

Guest Editor's Introduction: Manchuria and Korea in East Asian History

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Geopolitical Connections between Korea and Manchuria

Throughout history, many tribal peoples or ethnic groups originated and occupied the region known today as Manchuria.¹ It was the home of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes such as the Khitans and Jurchens whose history, language, and culture were totally different from those of Han Chinese. Manchurian peoples built powerful empires that conquered parts or all of China, but Han Chinese dynasties also controlled parts of the region at different times. Manchuria also had a very close connection to Korea. Parts of Manchuria and Korea were “unified” under Korean states such as Old Chosŏn (古朝鮮), Puyŏ (夫餘), Koguryŏ (高句麗), and Parhae (渤海). In particular, Koguryŏ, the earliest and the strongest of the Three Kingdoms, ruled over much of the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria for several centuries.

Manchuria and Korea were again “reunited” for a very brief period in

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1 The name “Manchuria” (滿洲) is used around the world except in China, where the region is usually referred to as *Dongbei* (東北, “Northeast”) or the “Three Northeast Provinces” (東北三省). The Chinese aversion to the term “Manchuria” is due to the term’s close association with Japanese imperialism and the puppet state of Manchukuo. During premodern times, the region was commonly referred to as Yodong (Liaodong 遼東, “East of the Liao River”) in historical sources.

the 14th century under the Koryŏ monarchy, when King Ch'ungsŏn (忠宣王, r. 1298, 1308~13) concurrently held the titles of the King of Koryŏ and the King of Shenyang (瀋陽王, 1307-1310 or Shenwang, 瀋王 from 1310), who had some control over Koryŏ people living in the Liaodong region. However, the title of Shenwang passed to the king's nephew whereas the throne of Koryŏ was succeeded by his son. The two thrones were never reunited again as the Mongol court exploited political rivalry between the Shenwang and the Koryŏ king, consistent with the Mongol strategy of exercising greater control through multiple and overlapping authority.² The presence of a potential competitor of Shenwang in Liaodong did serve as a powerful deterrent to independent actions from Kaegyŏng, and bitter struggles for the succession to the Koryŏ throne often erupted.

In any case, many continue to view Korea and Manchuria as [potential-ly] comprising a single region in the fourteenth century. There were repeated attempts to abolish the kingdom of Koryŏ and establish a regular province in its place. In 1302, it was proposed that the kingdom of Koryŏ and the Liaoyang province (遼陽行省) be combined into a new enlarged province with its capital located in Liaodong.³ These proposals were ultimately rejected by the Mongol court. On the other hand, Koryŏ maintained its territorial claim over Liaodong. As Mongol power rapidly declined, King Kongmin (恭愍王) in 1356 sent troops across the Amnok River to destroy the Mongol relay stations.⁴ After the Mongol court retreated to the steppe, Kongmin in 1370 again ordered General Yi Sŏnggye (李成桂) (later the founder of the Chosŏn dynasty) to lead a preemptive strike into Manchuria with a force of 5,000 cavalry soldiers and 10,000 infantry. The Koryŏ army forced the surrender of over 10,000 households

2 Endicott-West, "The Yüan Government and Society," in Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 6, Alien Regimes and Border States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 593.

3 *Koryŏsa*, 32:13a6-7.

4 *Koryŏsa*, 39:4a4-7.

and captured the city of Liaoyang. The Koryŏ court then publicly declared that the region of “Liao-Shen” (遼瀋) was originally within its borders.⁵

At the time, Koryŏ’s territorial claim over Liaodong was not challenged by the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋) who had a higher priority in military campaigns against the Mongols in the west and north. The Ming took rather defensive measures in the Northeast and even delegated the “defense of the Liaodong” to Koryŏ.⁶ The eventual outcome of military conflict between the Mongols and the Ming was still very much in doubt at the time. As Koryŏ tried to avoid of the conflict altogether by keeping lines open to both sides, Zhu Yuanzhang became highly suspicious of Koryŏ’s intentions regarding the Ming and the Northern Yuan (北元). As the Ming gradually gained control over southern Liaodong, Zhu provoked Koryŏ by announcing his intention to take over not only Liaodong but also the Northern part of the Korean peninsula north of Ch’ŏllyŏng (鐵嶺, parts of modern P’yŏngan and Hamgyŏng provinces) that Koryŏ had recently recovered by force. As relations deteriorated rapidly, Koryŏ decided to strike first and launch a military expedition, which was aborted when Yi Sŏnggye turned his troops around at the Amnok River and returned to the capital to depose the king.

