Special Feature

The Significance of Perceptions of Baekdusan in Baekdu-related Myths

Cho Hyun-soul

The Review of Korean Studies Volume 13 Number 4 (December 2010): 33-52

Introduction

Baekdusan is more than a natural geographical space of 42 degrees of northern latitude and 128 degrees east longitude. It is also an imagined geographical space reconstructed by the images of stories on Baekdusan. To put it differently, it is a symbolic space. My interest in Baekdusan as an imagined space stems from the mountain's added dimension of significance as a place of worship by the local population.

An important aspect of Baekdusan's imagined geographies is its mythological component. Myth not only has the power to ingrain, through its aura of sacredness, certain sorts of images upon the myth's protagonist or the places in which the myth takes place, but also can imprint, upon the audience, imagined images, as produced through the processes of interpreting and introducing myths. The case of the debate over the Dangun myth during the 1920s is a useful example of the latter. To put it differently, new sorts of myths can be engendered through discursive processes. Baekdusan can be an apt case example of such gendering of new myths. Therefore, I believe that it is difficult to analyze the popular perception of Baekdusan without a discussion of its myths and mythical perceptions.

An important factor that cannot be omitted in discussing myths related to Baekdusan is the fact that the Koreans were not the only ones who considered Baekdusan sacred. Tungusic peoples who trace their ancestry in the Sushen-Wuji-Mohe-Jurchen-Manchu line also have perceived Baekdusan as a sacred space. The Manchus and their Jurchen ancestors, in particular, treated Baekdusan (or Changbaishan) sacredly, as the place of their origin. If the Korean people, who trace their ancestry from the Gojoseon-Three Kingdoms (or Four Kingdoms)-Unified Silla and Balhae-Goryeo-Joseon line, perceive Baekdusan to be the birthplace of the mythical founder Dangun, the Jurchens and Manchus who founded the Jin and Qing dynasties also treated Baekdusan as a sacred place from which their founders originated. Therefore, treating both groups' perceptions of Baekdusan by may be useful in accurately assessing our perception of Baekdusan.

As a related point, I believe that there is a need to use the concept of "geographical exteriority" as a basis for assessing perception of Baekdusan.

This work was supported by the Academy of Korean Studies Grant (AKSR2009-03).

For the Korean people, since the time of Unified Silla, Baekdusan was almost always a place outside of political boundaries. This condition is different from that of the Jurchens and Manchus of the Jin and the Qing, who essentially operated around Baekdusan. It is worth considering if such "geographical exteriority" increased psychological intimacy. A sense of origin as well as desire to recover the "lost" territory may have contributed in creating a certain sort of image of that place. This issue, however, is difficult to discuss without a comparative discussion using Manchu oral myths and the Jin and the Qing myths of their national founding.

Jin (2000), Bae (2007), Son (2008), Kim (2009) have researched perceptions of Baekdusan using literary sources such as historical records, maps, travelogues, and poems. Research on Baekdusan myths and fables have also been put together (Jeong 1992; Seo 2001; Cho 2003; Cho 2006). Ethnic differences in myths related to Baekdusan, however, have not been discussed—even though such a comparative study is necessary in order to locate our own perception in the larger context. In particular, there were no attempts to locate places where mythical memories meet modern nationalist discourses. In order to fill in these gaps in research, this paper attempts to introduce concepts such as "imagined geography" and "geographical exteriority" in comparing the two ethnic bodies of myths so that the flow and power of perceptions of Baekdusan can be located.

Pyeonnyeon Tongrok, a Coordinate in Mythical Perception of Baekdusan

Kim Gwaneui, a man from the era of Goryeo King Euijong, left interesting material in *Pyeonnyeon tongrok*. This record, which made its way into prestigious sources such as *Goryeosa* and *Goryeo segye* in an edited form, successfully displays the Goryeo myth of national founding. Although the Goryeo myth of national founding differs from its predecessors, it can be categorized the same way in that it argues for the case of Goryeo being established, by Wang Geon, as a divinely ordained and sacred country. In the section on Wang Geon's third great-grandfather Ho Gyeong, it states, "the self-proclaimed "sacred bone" General Ho Gyeong went on to live at Buso Mountain from Baekdusan." Through this one line, Goryeo's founding gets

connected to Baekdusan. What is the purpose of this record?

