

Research on Liaodongbazhan [遼東八站] and Liaodong Defense Barricade [遼東邊牆]

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The Ming Dynasty occupied Liaodong [遼東] before striving to extend its power by establishing Liaodongdusi [遼東都司], a local defensive headquarters, as a base. The country redesigned the Wei-suo [衛所] system under Liaodongdusi and brought more people to the region in a bid to secure internal stability.

The dynasty, as part of its strategy to advance overseas, devoted greater effort to subjugating the Mongols, appeasing the Jurchens [女真], and establishing Nuergandusi [奴兒干都司] during the Yongle years [永樂年間]. Ming sought to dominate the Mongols and Jurchens; however, the two groups strengthened themselves sufficiently to pose a serious threat to Ming's borders.

The Jurchen Wei-suo [女真衛所], established by Ming in Jurchen territory, did not become subordinate to the dynasty as Nuergandusi had been losing its capability to survive. Liaodongdusi was able to bring only twenty-five wei [衛], military administrative units, under its control, so Ming set up the Liaodong Defense Line [遼東邊牆] to defend Liaodong from both the Mongols and the Jurchens.

Liaodongbazhan [遼東八站], a border area between Joseon [朝鮮] and Ming China, remained neutral as a sort of power vacuum without a defense line, and thus many people continued to escape across the border until the late Ming Dynasty. Ultimately, Liaodongdusi became beyond remedy as its garrison farms were reduced, its horse administration collapsed, and its soldiers either rebelled or deserted, with the result that Liaodong was finally turned over to the Manchu. It appears that Liaodongdusi had reached its limits, being faced with Ming's domestic difficulties as well as challenges from growing neighbors, and that the dynasty had a passive defense policy centered on Liaodongdusi. As regards the literature, it has been claimed in China that Manchuria belonged to Ming. The historical evidence, however, clearly shows that such arguments are disputable.

Keywords: Liaodong, Liaodongdusi, Liaodongbazhan, Liaodong Defense Line, Jurchens, Nuergandusi

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I. Introduction

The People's Republic of China (China) is keenly interested in the history of Liaodong (Manchuria). Both the ancient and the modern history of the region have become (main) parts of Chinese history based on the claim that Liaodong and Zhongyuan had been closely related since history began. China has dismissed the regimes or states established in the northern area—including Old Joseon, Goguryeo, Balhae, Xiongnu, Liao, Chin, Yuan, and Qing [清]—as local regimes in Zhongyuan or its brother peoples. Here, a serious problem lies in the fact that China is distorting the ancient history of this northern region by characterizing its neighbors as insignificant entities.

The History of Liaodong (Manchuria) under the Ming Dynasty is worth studying from the perspective of China's process of incorporating the history of the northern region into its own history. Liaodong in Ming played a significant role in the development of East Asian history. Above all, Liaodong, located conveniently within reach of Joseon, the Jurchens, and the Mongols, was a historic region over which a number of countries

competed fiercely. The Ming Dynasty also rushed to advance into the region during the chaos occasioned by the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, and consequently took over certain parts of it. The dynasty established Liaodongdusi, a local defensive headquarters, and twenty-five *wei* were set up there to protect its capital and defend the eastern border area, so as to stabilize the regime and facilitate overseas expansion.

Research on Liaodong during the Ming period, however, is problematic in this respect. They went so far as to argue that the dynasty ruled not only part of Mongolia but Jurchens occupying wide Manchuria, including the Jilin and Heilong River area, and that these regions were under Ming's control. This does not make sense practically speaking. The area, over which Ming actually exercised some influence, was roughly confined to the jurisdiction of Liaodongdusi, currently Liaoning Province (Cai Yunchen, 1957). The geographic definition of Liaodong under the Ming dynasty is mostly limited to referring to the twenty-five *wei* controlled by Liaodongdusi, thus indicating that the dynasty did not hold much sway over these areas aside from its jurisdiction over Liaodongdusi.