Yi Sŏnggye’s coup ended Koryŏ’s Liaodong expedition, but Zhu did not show much enthusiasm for Yi or the new Chosŏn dynasty. Rather, Zhu responded with a warning that Yi must not practice the same “deceitful actions” of previous Koryŏ kings.⁷ Among many issues, the status of Jurchen refugees in Korea was crucial and contentious in Chosŏn-Ming relations.⁸ As Jurchen tribes in Liaodong have long posed a security threat, the Korean court traditionally employed the strategy of offering

5 *Koryŏsa*, 42:1a6-8, 1b1-2a2, 24a4-5, 24b7, 25a8, 114:13a8-b6; *Koryŏsa chŏryŏ*, 29:1a5-7.

6 *Koryŏsa*, 42:9a1-9.

7 *T’aejo sillok* [in *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*], 2:10b1-10.

8 *Chŏngjong sillok* [in *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*], 1:4a15-b1.

economic incentives and resettlement of some Jurchens within its borders as the most effective means of control. Thus, it was not surprising that the Chosŏn court was initially unwilling to surrender the Jurchens within its borders to the Ming. Relations only improved somewhat between the two states after Chosŏn repatriated some of the Jurchen refugees.

However, Ming China continued to accuse Chosŏn of various “wrongdoings” and repeatedly humiliated Chosŏn envoys. In the final two years of his reign, Zhu Yuanzhang found three Korean memorials (表) to contain what he considered to be improper and insulting language.⁹ The Ming emperor was known for his hyper-sensitivity over alleged insinuations of his humble background, and many Chinese writers lost their lives for small and inadvertent mistakes in their literary compositions. It is unlikely that Chosŏn would have intentionally sought to insult Zhu Yuanzhang, but the matter became more complicated as the official involved in these affairs was none other than Chŏng Tojŏn (鄭道傳), one of the most influential and trusted officials at the court. Continued Ming insistence that Chŏng be brought to the Ming capital escalated to the point that Chosŏn now planned a preemptive expedition to Liaodong. The decision to launch a military campaign to Liaodong was said to have been made in the eighth month of 1398, but the expedition was aborted only two months later as Chŏng Tojŏn and his supporters were killed in a palace coup led by Yi Pangwŏn (李芳遠), who soon seized the throne.¹⁰

Throughout the 15th century, Chosŏn moved to incorporate the land south of the Amnok and Tuman Rivers. With Ming control of southern Liaodong along the border with Korea, Manchuria would not pose a serious security problem until the rise of the Jurchens under the leadership of

9 See Ku Chieh-kang, “A Study of Literary Persecution during the Ming,” translated by L.C. Goodrich, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 3 (1938), 264-269; Donald N. Clark, “Autonomy, Legitimacy, and Tributary Politics: Sino-Korean Relations in the Fall of Koryŏ and the Founding of the Yi,” Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1978, 144-152.

10 *T'aejo sillok*, 14:18b8-9.

Nurhaci. After the founding of the Qing Dynasty, the Manchus strictly controlled their homeland by constructing a barrier and border called Willow Palisade (柳條邊) to restrict Han Chinese access, and Manchuria maintained its separate identity from “China.” Both the Qing and Chosŏn imposed strict controls over the border and prohibited private contact.

