of each original memorial, affix an official seal, and transfer it to the responsible *titang*. The *titang* shall print and send it to his province on a daily basis. In addition, the *titang* should keep all the copies and stamped original memorials and should submit them to the Board every ten days so that they can be preserved as government records. Any document that was not forwarded by the respective government office is not to be published. A document with confidential matter cannot be copied and made public until ten days after it has been issued (*DQHD*, 51: 16).

From the *Qing Collected Statutes*, it is evident that each *titang*, as a liaison representing his provincial government, was in charge of, firstly, transmitting documents between the capital and his province and, secondly, managing a printing house for the publication of court gazettes. They were to go in person to the Six Departments and transcribe decrees and memorials; then they were to print them in their own printing houses in the form of a court gazette and deliver it to the provincial governments through the official courier system.

**The Jingbao and the Roles of the Baofang**

One of the most important social and cultural changes in late Qing China that facilitated the emergence of the *Jingbao* as an example of the Chinese court gazette tradition replacing the *Dichao* is closely linked to the emergence of business-oriented private printing houses called *baofang* that acted as publishers of the *Jingbao*. As explained above, the *titang* was officially designated as the primary agent of court gazette production. However, there are reasons to believe that over the late Qing period the *titang* only played a nominal role and the court gazette was actually produced by private printing houses that sought to make a profit. This change brought about the spread of the term *jingbao* as the generic name for court gazettes, a trend that was greatly helped by the fact that the private printing houses used to print or stamp the term on the cover pages of their court gazette publications that targeted a general readership as well as the *titang* or the Qing officialdom. With the popularity of court gazettes published by private printing houses, the name *jingbao* was also circulated broadly and became a generic name for court gazettes, replacing the term *dichao* or *dibao*.

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3 During this period, the Qing court also increasingly preferred to call court gazettes *jingbao*. For example, in 1723 the Yongzheng Emperor chose the term *jingbao* as the official name of court gazettes (Mitlter 2004, 24-25).
As mentioned, in theory each titang was to go to the Six Departments to transcribe the court documents released each day and produce court gazettes at the printing house that each one was supposed to run. However, what actually happened was that the entire process of court gazette production was in the hands of private printing houses, as the titang offices did not want to be burdened with this task. So, with the tacit approval of the imperial court, they willingly contracted out the task of publishing court gazettes to these private, business-oriented publishers (Ocko 1973, 37-38).

It is difficult to tell when exactly private printing houses began producing the Jingbao, but it has been suggested that their emergence as the main body of court gazette production began either during the reign of the Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1722-1735), or after his reign and during that of the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-1796) (Fang 2003, 139; Hu 1999, 11). This argument claims that in the 20th year of the Qianlong reign there already was no titang office that published a court gazette, which means that all of the titang offices purchased custom-made court gazettes from private printing houses and delivered them to their provinces. To be sure, by the 19th century at the latest, the producers of court gazettes were definitely not the titang but rather these private publishers (Britton 1933, 11; Lü 2000, 95-96).

The primary reasons for this shift from the titang to the baofang are as follows: first, the titang wanted to be relieved of the burden of producing court gazettes, preferring instead to save time, energy, and money for their primary role of maintaining sound communication between the capital and the provinces. Second, although the duty of the titang was laid down in the Qing Collected Statutes, in reality the government lacked a well-developed system or thorough policy concerning the publication of court gazettes (Lü 2000, 93-95). Hence, the titang willingly handed court gazette production over to the private printing houses.

Turning over court gazette production to the private printing houses became a general trend in late Qing China, as these printing houses sent their own people to the Six Departments to transcribe the court documents released each day to print. Of course, the titang purchased the transcriptions of court documents and transmitted them to the provinces through the official post-relay system (Lü 2000, 95-96). It is significant to note that, in addition to producing customized court gazettes for the titang, another important business interest of the printing houses was publishing other court gazettes that targeted a broader readership of educated Chinese. The name of the printing house and the title jingbao usually being displayed on the cover page, these court gazettes intended for wider circulation were read beyond the ranks of officiahdom. The private printing houses' production of court gazettes for an extensive readership clearly marked a significant transition in the history of Chinese court gazette production.

