

Memories of "Manchuria" in Historical and Literary Narratives of East Asia

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An international conference on the theme of "Memories of 'Manchuria' in Historical and Literary Narratives of East Asia" was held December 3 and 4 on the campus of Dong-A University in Pusan, Republic of Korea. The conference, hosted by the Manchurian Studies Association (Korea) and the Institute of East Asian Studies (Dong-A University) and sponsored by Korea Research Foundation and Koguryo Research Foundation, sought to present recent worldwide research trends and future prospects on Manchukuo.¹

Korea has a long academic tradition of Sinological studies, but it is remarkable that the past several years saw the establishment of an academic association and a research institute that focus on the region of Manchuria.² This development is not unrelated to the nationalist tendencies in East Asian states quite contrary to the tendencies of community integration in other continents. The Chinese have attempted to "steal" the history of Koguryō, a major foundation of ancient Korean civilization, to incorporate it into the "Manchurian local history" of China, and this episode does not appear to get resolved in a simple manner. The China centrism and the traditional ideology of the "Great Harmony" (Datong 大同) incorporate the histories of the conquerors such as Khitans, Jurchens, Mongols, and Manchus as parts of

¹ A number of papers presented at the conference have been published in the *Journal of Manchurian Studies*, volume 2 (April 2005).

² See the homepage addresses of the Manchurian Studies Association (<http://dragon.seowon.ac.kr/~kwk1ch/manchuria>) and Koguryo Research Foundation (<http://www.koguryo.re.kr>)

Chinese history. It means that Chinese historians claimed that any people or state in the past that had occupied any part of Chinese territory must belong to Chinese history. The Chinese hold the same view toward Koguryō and this threat to Korean history has provided the background and motivation for the establishment of academic organizations focusing on the Manchurian area studies.

Manchukuo (1932-45), the main theme of the conference, is a part of both the Japanese and Chinese studies, and it is closely related to the development of modern Korean history. Manchuria was one of the Korea's living space in the late 19th century to the end of the colonial period. Legacies and experiences in Manchukuo are significant in themselves but they were also very important factors in the construction of modern Korea. It is inevitable that there will be widely different perspectives on Manchukuo among Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Western scholars. Thus, the conference was meaningful in that it provided a forum attended by scholars from Korea, Japan, United States, and Australia. One of the presenters was a Korean Chinese scholar, but it was regrettable that no Han Chinese scholar could attend the conference.

Manchukuo has often been considered as the puppet state of imperial Japan. Professor Prasenjit Duara of the University of Chicago provided a clear theoretical definition of this puppet state from world historical perspective. Duara, in his keynote address, stated that the special features of the new imperialism after the World War II or the "new empires without colonialism" began to manifest in the establishment of Manchukuo by Japan. Japan opposed the Western colonial imperialism and under the slogan of Pan Asianism tried to construct a form of regional domination under Japanese hegemony. Thus, instead of direct rule of colony in Manchuria, Japan created a legally sovereign nation state of Manchukuo that was at the same time under the brutal military totalitarian rule of Japan. Japan also advocated the "way of the moral king" (王道), and the Manchu emperor Pu Yi became the "younger half brother" of the Japanese *tenno*. I believe that these may represent a Japanese version of the traditional Chinese world order.

Professor Gavan McCormack of Australian National University used

the paradigm of the relationship between the imperial Japan and Manchukuo to vituperate against the current international situation between Japan and the United States. Just as the imperial Japan had employed the slogan of pan-Asianism, the United States invaded Iraq on the pretext of democratization of the Middle East. The US also tried to rebuild the postwar Japan as a new version of Manchukuo, and Japan's Koizumi regime has been faithfully and actively fulfilling its role of the US satellite in East Asian international order. While McCormack's stinging criticism seems to reflect his progressive view, I believe that it is inappropriate to apply the political rhetoric of "Japan as a subordinate state of the US" to the framework of "Imperial Japan Subordinate Manchukuo." Japan as a nation-state under Koizumi can't be considered as comparable to Manchukuo under Aisin Gioro Pu Yi.

In the recent researches presented by Japanese scholars we can glimpse the continuation of the tradition of the Research Institute of South Manchurian Railway. Professor Yamamoto Yuzo of Chubu University in a special lecture introduced his latest work *Manshukoku keizaishi kenkyū* (An Economic History of Manchukuo). He has uncovered statistical data for Manchukuo at the Hoover Institute of Stanford University. Yamamoto considers Manchukuo as nation state and sought to find out productivity and living standard of Manchukuo through an analysis of statistical data on industrial production, per capita income, international trade balance, etc. He concluded that such study was indispensable in our comprehensive understanding of the Japanese colonial rule. This view of looking at the parts to gain an overall understanding of the whole also drives the paper presented by Joung An-ki of Korea University who put forward a comparative statistical analysis of the textile industries in colonial Korea and Manchukuo.