However, the historical and geopolitical connections between Korea and Manchuria continued to persist. It can still be seen in the late Eighteenth century, when the Qianlong emperor in the *Manzhou yuanliu kao* (滿州源流考) claimed that the Manchus inherited their history and heritage from not only the peoples and states in Manchuria but from such Korean states of Paekche and Silla located within the Korean Peninsula. Qianlong would claim all of Korean and Manchurian history and people except Koguryŏ and Koryŏ.¹¹ Finally, in the twentieth century as Japan occupied and sponsored the puppet state of Manchukuo, Japanese imperialist historiography revived this connection between Korea and Manchuria by putting forward the idea of the *Mansenshi* (滿鮮史, Manchuria-Korea history) that integrated these two regions as a single entity.

Manchuria in Premodern East Asian Interstate Relations

Powerful Manchurian states always represented serious threats to Chinese and Korean states, and it was the common threat of Manchurian states that enabled friendly relations Korean and Chinese states. The Silla-Tang alliance in the seventh century came about precisely because of the threat of Manchurian power (Koguryŏ). Once Koguryŏ was eliminated, Silla and the Tang would clash over the former territory and people of Koguryŏ. When the two states reconciled, it was not because the Tang court simply abandoned its territorial ambitions when Silla promised to remain a loyal tributary state, as suggested by some scholars.¹² The re-

11 See Pamela Crossley, “*Manzhou yuanliu kao* and Formalization of the Manchu Heritage,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (1987), 761–90

sumption of friendly relations between Silla and the Tang must be understood in the context of the rise of a new “Northern Threat” of the reconstituted Manchurian power of Parhae in 699. The Koryō dynasty displayed much hostility and contempt toward the Manchurian states of the Khitan and the Jin. While state boundaries were often not well-defined in pre-modern times and existed more as frontier regions, there are indications that the border between Koryō, Chinese and Manchurian states was clearly marked and closely monitored and controlled.

Manchurian states were important players in the multistate international order maintained by the balance of power. Song China and the Khitan Empire preserved the peace based on the Treaty of Shanyuan that provided for “friendly relations” on the condition that the Song would submit an annual payment of 100,000 *taels* of silver and 200,000 *bolts* of silk to the Khitan.¹³ While there remained sporadic military skirmishes, the treaty ensured a century of peace, trade, and economic prosperity in Northeast Asia.

Thomas Barfield noted that all conquest dynasties that ruled parts or all of China originated from Manchuria. He suggested that Han Chinese subsidies [or “payment” or “tributes”] in the guise of the tributary relations were so essential in maintaining the nomadic political structure that the rise and fall of the steppe empires paralleled those of Chinese empires. In other words, the complex political state organizations of the nomads were developed not to handle the simple internal affairs of the steppe but to deal with the large and highly organized Chinese states. Thus, the nomads rarely attempted to occupy Chinese land but instead employed what Barfield called the “outer frontier strategy” of forcing the Chinese states to accept their demands of tributes and trade.¹⁴ However, when this Chi-

12 Nishijima Sadao, *Nihon rekishi no kokusai kankyo* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1985), 126-27.

13 *Songshi*, 7.126-27; *Liaoshi*, 14.160 ; *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian*, 58.1299.

14 Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China 221 B.C. to AD 1757* (Cambridge MA & Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1989), 49-50, 91.

nese-Steppe nomad tandem fell into trouble, the Manchurian state would emerge. According to Barfield, the emergence of the nomadic empire and Manchurian dynasties were “secondary phenomena: the single nomad empires are logical consequences of the unification of China by native dynasties; foreign dynasties the product of the progressive breakdown of established order in China.”¹⁵

How should we approach and understand “Manchurian history”? Manchuria’s geopolitical connections with Korea and China and its complex and complicated historical legacy led to fierce competition for the ownership of its history among the modern states in East Asia. Mongolia now claims as its own history both the steppe nomads and people of Manchuria such as Xianbei (鮮卑) and Khitan. In Korea, Manchuria is remembered as the location of the first Korean state of Old Chosŏn and the great state of Koguryŏ. While some go so far as to claim that Koreans and Manchurians were of the same ethnic origin, the notion of “Greater Korea” encompassing a large swath of Manchuria has so far been confined to a nationalist fringe.