As part of the actual production process of the Jingbao, every day, early in the morning, an officer from the Grand Secretariat, which had as one of its functions in the late Qing period that of a comprehensive imperial office of records, was required to go over to the court to receive a large number of memorials, rescripts, decrees, and ordinances of appointment and promotion that were reviewed by the emperor and deemed fit to be made public by the Grand Council (Junjichu).
The officer took them to the Office of Transcription, called Chaoxiefang, located outside the Donghuamen (an east gate of the Forbidden City), and promulgated the released court documents at noon every day. In this office, the transcribers sent by the private printing houses selectively copied out these court documents and brought their transcriptions to the printing houses for production (Huang 1983, 164; Mayers 1875, v).

In Beijing, the private printing houses’ Jingbao, which targeted a wide readership of non-official educated Chinese, were sold by hawkers on the streets as well as delivered to subscribers by carriers. Copies were also rented out for a fraction of the purchasing price by the carriers themselves, which indicates that the carriers were engaged in every aspect of delivering, collecting, renting out, and re-distributing these publications. In addition, copies were circulated throughout the empire by special deliverymen and the private post (xinju). These special deliverymen working for the printing houses were dispatched to regions outside of Beijing on a regular basis: for example, every other day to destinations not far from Beijing, like Tongzhou; every five days to Tianjin; every ten days to Baoding; and once a month to remote regions. Delivery by private post was usually faster than the official post-relay system and reached as far as the Canton area from the early 19th century (Britton 1933, 10; Liu 1995, 38).

Rutherford Alcock, a British minister to China in the late 1860s, once wrote a vivid eyewitness account of the thriving private printing houses after he visited a district near the Zhengyangmen, a gate at the south end of present-day Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and the Liulichang, a well-known market street near the Zhengyangmen, in which these private printing houses were active in business.

If the visitor at Peking extend his researches into the Chinese City, and ever penetrate into one of the narrow side streets near Liu-li-chang, the Paternoster-Row of the capital, he may pass the door of one of the offices whence the printed copies are issued. This is the quarter of book-sellers, and their associate instruments, bookbinders and wood-engravers. On entering the shop, cases of wooden-cut characters may be seen ranged against the wall, and sorted according to the number of strokes in each. Some of frequent occurrence together are arranged as double characters, such as ‘Imperial edict,’ Mandarin titles, the official title of the reign, &c. About a dozen of these printing offices suffice to issue several thousand copies, from whence they are distributed, as in London, to their customers, or dispatched in batches to the different provinces. But these offices are all private, and trust to the sale of copies for their reimbursement and profits. For six dollars a year the Pekinese may keep himself posted up in all that the Government thinks it desirable he should know as to its acts, or the course of events in the provinces. Or he may hire his Gazette for the day, and return it if he does not approve of the cost of purchasing (Alcock 1873, 252).

The above quote shows that the Jingbao was not confined to officials, but widely circulated among non-bureaucrat Beijing residents as well. The private printing

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4 The Chinese City was the southern part of old Beijing.
houses’ commercial success is indicative of the existence of a huge population of non-official educated Chinese who were eager to be informed of court and government affairs, and of the achievement of the Jingbao in satisfying market demand.\(^5\)

As mentioned in the above quote, there were as many as a dozen active, private printing houses in Beijing during the late Qing period. Most of them came from the Shandong Province. They competed with one another but, at the same time, established a guild and cooperated when protecting common business interests. Most deliverymen hired by the printing houses were also Shandong people, and their number amounted to two hundred in 1905. They formed a powerful union (Fang 2003, 147-49; Huang 1983, 168).

My research on the British Library collection verifies the active publication of the Jingbao by Hecheng baofang, Quxing baofang, Juheng baofang, and Xinyi baofang between the 1870s and the 1890s.\(^6\) The British Library collection also shows the existence of different Jingbao versions and editions, along with different formats adopted by different publishers.\(^7\) At the same time, this collection reveals that in some cases different publishers used the same physical format in terms of the size of the publication, the cover page design, the layout of the table of contents, and/or the design and font of body pages. As already mentioned, notwithstanding their plurality, the news coverage of different Jingbao on a particular day would overlap, carrying the same stories in identical sentences.

Qing-Chosŏn Tributary Relations Reflected in the Jingbao Reporting on the Procedures for Sending and Receiving Embassies

Like the dynasties that preceded it, the Qing Empire regarded the tribute paid to it by foreign countries as an important diplomatic issue, and this tradition continued until the late Qing period. Bureaucratic activities regarding its tributary relations with tribute-paying countries, such as receiving foreign tributary embassy members and dispatching Qing imperial envoys, were of central concern to the Qing court. These important diplomatic transactions were often made public through the Jingbao, which means that the extensive Jingbao readership was informed of the supremacy of the Qing Empire in its relationship with tributary countries.