Related to this point, I have pointed out earlier that *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* was written in a new way of forging a myth of national founding. By "new way," I am referring to the usage of the theory of geomancy in myths (Cho 2000). The theory of geomancy emphasizes the so-called "dragon pulse" through which the earth's energy flows. Through this flow, geomancy establishes *josan* (ancestral mountain), *jongsan* (clan's mountain), and *jusan* (main mountain). This "dragon pulse" in *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* is written as flowing through Baekdusan, Ogwansan, and Busosan. Busosan is Songaksan, the "main mountain" of the Goryeo capital of Gaegyeong. In other words, *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* is arguing that the earth's energy flows from Baekdusan to Songaksan, which made the Gaegyeong-centered founding of Goryeo feasible and natural. Wang Geon's ancestor Ho Gyeong, according to this logic, has to descend from Baekdusan regardless of where he actually lived his life. That is the reason why the Silla's "sacred bone" general came down to Busosan from Baekdusan. Regardless of the actual truth of the matter, the important factor here is the mythical reality.

This mythical recording in *Pyeonnyeon tongrok*, in addition to demonstrating that the Goryeo myth of national founding was based on the logic of geomancy, shows that the knowledge of geomancy was widely circulated as a way of understanding geography at the time. As is widely known, geomancy is a representative East Asian study of physical geography. Its significance, however, goes beyond the realm of scholarship. As can be seen in the concept of "ancestral mountain," there is a factor of imagination. Once Baekdusan gets categorized as the "ancestral mountain," all other mountains around it become subordinated through the flow of "dragon pulse." Baekdusan naturally becomes a sacred place through this "imagined geography." At the same time, through these connections, this flow of the "energy" reinforces the conceptual image of a single national territory. As will be mentioned later on, maps such as *Goryeodo* demonstrate this effect.

Although *Goryeo segye* (quoted below) records that geomancy was first brought to Korea by Do Seon, who imported the concept first created by the Chinese monk Yi Xing (683-727), further corroboration would be helpful.

A Dongli Mountain priest Do Seon learned a law of geography (geomancy)

> during his trip to Tang-dynasty China. He climbed Baekdusan. He went to Gokryeong and saw Sejo building a new house there. Do Seon said, "Why are you planting ginseng at a place where millet should be planted?" Do Seon then immediately left the place. When Sejo's wife heard of this and notified Sejo, Sejo quickly pursued Do Seon and met with him. … Do Seon predicted that Sejo's wife would give birth to a divine being and name him Wang Geon. (Kim 1991:53)

However, an interest in geomancy certainly existed in the Three Kingdoms period. As can be seen in geomancy texts such as *Doseonbigi*, geomancy was clearly popular during late Silla. I believe that geomantic perspective, circulated by the Buddhist monks of the day since the Unified Silla era, deeply influenced the people's perspective on national territory. I also believe that the concept that Silla had unified the Three Kingdoms into one Korea, formed in the era of Unified Silla, was closely related to geomancy in Korea. The perspective of "dragon pulse," as discussed earlier, closely matches the perspective of *Samguk yusa*—which draws a national lineage from Gojoseon to small kingdoms and the Three Hans and then to the Three Kingdoms.

It is important to note that this "imagined geography" which considers Baekdusan as an "ancestral mountain" is different from the older mythical perceptions of Baekdusan. As is known, Baekdusan is often talked about in relation to the Gojoseon and Goguryeo myths of national founding. Let's first examine the case of Taebaeksan in the Dangun myth, as recorded in *Samguk yusa*. There has been quite a lot of dissension on the issue of the truth of Taebaeksan. Il Yeon described Taebaeksan as Myohyangsan according his Buddhist perspective. Yi Seunghyu designated Asadalsan, where Dangun became a mountain god after moving his capital, as Guwolsan in *Jewang ungi*. Later thinkers such as An Jeongbok (in his *Dongsa gangmok*), Buk Ae (in his *Gyuwon sahwa*), Choe Namseon during the 1920s—as well as modern scholars Yang Judong and Yi Byeongdo—considered Taebaeksan to be Baeksan—the natural geographical Baekdusan. On the other hand, however, there is also an opinion that Baekdusan is not a proper noun and could be the northern region's Daejinsan (Kim 1974:4). Although I generally agree with the perspective that sees Baekdusan as a common noun, I believe that the more pressing question on Baekdusan perspectives lies elsewhere. This is same for the myth of Jumong. According to Yi Gyubo's *Gusamguksa*-based *Dongmyeongwangpyeon*, the place the son

