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**The Course of Korean Historiography:
from Orthodox to post-Altaic**

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In broadest terms, there are two main branches of Korean historiography, the conventionally more Sinocentric 'orthodox' narrative and the opposing 'northern' or 'continental-Altaic' narrative. The orthodox narrative is most associated with the premodern Confucian tradition of historiography, and the northern/continental-Altaic narrative with modern historical analysis influenced by notions of ethnic nationalism and the Altaic language hypothesis. However, even before the modern era the substance of a non-Sinic narrative was present within orthodox tradition and, just as the Altaic hypothesis continues to inform popular Korean historiography today, the orthodox narrative at once survives owing to the body of tradition it maintains. If not interdependent, they are inseparably interrelated.

The difference between the two narratives primarily lies in their description of the ancient period prior to the Three Kingdoms, in particular the notion of Old Joseon which, regardless of its location and early periodization, is largely accepted in both narratives to have been overthrown by Han China in 108BCE at which time the Han Commanderies were established. Key points distinguishing the narratives of Old Joseon are: recognition and treatment of the Dan'gun myth and the Gi Ja legend; ethnic identifications of the Yan (燕) state and usurper Wi Man, and the locations of the Old Joseon capital of Wanggeom-seong (王儉城), the Paesu river (溟水), the Liao river (遼河, and by extension Liaodong itself), the great walls of Yan, Qin and Han, and the Han Commanderies.¹ Another crucial matter of differentiation between the narratives is how, if at all, they explain geographic and ethnic continuity from Old Joseon to Buyeo and the emergence of the Three Kingdoms.

Since the early Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), both narratives have relied on the same historical documents, namely the early Chinese histories, the *Samguk-sagi* and *Samguk-Yusa*. Scholars of the Silhak movement beginning with Han Baekgyeom (1552-1615) were the first to concertedly reexamine these historical documents and since then, until today, the discourse on Old Joseon has essentially remained a matter of rearranging the same incomplete jigsaw pieces. Since the early modern era, the only additional source text to come to light is the Gwanggaeto Stele, however, modern historiography has been further augmented by archaeology, comparative linguistics and folkloristics.

The premodern orthodox narrative holds some attraction in its simplicity: it locates Old Joseon in the region of modern North Korea with the capital, Wanggeom-seong, in the position of modern Pyongyang. It follows a lineal chronology beginning with the mythical Dan'gun abdicating in favour of a Chinese Gi Ja who arrives from the state of Yin/Shang (殷/商), introducing Chinese learning; his descendent Gi Jun

¹ Owing to space limitations this paper will omit discussion of the walls.

is then forced from power by Wi Man, also regarded as Chinese, leading refugees from Yan. This precipitates Gi Jun's emigration south to Mahan thus bringing the lineage of Chinese learning to the southern half of the Korean peninsula from whence it diffuses to Jinhan, precursor to the eventual victor of the Three Kingdoms, Silla. This narrative was essential in establishing the Confucian lineage for subsequent Korean dynasties - Goryeo and Joseon - that traced their legitimacy through Silla back to Gi Ja. With Chinese civilization successfully transplanted in the south of the peninsula, meanwhile in the north Wi Man Joseon is overthrown by the Chinese Han dynasty which establishes the so-called Four Han Commanderies, one of which, Lelang (Kor. Nangnang), located at the capital site of Pyeongyang, significantly outlives the Chinese Han dynasty itself being eventually defeated by Goguryeo only in 313CE. Periphery within the orthodox narrative are the Buyeo states to the north which provide the places of birth for the founders of Goguryeo and Baekje, implying by extension the less enlightened nature of Goguryeo and Baekje's origins compared to Silla.

The orthodox narrative had been fully formulated by the mid to late Goryeo dynasty and remained largely unchallenged until the modern era; its relative consistency can be seen through examination of two poetic works composed some five hundred years apart, Yi Seunghyu's *Jewang-un'gi* (帝王韻紀1287) and Yu Deukgong's *Nostalgic Reflections of the Twenty-One Capitals* (二十一都懷古詩1792). Contemporary to the *Samguk-yusa*, *Jewang-un'gi* is most often cited today for containing the only other early rendition of the Dan'gun myth as well as inclusion of Balhae, whilst Northern Learning scholar Yu Deukgong is currently known for compiling the *Balhae-go* (渤海考 1784), and as such both these scholars have become most popularly associated with the discourse of the modern Altaic narrative.

As privately authored works, both *Jewang-un'gi* and *Nostalgic Reflections* fall in the category of *yasa* (野史) unofficial history as opposed to the officially compiled dynastic *jeongsa* (正史) histories, however, emphasis of this distinction serves more the objectives of modern historiography and obscures the orthodox perspective contained within both of the works themselves. What is more notable about *Jewang-un'gi* and *Nostalgic Reflections* is their successful ability to encompass both a Sinocentric perspective as well as indigenous tradition, demonstrating that throughout the premodern era there was no explicit or irreconcilable conflict between the narratives as is felt today.

Written during the time of the Mongol Yuan occupation, *Jewang-un'gi* is in fact significant for presenting the earliest surviving exposition of the orthodox narrative; often forgotten is that the first half of the work lays out Chinese history before the second half focuses on Korea. It thus demonstrates an unabashed Sinocentric viewpoint but composed at a time before Neo-Confucianism had eclipsed all other orthodox tradition, it is at once as balanced a rendition of the orthodox narrative as was ever to be produced, more so even than by the Silhak scholars who disfavoured Buddhism.

The structure of the narrative in *Jewang-un'gi* is as follows:

Canto:	Includes mention of:
Record of Geography (地理紀)	Joseon located 'east of Liao' (遼東); termed 'little China' (小中華).
Former Joseon (前朝鮮紀)	Dan'gun; Sira (尸羅), Gorye (高禮), South and North Okjeo, East and North Buyeo, Ye (濊) and Maek (貊) all descended from Dan'gun; Asadal-san mountain (阿斯達山) as Guwol-san (九月山) in modern South Hwanghae-do.