Among many tributary countries, Chosŏn Korea was the primary core

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\(^5\) After the private printing houses began to mass-produce it, the total daily circulation of the Jingbao was as many as ten thousand copies including provincial reprints and manuscript editions. This number is significantly higher than the transcribed court gazettes’ total circulation of a few hundred copies before the mass-print era. The number of readers actually significantly exceeded the number of copies sold, since a copy was passed around and read by multiple readers and those readers who could not afford to purchase a copy could still rent one for a far lower price (Britton 1933, 10; Fang 2003, 147).

\(^6\) This confirms Barbara Mittler’s archival research. See Mittler 2004, 183.

\(^7\) Some publishers omitted the name of the publishing house and/or the title of their publication, which usually was jingbao. And a considerable portion of the British Library collection displays the name of the publishing house not on the cover page but on the first body page, on which the date of publication and the table of contents are usually placed.
member of the Qing-centered tribute system and was widely regarded as the Qing Empire's model tributary country. The Qing-Chosŏn tributary relationship was maintained primarily by sending and receiving embassies, and Chosŏn Korea usually sent an embassy once a year on the occasion of the winter solstice. The frequency and scale of Korean tribute-paying embassies far exceeded the Qing Empire's other key tributary countries, such as Vietnam and the Ryukyu Kingdom (see Chŏn 1968, 90-111). A reading of the Jingbao regarding late Qing's tributary relations with Korea clearly shows how much the Qing court endeavored to re-conceptualize and rearticulate the waning tributary rhetoric for the purpose of tightening its loosening tributary ties with Korea, which, along with the traditional Sino-centric worldview and world order, were being seriously damaged by Western encroachment upon China and the emergence of Meiji Japan as a new leading power in East Asia, threatening China's hegemony over Korea.

Looking at the Jingbao records of tributary missions between Qing China and Chosŏn Korea shows that Korea was one of the most significant participants in the China-centered tribute system and, thus, the Qing court was greatly concerned with the procedure of selecting imperial envoys to be sent to the Korean court. The frequent accounts in the Jingbao on the dispatch of imperial envoys to Korea confirm this. On the demise of the Tongzhi Emperor in early 1875, for instance, several announcements and decrees regarding the bureaucratic procedure of dispatching a Qing envoy to Korea in order to carry the mission of delivering the Qing court's proclamation were made public through the Jingbao over the following months. These procedures consisted of the following actions.

First, the Board of Rites (Libu) presents a memorial to the throne, requesting that an envoy and an associate envoy be appointed to convey a proclamation to Korea. As a response to this memorial, an imperial decree announces the appointment of Ming'an, a vice-president of the Board of Revenue in the provincial government in Shengjing (present-day Shenyang), as the chief-envoy, and Lirui, a chamberlain of the Imperial Bodyguard, as the vice-envoy. After the promulgation of this imperial decree, the Jingbao informs us that Lirui has had an imperial audience of leave before proceeding to Korea. Next, after receiving imperial orders regarding the delivery of the proclamation and an imperial decree that announces the enthronement of the current Guangxu Emperor, Ming'an presents a memorial to the throne that reports his schedule of departure from his post in compliance with the schedule of Lirui. After the mission in Korea is completed, the Jingbao delivers the news of Lirui's return from Korea and Ming'an's submission of an

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8 See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), January 30, 1875, 7 and Shangyu zoubao, January 30, 1875, 5. Also see TPG for 1875, 19.
9 See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), March 4, 1875, 3 and Shangyu zoubao, March 4, 1875, 1. Also see TPG for 1875, 29.
10 See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), May 25, 1875, 19-23. Also see TPG for 1875, 65.
11 See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), July 2, 1875, 3. Also see TPG for 1875, 79.
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official report to the throne.\textsuperscript{12}

Besides this occasion of the demise of the Tongzhi Emperor, another important event in the same year in Sino-Korean tributary relations was the investiture of the son of the Korean king Kojong as heir apparent. Once again, the Jingbao reports thoroughly on the bureaucratic procedures from the time of selecting a chief-envoy and vice-envoy to their return to China early in the following year: on November 21, 1875, it publishes an imperial decree that appoints Jihe and Wulaxichong’a as the chief- and vice-envoy, respectively, to go to Korea with the mission of conferring a customary patent of investiture upon the Korean king’s son. It also informs us that this decision of dispatching the imperial envoy to Korea signaled the Qing court’s acceptance of the Korean king’s request that was delivered by a Korean tribute-paying embassy six weeks earlier.\textsuperscript{13}