of the heaven Haemosu landed on riding Oryonggeo was Ungsimsan. The place where Cheongha (Abrok River) Sin Habaek's daughter Yu Hwa met Haemosu was the Ungsim Lake of Ungsimsan. According to *Guksa goryeo bongi*, which *Samguk yusa* later quoted, the place where Haemosu allured Yu Hwa was a house nearby Abrok River and Ungsinsan. It is therefore likely that Ungsimsan (Ungsinsan) is Baekdusan.

Regardless of whether Taebaeksan or Unsimsan is Baekdusan, or Baekdusan is a single mountain or several, the more important fact is that a mountain was a sacred place for the people who lived around it. As is well known, the sacred mountains of Silla are numerous. Yangsan is considered sacred as the birthplace of Bak Hyeokgeose and Seoak is considered sacred as the mountain where the mother of Bak Hyeokgeose Seosul (Seondo) was enshrined. Dongak is also considered sacred as the place where Seoktalhae sat after death. For Garak (or Daegaya), Gujibong is considered sacred as the place where King Suro descended from heaven. According to another myth, Gayasan is considered scared as the place where originator of Geumgwan Gaya was enshrined. Such places are all mountains where the locals lived—reflecting a general tendency of the ancients to mountain worship. To put it differently, Baekdusan was considered sacred by the people of Gojoseon and Goguryeo who lived around it, not by the peoples of Silla and Garak who lived far away from it.

This point can also be confirmed by the Jin and the Qing myths of national founding. The Jin dynasty founder Kim Hambo declared Baekdusan to be his birthplace. Emperor Shizong, his descendant, ordered a ceremony appointing Baekdusan as an emperor (*Kaitian dahong shengdi*) in 1193. The reason why Kim Hambo, a man from Silla, emphasized Baekdusan most likely had to do with the Jurchen people's worship of Baekdusan. Puguliyungsun, the supposed founder of the Qing, is said to have born at the Poiholi Lake of Baekdusan to a fairy who came down from the heaven to bathe. Baekdusan is therefore also a sacred place for the Manchus—the place their ancestor was born. The Jurchens and Manchus lived around Baekdusan and worshiped it as the place where their ancestor was born or as a sacred space. This perception of Baekdusan is not dissimilar to the relationship the peoples of Gojoseon and Goguryeo had with Baekdusan.

In this context, a more important factor in our perception of Baekdusan is how Baekdusan was transformed, from a sacred mountain of provincial

status during the time of Gojoseon and Goguryeo, into a sacred mountain of the Korean people at large. In the process of this transformation, I believe that the Goryeo myth of national founding as recorded in *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* plays an important role as a catalyst. Gojoseon became established as the predecessor of the Samhan and the Three (of four) Kingdoms through the concept of the "unification" of the three kingdoms. In a similar way, the notion that the Korean peninsula makes up a single national state became established through the geomantic concept of "ancestral mountain." This notion is evident in the *Pyeonnyeon tongrok*, which Kim Gwaneui produced using a collection of private family documents, in its rendering of Baekdusan as an "ancestral mountain" out of which the royal family of Goryeo descended.

Related to the point above, the following records on maps are worth noting:

> Although *Goryeodo* appeared for the first time since the unification of the three kingdoms, nobody knows who made it. Looking at the mountain range, it all starts from Baekdu, and comes southward in a zigzag fashion. The range bumps up near Cheollyeong, becoming Pungaksan. It goes further down and engenders Taebaeksan, Sobaeksan, Jukryeong, Gyerib, Samharyeong, and Chuyangsan. (Seo 1975:340).