Later Joseon (後朝鮮紀)	Gi Ja; <i>Hongbeom-guju</i> (洪範九疇); [King] Jun (準) escaping to Geumma-gun (金馬郡).
Wi Man Joseon (衛滿朝鮮紀)	Wi Man; U Geo (右渠) overthrown by Han invasion.
Four Han Commanderies and Multiple States (漢四郡及列國紀)	Four Han Commanderies becoming the Samhan; Buyeo, Biryuguk (沸流國), Silla, Goguryeo, and Yemaek (濊貊) all descended from Dan'gun; foundation myth of East Buyeo.
Main Record of Silla (新羅本紀)	Kim Yusin, Choe Chiwon, Wonhyo, Uisang, Seol Chong.
Goguryeo (高句麗紀)	Jumong myth; Mahan Wanggeom-seong established as the capital in contemporary modern Pyeongyang (西京); submission of Biryuguk; Yuri (類利), Jumong's jade whip (玉鞭); (Yeon) Gaesomun; Chinese general Li Ji (李績).
Record of Later Goguryeo (後高句麗紀)	
Record of Baekje (百濟紀)	
Record of Later Baekje (後百濟紀)	
Record of Balhae (渤海紀)	
Current Dynastic Period (本朝君王世系年代)	
Record of Previous ancestors (先代紀)	
Record of Past Goryeo Kings (歷代紀)	
Record of the Current King (今代紀)	

Jewang-un'gi is celebrated by proponents of the Altaic narrative for its inclusion of both Dan'gun Joseon and Balhae, however, with the Three Kingdoms period it is equally notable for completely ignoring the heroes of Goguryeo and Baekje such as Eulji Mundeok and Gyebaek and naming only the alleged villains of Yeon Gaesomun and decadent Baekje king, Wija. Goryeo's civilization is exclusively derived from Silla whose tradition provides the military hero Kim Yusin, Confucian literati Choe Chiwon, and Buddhist masters Wonhyo and Uisang, whilst the invention of the *idu* script is attributed to calligrapher Seol Chong. That *idu*, as a vehicle for the vernacular, is included alongside the celebrated master of Chinese learning, Choe Chiwon, demonstrates well the balance between Sinic and indigenous traditions supported by the orthodox narrative. The explicit Silla bias is, however, an equally entrenched characteristic; clearly this was an original product of Silla's victory over Baekje and Goguryeo and not a later distortion. It is interesting therefore that the Dan'gun myth associated with locations in former Goguryeo territory was so successfully adopted.

The structure of *Nostalgic Reflections* is as follows:

Canto:	Includes mention of:
Dan'gun Joseon (檀君朝鮮)	Dan'gun myth; Daedong-gang; Wanggeom-seong; Hae Buru.
Gi Ja Joseon (箕子朝鮮)	Gi Ja legend; Nangnang Joseon (樂浪朝鮮); eight article law code (八條法禁) and the <i>Hongbeom-guju</i> (洪範九疇).
Wi Man Joseon (衛滿朝鮮)	Wi Man usurpation; Paesu river; Han invasion and Four Commanderies.
Han (韓) - Ye (濊) - Maek (貊)	Samhan; Gi Jun usurping Mahan kingship.

Goguryeo (高句麗) - Bodeok (報德) - Biryu (沸流) Jumong foundation myth; Yuri; jade whip.

Baekje (百濟) - Michuhol (彌鄒忽)

Silla (新羅) - Myeongju (溟洲) - Geumgwan (金官) - Dae-gaya (大伽倻) -

Gammun (甘文) – Usan (于山) - Tamna (耽羅)

Later Baekje (後百濟)

Taebong (泰封 aka Later Goguryeo)

Goryeo (高麗)

Loyal to orthodox sources, *Nostalgic Reflections* maintains the Silla bias, especially against Baekje; written as a culmination of Joseon historiography, Goryeo is presented as an enfeebled dynasty ignoring its earlier vigour and focusing on the Yuan occupation. However, this is partly just the melancholy tone of the work, it is not so denunciatory of Goryeo as works such as *Yongbi-eocheonga* (龍飛御天歌 1445). In short, between *Jewang-un'gi* and *Nostalgic Reflections*, the orthodox narrative remained remarkably unchanged seeing only a slight narrowing in scope with the removal of Balhae and greater emphasis of Gi Ja over Dan'gun.

Points of contention the orthodox narrative fails to address or satisfactorily elaborate are the ethnicity of Wi Man and the nature of the Lelang polity. Wi Man is conventionally described as Chinese, from Yan (assuming that Yan was Chinese) who adopts barbarian dress before, or on his way to, Joseon. The chief contradiction regularly pointed out by proponents of the Altaic narrative is why, if Wi Man was Chinese, did Joseon become a perceived ally to the Xiongnu and enemy of the Han dynasty; that his 'Chinese surname', Wi, was an addition appearing after his original mention simply as Man in the *Shiji* only adds fuel to suspicion that he was not originally Chinese.

In the orthodox narrative, Lelang is presented as one of the four Han Commanderies established in 108BCE but what is not explained is how it survived for some four hundred years, until 313CE, outlasting the Han dynasty itself by almost a century.

Even as *Nostalgic Reflections* upheld the orthodox narrative, Yu Deukgong's later writings anticipated the direction of modern historiographic discourse. With the current ongoing history dispute with Beijing, Yu's *Balhae-go* has established itself as a household name through its reintroduction of Balhae and argumentation for a Northern and Southern Kingdoms period in place of the exclusionary 'unified' Silla period which had been fixed by the *Samguk-sagi* and likely as early as the now lost but similarly titled *Old Samguk-sa* (舊三國史). The significance in reclaiming Balhae as 'Korean' was the greatly expanded territorial range over which heritage could be claimed.

Unlike the modern historians who would take up his direction of research more than a century after, Yu had no need to associate the Han Commanderies with the shame of the yet to occur Japanese colonialization and so he was able to make an objective study of a key period which still even today cannot be treated free of nationalist subjectivities. As a Confucian scholar, Yu Deukgong still accepted the existence of Gi Ja Joseon and so the later Han Commanderies carried less suggestion of being the vehicle through which Chinese learning could have been transmitted to the peninsular.

