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THE HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF TERRITORY
IN LATE CHOSŎN**

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Northern Territories and the Historical Understanding of Territory in Late Chosŏn

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Introduction

A conspicuous feature of intellectual life in Late Chosŏn is an increased interest in the areas north of the Korean peninsula. Partly dictated by strategic concerns, this interest also interacted with a renewed interest in northern kingdoms in Korean history and a re-conceptualisation of the country's role in the history of the region. This interest in the Liaodong/Manchuria area has already been studied in great detail, but the focus has mainly been on "claims" of this territory, or the growing geographical knowledge of it, and not enough attention has been given to the larger question of how the intellectuals of late Chosŏn viewed the historical relationship between the Korean peninsula and the Liaodong/Manchuria area.

There were admittedly historical kingdoms in the region, like Old Chosŏn, Kija Chosŏn and Koguryŏ, that for a long time had been part of the historical memory and ethnic identity of Korea. But other kingdoms, like Parhae, had a more ambivalent position, and also other ethnic groups inhabiting the area, like the Khitans and Jurchens, had occasionally formed strong states. Korea's relation to the area is thus more complex than the discussion on Late Chosŏn irredentism seems to assume, and it is worth reconsidering how scholars of the period viewed this relation.

Furthermore, Bae Woo Sung has made a strong case for the "organic" view of territory in Late Chosŏn. According to these geomantic views the destiny of the kingdom was dependent on the topographical features of the peninsula, and in this view Paektusan was the head and Cheju and Tsushima the feet of this organic body. Since there is no part of the body above the head, it is worth to reconsider the perceived relationship between the peninsula and Liaodong/Manchuria in terms of territorial notions.

Crucial in such perceptions of the relationship between the Korean peninsula and the Liaodong/Manchuria area is how intellectuals of the period understood the history of the region in general. The term Chosŏn intellectuals used when writing dynasty-transcending histories of the Korean peninsula and adjacent areas to the north was "Eastern History" (*tongsa* 東史), or "the History of the Eastern Kingdom" (*tongguksa* 東國史). An inclusive concept, this was not a closed historical community, therefore allowing a lively discussion on what

peoples/kingdoms/dynasties should be included and emphasised.

Particularly interesting for the topic of this paper are the shifting attitudes towards the northern kingdom of Parhae. Whereas previously not considered part of “our history,” scholars in Late Chosŏn gradually started to include it in their historical narration in Eastern History. The process through which Parhae was incorporated into Korean history in late Chosŏn has, once again, been studied in detail. The criterion for inclusion into “our” history is mostly understood to be ethnicity, and previous studies detail a linear development towards an inclusion into Eastern History in terms of this ethnicity. However, most historical works of the period, even though they included Parhae into Korean history, stated that the founders of the kingdom ethnically were Mohe/Malgal, thus “they” and not “us”. This is considered to be a contradiction within these late Chosŏn historical works.

This paper will argue that this might not be a contradiction and that the modern studies that deal with the incorporation of Parhae into Korean history disregard the implications of the terminological problems caused by the lack of a term equivalent to “Korean history” in pre-modern Korea. Prasenjit Duara has reminded us of the multiplicity of identities and historical narratives in pre-modern societies¹, and without questioning the existence of ethnic identity in Chosŏn Korea, this essay will argue that to consistently equate Eastern history or the History of the Eastern kingdom with the modern concept of a Korean ethnic nation at times puts a straightjacket on the rich and diverse historical discourse of late Chosŏn. This paper will argue that understanding the rationale behind the inclusion of Parhae into Eastern History will provide a crucial clue as to how intellectuals of the period viewed the relationship between the Korean peninsula and the Liaodong/Manchuria area, which in turn will provide a clue as to the historical understanding of territory in the larger region.