After the Qing court’s decision to dispatch the imperial envoy to Korea has been made, the Jingbao also describes the Board of Rites’ careful procedure for selecting the chief- and vice-envoy as bearers of the imperial patent. It introduces the Board of Rites’ suggestion regarding the ranks of the chief- and vice-envoy, that the chief-envoy should be selected from among the high-ranking officials of the Imperial Court or the Imperial Guards, and the vice-envoy should be chosen from among the vice-chancellors of the Grand Secretariat, Manchu chancellors of the Hanlin Academy, or Manchu vice-presidents of the Board of Rites, all of whom were in high-ranking positions on the Qing Empire’s bureaucratic ladder. It also carries the Board of Rites’ proposal that a list of eligible officials should be submitted to the emperor for his final decision and that the emperor’s statement to Korea should be drafted in conformity with precedents.\textsuperscript{14} Twenty days later, the Jingbao makes public the news that the chief- and vice-envoy have been appointed and granted an imperial audience before departure.\textsuperscript{15} In March of the following year it also reports their return to China.\textsuperscript{16}

**Detailed Coverage of Tributary Affairs**

One of the key merits of reading the Jingbao today is that its news coverage was so detailed that it provides us with a glimpse of the actual operations of tributary transactions when they deviated from prescribed principles, as is evident in the Jingbao’s reports on some incidents. This characteristic of the Jingbao is particularly salient in its memorial section (zouzhe), which is filled with high-ranking bureaucrats’ memorials that were presented to the throne. One type of incident that reveals the gap between prescribed principles and actual operations of tributary transactions is that of robberies targeting Korean tribute-paying embassy members.

\textsuperscript{12} See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), July 11, 1875, 25-27. Also see TPG for 1875, 84.

\textsuperscript{13} See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), November 21, 1875, 41. Also see TPG for 1875, 150.

\textsuperscript{14} See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), December 9, 1875, 9-12. Also see TPG for 1875, 159.

\textsuperscript{15} See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), December 29, 1875, 3 and Shangyu zoubao, December 29, 1875, 1. Also see TPG for 1875 (page number not provided).

\textsuperscript{16} See the Jingbao (Shandong tangwu), March 30, 1876, 5. Also see TPG for 1876, 26.
on Chinese soil.

On October 3, 1881, for example, the Jingbao\(^{17}\) published a memorial submitted by Qiyuan, a military governor in Moukden (another name for Shengjing), that reports the robbery of a member of the Korean embassy named Pyŏn Ch’unch’i, who was an interpreter. The memorial states that Pyŏn was separated from the main body of the embassy on some business. As he was trying to catch up with the main body, he had to proceed on an unfrequented route because the regular road was flooded and thus was difficult to travel on. Unfortunately, he was attacked there by two strangers. They took all his belongings and left him badly wounded in both legs. Sometime later, he was found and carried to an inn in the nearest village, where he was taken care of until he recovered enough to resume his journey with adequate compensation provided by local authorities to make up for his misfortunes. In the meantime, the memorial says, there has been no progress in the investigation of the criminals, not even a clue as to their identity. So the memorialist requests the throne that the responsible sub-prefect and other minor officials under whose jurisdiction this crime occurred should be duly reprimanded, and that the criminals should be arrested and punished within three months’ time. The Jingbao states that his requests were granted. Given that Korean tribute-paying embassy members had to journey as a group on Chinese soil and that traveling alone was greatly discouraged, the Jingbao’s vivid and detailed accounts of the circumstances of Pyŏn’s misadventures illustrate the existence of a divergence between prescribed principles and actual practices in Sino-Korean tributary relations.

This gap between prescribed principles and actual practices is most evident with regard to the issue of how to send shipwrecked Koreans back to Korea. From reading the Jingbao, one learns that they had to first be transported overland to Beijing and thence sent back to Korea, accompanied by a Korean tribute-paying embassy returning from Beijing, a process confirmable in the well-recorded shipwreck case of a Korean literatus named Ch’oe Pu in the late 15\(^{th}\) century. As a matter of fact, the practice of transporting shipwrecked Koreans overland first to Beijing was inherited from the pre-Qing era. Ch’oe left a comprehensive travelogue describing his shipwreck in early 1488 and his return to Korea half a year later. At the time of his shipwreck, he had been recently appointed to a government position in Cheju Island, located off the southern coast of the Korean Peninsula. Shortly after he took up his post in the island, his father died. So he departed the island on a ship, heading to the mainland for the funeral. Unfortunately, while crossing the sea, a storm wrecked his ship and he drifted southwest to the east coast of China, near Ningbo. It took half a year before he finally returned to Korea.\(^{18}\)

After Ch’oe, along with several dozen crew members and passengers, washed ashore on the Chinese coast near Ningbo, he was sent overland (and also through

\(^{17}\) See the Jingbao (Juheng baofang), October 3, 1881, 7-13. Also see TPG for 1881, 122-23.