In the *Sagun-ji* (四郡志 c.1806) Yu locates the Four Han Commanderies established in 108BCE as follows: **Nangnang-gun** (樂浪郡 Lelang-jun) in Joseon-hyeon (朝鮮縣), modern Pyeongyang; **Imdun-gun** (臨屯郡 Lintun-jun) in Dong'i-hyeon (東曉縣), modern Gangneung-bu; **Old Hyeondo-gun**

(舊玄菟郡 Jiu-Xuantu-jun) in Okjeo-hyeon (沃沮縣), modern Hamheung-bu and **Jinbeon-gun** (眞番郡 Zhenpan-jun) in Sap-hyeon (霄縣), north of the Yalu river.²

Previous to the commanderies, Yu identifies the ancient indigenous states as **Guryeo** (句麗) in the north of (Old) Joseon, **Okjeo** in the northeast, **Ye** (濊) in the east and **Han** (韓) to the south, whilst Liaodong-jun (遼東郡) has been absorbed by Yan (燕) during the Warring States period. Thus, **Joseon becomes Nangnang-gun** (north of the Han-gang river up to Gwanseo 關西, Pyeong'an-do), **Guryeo becomes Jinbeon-gun** (north of the Yalu river, modern Xingjing 興京, now Xinbin新賓 Manchu Autonomous County), **Okjeo becomes Hyeondo-gun** (modern Hamgyeong) and **Ye becomes Imdun-gun** (modern Gwandong 關東) whilst Han (韓) remains as it was to the south of the commanderies. Yu equates Han with Gi (箕) and argues that Gi Ja Joseon has already been termed as Han, with a Han-hu lord (韓侯), before Gi Jun is forced to flee south by Wi Man.³

In 82BCE, the Four Han Commanderies are reduced to two with what becomes 'Old' Hyeondo-gun moved northwestwards replacing Jinbeon-gun, and Imdun-gun annexed by Nangnang-gun, thus ushering in a **Two Commanderies period** (二郡時代). Significantly later, in 205CE, the south of Nangnang-gun becomes separated as Daebang-gun (帶方郡) resulting in a **Three Commanderies period** (三郡時代) anticipating the Three Kingdoms which sees Goguryeo emerge in place of Nangnang-gun and Hyeondo-gun, Daebang replaced by Baekje and the 'eastern part' of Nangnang-gun evolve into Silla.

Yu's examination of the Han Commanderies was vital in explaining the transition from the ancient Joseon states to the emergence of the Three Kingdoms, however, he was still unable to elucidate the exact relationship of Nangnang-gun either to China proper or the local peninsula populace.

The largest change in the modern Altaic narrative, created almost singlehandedly by Sin Chaeho (1880-1936), is both a shift westwards and major territorial expansion of the ancient Joseon domain. Aside from the geographical relocations of Joseon, the key characteristics of Sin's methodology and narrative were: not trusting the Chinese histories at face value and calling into question their objectivity; explicit criticism of Sima Qian and especially Kim Busik; elevation of Dan'gun, negation of Gi Ja's significance; downplaying of the Han Commanderies and finally, active rediscovery and emphasis of a non-Chinese heritage realised through deciphering hidden meaning in *idu* script, historicizing mythology and placing it within the broader framework of the Altaic language hypothesis. All these represent a radical departure from the orthodox narrative and remain primary features of present day popular Korean historiography, all the way from nationalist writing and school textbooks to more dubious revisionism and largely even North Korean historiography (even if Sin himself is criticized). Only on the nationalist end of the spectrum has virulent criticism of the *Samguk-sagi* been tempered.

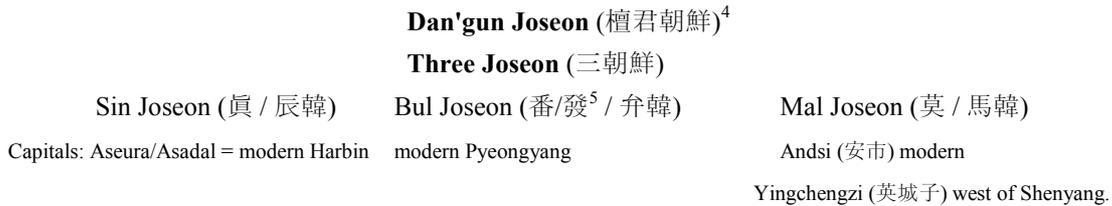
Key weaknesses in this modern methodology are, firstly, that questioning the reliability of the Chinese histories yet relying on them for any evidence at all can quickly lead to a pick-and-mix approach, a chief fallacy of much of the revisionist pseudo history writing today; the removal of Gi Ja and de-emphasis of the Han Commanderies breaks the narrative continuity from ancient Joseon to the Three Kingdoms, whilst the more Dan'gun Joseon is exaggerated, the less explanation there is for why it disappeared without a trace and simultaneously it becomes more difficult to claim exclusive Korean heritage over

² Jeong 1998:265-85

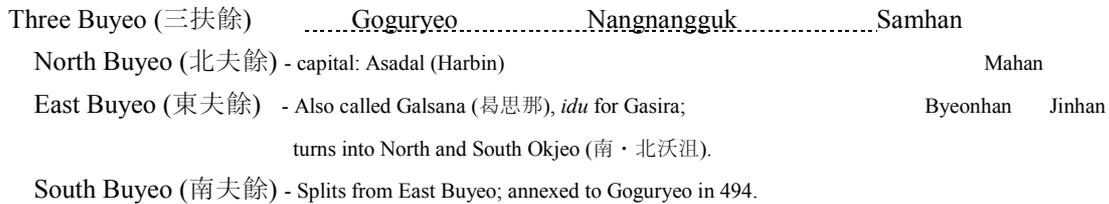
³ Jeong 1998:301-19

such expansive continental territory. Finally, invocation of the Altaic hypothesis and an untrained approach to comparative linguistics does not so much undermine the narrative itself, because 'linguistic evidence' is usually supportive rather than primary, but it does discredit the methodology and overall scholarship; Choe Namseon (1890-1957) and some of the more recent historians, discussed below, are more guilty of this particular vice than Sin Chaeho.

As laid out in *Joseon-sanggo-sa* (朝鮮上古史 1948), Sin's basic narrative structure is as follows:



Yeolguk 'Multiple States' Period (列國時代)



Four Han Commanderies

Occupies only the former territory of Wi Man Joseon (Bul Joseon) in Liaodong.

Three Kingdoms

Identifying Wanda-shan (完達山) mountain as 'Asadal-san mountain', Sin locates the capital of Dan'gun Joseon, Asadal/Wanggeom-seon, in the vicinity of modern Harbin. Two other 'middle' (中京) and 'south' (南京) capitals are specified as Ariti (아리티) at the site of Anshi (安市) in mid-western Manchuria, and Pyeongyang at its modern location which had also been named Wanggeom-seong. Sin interprets 'wanggeom' (王儉) as an *idu* rendering for imgeum (임금 'ruler') making *wanggeom-seong* a more generic term for royal capital, enabling the differentiation between the locations of Asadal and modern Pyeongyang.