Professor Yamamuro Shinichi of Kyoto University presented a paper that used still another approach. Yamamuro asserted that one can gain a comprehensive understanding of Manchukuo only in the context of the imperial Japanese network that also included Japan, China, Taiwan, and Korea. He used the term "Nation-Empire" to describe the imperial Japanese ruling structure that encompassed metropole, colony, and subordinate nation state. One can understand the structure of Manchukuo and imperial

Japan through the network of political institutions, thoughts, personnel, population, and materials in imperial Japanese world. Yamamuro's "Nation-Empire" thesis, while similar to Duara's "New Imperialism," emphasizes complex and overlapping relations among the diverse political groups in imperial Japan. However, we will need to consider carefully if the term "Nation-Empire" adequately represent such form of imperialism.

On the other hand, Korean scholars begin with reflections on the distortion of Manchukuo history. Professor Shin Jubaek of Seoul National University criticizes textbooks of both Koreas for their failure to look into Manchukuo itself or the life in Manchukuo and focus exclusively on Korea's anti Japanese movements. Nowadays in the Republic of Korea, scholars have begun to examine anti-Japanese movements of socialists, but the Democratic People's Republic of Korea always focused on Kim Il Sung's activities and such personal worship of Kim has intensified even more in recent years. After liberation from the Japanese colonial rule, two competing states emerged and attempted to mobilize and unite their citizens. In such a historical circumstance, Korean historical view of Manchukuo was produced and taught in incomplete and distorted ways. Such selective productions of history in the name of nationalism were also pointed out by Professor Park Sunyoung of Pohang University of Science and Technology. Park analyzed memoirs and papers of the anti Japanese activities of the Manchurian Provincial Committee of the CCP. The CCP portrayed Manchukuo only as the puppet state of imperial Japan and emphasize the anti Japanese struggles. However, the other face of Manchukuo, the side of the nation-state, had been ignored.

Manchukuo had a dual identity, so were Korean residents in Manchuria. Professor Cui Fenglong of the Yanbian History Center illustrated such dual identity of Koreans who were the "second class citizens" of imperial Japan. Previous studies have largely ignored the activities of many pro-Japanese collaborators and Cui suggests that we must examine the whole perspective.

Even the pro- and anti-Japanese dichotomy was based on rather narrowly defined criteria. It is evident in the study of Professor Kim Oegon (Seowon University). Although there appears to be different images of the

lives of Koreans in Manchukuo in different times as seen in literary works after the 1920s, Kim finds the basic type was that of immigrants. Koreans came to Manchuria in search of new life after the Japanese annexation of Korea, and as merchants, tenants, farmers, and second class Japanese citizens, they coped with various social and political environments of Manchukuo. Concrete and vivid descriptions of the life, thought, feelings, social and political attitudes of Korean immigrants are found in the literary works of An Sugil whose life and works were examined by Professor Han Suyong of Dong-A University. Mr. An went to Manchuria in 1924 as a fourteen year old boy and lived as an immigrant and a reporter until he returned to Korea in 1945. Based on his personal experience, An reproduced in his novels the life and consciousness of Koreans who lived as a "second class Japanese" citizen of Manchukuo. His fictions provide the patterns of the lifestyles of Koreans in Manchuria.

The viewpoint shared by Korean scholars at the conference is that we must investigate the past that had been forgotten, hidden, and distorted, and rethink Koreans and Korean society in Manchuria from objective and scientific perspectives. There were also concise reviews of Chinese literature on Manchuria written in the People's Republic of China and the Manchurian literature by Japanese residents of Manchukuo. They will no doubt add strength to the international development of Manchukuo studies.

As early winter rain was falling, the participants gathered at Pusan, the beachhead of Japan's imperialist expansion into East Asia. As they presented and discussed research of Manchukuo and its historical analyses, they shared the sentiments of the potential problem of historical tragedy, self-righteousness, and deception that can result from overly zealous nationalism. They also all agreed that further inter disciplinary and international cooperation are necessary to share the source materials and to pursue the historical truth. In the 21st century, nationalism continues to function as the dynamic energy propelling societies in East Asia. Japan wants a confirmation of its status as the world power; China yearns to recapture its imperial glory as it is becoming the new factory of the world; and Korea fights to achieve unification and enter the ranks of advanced countries. All three states are hurrying toward the future as if they are fighting against time. However, the

20th century history of East Asia clearly tells us that desire for quick national development and feelings of cultural superiority inevitably led to dictatorship and imperial expansionism of Japan.³ To justify the revolution and national development, efficiency and expediency took precedence over democracy and human rights. Thus, the issues of Manchukuo and pan-Asianism are still relevant today, and until the maturity of democracy, human rights, and civil society in East Asia that can neutralize ultra nationalism, they will remain as one of the major historical themes that will be continuously reinterpreted.

³ See the articles "Sigan kwa üi kyôngjaeng 20 segi Tong Asia üi hyôngmyông kwa p'aengch'ang" and "Tong Asia üi silch'e wa ku chônman" in Min Tugi, ed., *Sigan kwa üi kyôngjaeng: Tong Asia kün hyöndaesa nonjip* (Seoul: Yönsae taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2001).