\(^{18}\) My reference for Ch’oe Pu’s travel record is Ch’oe Pu, Pyohae-rok (Seoul: Koryŏ University Press, 2006).

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the Grand Canal) to Beijing, passing through such major cities as Hangzhou, Suzhou, Yangzhou, and Tianjin. He finally returned to Korea from Beijing through the land route, accompanying a tribute-paying Korean embassy. This was the only prescribed procedure and itinerary for returning shipwrecked Koreans during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The Jingbao tells us stories that are different from the prescribed principles exemplified in the case of Ch’oe Pu. That is, Korean shipwreck survivors were often sent to Beijing by sea.19 A memorial presented by the governor-general of Fujian, published in the Jingbao on February 25, 1881,20 indicates that forwarding Korean shipwreck survivors via sea was actually possible. On the basis of the information provided by the local magistrate who communicated in writing with the Koreans, the governor-general first reports to the throne of the arrival of a small Korean junk with seven people on board in his jurisdiction. It is obvious from the memorial that the governor-general is well aware that according to the rules, they should be sent overland to Beijing. However, he expresses his willingness to send them to Beijing by sea. The first reason that led him to consider this alternative option is that there were two precedents in 1876 and 1878 when Korean shipwreck survivors were ferried to a harbor near Beijing by sea. On these two occasions, he continues, the survivors preferred the sea route because it was speedier and more comfortable, and their requests were granted accordingly. The other reason is that the weather in winter would make their land journey particularly difficult. Hence, he proposes that he keep the Koreans in Fuzhou until spring and then send them by steamer to Tianjin, a gateway port city to Beijing, via Shanghai.

One can learn of the final handling of this shipwreck case in detail from the governor-general’s follow-up memorial that was made public through the Jingbao on June 9 of the same year.21 His initial proposal to forward the Koreans by steamer was granted by the throne. The Koreans, however, became very worried when notified that they were to be sent by steamer because, according to them, there was a written prohibition in Korea against traveling by that means, and severe punishment was unavoidable for those who violated it. He assumes that the Korean law must have been enacted after the aforementioned 1876 and 1878 shipwreck cases, for, as far as he knows, no problems arose in the previous two cases when the Chinese authorities returned the Koreans home by steamer. He finally proposes the transportation of the Koreans overland from province to province until they arrive in Beijing. At the end of the memorial, he adds a comment criticizing the Korean government for sticking rigidly to the old procedure even in matters of life and death. Though not carried out, the governor-general’s initial plan to transport the shipwrecked Koreans by sea is still quite meaningful. Rather than rigidly adhering to the prescribed principles, the memorialist, as an actual executor of the rules

19 See, for instance, the Jingbao (Juheng baofang) on February 25 (9-12), April 10 (11-16), and June 9 (29-32) in 1881. Also see TPG for 1872, 121-22 and TPG for 1881, 22, 44, and 72-73.
20 See the Jingbao (Juheng baofang), February 25, 1881, 9-12. Also see TPG for 1881, 22.
21 See the Jingbao (Juheng baofang), June 9, 1881, 29-32. Also see TPG for 1881, 72-73.
on the ground, was flexible enough to modify them to meet practical needs and changing situations.

Interestingly, the Jingbao also proves that, as early as ten years prior to the aforementioned 1881 shipwreck case, provincial Qing officials were even willing to send shipwrecked Koreans directly back to Korea by sea, skipping the mandated procedure of first transporting them overland to Beijing. This is confirmed by a joint memorial in 1872, drafted chiefly by a top-ranking provincial official of Shandong, on how to deal with Koreans who had recently drifted ashore and arrived on the Chinese coast under his jurisdiction. That is, after being reported by a district magistrate who communicated with the shipwrecked Koreans in writing that the Koreans did not want to be sent to Beijing, instead begging to be allowed to repair their boat at the very location where it ran aground and to return home directly from there, the memorialists seriously thought about granting their request. The memorialists were of course fully aware of the prescription against sending shipwrecked Koreans directly back to Korea by sea in cases like this. However, after considering that the distance by sea from the shipwrecked location to the coast of Korea was close enough for the Koreans to arrive in their home country within a day and a night with a favorable wind, and that it would cause them much inconvenience to carry all their belongings to Beijing, the memorialists were convinced that granting their request might be the most desirable way to conclude this case. The memorialists' request to do this was granted by the emperor.