Qing and “Manchuria”

When discussing the changing attitudes towards the Liaodong/Manchuria area in Late Chosŏn, we must consider the larger geopolitical changes brought about by the Ming/Qing transition on the mainland. The area later named Manchuria had been a peripheral frontier area between Ming and Chosŏn, inhabited by nomadic northern tribes and not a central concern for either of the governments, apart from the military threat these tribes constituted. However, with the establishment of the Qing dynasty this area now came to play a central part in Qing imperial ideology, and as the sacred homeland of the Manchu it needed to be protected. Mark C. Elliot has described the changed position of the Northeast in Qing as one from “space to place”.²

In the process of Manchu identity formation the Qing emperor insisted that his lineage sprang from the same roots as the Mongols, the Koreans, and the hunting peoples of the Northeast.³ These efforts culminated in the compilation of *Researches in the Origins of the*

¹ Prasenjit Duara. *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

² Mark C. Elliot. “The Limits of Tartary: Manchuria in Imperial and National Geographies.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 59:3 (2000)

³ Pamela Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, p. 133.

Manchus (*Manzhuo yuanliu kao* 滿洲源流考) in 1778. In this text the cultural kinship of the Manchu with Korea was documented, Manchu heritage was sought among ancient North-eastern peoples like the Sushen and Puyŏ, and Parhae was raised to central importance for Manchu history.⁴

The Manchu also had interest in the Northeast for strategic reasons and the above discussion had territorial consequences. According to Qing imperial ideology the emperor was the descendent of former Jurchen leaders who had possessed the Changbai/Paektusan Mountain and parts of the northern Korean peninsula, which made him the rightful lord of the mountain area in the present.⁵ When Qing in their ideology formation included old kingdoms in the Liaodong/Manchuria area into their historical memory they encroached upon the Korean memory. Previously neglected peoples and kingdoms started to be incorporated in the formulation of historical narratives in both Qing China and Chosŏn Korea. It was thus both the territory and the history of the area that became contested and Late Chosŏn historiography saw conspicuous changes in the attitude towards this area.

Late Chosŏn and the Liaodong/Manchuria area

Mid-Chosŏn historiography had been dominated by the notion that Korean history was centred on a chain of legitimate kingdoms that linked Korea with Chinese civilisation. This chain started with Kija Chosŏn since Kija, a scion of Shang, allegedly had introduced Chinese civilization. This legitimacy was later carried over to Mahan, Silla, Koryŏ and finally Chosŏn. Northern kingdoms like Old Chosŏn and Koguryŏ, while still part of the collective historical memory of Chosŏn, were therefore not considered as important as for instance Kija Chosŏn or Silla.

In Chosŏn the renewed interest in the areas north of the peninsula initially came out of strategic concerns. The conviction that the barbarian Qing was going to fall led to concerns over what might happen when the Jurchen/Manchu retreated to their former territory of Yŏnggot'ap. Concerns were raised that due to the Mongols they would take a detour through the northern part of the Korean peninsula. This necessitated a better knowledge of the geography on both sides of the Yalu and Tumen rivers. Chosŏn thus obtained maps from China, and based on these and domestic maps produced detailed maps covering Manchuria and the northern part of the peninsula.⁶

However, with the realization that Qing was not going to fall and the perceived threat of unrest weakened. Chosŏn had to get accustomed to being a tributary to Qing and the view of Chosŏn intellectuals on both the geopolitical situation in the region and on the Eastern Kingdom and its historical role started to change. In its relation to Chosŏn Qing was no longer so much a military threat – although still a menace to civilization – as one to the legitimacy of historicised identities based on Manchuria. This engendered a new interest in these regions among the

⁴ Pamela Crossley, "Manzhou yuanli kao and the Formalization of the Manchu Heritage", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46:4 (1987), pp. 763-766; Crossley 1999, p. 304.

⁵ Crossley 1999, pp. 196-7.

⁶ Pae Usŏng, *Chosŏn hugi kukt'ogwan kwa ch'ŏnhagwan ūi pyŏnhwa* [Changing Perceptions of National Territory and the World in Late Chosŏn], Seoul: Ichisa, 1998, pp. 64-95

scholars of Chosŏn and in the Korean kingdoms that had once held them. The geographical knowledge gained as a consequence of the previous strategic concerns now provided the empirical knowledge that was crucial for the historical/geographic studies that came in vogue in the period.