> Jirisan is also called Duryusan. It stems from the north's Baekdusan, and its mounds and gorges continue down to Sakbang County. As they are entangled for thousands of *li*, its circumference touches ten towns. It takes a minimum of a month to explore its contours. (Yi 1978)

The first source is from *Dongmunseon*. Although *Dongmunseon* is an edited poetry and writing collection compiled by Seo Geojeong during the era of King Seongjong in Joseon, it suffices in confirming the existence and circulation of the map *Goryeodo*. According to the quote's explanation, *Goryeodo* depicts the concept of a Baekdusan-centered national territory—which later conceptualized around Baekdudaegan in late Joseon. Yi Inro's *Pahanjib*, published in 1260, also has an explanation on Jirisan using a similar logic. Jirisan's geography is explained while placing Baekdusan as the origin. Through such sources, we can be confident that maps such as Goryeodo must have been produced in early Goryeo and this conceptual image was well in place by the time of Yi Inro. The perception of territory in Goryeodo does not appear to be different from geomantic perceptions

discussed earlier. Could we not conclude that by early Goryeo, when the founding of Goryeo was legitimized by geomancy and this ideology of legitimization was in circulation through *Goryeodo*, Baekdusan was already considered sacred as the place of origin of the royal family as well as that of the national territory?

The "Imagined geography" of Baekdusan, as created during early Goryeo, continued down to the first years of the modern era without much alteration. Early Joseon had succeeded the Goryeo ritual and carried out the rites for Baekdusan every spring and fall at Yeongheung. However, this practice was written out in the process of rewriting the state rituals during the era of Sejong—the reason being that Baekdusan was located outside of its borders (Song 2007). That it was written out does not necessarily mean the popular perception itself was erased, and evidence of that can be found in Yang Seongji's remonstrance during the Sejo era asking for its re-inclusion. It appears that this perception of Baekdusan persisted. Increase of interest in Baekdusan by late Joseon *silhak* (practical learning) scholars and the reinstatement of Baekdusan as an object of state worship in 1767 were all possible due to persistence of this perception of Baekdusan.

In this way, it may be more appropriate to view the new understanding of Baekdusan among modern intellectuals as a reinterpretation of tradition instead of something entirely new. The case of Choe Namseon in the 1920s is most representative. Interpretation of Baekdusan as "the immortal origin of Korean nation" in his *Baekdusan geunchamgi* (1927) was a fusion of pre-modern imaginings of Baekdusan with modern nationalism. It also was his attempt to represent the results of his active interpretation of history of Gojoseon and the Dangun myth—about which he argued with Japanese scholars around the year 1925—to the geographical space of Baekdusan (Bok 2005). In this context, I believe that *Pyeonnyeon tongrok*, written by Kim Gwaneui in the mid-twelfth century, is sufficient to be read as the catalyst of mythical perception on Baekdusan.

The Context of Oral Myth and the Baekdusan's Image in Myths of National Founding

Although *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* is certainly important in its role as a catalyst,

geomancy is not sufficient to explain the mythical importance of Baekdusan in its entirety. If *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* granted an important significance to Baekdusan, there must have been fertile mythical soil that already treated Baekdusan as a sacred place. Popular perception was necessary in order for the myth of national founding to be effective. To examine these perceptions, we must first return to oral myths related to Baekdusan.

In the areas around Baekdusan, there are a number of myths on the founding of Baekdusan that are continuously passed down to this day. Let's first examine two representative mythological stories of heroism.

> *Cheonji*: The areas around Baekdusan were once a prosperous and fertile place. The area became uninhabitable when a black dragon appeared and swung swords of fire—drying up the crops and farmland. A small country nearby Baekdusan had a beautiful and talented princess, who declared that she will marry the hero who can kill the havoc-causing black dragon. A young man with the surname Baek had searched for water to help the peasants a number of times, but was consistently frustrated by the dragon that turned each water source into a stone mound. The princess told Baek that he could defeat the dragon if he drinks the water of *Okjangcheon* for a hundred days. After Baek drank the water for one hundred days, the princess reappeared. The two went to the mountain's top and began to dig. Baek created a mountain peak with a single shovelful. That is how the sixteen peaks of Baekdusan were created. Underground water poured out of the ground dug by Baek, and Baek and the princess celebrated together happily. Hearing this, the black dragon rushed over and attacked Baek. Struck by the sword of fire, Baek was knocked unconscious. The princess grabbed Baek and flew over to *Okjangcheon*. Recharged after a hundred days of rehabilitation, Baek fought the black dragon again. When Baek struck the dragon's sword of fire, the sword flew to the north and landed on a mound. The place became a water source. Having lost the sword of fire, the dragon escaped to the East Sea. Baek and the princess built a crystal place in the mountain lake of Baekdu and lived there together. They repulsed the black dragon every time it showed up again. (Li and Choe 1989:1-7)