Sin largely discounts the Dan'gun myth recorded in the *Samguk-yusa* as heavily influenced by later Buddhism but he nevertheless seeks to historicize Dan'gun Joseon explaining *dan'gun* (檀君) to be a Chinese semantic rendering meaning 'god of *sudu*', with *sudu* in turn denoting sacred forests where the "god of light" (光明神) is worshipped. Joseon (朝鮮) then becomes *idu* for 'light'. Thus the *dan'gun* were shamanic high priest-officiator rulers. Although unsubstantiable, this rational interpretation of *dan'gun* is now widely accepted and included in school textbooks; the *Sudu-gyo* religion is described in all but name in Grayson's *Korea - A Religious History*, similarly to Sin without any referenced sources.⁶ Sin also has *Sudu-gyo* being spread across the expansive Dan'gun Joseon domain and transmitted to such

⁴ This and the following diagrams can be broadly read left to right as representing relative positioning west to east and, to a lesser degree, north to south; top to bottom is the narrative chronology whilst dotted underlining distinguishes where there is no narrative or geographic continuity with text immediately below.

⁵ As recorded in *Guanzi* (管子).

⁶ Grayson 2002:20

supposed fraternal peoples as the Xiongnu.

As *idu* is already in use at this early stage, Sin estimates it must have been created around 1000BCE and not by Silla scholar Seol Chong. Both *Sudu-gyo* and *idu* script serve as important identifiers of Dan'gun Joseon's lost civilization; that *idu* is a phonetic script derived from pictograms puts it on a level with Egyptian hieroglyphs supposedly representing a more advanced stage of development than Chinese characters. The Altaic narrative today is closely associated with hangeul nationalism; at this early date Sin uses *idu* as the antithesis to Chinese characters and so it can be understood as the spiritual ancestor to hangeul.

In Sin's narrative, Dan'gun Joseon splits into the Three Joseon (三朝鮮) sometime contemporary with the Warring States period. Sin Joseon is the principle state with its ruler titled 'great *dan'gun*' (大檀君) whilst Bul and Mal Joseon are ruled by subordinate lesser *dan'gun* (小檀君). Sin identifies two traditions of *idu* renderings for the three states, Jin 眞, Mak 莫 and Beon 番 (alternatively 發 Bal) and Jin 辰, Ma 馬, and Byeon 弁; the latter set was also written with the suffix *han* 韓 as an *idu* term for the countries and which later became adopted as the ethnonym for the Korean people. Hence the Three Joseon anticipate the names of the later Samhan polities that are subsequently established on the peninsula.

With the rise of the Qin, Yan and Xiongnu powers, the Three Joseon are pushed eastwards; this is the *idong-seol* Movement Theory (移動說) which remains a central facet of the Altaic narrative. The Yan expansion into Liaodong sees the disintegration of Sin Joseon at which time the Paesu river comes to form the border between Bul Joseon and Yan; Sin identifies the Paesu as the Heon'uran (軒芋瀾) river which would appear to refer to the modern Luan River.

Sin tolerates the existence of Gi Ja but discounts the substance of the legend allowing only that descendants of Gi Ja eventually emerged as rulers of Bul Joseon in time for Wi Man's usurpation. Concerning Gi Ja's introduction of the *Hongbeom-guju* (洪範九疇) which in the orthodox narrative represent articles of Chinese civilization, Sin explains that this was originally derived from the teachings of *Sudu-gyo* which had been transmitted by Hae Buru of Dan'gun Joseon to king Yu of Xia (夏禹) when they met on To-san (塗山) mountain. It is thus only a *reintroduction* of ancient Joseon learning but no explanation is given for how it had been forgotten in the Joseon homeland in the meantime.

Sin adapts the orthodox narrative account of Wi Man arriving from Yan and displacing Gi Jun, the modification being the *wanggeom-seong* capital Wi Man takes control of is that of Bul Joseon, outside of the Korean peninsula.

Owing then to the eastward shift, Mal Joseon has meanwhile been pushed downwards into the southern half of the Korean peninsula and it is to here that Gi Jun arrives, whereupon he changes his surname from Gi (箕) to Han (韓) in order to ingratiate himself with the local populace; Mahan thus emerges as the survivor of the Three Joseon. Following the 108BCE overthrow of Bul Joseon, Mahan establishes Byeonhan (弁韓) and Jinhan (辰韓) domains in the southeast of the peninsula for the influx of refugees coming from their former continental namesakes. Thus even as the greater territory is lost, ethnic continuity is maintained alongside the transposition of the former Three Joseon names to the Samhan of the peninsula; whilst easy to dismiss as creative speculation, this remapping is central to Sin's narrative.

The establishment of the peninsula Samhan is part of a historical period Sin refers to as the Yeolguk (列國 'multiple states') period, a term interestingly borrowed from Yi Seunghyu's *Jewang-un'gi*. This sees North Buyeo emerge around the location of Sin Joseon's former capital (modern Harbin), East Buyeo in

the far northeast of the Korean peninsula, later becoming Okjeo (沃沮); Goguryeo around modern Ji'an (輯安縣), north of the Yalu, and Nangnangguk (樂浪國) around the location of Pyeongyang after it had been vacated by Mal Joseon. Sin's account fails to explain, though, why there was room for such new entities if the original reason for the movement eastwards and into the peninsula had been the pressure from continental states expanding.

A major innovation of the narrative is to thoroughly distinguish the indigenous Nangnangguk (樂浪國) of Pyeongyang from the Lelang-jun (樂浪郡) Han Commandery which Sin locates together with the other three commanderies all within the confines of Liaodong. Sin terms the two respective Nangnang/Lelang entities as North Lelang (北樂浪) and South Lelang/Nangnang (南樂浪).

Locating the Four Han Commanderies within Liaodong, he argues that their names reflect only failed campaign objectives, that Jinbeon-gun (*Zhenpan-jun*) had been meant for Goguryeo, Hyeondo-gun (*Xuantu-jun*) for Northern East Buyeo (東北夫餘), aka Northern Okjeo, Imdo-gun (*Lintun-jun*) for Southern East Buyeo (南東夫餘) and Nangnang-gun (*Lelang-jun*) for Nangnangguk. In contrast to the orthodox narrative that Hyeondo-gun was briefly established in the region of Okjeo before being removed to Imdun-gun, Sin simply has it that this never occurred. The Nangnang entity referred to in the *Samguk-sagi*, replete with a king, is the indigenous South Nangnang but this, he claims, was mistakenly equated by premodern Confucian scholars with the Lelang Commandery. Sin discounts the Chinese Han artifacts unearthed by contemporary Japanese archaeologists in Pyeongyang as articles that had arrived through trade or pillage.