In *Yŏrha ilgi* Pak Chiwŏn lamented:

The scholars of our country today they just now of the present P'yŏngyang, and when it is said that Kija set up his capital in P'yŏngyang they believe that it was there ... If they were to be told that another P'yŏngyang was located in Liaodong they would scold it as an outrageous thing to say. They still don't realize that Liaodong once was the territory of Chosŏn and that many of the Tongi [Eastern barbarians] like Suksin, Ye, and Maek all were subordinated to Wiman Chosŏn. They are also not aware of the fact that Ora, Yŏnggot'ap and Huch'un were part of Koguryŏ territory...Thus the old territory of Chosŏn has diminished without any resistance.⁷

The fact that these northern kingdoms had held territories in the Liaodong/Manchuria area was thus something that had to be argued for and scholars started to use texts focused on the area, like the *History of the Liao Dynasty (Liaoshi)* and the *History of the Jin Dynasty (Jinshi)*, histories that had not been consulted much in early Chosŏn historiography. Many scholars criticized Kim Pusik and his *History of the Three Kingdoms* for dealing with the geography relating to Koguryŏ only in terms those territories that later fell within Silla's control.⁸ This limited envisioned spatial extension of Eastern history resulted in concrete misperceptions. The early Chosŏn geographical treatise *Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam*, for instance, regarded the Piryuch'ŏn, the area where Koguryŏ originated, to have been Sŏngch'ŏn in P'yŏngan province, and also that Kungnaesŏng, Koguryŏ's first capital, had been in Ūiju.⁹

The increased interest in the Liaodong/Manchuria area in late Chosŏn resulted not only in historical works that gave more attention to northern kingdoms, with scholars like An Chŏngbok and Yi Chonghwi starting the chain of legitimate kingdoms with Tan'gun Chosŏn, but also in detailed investigations into the historical geography of the larger region and separate kingdom studies like Yu Tŭkkong's *Parhaego*. Furthermore laments of lost territory, like the below by Yi Ik, was frequently expressed. When referring to the failure of Koryŏ to seize the territory of Parhae, Yi Ik said:

This opportunity was lost and we had to retreat and ended up with just a small piece of land. We became a weak country under Heaven, not being able to escape the fate of a bird in a cage or a frog in a well. Due to this the nature of our people became stubborn. Oh! Is this our destiny?¹⁰

⁷ Kugyŏk yŏrha ilgi, vol 1. Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe, 1968, pp. 527-8.

⁸ Like for instance An Chŏngbok . Han Yŏngu, Chosŏn hugi sahaksa yŏn'gu [Studies in Late Chosŏn Historiography], Seoul: Ilchogak, 1989, p. 305.

⁹ Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam, facs. ed., Seoul: Tongguk munhwasa, 1958, pp. 966, 987.

¹⁰ Quoted in Han Yŏngu 1989, p. 222.

Late Chosŏn inclusion of Parhae in Eastern History

While laments were expressed over the fact that Koryŏ had been unable to seize Parhae territory, Parhae was gradually included in the narration of Eastern history, in the end on a level equal with Silla, with some scholars even arguing that the period should be called the Period of a Northern and a Southern Kingdom. The views differed greatly though. While there were eighteenth century scholars like Sin Kyŏngjun and Yu Tŭkkong that fully incorporated it the structure of Eastern history, intellectual giants of the period like Yi Ik 李穡 (1682-1764) and An Chŏngbok 安鼎福 (1712-1791) excluded Parhae from “our” history, albeit showing a keen interest.

The interest somewhat faded in the nineteenth century, but it was the attitude of Sin Kyŏngjun and Yu Tŭkkong that was dominant with scholars like Han Ch’iyun 韓致奭 and Han Chinsŏ 韓鎭書 who in *Haedong yŏksa* 海東繹史 treated Parhae on equal level with Silla and other kingdoms central to Eastern history¹¹ and Kim Chŏnggho who reiterated Yu Tŭkkong’s argument that Silla and Parhae together formed a Period of Northern and Southern Kingdoms.¹²