> *Yeojin jeongsu*: A young couple, Wandal and Yeojin, lived on the top of Daeheung anryeong. While they waited for the right time to harvest, evil dragons showed up and destroyed the crops with harsh winds and rains. They had stolen *Jeongju boju*, which the black, white, and blue dragons

> used to control nature from the heavens. When Wandal and Yeojin told the dragons to stop the rampage, the dragons attacked them. The couple broke the stones from the mountain top and threw them at the dragons. They discovered *chilseongbu* from the stone mound, and used it to dispel the dragons. … The couple rode on the dragon horn, a flying treasure, and captured the white dragon at Changbaisan (Baekdusan). Wandal killed the white dragon by cutting its waist, took a marble from its mouth and gave it to Yeojin. At that moment Yeojin started saying that her stomach began hurting. Realizing that she was pregnant, Wandal took her to the top of Baekdusan. There, Wandal threw the marble he took from the white dragon while praying for better weather. The marble, however, turned into flames and melted the mountain's snow. That is how the mountain's lake was formed. The flood created by the snow melting washed Yeojin away. Wandal heard a crying sound as he was looking for Yeojin. When he looked at the lake towards the direction of the sound, Yeojin was laying on a giant lotus leaf with twins—a boy and a girl—wrapped in a lotus leaf. Yeojin named the boy Heunggae, and Wandal named the girl Moran. Later on, Wandal went after the blue dragon, which had the *Jeongsu boju*. When attacking the blue dragon inside the lake, Wandal struck the *Boju* the blue dragon spat out with *Chilseongbu*. The broken pieces of marble that fell on Yeonjusan became sources of spring water. Wandal finally killed the blue dragon after four days and nights of fighting. As he was walking away from Baekdusan, he exhausted his energy and turned into a mountain. The mountain thereafter blocked storms and floods. Looking for Wandal, Yeojin arrived at Yeonjusan. … When Yeojin, along with Heunggae and Moran, immobilized the black dragon by nailing it with broken pieces of marble, the river quieted down and the river bank also stabilized (Zhongguo minjian wenyi yanjiuhui 1981:26-37).

The two sources I have shortened and introduced both have mythological and folktale-like qualities in explaining the origins of place names of and around Baekdusan. However, they also can be seen as "more of collective mythologies of those who lived around Baekdusan than simple myths explaining the geographical origins of places" (Seo 2001: 449). *Cheonji*, which is of Korean-Chinese tradition, speaks of how the two couple gods of the lake on Baekdusan became divine. *Yeojin jeongsu*, a myth of Manchu tradition, also displays aspects of ritual towards the mountain god in Yeojin ordering Heunggae and Moran to bow toward the Wandal Mountain. Furthermore, *Yeojin jeongsu* represents Wandal and Yeojin as sacred progenitors of the

Manchu people. These aspects show that the two stories can be read as myths of heroes who fought against natural disasters.

Although both stories feature Baekdusan, there nevertheless are significant differences in their representation of it. While the story of *Cheonji* takes place on Baekdusan and explains the origins of its sixteen peaks as well as the lake's protector, the main stage of *Yeojin jeongsu* is Heilongjiang. Baekdusan appears as a mere stage where the process of fighting against the white dragon takes place. However, not only is the lake on Baekdusan created in the process of fighting between the white dragon and the Wandal couple, but their twins are also born on the lake. It therefore cannot be said that Baekdusan occupies an insignificant place in Manchu mythology. Other Manchu myths of heroism such as *Derung gege* represent Baekdusan as the ancestor god or protective god of the Manchu people. Furthermore, the status of the Baekdusan god is ranked in the established hierarchy of Manchu mythology as a student (a subordinate) of Abukaeunduri—the Manchu creator God. We can easily deduce that Baekdusan is a sacred place with an image of divine protector, ancestor and mountain deity for the people who lived around it regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. This perception is not different from other traditions of mountain worship that can be found in other relationships between the peoples and their mountains.