Sin also similarly explains the earlier Changhae-gun (滄{蒼}海郡 *Canghai-jun*) commandery as indicating falsified Han Chinese historiography which sought to hide a failed campaign to invade Southern East Buyeo that had resulted in a nine year war with Goguryeo 134-126BCE.

Another departure from the orthodox narrative Sin takes is in dating the establishment of Goguryeo some 110 years earlier, historicizing Jumong and making him a contemporary of Wi Man. Evidence for the earlier date of Goguryeo is taken from the Gwanggaeto Stele which describes Gwanggaeto as the 17th ruler and not 13th as given in the *Samguk-sagi*.

Finally, concerning identification of the Paesu river, Sin hypothesizes that Nangnang, Pyeongyang and Paesu are all various *idu* renderings of the word *pyeora (피라) which could refer both to a capital and its river; he reasons that there were two Paesu rivers, the Heon'uran Paesu and the Daedong-gang Paesu which were again conflated by premodern Confucian scholars.

Through expanding the original territory of ancient Joseon, the dual benefit of the Altaic narrative as first propounded by Sin, is in being able to both exaggerate the greatness of Joseon whilst undermining continental China's historical influence over the Korean peninsula. This effectively turns the tables on assertions by both colonial era Japanese scholars and present day Chinese government historians, that the Korean peninsula had been subjugated by China in ancient times.

In the postwar era up until today, the core tenets of Sin Chaeho's Altaic/northern narrative have come to form the basis of popular Korean historiography, however, his specific model of the Three Joseon and other particulars have been quietly discarded. Two main variations of the narrative now coexist, one incorporates Old Joseon as the centre of a pan-Altaic confederacy, the other as a once mighty empire of which the Korean people are the primary descendants; both variants continue to present Old Joseon as an

expansive continental polity that had its own indigenous culture rivaling ancient China, predicated on the Altaic language hypothesis and highly selective criticism of the Chinese histories and *Samguk-sagi*.

The Altaic narrative came to renewed prominence with the Jaeya (在野) historians of the 1970s and '80s who today occupy posts in many regional universities and are active writers of popular history. The two variants of the narrative are both avowedly anti-Sinocentric but represent competing concerns of Altaic solidarity and Korean ethnic nationalism (민족주의).⁷

A proponent of pan-Altaicism today is popular pseudo history writer Kim Unhoe. In his recent work, *The Old Joseon We Have Learnt About is Fake* (우리가 배운 고조선은 가짜다), Kim essentially presents a 'splitist' theory, that Old Joseon subsequently divided into two main lineages, one forming the continental Xianbei and the other Goguryeo-Balhae:

"Old Joseon existed from the legendary period of China, it was maintained in the form of such states as the Five *ba* Hegemons (春秋五霸) of the 7th century BCE Spring and Autumn period and the Seven *xiong* of the Warring States period (戰國七雄). From around the 4th century BCE it became more of an independent ancient state and competed with the Yan; from the end of the 3rd century BCE its borders faced the Qin (秦) dynasty [but] it maintained peace. In the 2nd century BCE, it thrived between the rivalry of the Xiongnu and Han dynasty; after its collapse, it was [both] succeeded and continuously revived by Goguryeo and Silla in the south and Xianbei Wuhuan (鮮卑烏桓) in the north. After the 4th century Murong clan [rulers], the descendants of Old Joseon showed a serious trait of ruling China and they began to move southwards into the Chinese continent. Subsequently the vast majority of non-Han Chinese dynasties were established by these people. However, in the process of ruling over China, they lost their unique cultural traits (固有性) of Old Joseon. These traits were largely maintained by Goguryeo, the Khitan [Liao], the [Jurchen] Jin, Goryeo and the [Manchu] Qing."⁸

		Altai			
		*Jushen	*Gaoli		
	(Xiongnu)		Yemaek (Malgal)	Tungus	
	Old Joseon				
Murong Xianbei (慕容鮮卑)		Buyeo		Samhan	
Former Yan (前燕 337-70)			Goguryeo		
Later Yan (後燕 384-409)			(1st century BCE-668)		
Tuoba Xianbei (拓拔鮮卑)					
	Northern Wei (北魏 386-534)				
	Yuwen Xianbei (宇文鮮卑)		Balhae		
Han-Xianbei (漢-鮮卑)	Khitan Liao				
Sui (隋 581-618)					
Tang (唐 618-907)					

⁷ Song 2004:141

⁸ Kim 2012:152

Kim locates Old Joseon's core territory as spanning between Beijing and the Liao river. He suggests the Paesu as being either the modern Luan (滦{灤}河) or Daling (大凌河) rivers but elsewhere conjectures the Yeolsu river (列水), associated with the location of Wanggeom-seong, may also have been the Luan.⁹ Kim rejects any association between Dan'gun and Old Joseon instead inadvertently adopting the colonial Japanese line of argument that Dan'gun was a later 13th century invention; he suggests Dan'gun was a shamanic deity local to modern Pyeongyang but indicative of a wider Siberian Tungusic influence centered around bear totemism towards which the Korean population was naturally predisposed on account of their ancient bronze age Tungusic ancestry.¹⁰

Concerning Gi Ja and Wi Man, Kim argues that the states of Yin (殷) and Yan (燕) were both ethnically Dong'i (東夷), and not Han Chinese. Whilst there is some archaeological evidence of a Gi-hu (箕侯) lordship associated with a Giguk (箕國) state which may have been a predecessor to, or absorbed by, Old Joseon, there is no evidence for a Chinese Gi Ja and this Dong'i Giguk itself was located in a similar region as Old Joseon and so never reached the Korean peninsula. Yan, meanwhile, was Dong'i but a rival state competing with Old Joseon. Wi Man is treated as historical but his Chinese surname is dropped. If (Wi) Man came from Yan, he was still of Dong'i ancestry and not Chinese, but Kim further reasons that he was, in any event, likely of Old Joseon origin given: the ready trust (Gi) Jun places in him, that he maintains Joseon following the usurpation without any major changes and that Joseon under Man has better relations with the Xiongnu than Han China, albeit the last is an argument for Man not being Chinese rather than not coming from Dong'i Yan!

No mention is given of (Gi) Jun's fate and so any connection to the founding of Mahan on the Korean peninsula remains unacknowledged. Kim's narrative of Old Joseon finishes with its 108BCE overthrow and he does not discuss the Han Commanderies though clearly, according to his scheme, they would have been located in the former Old Joseon territory and have had little to no influence over the Korean peninsula; as a result no explanation is given for how Chinese learning would have been introduced to Goguryeo and Mahan.