As mentioned above, in modern scholarship the rationale for the inclusion of Parhae has often been considered to be ethnicity, that is, that the founders of the state were of Koguryŏ stock and therefore Korean. However, the inclusion of Parhae into the narration of Eastern history in late Chosŏn is not paralleled by an increased acceptance of the “Koreaness” of its founders. As for the origin of Parhae, Yu Tŭkkong in the foreword of his *Parhaego* states that Tae Choyŏng was Koguryŏ, but then the main text states that his father was Mohe/Malgal. Some contemporary scholars has seen this as a structural weakness of his work¹³, but a just as plausible conclusion would be that Yu Tŭkkong did not consider the distinction of origin important in establishing Parhae as an integral part of Eastern history, and that the two might not have been considered contradictory, in the sense that he could have considered Tae Choyŏng to be a Koguryŏ-ized Mohe.¹⁴ In this vein Yi Manyŏl concludes that Yu Tŭkkong probably considered Tae Choyŏng to have been of a Mohe/Malgal tribe under Koguryŏ domination and that he was active as a Koguryŏ general.¹⁵

Scholars like Han Ch’iyun and Kim Chŏnggho, while fully including Parhae into Eastern history, continued to describe the founders of Parhae both in terms of Koguryŏ and Mohe/Malgal. Once again we have to be open to the possibility that although the distinction is considered to be important today, the reason that these scholars used them interchangeably was that they did not see it as contradictory for someone to be *both* Koguryŏ and Mohe/Malgal.

¹¹ *Haedong yŏksa*, vol. 1, Kyŏngsŏng : Chosŏn Kosŏ Kanhaenghoe, 1911.

¹² *Taedong chiji*, facs.ed. Seoul: Asea Munhwasa, 1976, pp. 614-5.

¹³ Cho Tonggŏl et al, *Han’guk ui yŏksaka wa yŏksa hak*, sang [Historians and Historiography of Korea, Volume 1]. Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 1994, p. 304; Song Kiho ” Chosŏn sidae sasŏ e nat’anan Parhaegwan” [Views on Parhae in Chosŏn Historical Texts], *Han’guksa yŏn’gu* 72 (1991), p. 66.

¹⁴ Song Kiho discusses the possibility of such a view [Tae Choyŏng as a “Koguryŏ-ized person” (koguryŏhwa han inmul)] regarding Hong Sŏkchu who while describing the founders as Mohe/Malgal still called Tae Choyŏng a yumin of Koguryŏ. Song Kiho 1991, p. 64.

¹⁵ Yi Manyŏl, “Chosŏn hugi Parhaesa insik” [Views on Parhae in Late Chosŏn], in *Han Ugŭn paksa chŏngnyŏn kinyŏm sahak nonch’ong*. Seoul: Chisik sanŏpsa 1981, p. 462.

After all, given that the Koguryŏ state by its demise had been constituted of these two groups for centuries, it seems likely that a “Koguryŏ general” (as Tae Choyŏng increasingly was referred to) in fact could come from a Mohe/Malgal background.

Given the distinction in ethnic terms between Koguryŏ and Mohe/Malgal, and that the former were considered to be “us” and the second not, the founders of Parhae were thus not considered to be bona fide “us”, a view also expressed by the Sirhak scholar Yi Tŏngmu 李德懋 (1741-1793) who described Parhae as “the most civilised and strongest of the outer barbarians”.¹⁶ The fact that Parhae could be included into Eastern history although considered to ethnically different from “us” brings us to the question of how Chosŏn intellectuals viewed the relationship between the Korean peninsula and the northern territories.

The relationship between the Korean peninsula and the northern territories

An interesting clue as to how the Chosŏn state considered the relationship between the peninsula and the northern territories has been provided by the young Korean scholar Chŏng Taham. He questions the way in which the foreign relations since early Chosŏn has been described as “service to the great” (*sadae chuŭi* 事大主義) with mainland China and “neighbourly relations” (*kyorin* 交隣) with the peoples and states to the north and south of the peninsula. Chŏng argues that the early Chosŏn state did not consider the Jurchen (or Taemado/Tsushima) as equal neighbours, as the term suggests, but rather as vassals, and that Chosŏn aspired to establish a “small peripheral empire” (주변부의 작은 제국) in the region. He does not consider the military conflicts with the Jurchen (*yŏjin chŏngbŏl* 女眞征伐) in early Chosŏn to be primarily defensive, warding off marauding tribes, as they previously have been interpreted, but as efforts to subjugate the northern Jurchen tribes into loyalty to the new dynasty.¹⁷ This attitude towards the Jurchen and Taemado/Tsushima, according to Chŏng, can also be seen in the fact that the envoys the Chosŏn state sent to these areas were titled *kyŏngch’agwan* 敬差官, an envoy usually understood to have been sent to local provinces.¹⁸