The myth of national founding is generally forged on top of this mythical tradition. As projects of justification for the ancient states' founding, the myth of the founding of the nation naturally relied on the earlier tradition of myths for legitimacy. Worship of mountains is also an important mythical tradition for these purposes. The myth of the national founding of Silla, as recorded in *Samguk yusa*, also claims that all of their six founding fathers who received the legendary Hyeokgeose descended from a mountain, providing us with another example of traditional mountain worship. As I've already mentioned earlier, this case is true also for other ancient Korean states such as Garak, Gojoseon, and Goguryeo. The founding fathers in such myths always descend from a mountain before starting their interactions with those who live below it. Baekdusan is one such mountain. That is why Baekdusan became a sacred place for all peoples who founded their states around it—Koreans of Gojoseon and Goguryeo as well as Jurchens and Manchus of the Jin and the Qing.

On the other hand, however, we must note that myth of national

founding also accepts, actively and intentionally, new elements from different myths. Perhaps the most relevant case is the Manchu myth of national founding—likely the most recently formed myth of national founding in East Asia.

> Our ancestors, for generations, have lived in Poiholi Lake south of Pogolisan. Although there are no extant written records, orally transmitted stories tell us that three fairies by the names of Eungoryun, Jeonggoryun, and Bulgoryun were once bathing at the Lake of Pogolisan. The youngest, Pulgoryun became pregnant after swallowing a fruit dropped by a divine magpie. She gave birth to Pogoliongsun, whose descendants are the Manchu people. Poiholisan has a circumference of 100 *li* and is around 120-130 *li* away from the Heilong River. I later moved to live in the Nabihon region of Heilong River from Poiholi. (Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan 1989:161)

> Jangbaeksan (Baekdusan) has a height of 200 *li* and a circumference of 1,000 *li*. The mountain has a lake on the top called Dalmun. It has a circumference of 800 *li*. Abrok, Hondong, and Aeho rivers all flow out of this mountain. Abrok River comes out from the south of this mountain, flows westward into the sea south of Liaodong. Hondong River flows out from the north of the mountain, flows northward into the northern sea. Aeho River flows eastward directly into the East Sea. Pearls always come out of the three rivers. Jangbaeksan is tall, its earth is cold, and harsh winds around it never end. All animals returning back to the mountain rest on the mountain. This mountain is made entirely of pumice and is one of the famous mountains of the northeast.

> *Manju wonryu*: Manchuria first arose from a lake called Poreukhori. It is located south of Pogorisan, which is in turn located northeast of Jangbaeksan. In the beginning, three fairies from the heavens landed on this lake and had a bath there. The first fairy was called Eungoryun, the second was called Jeonggoryun, and the third was called Bulgoryun. When they finished bathing and went up to the foot of the mountain, a divine magpie dropped a fruit on top of Bulgoryun's clothes. The fruit's colors were beautiful. Mesmerized, Bulgoryun was not able to take the fruit out of her hands. She placed the fruit in her mouth as she dressed, and accidently swallowed the fruit. She soon became pregnant. She told her two older sisters, 'I cannot go up [to the heavens] with you because of my heavy stomach. What should I do?' The two sisters answered, 'We are already

> immune to death as we have swallowed the medicine of immortality. This is the will of heaven. It is not too late for you to come back to the heaven after your body gets lighter.' The two sisters bade her farewell and left. Bulgoryun later gave a birth to a boy who could speak immediately after birth. The boy also grew much faster than other children. The mother told her son, 'The reason why heaven gave birth to you is to have you stabilize the contemporary crisis. Now, go to the battlefields and explain the purpose of your birth in detail!' When she gave him a boat and told him, 'Go follow the water and its end is the promised land.' Soon after she finished speaking, he was gone.
>
> The son followed the water on a boat and reached a place where people lived. After getting out of the boat, he used willows to put together a sitting device. It looked just like a chair, and he sat on top of it. At that time, there were three families who lived at a town called Akdari in a region called Akmohwi. The three families killed each other's members in an effort to become the tribal leader. On his way to obtain water from the river, one person who saw the boy became startled by the boy's unusual mannerisms and looks. He went back to the town and told the others, 'You all should stop fighting. I saw a man at the place I obtained water and he was indeed unusual. To think of him, I think the heaven gave birth to him for an important reason. Why not go take a look at him?' The people of the town then stopped fighting with each other and went to see him, and, indeed, he was not an ordinary man. When people asked about him, he answered as his mother instructed him. He said, 'The fairy Bulgoryun gave birth to me. My surname name is Aesingakla (Aixingoro) and my given name is Pogoliongsun. The heavens sent me to stop your fighting.' The people thereafter made a palanquin using their hands and brought him to their town. They ended their quarrels with each other and made the Pogoliongsun their lord and Baeklinyeo his wife. The name of their country was named Manju (Manzhou). This man is the originator. (*Manzhou shilu*)