Conclusion
This article has explored a significant and also somewhat neglected topic in the history of late Qing Chinese print culture. The Jingbao was a powerful news medium in late Qing China that marked a business-oriented transformation in China's long tradition of court gazette production. The major roles played by the private printing houses in producing the Jingbao provide us with a rare glimpse of late Qing China's print culture and the social conditions surrounding it. Shedding light on the history of the Jingbao as a business-oriented news medium and understanding the Jingbao as an influential precursor of the modern newspaper in a Chinese setting can redress the current emphasis on the Western origin of the modern Chinese press. In addition, the Jingbao's detailed news coverage of the Sino-Korean tributary transactions demonstrates the existence of the gap between prescribed principles and actual operations, which is most evident with regard to the issue of how to send shipwrecked Koreans back to Korea.

The Jingbao's pervasive influence in late Qing Chinese society was well recognized by Chinese-language modern newspapers like the Shenbao, one of the most widely circulated newspapers in late Qing China. That is, modern newspapers were eager to take advantage of the authority and popularity of the Jingbao by

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22 See TPG for 1872, 121-22.
reprinting it on their pages.\textsuperscript{23} This demonstrates that modern newspapers were very conscious that their commercial success and popularity was to some degree conditioned by their readers’ familiarity with the Jingbao, and they therefore tried to meet readers’ expectations (Mittler 2004, 180-84).

The tendency to reprint the Jingbao was not confined to Chinese-language newspapers. Some foreign-language newspapers also used to translate portions of the Jingbao and print them on their pages, as seen in the influential English-language British newspaper published in Shanghai of the day, The North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette, which was eager to translate and reprint Jingbao news stories it deemed important during the last several decades of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and the beginning years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

As a matter of fact, Western powers in China of the time were in desperate need of access to reliable, high-quality information on daily court and government affairs, and the Jingbao provided them with many documents of unusual significance. Without a doubt, the Jingbao functioned as a precious news source that enabled Western powers to become familiar with the ongoing concerns of the Qing administration and, further, with Chinese culture and society. A French observer put it this way in 1893: “[Through the Jingbao] one can get to know thousands of unknown facts as to the actions of the emperor and the imperial ceremonies, as to the bureaucratic and judicial structure as well as to the habits and customs, superstitions and folklore of the Chinese people” (quoted in Mittler 2004, 204). Rutherford Alcock also noted that reading the Jingbao was crucial for Western powers to obtain a glimpse of “the actual condition of the country as well as the governing influences at work … [I]t may well afford valuable information to all who seek to understand the condition of the country and the abuses in its Government” (Alcock 1873, 248-49).\textsuperscript{24}

Western powers’ keen interest in the Jingbao was not restricted to the mere reading of it. They even intended to actively use it to their advantage by attempting to disseminate their imperialist voices through it. During the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, for instance, Western legations in Beijing collectively made an abortive attempt to demand that the Qing government make an announcement through the Jingbao that it was firmly determined to suppress the anti-Western rebellion (Huang 1983, 160). Their bold attempt reveals how conscious they were of the influence

\textsuperscript{23} Of course, this was possible because there was no copyright on the Jingbao in late Qing China. Some businessmen even profited by engaging professionally in publishing pirated editions of the Jingbao (Hu 1999, 13).

\textsuperscript{24} As the encroachment of Western imperialism upon China escalated in the late Qing period, the Qing court and government became increasingly displeased with Western powers’ reading of the Jingbao. In particular, they were extremely concerned about the British Legation’s regular obtainment and vigilant reading of the Jingbao issues, since they were well aware that it could result in the leaking of Qing administrative information into what they regarded as enemy hands. The fact that the Daoguang Emperor once ordered a special investigation into the current situation of the British acquirement of the Jingbao clearly reveals how deep their apprehension was and, consequently, how valuable the Jingbao was for acquainting the British with what was going on both inside and outside Qing officialdom (Fairbank and Teng 1960, 97; Lü 2000, 95-96).
of the Jingbao in Chinese society, which is also reminiscent of the aforementioned modern newspapers’ recognition of the influence of the Jingbao.

GLOSSARY

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REFERENCES