As we have seen, in late Chosŏn Parhae was included into Eastern history although most scholars continued to consider it to have been a state founded by the Mohe/Malgal. Given the manner in which Parhae was included into Eastern History, this paper suggests that late Chosŏn intellectuals considered the Eastern Kingdom to be a middle kingdom in the region, similar to the view of the early Chosŏn state, centred on the Korean peninsula and stretching its influence, and occasionally power, into the Liaodong and Manchuria areas. Eastern history in late Chosŏn was written as a “regional” history, modelled on the histories written on China, centring on a group of legitimate kingdoms surrounded by dependent kingdoms, vassals and barbarians.

¹⁶ Yi Tŏngmu, Ch’ŏngjanggwŏn chŏnsŏ, kwŏn 54 (www.minchu.or.kr)

¹⁷ Chŏng Taham, “‘Kyorin’iranŭn t’ŭl: Sumgyŏjin chegukchuŭijŏk yongmang kwa chosŏn-yŏjin kwan’gye” [The Kyorin Mould: Hidden Imperialistic Ambitions and Chosŏn-Jurchen Relations], in Kŭndae han’guk, cheguk kwa minjok ŭi kyoch’a ro, Seoul: Hyumanisŭt’ŭ (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Chŏng Taham, “Chosŏn ch’ogi yain kwa taemado e taehan pyŏlli, pyŏnbyŏng ŭisik ŭi hyŏngsŏng kwa kyŏngch’agwan ŭi p’agyŏn” [Creating Chosŏn’s Suzerainty over Jurchen and Tsushima and the Dispatch of Kyŏngch’agwan], Tongbang hakchi 141 (2008).

The position of Parhae in this historical community was that of a kingdom that succeeded a for Eastern history central kingdom, Koguryŏ, in terms of territory and people, and to a certain extent historical legitimacy, and had created a large and powerful state. It was thus important in the history of the Eastern kingdom, some scholars arguing for a Period of Northern and Southern Kingdoms, although the founders were not considered to be “us”. This is not unlike the Northern and Southern Dynasties in China (420-589) with a northern dynasty like the Northern Wei founded by barbarian Xianbei. Also ethnic groups like the Khitan or Jurchen occasionally grew strong and established large and powerful kingdoms like Liao and Jin. Such kingdoms also came to play an important, although contested, role in Chinese history.

Although not referring to the northern areas, but explicitly mentioning the “the middle kingdom of the Easter Kingdom”, the below quote by Chŏng Yagyong indicates such notion of a civilised, agricultural southern part of the peninsula as opposed to the more uncivilised areas to the north:

As for our country the northwest is rough and cold, the east is mountainous and narrow, the Yŏngnam region is an isolated distant area, and in the northern part of the Kyŏnggi province the land is barren and the peasants poor. Only south of the Han River, the old territory of Mahan, is the climate benign and the soil fertile. It is the middle kingdom of the Eastern Kingdom and that is why Mahan could become the leader among the three Han.¹⁹

It is interesting to note that Yi Ik ascribed the yet not fully civilised character of the north-eastern part of the peninsula to the migration of people from Parhae and Liao.

When Parhae fell its people moved into our country, and when the Khitan fell its people also moved into our country. [...] That is why the people in the west mostly are sturdy and found of physical strength and why the old habits still have not disappeared.²⁰

If the settled and agricultural, that is, civilised center of the Easter Kingdom was the southern part of the Korean peninsula. What was then the character of the northern areas? This is what Chŏng Yagyong had to say about the Liaodong area:

I consider the fact that Liaodong has not been reclaimed as good luck for our country. Liaodong is an area that is constantly overrun by the Chinese and the barbarians. The Jurchens have to pass Liaodong to get to China, the Xianbei and Khitans can not ward off the enemies without holding Liaodong, and the Mongols have to pass through Liaodong to get to the Jurchen. If a truly honest and gentle country that doesn't value military power comes to hold Liaodong, then the damage will be unspeakable.²¹

¹⁹ “Kangyŏkko”, Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ, vol. 6, Seoul: Kyŏngin Munhwasa, 1970, p. 302.

