

*Foreword*

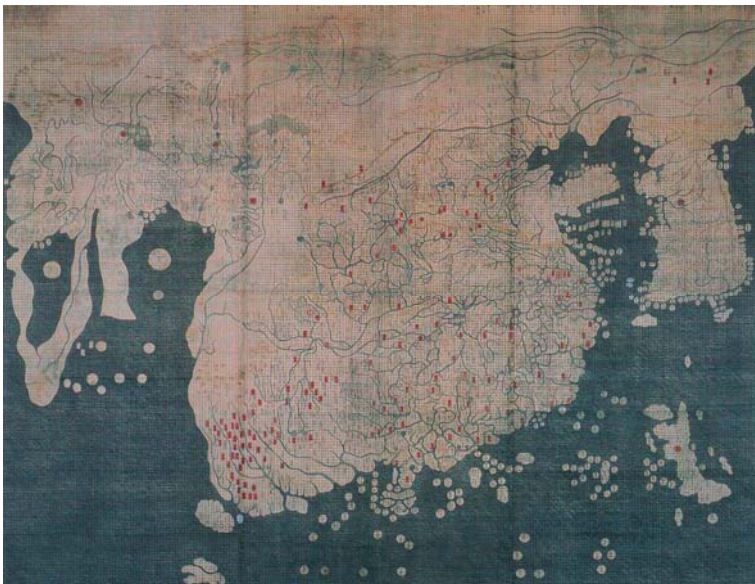
East Asia

A History and Interpretation



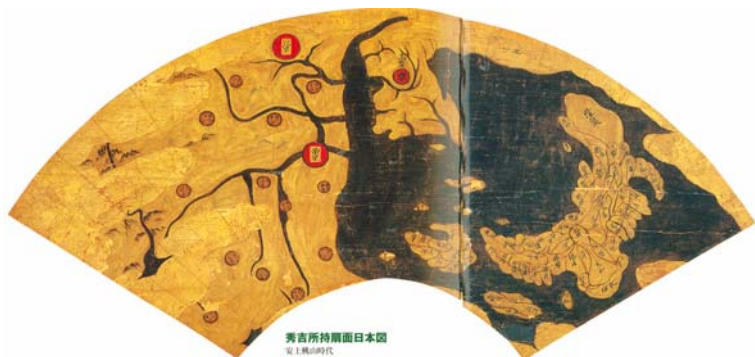
TOP: A Chinese Perspective

"Overall Map of the Geography of All Under Heaven" drawn by Mo Yi Tong in 1763 allegedly as a copy of the 1418 original.



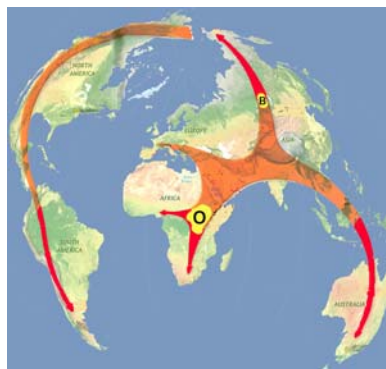
MIDDLE: A Korean Perspective

Kang-ni-do (歷代帝王混一疆理圖) was made in Korea in August 1402 (the second year of Tai-zong's reign of the Chosun dynasty) by Lee Hui (李薈). Lee Hui combined two maps made in Ming (李澤民 聲教廣被圖 and 清濬 混一疆理圖), a map of Japanese islands obtained in 1401 from the governor (源詳助) of Hishū (肥州, the Hizen 肥前 and Higo 肥後 taken collectively) by an envoy (朴敦之) to the Muromachi shogunate, and a map of Chosun (本國地圖) made by himself in May 1402. (Size: 171 cm by 164 cm)



BOTTOM: A Japanese Perspective

A map of Japan, Korea and China drawn on a folding fan used by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-98).



0.1. Out of Africa: The Greatest Journey

<sup>1</sup> According to Schurr (2000: 253), the highest frequencies of haplogroup A-to-D mtDNAs “occur in the Altai Mountain/Tuva/Lake Baikal region, implying that this general region gave rise to the founders of Native American populations.” See also Relethford (2003: 115 and 133).

<sup>2</sup> Altaic languages share a great number of grammatical characteristics, including the subject-object-verb word order. They add syllables to show tense, and insert particles into the sentences to show case instead of changing the vowel sounds within words to express tense or case, as the Indo-European languages do.