Relying on such views, this paper attempts to analyze and criticize China's far-fetched interpretations of Ming's control over Liaodong and hence to review carefully the historic significance of the region. First, this paper will review certain characteristics of Liaodongdusi, i.e., as a stepping stone in the advance on Liaodong and certain controlled areas under the jurisdiction of the headquarters. The role of Liaodongdusi and the scope of its governance will be studied so as to determine which areas were actually under its influence. The Liaodong Defense Barricade [遼東邊牆], which was built to guard the area after the establishment of Liaodongdusi, will also be examined.

Liaodongbazhan, out of the Liaodong Defense Barricade, was a neutral zone situated between Joseon and Ming China. The area stretched from Joseon's Amnok (Yalu) River, where Ming's territory started, to Yeonsangwan, the area in which the Zahmen [柵門], a border

entrance to Ming territory, had been established (the Zahmen was built in Fenghuangcheng some time after the 1480s). In Yuan, Ichan, a relay postal service station was set up in Liaodongbazhan. This zone also served as the route along which envoys traveled between Joseon and China. In particular, acquiring a fuller understanding of Liaodongbazhan is important when reconsidering the Chinese argument that the Amnok River was the border between Joseon and Ming, and in showing that there was not a border line but rather a border area between the two countries. It also provides fresh insight about the idea that the Amnok and the Duman (Tumen) Rivers were traditionally regarded as a border zone between Ming and Joseon, as well as clarifying that the Jurchen people and their territory were not under Ming's control.

Next, Ming-Jurchen relations are currently being analyzed with regard to the alleged control of the tribe by the dynasty. Chinese researchers have maintained that the Jurchens were in a subordinate relationship to the Ming dynasty, and therefore that Jurchen territory was ruled by Ming, given that the dynasty had established the Jurchens' Wei-suo, which paid tribute to the dynasty. However, Ming's strategy in the Hongwu years of moving forward to the areas around the Amnok, Duman, Songhua and Heilong Rivers had already reached a limit in the early days of the dynasty, as shown in the failed attempt to create the Sawan wei and Tieling wei near the Duman and Amnok Rivers.

In addition, many members of the Jurchen tribes left Ming for the Duman and Amnok river areas to escape from conflict with the dynasty. However, given the assumption that the areas around the two rivers were taken over by Ming, it is hard to explain such an exodus logically. Historical records reveal that most of the Jurchens' Wei-suo, during the Yongle years, were installed based on the tribe's villages, thus indicating that they were different from those in Ming as well as being independent from the dynasty. Contrary to being under Ming influence, the Jianzhou Jurchens, a specific grouping of the Jurchen peoples, gradually gained strength after the Yongle years and, taking advantage of the absence of

Ming's involvement there, intimidated Liaodong. Eventually, it overthrew the Ming Dynasty and founded Hou Chin (後金, Qing).

Last, it is necessary to study Nuergandusi, which has served as the reasoning behind the Ming dynasty's occupation of the Heilong River area. It has been argued that the Ming took over the region because Nuergandusi was situated on the estuary region of the lower Heilong River during the Yongle years. However, based on certain related records concerning the inscription on the Yongningsi, a temple built in the area during the period in question, it was revealed that Ming's attempt to take control of the area was made on a temporal basis and that Nuergandusi, a provisional agency, encountered formidable barriers.

China's key findings on the above-mentioned topics are as follows:

In terms of Liaodongdusi, considerable research findings, such as Yang Yang's *Liaodongdusi during the Ming Dynasty* (1988), have emerged. Most of the Chinese research on this theme focuses on the bright side, including the establishment of the defensive headquarters, the dismissal of the northern tribes, the formation of the twenty-five Wei under the headquarters, and the pursuit of overseas expansion. Further analysis, however, is required of other aspects such as the fall of Liaodongdusi, which lost its influence and role due to internal problems after the Yongle years, the reshuffling period facing difficulties in and out, and its final collapse. The omission served as the grounds for the claim that the Ming dynasty was able to rule over all of Manchuria by operating Liaodongdusi.

In *Research on the Influence of Nuergandusi on the Wei-suo during the Ming Dynasty* (1982) by Yang Yang et al., it is argued that the Jurchen territory, including the Jilin and Heilong River area, was under the jurisdiction of Nuergandusi based on the Unified Multi-Ethnic State Theory of China. Such views should be reviewed, given that Nuergandusi was impotent in the early days of the Ming Dynasty, and

furthermore was incorporated into Liaodongdusi.