²⁰ Yi Ik, “P’unggi yujŏn”, Sŏngho sasŏl.

²¹ Yodongnon [A Treatise on Liaodong], p. 392.

Chǒng Yagyong's willingness to dispense of Liaodong could be linked to the fact that he, unlike many other scholars of the period, did not consider Kija Chosŏn to originally have been located in Liaodong, but rather in the northern part of the peninsula. Only later when Kija Chosŏn grew in strength had it conquered Liaodong and come into contact with Yen.²² His willingness to dispense of Liaodong can also be seen in the following quote:

The topography of our country has the two rivers (Yalu and Tumen) as the northern border and the rest is surrounded by water, so the composition of our borders forms a natural complete unit. So if we were to obtain Liaodong, it would rather be to attach something superfluous. Why is that something to lament?²³

Yi Ik also expressed similar views. Acknowledging the problems, from Chosŏn's point of view, with the border east of Paektusan established in 1712 he continued:

However, just because we say that we want to retrieve something that we abandoned a long time ago does not mean that we will get it back. There is also the problem of defending and safeguarding such areas, and that would become a great worry in the future. So one should not make it one's business just to broaden the territory. We have good relations with China now, and we have no problems at the borders, so we cannot but worry about greedy ambitions that can create problems.²⁴

With the notion of Chosŏn as a middle kingdom in the region, historical texts in late Chosŏn started to include peripheral states and the barbarians north of the peninsula in the narration of Eastern history. For a scholar like Chǒng Yagyong, the Eastern Kingdom was a geographic entity.

As for the country south of the wall and north of the five mountain passes, it is called the Middle Kingdom, and the country east of the Liao River is called Eastern Kingdom.²⁵

We have seen how Parhae was gradually and many other kingdoms and people were also included as appendices. We can see this trend emerging already in the seventeenth century. Hong Yŏha's *Hwich'an yŏsa*, for instance, included a section on the "outer barbarians" (*oeijŏn* 外夷傳) that dealt with Japan, the Khitans and the Jurchen.²⁶

This feature becomes more prominent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yu Tŭkkong for instance, while writing a treatise on Parhae also wrote a treatise on the four Han

²² Han Yŏngu 1989, p. 369.

²³ *Yodongnon*, p. 392.

²⁴ Yi Ik, "Tuman chaenggye", *Sŏngho sasŏl*.

²⁵ Chǒng Yagyong, "Song Han Kyori sa yŏn sŏ", *Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ*.

國於長城之南五嶺之北。謂之中國。而國於遼河之東謂之東國。 Admittedly this statement is made within a context of questioning mainland China as the center of the world, but the phrasing is still significant.

²⁶ Yi Manyŏl 1974, pp. 343-4.

commanderies, and originally Tasan had intended to include studies on the Jurchen, Khitans and Mongols in his *Abang kangyŏkko*.²⁷ Although not extant today, An Chŏngbok also wrote a treatise on surrounding states and ethnic groups (*Tongsa eojoŏn* 東史外傳) to supplement his *Tongsa kangmok*, and in this work he reportedly dealt with Parhae, the Jurchen and Japan.²⁸

That the northern areas were considered to part of Eastern history regardless if they were controlled by a “Korean” state or not, and how groups not associated with “us” were included in this historical/geographical community can also be seen in Kim Chŏnggho’s *Taedong chiji*. After dealing with the three Chosŏn and the Han Commanderies, and before going on to the kingdoms that existed in the southern part of the peninsula, this work includes a section in which other kingdoms/tribes in the Liaodong and Shenyang area are introduced, under the heading *Yosim cheguk* 遼瀋諸國 covering among others Suksin, Malgal, Puyŏ, Okchŏ, Yemaek, Hsien-Pei, Khitans, and Jurchen.²⁹