The first record is a story about the Manchu originator Pogoliongsun, as listed in the 1635 record *Manwen laodang*. The recorder of it heard it first from a man called Mokgogeuk, someone who surrendered from a different Jurchen tribe called Hoihap. The latter is from *Manzhou shilu*, an official history written during the Qing Taizu Nurhaci's reign. *Manwen laodang* was one of the sources used to write *Manzhou shilu*. Although similar in its descriptions of the birth of the originator, there nevertheless is a clear point of difference between the two records—descriptions of Baekdusan.

Manzhou shilu features a geographical description of Baekdusan in the beginning part of the narrative on the Manchu originator, and *Manwen laodang* does not. *Manwen laodang* originally speaks of Pogolisan (not Baekdusan) and its Poiholi Lake is the stage where the myth takes place. Mokgogeuk is claiming that his tribe once lived near Poiholi Lake before moving to the area near Heilong River. However, *Manzhou shilu* deemphasizes this Pogolisan with a sentence saying, "Manzhou (Manchuria) arose from a lake called Poreukholi of Pogolisan, northeast of Jangbaeksan." Pogolisan is not identical to Jangbaek (Baekdusan)—it is a separate mountain located in a nearby region. By writing (and in effect tying) the two mountains together, *Manzhou shilu* reveals its intention to use Baekdusan as the place where the Manchu originator came from. This can be read as a process of transforming an oral myth into a myth of national founding. The decision placing Baekdusan into the background of Pogolisan most likely stemmed from the perceptions of Baekdusan among the Manchus as well as the locals who lived around Baekdusan, as can be gleaned from sources such as *Cheonji* and *Yeojin jeongsu*.

The way of signifying Baekdusan in the process of Manchu national mythmaking is not dissimilar to the method *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* took in signifying Baekdusan. Wang Geon and his family constituted a maritime power based on the Yeseong River and the Yellow Sea's coastal areas. As can be seen from the myth of *Jakjegeon*, they most likely worshipped sea deities. Their decision to identify their supposed originator as General Hogyeong of Baekdusan can only be interpreted as an intention to benefit from Baekdusan's prestige. In other words, *Manzhou shilu* is repeating the Baekdusan-centered imagined geographical mythmaking process of *Pyeonnyeon tongrok*. Here we can also reconfirm the significance of *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* as a catalyzing point.

However, we must not neglect the difference between the two in the "imagined geography" of Baekdusan. As mentioned before, the perception of Baekdusan as a sacred space and the place the national territory originates, as can be seen in *Pyeonnyeon tongrok*, persisted through Goryeo into Joseon. In late Joseon, after the Baekdusan boundary stone was erected, the notion of territory lost became strengthened. Although Baekdusan thereafter sheds its mythical image, its symbolism gets further strengthened. Such strengthened symbolism goes through another process of mythologization as a sacred

mountain of the modern nation through Korea's process of colonization. The Jin and the Qing myths of national founding recognized Baekdusan to be sacred, and carried out rites to Baekdusan at the state level. However, there is no evidence that Baekdusan became an object of worship by all subjects (non-Jurchen and Manchu) of the Jin and the Qing empires. After entering China proper, the Qing continued to carry out official rites to Baekdusan in Beijing and at Baekdusan in order to remind themselves of their place of origin. However, such mythical symbolism did not transcend the boundary of Manchu ethnicity. This difference is not inconsequential in our discussion of perceptions of Baekdusan.

Conclusion: Relationship between Geographical Exteriority and Mythical Perception of Baekdusan

It would be useful now to examine the issue of "geographical exteriority." For the cases of the Jin and the Qing, Baekdusan existed within its borders, and it is difficult to say that the Jurchen and Manchu peoples lived outside of Baekdusan even before the formations of their states. However, Baekdusan was located outside of the Korean border after the fall of Goguryeo and the unification by Silla. Although Balhae was established around Baekdusan, we do not have any data on the Balhae people's perception of Baekdusan. Although early Goryeo kings claimed to be the sons of heaven and had the worldview that considered the area east of Liao River, which includes Baekdusan, to be Korean territory (Song 2007:139), this perception remained highly idealized and was not a concrete concept of territory. It would not be an exaggeration to say this worldview must have reinforced the exteriority of Baekdusan. The sense of pursuit may have been greater for Baekdusan, which was included in the idealized concept of territory as the place of origin of national territory as well as that of the royal family, but which remained outside of actual control. In other words, geographical exteriority may strengthen psychological interiority.