Research on the Jianzhou Jurchens includes the following: *An analysis of the Ming-Joseon Discussion on Jurchen-related Issues* (Yu Xiaoguang, 2003, Study of History 1-19) and *A Study on Jianzhou Jurchen-Joseon Relations* (Liu Binghu, 2003, *Journal of Dalian University* 3-24). The Jianzhou Jurchens kept moving around three Jianzhou *Wei* to build up their military strength and intimidate Liaodongdusi, although they had once been absorbed into Ming's Wei-suo system. Ming, being unable to advance further forward, switched to passive defense, as evidenced by the establishment of the Liaodong Defense Barricade. Studies on the barricade can be found in *Research on the Influence of the Great Wall on Liaodong Defense during the Ming Dynasty* (Liu Qian, 1989, Munmul Publishing House). Such works didn't show that the defense barricade functioned as a border to protect the dynasty from foreign powers such as the Mongols and the Jurchens by describing it as an interior defense line of Ming, thus consequently claiming that the Ming Dynasty controlled the Jurchen people and ruled their territory beyond the Liaodong Defense Barricade. Based on this interpretation of the Liaodong Defense Barricade, China argues that all Jurchens was Ming's subordinate Wei-suo, and that the Heilong River belonged to Ming throughout the entire period of the dynasty.

As for research works on Liaodongbazhan, the border area between Joseon and Ming, there are *A Study on the Route by which Joseon Paid Tribute to Ming* (Sun Wei-Guo, 1993), *Occupation of the Dopalcham Region by the Ming Dynasty in 15th Century and the Counteraction of Joseon* (Yu Jae-chun, 2001), and *Occupation of Liaodongdusi and Liaodongbazhan in the Early Ming Dynasty* (Nam Eui-hyeon, 2004). In *A Study on the Route by which Joseon Paid Tribute to Ming*, Sun didn't examine fully the characteristics of the region as a neutral border, with the exception of its function as the route for the exchange of envoys and its location. According to his work, Ming's border with Joseon was not a neutral zone, but the Amnok and Duman Rivers, and such condition was

passed to Qing. However, the other two authors studied Liaodongbazhan as a neutral frontier area, in opposition to the idea that the Amnok River was the border. In this paper, the conflicting views of the two countries will be comprehensively reviewed in terms of the scope and functions of the Liaodong area and other related issues.

II. Weakening Function of Liaodongdusi and Shrinking Liaodong Defense Line

1. Weakening Function of Liaodongdusi

Frequent conflicts with the Mongols blocked the overland route from Liaoxi to Liaodong in the early days of the Ming Dynasty, making the seaway between Shandong and Lyushun the fastest and surest way to reach Liaodong. Liaodongdusi, which had 25 wei at that time (Yang, 1988), served military and political purposes concurrently, but military supplies had to be transported to Liaodong through Shandong during the Hongwu years. According to various reports, an average of 108 million liters of provisions were transported to Liaodong in the early days of the dynasty, since the Mongols remained strong in Liaodong, since the underdeveloped garrison farms actually hindered food self-sufficiency. It was from the Yongle years on that Ming finally paid attention to the development of the farms and raised their productivity.

However, Liaodong saw a gradual decrease in production by as much as 126 million liters during the Yongle years, and this decline continued throughout the Xuande and Zhengtong years. Such a large-scale reduction placed a heavy burden on Ming's frontier policy, as the productivity of the garrison farms was supposed to be an important factor in military defense (Zhang Shizun, 2002).