0.2. From Transbaikalia Into Americas

## FOREWORD

## EAST ASIA

## A HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION

**THE SINOCENTRIC EAST ASIAN HISTORY**

An analysis of Mitochondrial DNA suggests that the first Americans descended from the people who had initially settled in the Altai Mountain area near Lake Baikal.<sup>1</sup> The ancient northern Mongoloid populations who had first settled around Transbaikalia seem to have dispersed further across the Greater Xing’an Range to become the proto-Xianbei-Tungus in Manchuria, and moved into the Sakhalin-Hokkai islands to become Ainu on the Japanese archipelago. The Korean peninsula and Japanese islands have been intimately connected with Manchuria, not only as a physical reality but also as an ethnohistorical entity. The distinctive linguistic feature shared by all these people may be called Altaic, going back to their no longer extant common source, i.e., proto-Altaic.<sup>2</sup>

The conventional dogma that had been instilled by Sima Qian (c. 145-80 BCE), and preserved without any change in essence until now, is this: the Chinese emperor, the Son of Heaven and the undisputed leader of the peoples of East Asia, imposed his own world order on the “barbarians,” through the tribute system, from the second century BCE until the middle of the nineteenth century. Rossabi, et al. (1983: 1-12) were “brave enough” to challenge such a deluded view, meekly saying that the Chinese world order did not persist for the entire period because, from time to time, China did not enforce its own system of foreign relations but, rather, treated the

barbarian nations as “equals.” The Song (960-1279) is mentioned as an example of the principal dynasty that adopted a realistic and flexible foreign policy.

The myth of Han Chinese superiority was apparently created for domestic consumption, but somehow most modern-day historians are stilled cocooned in a pile of rhetorics of the *Sbi-ji* type. The traditional Sinocentric view of a self-contained and self-perpetuating center of civilization, surrounded by the uncivilized world of the “barbarians” who were permitted to pay tributes and even gracefully allowed to be sinified, still seems to dominate the stream of unconsciousness in historians’ minds.<sup>3</sup>

#### A TRIPOLAR FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

As Barfield (1989: 12) contends, Manchuria, the Mongolian steppe, and mainland China must be analyzed as distinct parts of a single historical system. The tripolar framework is clearly different from the simple bipolar approach, *à la* Sima Qian (c. 145-80 BCE), of nomads versus the sedentary Chinese. The bipolar approach typically contends that, when the nomadic peoples were not able to obtain essential commodities such as grain and clothes from the Han Chinese through gifts and subsidized trade at the frontier markets, they raided China to acquire the goods they needed, but if the Han Chinese were willing to provide these goods peacefully to the nomadic peoples, peace was possible.

Few people recognize the simple fact that, with the exception of the Mongol Yuan (1206-1368), all of the foreign conquest dynasties in China were of Manchurian origin: TuobaXianbei Wei (386-534) and Qidan-Xianbei Liao (916-1125) originating from the Liao-xi steppe of western Manchuria, and Ruzhen-Tungus Kin (1115-1234) and Manchu-Tungus Qing (1616-1912) originating from the wild forest regions of eastern Manchuria – not to mention the Former Yan (337-70) of Murong-Xianbei for its trial performance as a proto-conquest dynasty. Never conquered from the south, mainland China had always been unified by regimes originating from the north.

Even fewer people recognize the fact that the Chinggis Khan’s Mongol tribe was the *Meng-wu* (Mongol)

<sup>3</sup> I will give an example. Tao (1976: 111) states that: “Only twice did aliens conquer the whole of China. In the first instance, the Mongols refused to accept the Chinese way of life, and this is probably one of the reasons they did not maintain their power in China very long. In the second case the Manchus ruled the Chinese much longer, but only after they adopted the Chinese culture and achieved a Sino-Manchu synthesis.” According to Crossley (1999: 3), the following beliefs are the “basics” that are “accepted” in the field of Qing history: the Qing empire was “given a certain political and cultural cast by the Manchus”; or the Qing empire was “controlled by the Manchus”; or the Qing empire was founded by the Manchus but the Qing rulers “remade the court to bring it into harmony with established Chinese values” and the “golden age was represented in the rule of the Qian-long emperor, the most Confucian and sinified” of the Qing rulers. I can give another example. Franke (Franke and Twitchett, 1994: 320) states that: “At the latest in 1203 the Ruzhen state of Kin had ... become fully Chinese ... that ... could be considered a fully legitimate element in the Chinese world order. Modern historians, too, might well consider the Kin as more than just a barbarian interlude in Chinese history. There can be little doubt that ... the conviction of Kin intellectuals that they represent true Chinese values, contributed ... to perpetuate Chinese ways of life ...”