Concluding remarks

This paper argues that late Chosŏn intellectuals saw the relationship between the Korean peninsula and the areas to its north as one between a civilised center and an uncivilised periphery. As such it was the territory of the peninsula and its topography that was crucial in identity formation, as reflected in the organic views argued for by Professor Bae, and most of the Liaodong/Manchuria region was considered to be an area overrun by barbarians. The attitude towards much of the land of the northern areas was not that of territory crucial for the Eastern kingdom, but rather that of frontier land to grab (or loose). The significance of these northern areas lay in the fact that the Eastern kingdom had been large and powerful when it held them. The following is what Han Chiyŏn wrote in the preface to his 1903 reworking of Chŏng Yagyong’s *Abang kangyŏkko*, the *Taehan kangyŏkko*:

Our country is located in the corner of the East. To the north we border to the areas of the Jurchen and Maek tribes and to the west to Liaodong and the area of Yen. Since old the territorial division has been unfixed and the frontier area has been invaded and fought over. When strong we have advanced and seized Liaodong and ??? and commanded the Eastern barbarians (*i* 夷) and Maek tribes. When weak we have retreated and defended half of that, and the territory has been split up. Puyŏ, Yemaek, Parhae, Malgal have all seized the opportunities given to them and occupied parts, so that the full extent of the territory looks like a chessboard.³⁰

A peninsular focus can not only be seen in the willing among scholars like Yi Ik and Chŏng

²⁷ Cho Sŏngŭl, “‘Abang kangyŏkko’ e nat’anan Chŏng Yagyong ūi yŏksa insik” [Chŏng Yagyong’s View on History as Seen in *Abang kangyŏkko*], *Kyujanggak* 15 (1992), p. 65.

²⁸ Ha Ubong, *Chosŏn sidae han’gugin ūi ilbon insik* [Koreans’ Understanding of Japan in Chosŏn Dynasty], Seoul: Hyeon, 2006, p. 232.

²⁹ *Taedong chiji* 573-581.

³⁰ 韋庵文稿卷之四 內集, 序, 大韓疆域考序, 穢貊·渤海·靺鞨·乘機伺釁, 分峙各占, 青邱全幅, 便成一奕棋之場

Yagyong to dispense of this territory, but also in the limited envisioned spatial extension of the territories of northern Korean kingdoms in Late Chosŏn historical maps. For instance, when indicating the borders of Koguryŏ "at its height" (*chŏnsŏng* 全盛), the map in An Chŏngbok's *Tongsa kangmok* is still centred on the Korean peninsula and the northward expanse of the kingdom greatly understated. Also, in Han Ch'iyun's *Haedong yŏksa* the map in the beginning "providing a general outline map for the historical maps to follow" is a map of the eight provinces of Chosŏn. The later visual description of Koguryŏ territory that follows shows the same limited envisioned spatial extension as *Tongsa kangmok*.

However, the historically significant Liaodong area seems to have been perceived different. This was the area where many late Chosŏn intellectuals located Kija Chosŏn, the kingdom crucial in the transmission of mainland civilisation to the Korean peninsula and in the early beginnings of the legitimacy of history of the Eastern kingdom. Although we have seen scholars like Chŏng Yagyong gladly dispense of Liaodong (he considered Kija Chosŏn to have been located on the Korean peninsula), we can also see efforts to bring Liaodong into the organic understanding of Chosŏn territory. Hong Kyŏngmo, for instance, travelling the area as part of a Chosŏn embassy to the Chinese capital, linked the Liaodong peninsula with the Korean peninsula in geomantic terms.³¹ Furthermore, if we look at some of the historical maps of late Chosŏn, reflecting perceptions of history as much as actual geography, the Liaodong peninsula can be seen as part of the Korean peninsula, and can thus also be "headed" by Paektusan.

³¹ Yi Sŏngsu, "Chosŏn hugi yŏnhaeng ch'ehŏm kwa kot'o insik: Tongp'alch'am ūl chungsim ūro" [The Experience of Travelling to China and Perceptions on Old National Territory: Focussing on Tongp'alch'am], *Tongbang hakchi* 127 (2004)