Furthermore, the population in the Liaodongdusi jurisdiction was falling (from 500,000 in the early Ming days), sapping its military strength. This was mainly because the number of Wei-suo soldiers

decreased as the Wei-suo system was gradually destroyed. In 1488, the first year of the Hongzhi Reign, Yu Zijun, the Secretary of Department of Defense, proposed the enlistment of military personnel to address the population loss. Such a proposal indicates that deserting soldiers were the primary reason for the fall in the military population around the border area during the Hongzhi Reign (1488-1505).¹ According to the records, the number of servicemen in Liaodong fell from 190,000 in the early Ming period to 70,000 in the 16th year of the Hongzhi Reign (1503), indicating that Liaodong suffered a serious decline in its population during the Ming Dynasty.²

Officers' confiscation of private land for their own good³ and the imposition of heavy forced labor⁴ were the main factors behind the mass desertions. The speed of population decline in Liaodongdusi, which started in the mid Ming period, accelerated in the later years of the dynasty. During the Tianqi years (1621-1627), at least 100,000 people left Shanhaiguan to avoid the chaos, including the wars and rebellions in Liaodong.⁵

Liaodongdusi had been losing its function since the middle period of the Ming Dynasty due to the fall in population and the drop in farms' productivity caused by widespread desertion.

Failing horse administration was another major contributor to the decline in Liaodongdusi's (Nam, 2008) military power. The number of

¹ *Annals of Emperor Xiaozong of the Ming Dynasty* [明孝宗實錄; Mingxiaocong shilu], 1st year of the Hongzhi Reign (1487).

² *Annals of Emperor Xiaozong of the Ming Dynasty* [明孝宗實錄; Mingxiaocong shilu], 16th year of the Hongzhi Reign (1502).

³ *Annals of Emperor Xiaozong of the Ming Dynasty* [明孝宗實錄; Mingxiaocong shilu], 16th year of the Hongzhi Reign (1502).

⁴ *Annals of Emperor Xiaozong of the Ming Dynasty* [明孝宗實錄; Mingxiaocong shilu], 12th year of the Hongzhi Reign (1498).

⁵ *Annals of Emperor Xizong of the Ming Dynasty* [明熹宗實錄; Mingxizong shilu], 2nd year of the Tianqi Reign [天啓] (1621).

horses reserved for the purposes of war fell to 1/6 and then to 1/12 of the figure recorded in the early days of Ming, during the Chenghua years and the Jiajing years, respectively. It shows that Liaodongdusi was not able to expand overseas and that it failed to function properly during the later years of the Ming dynasty under these circumstances (Zhang, 1997). The growing strength of the Mongols and the Jurchens, along with the steady decline of Liaodongdusi, left the defensive headquarters witnessing reduced Liaodong Defense Barricade.

2. Reduced Liaodong Defense Barricade and the Shift to Passive Defense

Chinese researchers have stated, with regard to the Liaodong Defense Barricade, that Ming started building the 880km-long defensive barricade along the boundaries of Liaodong, Liaoxi, and Liaohetao in 1442, adding that the newly formed barricade built up the defensive capability of Liaodongdusi and contributed to the advance on the Jurchens and the Mongols.

As shown in studies on the Liaodong Defense Barricade, we can easily imagine that the defense line was not treated as a national boundary in China. That is, the Ming dynasty had made efforts to enlarge its jurisdiction by encroaching upon the Mongol and Jurchen territories, with Liaodongdusi and the twenty-five *wei* serving as the base, as mentioned above. As part of these efforts, Ming conquered the Mongols, attempted to take over the Heilong River area by establishing Nuergandusi, and also established the Jianzhou *wei*. These endeavors were, however, unsuccessful due to the growth of foreign powers, and thus were discontinued. This serves a reason that Liaodongdusi was transformed into a new defense system. As a last resort measure to protect Liaodongdusi, the dynasty came up with a plan to build the Liaodong Defense Barricade, connecting Shanhaiguan, Kaiyuan and the Amnok River sequentially in an M-shape. This indicated a U-turn in its

foreign policy from overseas expansion to passive defense. Against this backdrop, the Liaodong Defense Barricade served as a national borderline (Zhang, 2001).

The defense line was classified into three areas, namely the Liaoxi, Liaohetao, and Liaodong barricades (Li Zhiting, 2003). The Liaodong section was unable to function as a solid defensive line not only because of its considerable length but also because of the drop in the productivity of the garrison farms and the high number of deserters in the mid and late Ming periods. Arguments for the contraction of the Liaodong section were frequently advanced, but the idea was not put into practice.