In China, the historical experience of semi-colonial modernity that saw the loss of Manchuria to Japanese imperialist aggression strongly influenced its study of Manchuria and its ethnic groups. The Chinese government has been sponsoring the Northeast Project (東北工程) and the Qing History compilation Project (清史工程) to incorporate all history of Manchuria firmly into its national history, thereby recasting pre-modern history of Manchuria and Korea. This led to a concern that the historical identity of Manchus and Manchuria will be buried in the narrative of the unified history of the Chinese nation. Chinese historiography further con-

15 Thomas Barfield, “Inner Asia and Cycles of Power,” in Gary Seaman and Daniel Marks ed. *Rulers from the Steppe: State Formation on the Eurasian Periphery* (Ethnographic Press, 1991), 55.

tends that Manchurian states including Koguryō were merely “local regimes” and “vassals” of “Chinese” dynasties. In response, the Korean government sponsored history projects to respond to what it considers to be Chinese encroachment on Korean history and identity.

There have been some efforts by scholars such as Kim Han'gyu, who envisioned a separate historical concept of “historical community of Liaodong” as a way to overcome state or nationalist approaches.¹⁶ However, it is likely that modern Korean, Chinese, and Mongolian states will continue to make exclusive claims over all or parts of Manchurian history. It is an irony that the Manchus who once ruled China directly and exercised suzerain power over Chosŏn Korea ultimately failed to establish their own modern nation-state and became a “minority” in multi-ethnic China. If the Manchus had been successful in maintaining their own state in Manchuria, they would undoubtedly be engaged in a fierce struggle over the “ownership” of Manchurian history with its neighboring states.

In this special issue on Manchuria, scholars from Korea, China, and the United States offer studies on various historical topics related to Manchurian history spanning almost a millennium from the tenth to the eighteenth century. Pamela Crossley looks into the issue of Parhae identity after the fall of its state and its lasting influence on Khitan institutions through a careful examination of the puppet state of “Dan gur” [better known as Tongran or Dongdan 東丹], Parhae aristocrats, and the resettlement of the Parhae population. Lee Jungshin's paper traced changes in Chosŏn government officials' perceptions of Liaodong and court policy, using the descriptions of Liaodong found in important historical documents such as the *Sejong sillok chiriji* (世宗實錄地理志). Kye Sŭngbŏm also emphasized the importance of Korean historical sources for the study of early Manchu history. His paper shows that observations by Chosŏn officials enable us to better understand the political developments in southern Manchuria during Nurhaci's rise as a new military power and shift in the balance of

16 Kim Han'gyu, *Yodongsa* (Munhak kwa Chisŏngsa, 2004). See page 17 for an example of hostile reaction to Kim's thesis from both Korea and China.

power in East Asia. Temur Temule deals with the last phase of nomadic-sedentary confrontation in sixteenth century Ming-Mongol relations along the borders of Manchuria. He focused on aggressive Ming actions against Mongol tribes known as *daochoao* (搗巢, “strike the nest”) and *ganma* (趕馬, “herding away horses”) that have not yet attracted much scholarly attention. Kim Seonmin provides a detailed description and analysis of the actions by Chosŏn and the Qing following the murder of Qing ginseng diggers in the border region along the Tuman River in the mid-18th century. It paints a multilayered relationship between the two states rather than a simplified view of “tributary relations.” Finally, Noh Kishik reviewed recent Korean research trends on Jurchen-Manchu history of the 17th and eighteenth centuries when the Jurchen tribes became unified and then established the Qing Empire. Noh found a number of trends that show the growth of Manchu studies in Korea despite its late start compared to Japan and China.

While there remain nationalist and romantic visions of Manchuria, so do centuries-old and deep-rooted prejudices. Manchurian peoples such as the Khitans, Jurchens, Mongols, and Manchus have often been considered as “barbarians” who invaded and brought destruction to more advanced sedentary civilizations in Korea and China. It will require more extensive, detailed, comprehensive, and multi-perspective studies of Manchuria to overcome such prejudices. This special issue offers new perspectives and detailed examinations of various topics spanning many centuries of Manchurian history. We hope they will advance our understanding of the varied and complex, yet less well understood historical space called “Manchuria.”