With Old Joseon located entirely outside of Manchuria, Kim imagines the "ancient Korean" (고 한국인) population indigenous to the peninsula as a primarily nomadic Tungusic people over which the Yemaek Malgal of Buyeo and incoming remnants of Old Joseon spread, forming the Goguryeo and Baekje states.

Kim then hypothesizes the origins of the Dong'i people in the actual Altay region of current day southern Russia, China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan, and that these nomads migrated eastwards by two principle roots, one through northern China from which Old Joseon evolves, the other across the Mongolian steppe and into northern Manchuria, settling along the Amur and Yalu rivers forming the Tungusic peoples wherein Buyeo and Goguryeo constitute 'northern' and 'southern' lineages respectively. These two branches were to meet in the locus of Liaodong from which the Hongshan culture (紅山文化) develops.

Based on the perceived similarity of folk tales and modern day physical appearance of Kazakhs, Mongols and Koreans, Kim suggests, "It is not unreasonable to consider Altai as the first Proto-Korean region," ignoring the common consensus amongst even proponents of the Altaic hypothesis going back as early as Ramstedt (1947) that the homeland of the Altaic languages was southern Manchuria.¹¹ The "second

⁹ Kim 2012:206 and 89

¹⁰ Kim 2012:170-84

¹¹ Kim 2012:231. Comparative linguist Song Gi-jung (2003:85) notes how following the establishment of diplomatic ties with China and Central Asian states, South Korean journalists and professors reported on their travels as if they had "visited [their]

birthplace of the pan-Korean people" Kim concludes is Taebaek-san mountain (太白山, modern Baekdu-san 白頭山) which he posits was also the centre of worship for "Mongolians" (i.e. Khitan) who established the Liao dynasty, and "Manchus" (i.e. Jurchen) who established the Jin.

Kim discredits his own scholarship most through his indulgences in false "Altaic" etymologies demonstrating a general ignorance of the comparative method of historical linguistics, relying instead on mass and omni-comparisons such as the Starostin Database. The inconsistencies and disjointedness of his narrative are at once a reflection of the piecemeal fashion in which the non-Sinic peoples were treated in the surviving Chinese histories, but also demonstrate some of the inherent weakness of the Altaic narrative, namely its reliance on an unsubstantiated long-range language hypothesis to which the Korean peninsula has always been periphery.

A recent example of the "empire interpretation", notably from the same publisher as Kim, is *Old Joseon were Rulers of the Continent* (고조선은 대륙의 지배자였다) co-authored by Lee Deok-il and Kim Byeonggi and marked as number one in the "Correcting Our History" (우리역사 바로잡기) series. In contrast to both Sin Chaeho and the Altaic approach, this work lays strong emphasis on the *Samguk-yusa* and *Jewang-un'gi* which is in the spirit of Choe Namseon though he cannot be explicitly accredited due to his heavily tainted record as a collaborationist. There is at once, however, also greater acceptance of the Korean authored *Samguk-sagi* over Chinese histories; this is in contrast to Kim Unhoe, for example, who lays weight on the histories of the non-Han dynasties, in particular the *Liaoshi* (遼史). Another distinct feature of this particular work is that the narrative is no longer premised on Altaic etymologies and thus it may be termed 'post-Altaic'.

Looking to archaeology over linguistics, the territory of Old Joseon is defined by the distribution of broad bronze *bipa-hyeong* dagger blades (琵琶形銅劍), Misongni type (美松里型) earthenware and dolmen megaliths whilst periodization is matched to the orthodox 'Three Joseon' of Dan'gun, Gi Ja and Wi Man albeit with the greater emphasis on Dan'gun.

As is standard practice, *dan'gun* is rationalized as a title for the rulers of Old Joseon which the authors locate centered in the Liaoxi region between the Luan and Daling rivers; their map of Old Joseon at its greatest extent however takes the Luan river as its western border whilst, free of historiographical rivals, in all other directions the 'empire' extends across the whole of Manchuria fully incorporating the Nen, Songhua and Ussuri river systems to the north and the Korean peninsula, including Jeju and Tsushima islands, to the south. The Old Joseon 'empire' is thus presented as a Manchurian empire excluding only the Japanese archipelago.¹²

The authors seek to actively refute the Japanese claim that Dan'gun was a 13th century creation with various problematic evidence all of which is based on subjective conjecturing.¹³ Most dubious is the

ethnic homeland". That advocacy for the Altaic hypothesis was most staunchly maintained by Soviet Union scholars may well have further endeared it to the Jaeya historians whose ethnic nationalism is closely associated with leftwing politics.

¹² It is characteristic of Jaeya scholars that discussion or inclusion of ancient Japan and the peninsula origins of Japonic remain taboo.

¹³ Lee & Kim 2006:47-51. The evidence includes: murals from the Wu clan shrine (武氏祠) of Former Yan located in Shandong which, according to Korean interpretations (including Peter H. Lee 1997:5), portray scenes from the Dan'gun myth; a detail of the heavily deteriorated Goguryeo genre mural in Gakjeo-chong 'Tomb of the Wrestlers' (角抵塚), Jian, which supposedly depicts a bear and tiger together below a tree beside the much larger wrestlers; a record in the *Jiu-Tangshu* (舊唐書) describing the four gods worshipped in Goguryeo as Yeongseong-sin (靈星神), Il-sin (日神), Gahan-sin (可汗神) and Gija-sin (箕子神), out of which and without citing any supporting evidence, Gahan-sin is equated with Dan'gun whilst Gija-sin is ignored; a reference from

inclusion of names recorded in the *Dan'gun-segi* (檀君世紀) and *Dan-gi-gosa* (檀奇古史), the 'rediscovered' contents of which is widely regarded to be 20th century invention. At best they demonstrate there was some Dan'gun tradition by the early Goryeo period but this fails to place the myth as far back as Old Joseon.

The authors seek to substantiate the traditional dates of Dan'gun Joseon given in the *Samguk-yusa* arguing that whilst bronze age culture on the Korean peninsula "only" dates to 1000BCE, current bronze artifacts from modern Liaodong date up to 1500BCE and depending on "future excavations" will be extended further back; meanwhile the early bronze age culture of Bohai Bay (발해연안) dates as far back as 2000BCE so Il Yeon's foundation date of 2300BCE is, they claim, well supported by archaeology!¹⁴

Gi Ja is accepted as a historical person who receives a symbolic title of Gi-hu lord (箕侯) from King Wu of Zhou (周武王), however, similar to Sin's narrative he was never a vassal to the Chinese state and ruled over only a portion of Old Joseon. Wi Man, meanwhile, is once more a refugee but already of Old Joseon ancestry. Following the usurpation (Gi) Jun escapes to Pyeongyang, rather than any further south, where he establishes Mahan; this then accords with the statement by Choe Chiwon recorded in the *Samguk-sagi* equating Mahan with Goguryeo.