Thus, the Liaodong Defense Barricade was the border (Noh Gi-sik, 2008). The Zahmen, including the Fenghuangchengbao, as the passage in and out of the barricade, stood near the border, and thus left the barbarian Mongols and Jurchens beyond Ming's influence. The shortened defensive line is indicative of the fact that Liaodongdusi had become incompetent during the mid-to-late Ming period. The Liaodong Defense Barricade was designed to serve as the national border as it had been built to strengthen Liaodongdusi: consequently, the Mongols and the Jurchens were able to avoid occupation by the Ming dynasty.

As regards Joseon, Liaodongbazhan, stretching from the Amnok River to Fenghuangcheng, was located outside of the Liaodong Defense Barricade, and the Zahmen, the entrance to Ming territory, was built in Fenghuangcheng in the 1480s. As a result, Ming controlled the inside of the defense line, while the exterior remained free of its influence. The Liaodong Defense Barricade, rather than the Amnok and Duman Rivers, was the actual border between Joseon and Ming, and thus Liaodongbazhan remained a border area or a frontier (Nam, 2006).

III. Liaodongbazhan and the Conflict between Joseon and Ming

Liaodongbazhan, referred to as the border or frontier area between

Joseon and Ming, was located in the region beyond the Liaodong Defense Barricade. Studies on the region are of crucial importance as regards the issues of border crossing and the national boundaries between Joseon and Ming. Despite its importance, however, China has failed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the region in terms of Joseon-Ming relations, except with regard to geographic location and occupation of the area. In Chinese studies, Liaodongbazhan—which is on the opposite side of the Amnok River—has generally been regarded as falling under Ming’s Jurisdiction, with the river being set as the dynasty’s border line with Joseon.

According to historical records, Joseon people believed that they had stepped into Ming territory upon passing through the Zahmen in Fenghuangcheng. The area from the Amnok River to the Fenghuangcheng Zahmen was the border area between the two dynasties.⁶ *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* [朝鮮王朝實錄, Joseon wangjo sillok] state that the region lying about 70km east of Liaodong was facing China with the national boundary in Yeonsangwan, and that Liaodongbazhan, the area from the Amnok River to Yeonsangwan, was left unoccupied as a buffer zone between Joseon and Ming in case of conflict.⁷ After the 1480s, the Zahmen was transferred from Yeonsangwan to Fenghuangcheng, which was occupied by Ming, making the Fenghuangcheng-Amnok River region the border area between the two dynasties.⁸

After the Zahmen was moved to Fenghuangcheng, and hence the distance from Joseon shortened, Liaodongdusi sent an official letter to

⁶ *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* [朝鮮王朝實錄; Joseon wangjo sillok], 8th year of the Yeonsan’s (燕山) Reign (1502).

⁷ *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* [朝鮮王朝實錄; Joseon wangjo sillok], 12th year of the Seongjong’s (成宗) Reign (1481).

⁸ *Annals of the Joseon Dynasty* [朝鮮王朝實錄; Joseon wangjo sillok], 20th year of King Sejong’s (世宗) Reign (1438).

the dynasty asserting that some soldiers from Uiju had secretly crossed the river to fish and stolen local products from the residents of Fenghuangcheng, provoking public unrest. It asked the dynasty to address the issue.⁹ In the second year of the Hongzhi Reign, Joseon was asked again by Liaodongdusi to prevent its soldiers in Uiju from crossing the river without Ming's permission.¹⁰ As the smuggling of horses and cows prevailed in Liaodongbazhan, near Fenghuangcheng, the region began witnessing a growing number of troubles, including the threat posed by the Jurchens. For Joseon's part, the border-crossing issue was also a thorny problem because it led to a population decrease in the frontier area, as well as various other side effects.¹¹

Ming marched eastward to Fenghuangcheng, passing via Yeonsangwan, mainly as an attempt to defend itself from the Jurchens. The dynasty needed a new military base nearby and chose Fenghuangcheng for that reason, as the northern tribe was advancing on the Amnok River at that time. Then, outposts such as Tangzhan were established/the outpost at Tangzhan was established to protect Fenghuangcheng, and a fortress known as Jiangyantaibao was built on the Amnok River. These strongholds were too small and vulnerable to play an effective role, so commanders were often killed in fights with the Jurchens. Such conditions invited repeated attacks by the Jurchens and much plundering of the region.