The Sinocentric view on conquest dynasties amplifies the aspect of eventual melting down of “barbarian” elements by assimilation. The “assimilation” is understood to imply that “the subordinate group attempts to abandon its inadequate culture by entering into the society of the dominant group and accepting its culture, retaining only token vestiges of their culture traits.” The concept of sinicization is employed in the same sense as assimilation that encompasses both acculturation and integration (see Tao, 1976, pp. xiii, 111).

<sup>4</sup> The name of Mongols appears for the first time in the Old History of Tang. 蒙兀 is read “*meng-wu*” by the modern-day Chinese, but is read “*mong-ol*” by the modern-day Korean that is, as usual, much closer to the ancient (up to Tang time) reading of “*mong-uət*” in the metropolitan China. It may be due to what the anthropologists say the “freezing” phenomena in the periphery. The New Tang-shu writes 蒙瓦 whose ancient reading is “*mong-uär*” and modern reading is “*meng-wa*.”

<sup>5</sup> See Franke and Twitchett (1994: 329-33). The Mongolian steppe was the home of Xiong-nu, the ancestor of Turks. The “Mongol” appellation for the area must have occurred after the migration of the Mongol branch of Shi-wei from northern Manchuria. According to Janhunen (1996: 158, 160), “the linguistic Mongolization of Mongolia had ... taken place during the more than

branch of a larger ethnic grouping known to the Chinese as the *Shi-wei*. According to the Old Tang-shu, the *Shi-wei* were a branch of the Qidan, the descendents of Yuwen-Xianbei of western Manchuria.<sup>4</sup> The Chinggis Khans’s Mongol tribe migrated from their original homeland in northern Manchuria to the Argun River area sometime during the tenth century, and then finally settled in the Onon-Kerulen area during the eleventh century, transforming themselves into full-time nomads. The *Shi-wei* had eked out a meager existence through a combination of primitive agriculture, pig raising, hunting, fishing and pastoralism, and a branch of these Manchurian woodsmen had metamorphosed into Mongolian nomads within a couple of hundred years. The ethnonym “Mongol” that was originally peculiar to a small Qidan tribe of Xianbei provenance was elevated above other tribes by Chinggis Khan, resulting in an ethnonymic unification of the entire Mongolian steppe.<sup>5</sup>

The central theme of Barfield (1989: 9, 19, 230) is as follows. The extreme physical and cultural dissimilarity between the Mongolian steppe and mainland China enabled the coexistence of Turko-Mongol nomadic empires and sedentary Han Chinese dynasties most of the time, with the partner empires tending to flourish or perish together. There was, however, not such an extreme dissimilarity between Manchuria and the Great Plain of China south of the Great Wall. Western Manchuria was very much nomadic and eastern Manchuria was heavily forested, and yet the North-East Manchurian Plain (the *Dong-bei* plain consisting of Song-hua and Liao River basins) had been producing wheat and millet. The “barbarians” of Manchuria knew how to rule the farmers, and consequently tried to conquer the Han Chinese whenever both the Chinese dynasties and the nomadic partner empires in the Mongolian steppe were weakened.

The teachings of Confucius (551-479 BCE) and the indoctrinating effect of testing the Five Classics were attractive to the rulers of an empire. The Chinese-style bureaucratic governance that is led by Confucian elites was adopted and adapted by many non-Chinese regimes in East Asia, but even then each of these regimes tried to maintain its own identity and tradition. The “barbarian” conquest dynasties that ruled

China could maintain military supremacy by maintaining the “dual system” of Han Chinese style bureaucracy simultaneously functioning together with their own traditional tribal military organization commanded by hereditary aristocratic elites. They had effectively maintained a universal obligatory system of military service throughout their tribes. In war, each clan or tribe was grouped as a separate detachment under the command of its own chieftain. The conquest elite were administratively superimposed upon the bureaucracy. Improper wholesale sinicization led to the downfall of a conquest dynasty, and therefore was anathema to the farsighted non-Chinese rulers.

I take the tripolar framework --Manchuria, the Mongolian steppe and mainland China-- in analyzing East Asian history over the last two thousand years. The interactions among mainland China below the Great Wall (traditionally assumed to have been dominated by the Han Chinese), the Mongolian steppe of the Turko-Mongol homeland, and the greater Manchurian ethnohistorical sphere of the Xianbei-Tungus accounted for the complexity of East Asian history. Unlike Barfield, however, I explicitly include the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands within the greater Xianbei-Tungus ethnohistorical sphere of Manchurian provenance. The analytical effect of this inclusion is far from trivial, providing a more realistic perspective on East Asian history.<sup>6</sup> The proto-Altaic speech community of Xianbei-Tungus shares the Neolithic Hong-shan culture, and also the tradition of incised-plain pottery, dolmens, and broad-bladed bronze daggers.