The Han invasion of 108BCE is premised largely a failure and so all four commanderies are located in the modern region of Shanhaiguan (山海關), the current day eastern terminus of the Great Wall. Similar to Sin Chaeho, the authors distinguish the Lelang-jun commandery from the indigenous Nangnangguk state but the 313CE date of demise is matched rather to the commandery whilst Nangnangguk is conquered earlier on by Goguryeo in 32CE. The Han artifacts unearthed by Japanese archaeologists around Pyeongyang are claimed to be Later Han relics dating to an invasion of Nangnang led by Emperor Guangwu (光武帝) in 44CE which also saw the temporary establishment of a commandery; all these dates are taken from the *Samguk-sagi*.

Following the collapse of Old Joseon which, they hypothesize, comes about more through internal problems than the Han invasion, Silla, Buyeo, Goguryeo and all other ancient states in Manchuria and Korea are established with the influx of refugees (from the core western territory) who were accepted because the indigenous populations had already been a part of the federal Joseon empire. The authors take further evidence from the *Samguk-yusa* and *Jewang-un'gi* to posit that Hae Mosu of Buyeo was of Old Joseon royal *dan'gun* lineage and by extension, historicizing the Goguryeo foundation myth, so too was Jumong. Thus the Buyeo-Goguryeo/Baekje-Balhae lineage is given exceptional status within the break-up of Old Joseon.

In this way the empire interpretation does not reject the Altaic hypothesis but rather than seek anti-imperial solidarity, aims instead for Korean dominance and is unremittingly subjective towards this objective. The primary function of describing Old Joseon as an empire is to match ancient Chinese historiography; the uncritical reliance on Korean sources is the product of ethnic nationalism inherent in the Jaeya movement which actively defines itself in opposition to the "colonial view of history" (식민사관). The authors' emphasis of the *Samguk-yusa* is precisely because it had been rejected by the

the *Goryeo-sa* that a shrine to the 'Three Holies' (三聖祠 aka Hwan'in, Hwan'ung and Dan'gun) was established in 1006 on Guwol-san mountain (九月山) and that the shrine is also recorded in *Jewang-un'gi* as still existing, and finally, that one of the eight holy altars (八聖堂) established by Myocheong in 1131 was for the '*seon'in* of Guryeo-Pyeongyang' (句麗平壤仙人), which once more "of course" refers to Dan'gun.

¹⁴ Lee & Kim 2006:54

Japanese and subsequent conservative historians; they decry locating the Han Commanderies within the Korean peninsula as a specific product of the colonial view of history, ignoring that this had been convention within the orthodox narrative throughout the premodern era. Even as they avoid reliance on pseudo linguistic data, in the end it is their extreme subjectivity which most undermines their discourse.

Outside of the peninsula and parallel to the Jaeya movement, northeast Asian historiography has also long since evolved beyond overreliance on the Altaic language hypothesis and associated long range ethnographic comparisons to focus on a model of more immediate interacting ethno-political spheres. These interpretations share several basic elements in common with the modern Korean narratives, in particular their rejection of Sinocentrism and the diachronic identification of core ethnic lineages. Building on Lattimore (1940), Ledyard (1983) and Barfield (1989), the work of comparative linguist and ethnic historian Juha Janhunen represents one of the more comprehensive post-Altaic treatments of northeast Asia to date in which he emphasizes the importance of Manchuria *vis-à-vis* China proper.

Homelands:	Liaoxi region	Liaodong region	Central Manchuria	SE Korea	SW Korea-Japan
	(Khinganic?)¹⁵				
Sinitic	(Proto-Mongolic)				
	Para-Mongolic	Tungusic	Amuric	Koreanic	Japonic
		(Northern) (Southern)			
Warring States (475-222BCE)	Yan? (燕)	(Ewenic) Jurchenic Sushen?/Yilou	Buyeo?		
Qin (秦) (221-206BCE)	(until 222BCE)	Wuji/Mohe			
Western Han (206BCE-6CE)		Para-Jurchenic Goguryeo		Silla	Gaya Baekje
	Northen Wei? (386-534)	(until 668)			Yamato
	Khitan Liao	Jurchenic			
	Mongolic (907-1105)	Jurchen Jin			
	Mongol Yuan	(1115-1234)			
Ming (1368-1644)	(1279-1368)	Manchu Qing (1644-1911)			

Janhunen rejects the notion of a genetic Altaic language family but works still within a similar paradigm recognizing an "intricate network of areal contacts" and history of interaction that explains the "structural and material similarities between the languages of the Ural-Altaic complex".¹⁶ He maintains an 'out of Manchuria' hypothesis proposed by Ramstedt for the core typological 'Altaic' language groups of Turkic, Mongolic and Tungusic, adding Amuric to the north with which he tentatively associates Buyeo, whilst positing that Koreanic may have originated in the Silla homeland territory in the southeast of the

¹⁵ Question marks denote more tentative suggestions.

¹⁶ Janhunen personal correspondence, "On 'one' and other numerals in Ural-Altaic".

peninsula.

The principle lineage Janhunen identifies within Manchuria is of the Jurchen-Manchu within which he collaterally incorporates Goguryeo and Balhae as a 'Para-Jurchenic' branch. He is more doubtful of any ethnic relationship between Goguryeo and Baekje and generally discounts foundation legends as folklore.¹⁷

A particular innovation of Janhunen's model is in more actively recognizing the ancient presence of Chinese in Manchuria whose language develops into regional northeast idioms over a substrate of indigenous 'Altaic' languages; with the cyclical expansions of Manchurian states into China, he describes Mandarin simultaneously evolving *under* Altaic superstrata thus becoming the most typologically 'Altaic' of the Sinitic languages today and actively dispelling the notion of unidirectional acculturation of the foreign dynasties.¹⁸ Korean proponents of the Altaic narrative are still preoccupied with distancing themselves from the narrative of Sinicization and so have yet to consider the potency of an 'Altaicization of China' argument.