The islets in the lower reaches of the Amnok River were important with regard to border crossing. Many Liaodong people were illegally residing on those islets, causing conflicts with Ming. One of the islets,

⁹ *Annals of King Seongjong* [成宗實錄; Seongjong sillok], 20th year of Seongjong's reign (1489).

¹⁰ *Annals of King Seongjong* [成宗實錄; Seongjong sillok], 20th year of Seongjong's reign (1489).

¹¹ *Annals of King Seongjong* [成宗實錄; Seongjong sillok], 25th year of Seongjong's reign (1494).

Sindo or Jangdo, was close to the estuary of the Amnok River, and so a considerable number of Liaodong people were living there.¹² They farmed, fished and collected salt for a living, and strongly refused to leave the island (Noh, 1997). Likewise, Liaodongbazhan was maintained until the late Ming Dynasty sustaining problems, while, under the Qing, Fenghuangcheng continued to serve as the gateway to the dynasty from Joseon. In other words, the border between Ming and Joseon was not the Amnok River but Liaodongbazhan.

IV. Nuergandusi and the Heilong River Area

As already mentioned, the establishment of Nuergandusi is most frequently cited as grounds for the alleged occupation of the Heilong River area by Ming. Those who argue that the area was under the control of Ming seek justification from the fact that development of the Nuergan area began during the Taizu Reign and that Nuergandusi was set up during the Yongle years. They also claim that many of the chiefs of the Jurchen tribes, such as Jianzhou and Yeren, chose to be subordinate to Ming because of the function Nuergandusi performed.

According to their view, the seven visits paid by an envoy, Yi Shi-ha, to Nuergan at the emperor's behest, when Nuergandusi was being established, represented the exercise of national sovereignty over the region, and the trade between the tribes in the region and the dynasty, namely tribute, was thus a kind of special taxation. Such an argument led to the exaggerated conclusion that Nuergandusi made a great contribution to the unification of the frontier and the central region during the Ming Dynasty.

As such, most such studies focus primarily on the background to

¹² *Annals of King Jungjong* [中宗實錄; Jungjong sillok], 25th year of Jungjong's reign (1530).

the creation of Nuergandusi, but omit the fact that the defensive headquarters had already become useless by the early Ming period. The findings consequently give a distorted view of Nuergandusi, implying that the defensive headquarters had survived until the late Ming period, thereby influencing the Heilong River and Jilin areas.

Such views can be rejected by the counterevidence provided by the Nuergandusi-related monumental inscriptions of Yongningsi. According to these inscriptions, the military was sent to Nuergandusi nine or ten times, but the soldiers were not stationed there. Whenever necessary, the military would march to Nuergan, crossing the Songhua River, stay for a while to fulfill their duties, and then return to Liaodong after completing their work, leaving only a minimal number of soldiers behind.

More importantly, Nuergandusi was only a temporary institution rather than a standing authority in the region. It showed significant differences with Liaodongdusi in terms of its scale, structure, and characteristics. The inscriptions of Yongningsi state that the officials sent to Nuergan were mostly low-ranking military officers, and that some junior civil officials stationed there were merely responsible for the purpose of simple documentation and official communication, and did not exercise authority in Liaodongdusi (Nam, 2007). So, the Jurchens in the Heilong River and Jilin areas went directly to Liaodong or Beijing, rather than through Nuergandusi, for the purpose of trade with Ming, as Nuergandusi did not have permanent control over the Jurchen area.¹³

China has persistently argued that such a provisional agency did in fact have jurisdiction over the tribes in the wide area comprising the Heilong River and Jilin. However, as shown above, it remains questionable as to whether such an argument can be deemed reasonable without more in-depth studies being conducted.¹⁴ In reality, Nuergandusi

¹³ *Annals of the Ming Dynasty* [明實錄; Ming shilu], 1st year of the Yongle Reign (1402).

¹⁴ *Annals of the Ming Dynasty* [明實錄; Ming shilu], 7th year of the Yongle Reign (1408).

and the Jurchens' Wei-suo were not in a subordinate relationship, thus implying that their claims are logically not convincing.