Until recently, say, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the history of East Asia had essentially been the product of changing relationships among the Turko-Mongols, Xianbei-Tungus, and Han Chinese of these core sub-regions through time. They have been equal partners in the formation of East Asian history, constituting a system of correlations and predictions upon which historical causality is ultimately based. A newly conceptualized look at East Asia’s long history enables the formulation of a correct model that accounts for the causalities in modern East Asia within the globalized world, and predicts their future trends that inevitably affect the entire human race.

three centuries that separated the fall of the Uighur (840) and the proclamation of the Mongol Khanate (1206),” and “if we accept the hypothesis that the Qidan were linguistically related to the Mongols, we see that the political history of Manchuria involves a regular oscillation of the power between Mongolic and Tungusic elements.”



0.3. The Mongolian Steppe, Manchuria, and Mainland China

<sup>6</sup> Janhunen (1996: 3-7) states that “as a physical feature Korea is just a larger companion of Liao-dong, both forming mountainous extensions of the Manchurian heartland towards the south,” and “the island of Sakhalin is ... inseparably associated with the Amur River. ... [A]t its narrowest point, the Tartar Strait is not wider than some sections of the Lower Amur itself. On the other hand, from the southern tip of Sakhalin there is a close connection, including an ice bridge in winter, with Hokkaido and the rest of the Japanese Islands, which, in turn, are linked with Korea through the Tsushima Islands in the Korea Strait.” Janhunen notes that “the area of the Manchurian geographical realm is approximately

one million square miles (including the Liao River basin of 300 miles in length, and a plain with a diameter of over 300 miles around the courses of the river Song-hua and its northern tributary the Nen River), and roughly equals the size of China around the Yellow River and Yang-zi River basins.

<sup>7</sup> 東北邊疆歷史與現狀系列研究工程  
The Han Chinese sustained continuous “barbarian” attacks and rule. It was, however, the “barbarians” who could not preserve their cultural and ethnic identity. Most of these peoples are now incorporated in the People’s Republic of China, and are described as branches of the “Chinese people,” their history assimilated into Chinese history.



0.4. East Asia in Eurasian Continent

I am trying to let the readers attain a balanced perspective on East Asian history, by exposing them to a non-Sinocentric and non-Japancentric perspective. I offer readers a chance to see history from a point of view very different from what they are familiar with. On many sensitive issues, there is always room for scholars to disagree, and the truth might lie somewhere in the middle. For historians as well as laymen, it will be a refreshing experience to look at the East Asian world from an entirely new perspective. A proper, balanced interpretation of the past history of East Asia enables a more realistic understanding of modern East Asia.

Recently, the People’s Republic of China has launched the “Operation North East.” One of its major objectives is to make the history of Koguryeo a history of one of those minority nationalities in China. Paranoia or not, many Koreans suspect that the PRC government is trying to clear the ground to take over North Korea when it collapses, and integrate it, *à la* Tibet, into the great Chinese empire.<sup>7</sup>

Historians in every nation, whether Americans, Europeans, Arabs, Iranians, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, or Koreans, seem to be destined to write, consciously or unconsciously, biased histories to gratify the vanity and aspirations of their contemporaries. Viewed from the opposite side of the looking-glass, most historians who are specialists in East Asia are, consciously or unconsciously, still trying to fit the realities into a Sinocentric or a Japancentric model by twisting and bending the historical facts. Non-Asian historians have no reason to write a “nationalist” East Asian history. For the people who are not Han Chinese or Japanese, however, most of the writings of non-Asian historians seem subjective and biased, rather than “objective.”

The process of collecting historical traces and facts, spotting patterns in the data, analyzing how one set of data relates to another, building a model, formulating and designing hypotheses for empirical verification, and interpreting the history is determined by the existing conceptual framework. A scientific revolution is made by a complete changeover of idea. In history, however, because of the academic vested interest, a paradigm shift usually takes place through the replacement over time, often triggered by conceptual breakthroughs, of the

generation of historians who adhered to an old idea with another generation that cleaves to a new one.

Ideally, every highschool textbook in the world should present history from more than one viewpoint, and children of every nation should have a chance to see history from more than one point of view.

I am grateful to Professor Mary Schiber of Northern Illinois University who did an excellent job of editing to make my book more readable. I would like to thank Yang Sang-mee, the chief librarian of the Graduate School of International Studies, Seoul University, for her help in acquiring important research materials.

*Wontack Hong*  
2006



0.5. Gilt-bronze Headgear  
Koguryeo, Cheong-am-ri, Pyung-yang