Bridging the divide between post-Altaic Western academic literature and the popular Korean Altaic narrative is the late Wontack Hong who predominantly wrote in English in order to engage with Western scholars and, for this and other reasons, could be described as an aberrant Jaeya historian. Hong's 'tripolar' narrative is most immediately a reworking of Barfield's bipolar model of interaction between the China plain and Mongolian steppe, augmented by Janhunen's treatment of Manchuria as an equally key region.

Neolithic **Hongshan** (c.5000-3000BCE)

Early Bronze Age **Lower Xiajiadian culture** (c.2200-1600BCE)

Upper Xiajiadian culture (c.1200-600BCE)

	Donghu Xianbei	Yemaek/Dong'i Tungus	Mohe-Nüzhen Tungus
		(proto-macro-Tungusic)	
Shang/Yin	ancient Yan	Old Joseon/Buyeo/	Goguryeo Sushen-Yilou
	various Yan states/Wuhuan	<u>[early offshoot: Samhan]</u>	
	Northern Wei	Yemaek Mohe	
		(macro-Tungusic)	
		Balhae	
			Manchu

Hong ignores Dan'gun entirely but is highly critical of Sinocentric historiography and denounces Gi Ja as a fabrication of Sima Qian. He posits that Wi Man and the state of Yan are ethnic Donghu Xianbei with whom the Yemaek Joseon maintain an "intimate relationship". Hong identifies the ancient Liao river as the modern Luan enabling him to shift westwards ancient Liaodong ('east of Liao') to the region of modern Liaoxi. Aberrant to Jaeya practice, however, he still locates the Han Commanderies inside the Korean peninsula; the Lelang-jun commandery is on the Daedong-gang river and no second Nangnang kingdom is discussed. Despite this, though, he questions the level of Sinicization occurring noting for example "the so-called Han Chinese style observed at Lelang sites finds no directly corresponding

¹⁷ Janhunen 1996:210 and Janhunen 2005:74 note 12.

¹⁸ Janhunen 1996:164

counterparts in mainland China".¹⁹ Hong is also singular in discussing the post Han dynasty status of Lelang-jun and its southern partition Daifang, narrating that their jurisdiction is inherited by Cao Wei (魏 220-265) and Western Jin (西晉 265-316) before finally succumbing to Goguryeo in 313. Later mention of Lelang and Daifang in the region of Liaodong he explains as administrative districts, unrelated in all but name, established by the Xianbei leader Murong Hui (慕容廆 269-333) to receive Chinese refugees escaping eastwards from the Xiongnu.²⁰

Hong designates (Old) Joseon, Buyeo and Goguryeo as ethnically Yemaek Tungus which he identifies through the broad and narrow leafed styles of bronze daggers and northern and southern dolmen types associated with the Liaodong-northern Korean peninsula and southern Korean peninsula regions respectively; like Kim Unhoe, he also highlights the similarity in foundation myths between Goguryeo, Buyeo and the Xianbei. He meanwhile describes the population in the southern half of the Korean peninsula constituting Jin'guk (辰國) and Samhan (三韓), as "rice-cultivating Yemaek cousins."²¹ In contrast to Janhunen, he is unwilling to more clearly distinguish a southern Koreanic element unrelated to the northern Tungusic lineage of Korean historiography though he at once, somewhat contradictorily, posits rice cultivation to have been introduced by ancient southern Chinese crossing the Yellow Sea. Quoting Nelson, he gives the earliest carbon dates for rice found on the Korean peninsula as 2400-2100BCE which, although he leaves it unmentioned, would support Il Yeon's dates for Dan'gun!²²

Similar again to pan-Altaicist Kim Unhoe, Hong postulates that both the Donghu Xianbei and Yemaek Tungus belong to a "proto-Altaic speech community" sharing a culture of comb-patterned pottery (빗살무늬 토기, 櫛文) and broad bronze daggers ultimately tracing back to the Neolithic Hongshan culture spread between modern Chifeng city (赤峰市) in the west, the Liao river to the east and the Xar Moron river (西拉木倫) to the north, concomitant that is with the northern/Altaic narrative's location of Old Joseon.²³ The difference is that rather than designate this all as Old Joseon, Hong shares the lineage from the very beginning with the ancient Xianbei/Donghu Yan.

Hong hypothesizes that the Korean language originates from Goguryeo, Buyeo and Silla whilst Manchu evolves through the Sushen-Mohe-Jurchen complex; unlike Kim he fails to address the presence of indigenous Mohe (Malgal) on the Korean peninsula. He labels Balhae 'macro Tungusic' claiming that, "only by uniting with the Yemaek people, could the Mohe-Nüzhens (Jurchen) establish a full-fledged dynasty".²⁴ Balhae is thus a mixed state after which the Jurchen dominate Manchuria whilst "pure-blooded" Yemaek survive and prosper as the peninsula Koreans.

Perhaps only because their narratives tend to focus on the ancient period and/or history dispute with China, Hong also stands out from the Jaeya historians for his more active inclusion of Silla emphasizing how it absorbed Goguryeo remnants and went on to successfully drive the Tang out of the peninsula. In contrast to Sin Chaeho, he is similarly keen to highlight Goryeo's success in defending the peninsula against Khitan and Jurchen invasion attempts rather than lament its internal weaknesses and failure to retake continental territory. He treats the 1135 Myo Cheong rebellion with surprising impartiality

¹⁹ Hong 2010:139 referencing Oh 2006:86

²⁰ Hong 2010:150 quoting Schreiber 1949:406-9

²¹ Hong 2010:111

²² Hong 2010:112 quoting Nelson 1995:10

²³ Hong 2010:135

²⁴ Hong 2010:241

observing that Kim Busik likely had a more "realistic perception of the international power balance at that time".²⁵ In fact, by the medieval period, Hong has turned his back on continental pan-Altaicism viewing it rather as good fortune that any irredentist 'northern policy' ambitions failed:

"The irony of history seems to be that, had the Koreans identified themselves with their Manchurian cousins and were they actively supportive of the Manchu cause, they could have been a partner with the Manchus, as were the Mongols of Inner Mongolia, only to be buried in oblivion as inhabitants of one of those PRC Autonomous Regions."²⁶

In this way, just as the Neo-Confucian scholars believed their contemporary Joseon dynasty to be the last bastion of ancient Chinese civilization, proponents of the Altaic narrative reverse the self-conceit to present Korea today as the most successful of the Eastern Barbarian cultures, once more resisting against renewed Chinese pressure.

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²⁵ Hong 2010:315

²⁶ Hong 2010:390

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