Nuergandusi disappeared into the mists of history in the fourth year of the Xuande Reign (1429), during which the shipyards on the Songhua River were shut down¹⁵ and the dispatch of troops to the Heilong River region was abandoned due to the difficulties of shipbuilding, excessive spending, lower returns, and inconvenient transportation. The Jurchens, however continued to grow.

V. Changes in the Relations between the Ming Dynasty, Joseon and the Jurchens

Joseon and Ming had striven to appease the Jurchens since the early Ming period. Chinese studies advance the following five points about the Joseon-Jurchen relationship during the Ming period: First, Joseon took advantage of the unrest in the early Ming period to encroach upon Jurchen territory and control the tribe; Second, Joseon clashed with Ming concerning control over the Jurchens during the reign of King Taejong, when the Ming Emperor Yongle advanced into the region and appeased the people; Third, Ming set up 130 wei-suo in the Heilong and Songhua River regions as well as Nuergandusi in 1409, and exercised jurisdiction over the region despite the conflict with Joseon. This indicates that Joseon's granting of official posts to Jurchen people does not necessarily mean that the dynasty possessed the tribe's territory. Rather, the bilateral relationship was nothing more than an unsubstantial and informal dependency; Fourth, Ming's return of ten Jurchen-related units to Joseon during the Chengzu Reign was a significant concession; Lastly, the tribe was under the influence of Ming although the Jurchens' tribal grounds were located on Joseon soil.

¹⁵ *Ming shilu* [明實錄; Annals of the Ming Dynasty], 10th year of the Xuande Reign (1434).

Studies conducted in China naturally admitted the difference between the 25 *wei* based on Liaodongdusi and the Jurchen Wei-suo, but they describe the latter as being subordinate to Ming and the Jurchen territory as being under the dynasty's jurisdiction on the grounds that Ming established the Jurchen Wei-suo and received tribute from them. So, we need first to explore the structure, background, and characteristics of the Jurchen Wei-suo in order to point out the problems with such studies.

Ming's priority was the swift military reshuffling of Liaodong and the enforcement of the Wei-suo system when pursuing its policy of expansion to Liaodong during the Hongwu years.¹⁶ The dynasty also regarded Jurchen territory as a potential area under its considerable influence¹⁷ because the area east of Liaodongdusi was important as the gateway to Mongolia and as a defensive wall to protect Liaodongdusi. Strategically, it was a sort of hub connecting Mongolia to the Duman, Amnok, Songhua and Heilong Rivers, so a new crisis posed by the increasing power of the Mongol and Jurchens may have been brought about by Ming's abandoning of the strategic regions.

Most of the Jurchens in the Duman and Amnok River areas at that time were involved in compulsory service for Joseon or were included in the dynasty's register. Under such circumstances, Ming was preparing to advance on the Jurchens in order to keep Joseon in check, to prevent its expansion into the region, to separate Joseon from the tribe, and to appeal to the tribe.

It indicated that Ming had already started its attempt to take over the Jurchens during the Hongwu years. However, Liaodongdusi was unable to extend its power over the Tieling *wei* (Park Won-ho, 2006), Sawan *wei*, and Dongning *wei*, which were deliberately built in the

¹⁶ Liaodongzhi (遼東志), Vol. 5.

¹⁷ *Annals of Emperor Taizong of the Ming Dynasty* [明太宗實錄; Mingtaizong shilu], 7th year of the Yongle Reign (1408).

region so as to be close to the Jurchens and to Joseon. In addition, food supplies were hindered by the long distance. The three *wei* were finally transferred to Liaodongdusi in the 21st year of the Hongwu Reign (1388), failing to move forward to Duman and Amnok Rivers. In short, the effort to advance on the Jurchens came to nothing during this period.¹⁸ Although part of the Jurchen territory was included in Ming's *wei-suo* thanks to persistent bribes and diplomatic contacts, the Jurchen *wei-suo* enjoyed political and military independence, unlike those in the inner areas of the dynasty.

The Jurchen *wei-suo* were basically organized in a different way from those in Ming's vast inland territory. Their functions were somewhat unique. As the Jurchen *wei-suo* were based in independent Jurchen villages, they had the same structure as those of traditional villages. The name 'wei-suo' did not mean much. Therefore, it was free from Ming intervention. The rule of 5,600 people per *wei-suo* was of course not applied to the Jurchen *Wei-suo*, in contrast to the rest of the *wei* in Ming territory.

The Jurchens joined the *wei-suo* system because they could enjoy tangible benefits such as official posts, daily necessities through commercial trade, and economic advantages. In conclusion, the establishment of the Jurchen *wei-suo* was the combined result of the Jurchens' economic and Ming's political efforts to prevent the tribe from being united.

As mentioned earlier, the Jurchen *wei-suo* were not subordinate to Ming due to the dynasty's failure to expand into the region. The Jurchen *wei-suo* were not part of the formal *wei-suo* system, but rather organization of the tribe based on its own villages. They had totally different characteristics from the inland *wei*, having 5,600 members each, and were established by uniting the tribes in the mid and late Ming

¹⁸ *Annals of the Ming Dynasty* [明實錄; Ming shilu], 19th year of the Hongwu Reign (1386).

periods, intimidating Liaodongdusi instead of being under Ming's influence. Therefore, the argument that the Jurchen territory was occupied by Ming as a result of the overseas expansion of Liaodongdusi should be reconsidered.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed some previous research, paying special attention to Liaodongbazhan, the Liaodong Defense Barricade, and other Liaodong-related subjects during the Ming period. On its founding, Ming tried to expand its influence to Liaodong, ended up occupying part of the region, and established Liaodongdusi. However, Ming's attempt to take over the Mongols and the Jurchens failed despite the reorganization of Liaodongdusi's operational system. Liaodongdusi, which had 25 *wei*, was unable to perform a sound military and defensive function due to the unsuccessful garrison farm system and the desertion of soldiers from the *wei-suo*. It was also unable to prevent the Mongols and Jurchens from growing.

Large-scale expansion into alien territories was not sufficiently strong to weaken the Mongols or appease the Jurchens, so the Jurchen territory did not fall under Ming occupation. Nuergandusi, built on the estuary region of the lower Heilong River, was put together with Liaodongdusi, as Nuergandusi was no more than a temporary military agency and lacked a proper system, unlike Liaodongdusi. The temporary agency lacked the necessary authority, and therefore was unable to bring the Jurchen territory under its control. As it shows, Ming's attempt to expand its territory was almost in vain.

The Liaodong Defense Barricade, facing the threat posed by the Mongols and the Jurchens, become a sort of guard to protect Liaodongdusi. The defense barricade was largely formed along rugged terrain and made from strong bricks. The Liaodong Defense Barricade, as the last line of defense of Liaodongdusi, was clearly Ming's border with the Mongols

and Jurchens. Therefore, Jurchen territory lying beyond the barricade and Liaodongbazhan, the buffer zone with Joseon, was not controlled by Ming.

The Zahmen, the border entrance situated on the Liaodong Defense Barricade, was not built in the Amnok River area. In the 1480s it was positioned to facilitate the exchange of envoys in Yeonsangwan, and later in Fenghuangcheng. The area from the river to Fenghuangcheng served as a military buffer zone between Joseon and Ming. The Amnok River could not have constituted Ming's national boundary with Joseon since Liaodongbazhan was the border area.

The Duman River was the border between Joseon and the Jurchen tribes, not the one between the two dynasties, because the Jurchen territory was not Ming territory, either. The frontier area suffered serious problems, including the flight of Ming and Joseon people across the border, and the plunder and threat by the Jurchens. When Hou Chin was founded and took over Liaodongbazhan, the region entered a new phase. Historically, its governing jurisdiction was not clear: it was subordinate neither to Joseon nor to Ming. But Ming eventually fell under Hou Chin's control as a result of the ravages of war in the late Ming and early Qing period, and most of the Jurchen people entered the region after Qing was built. This explains why Liaodongbazhan remained as the border area between Joseon and Qing. At the same time, it also raises strong concern regarding the previous argument that Joseon's national boundary with Ming and Qing was constituted by the Amnok and Duman Rivers.

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