According to the *Goryeosa* section on Myocheong (Kim 1991:303-314), Myocheong established a temple called Palseongdang at Imwon Palace in 1131 and carried out rites of worship there. The fact that the first object was worship related to Baekdusan reveals this "sense of pursuit" towards Baekdusan.

The name of first object of worship is *Hoguk baekdu aktae baekseon insil deokmunsu saribosal*. The name includes elements of Daoism as well as Buddhism, but it is not difficult to also locate a tradition of mountain worship. As can be seen from his assertion in relocating the capital to Seogyeong (today's Pyeongyang), Myocheong represents a faction with a strong will in favor of northern expansion. The fact that this person worshipped Baekdusan as a first-class deity reconfirms my earlier assertion that geographical exteriority can strengthen mythical pursuit of Baekdusan. The perception of Baekdusan which Myocheong displayed can be said to have continued into the Joseon era. This perception can be located amongst Korean Daoist scholars represented by Cheonghakjib as well as practices of Korean animism in places of worship like Samseongsa of Guweolsan and Cheomseongdan of Ganghwa Island. In the case of the latter, of course, the actual place of worship changed to mountains such as Guwoelsan and Manisan. They could be seen as Baekdusan(s) *within* the imagined geography—replacements for Baekdusan which was outside of the geographical borders.

However, it was during early years of the modern period and the Japanese colonial period when the "imagined geography" of Baekdusan became most powerful. Although there is evidence that suggests strengthening of interest in Baekdusan from late Joseon—such as a stimulation of interest in Baekdusan and other border regions of Korea through the early eighteenth century building of the Baekdusan Monument and Confucian scholar Bak Jong's statement that "Baekdusan is a successor of Kunlun Mountain of China" (Yi 1998:264)—such instances are better understood as expressions of the generalized concept of *Sojunghwa* ("Little China") which was prevalent among late Joseon scholars. It is difficult to find them to be related to modern perception of the nation. As foreign ships began to invade Korea from the late nineteenth century, Baekdusan reemerged with an image quite different from that of the past. We can find a good example in Choe Namseon's rediscovery of national territory including Baekdusan in the 1920s.

As I have explained before in my comparisons of the modern beginning of East Asian mythology (Cho 2000), it is not an exaggeration to call Choe Namseon's mythological studies "Baekdusan mythological studies." Through his 1920s work on mythology, Choe placed Baekdusan at the center of national history as well as world history. That is his famous *Pulham munhwaron*. His pilgrimage to Baekdusan, as expressed in his *Baekdusan*

geunchamgi, therefore had to be a religious pilgrimage for the purpose of confirming the origin of nation and arousing nationalist sentiments. Through his pilgrimage and the record of his pilgrimage, Choe Namseon expresses his nationalistic passion by transforming fact into will and history into fantasy (Seo 2004). Here we can discern how Baekdusan was reborn and remade into a space of modern imagined geography. Although Baekdusan in the 1920s was a place that could be visited in person, it was geographically located outside of the nation due to the Korea's illegally-occupied status. His nationalistic fervor therefore had to draw Baekdusan into the psychological interior, the "imagined geography" of the nation. Through mythical fantasies, Baekdusan became a sacred place for Choe Namseon as well as the Korean people who, secondhand, experienced his voyages to Baekdusan.

References

1. Primary Sources

An, Jeongbok. 1778 (1978). *Dongsa gangmok*. Seoul: Hanguk gojeon beonyeokwon.

Buk, Ae. 1976. *Gyuwon sahwa*. Seoul: Asea munhwasa.

Choe, Namseon. 1927. *Baekdusan geunchamgi*. Seoul: Hanseong doseo.

Il, Yeon. 1990. *Samguk yusa*. Trans. Sangho Li. Seoul: Sinseowon.

Kim, Jongseo. 1991. *Goryeosa*. Trans. Sihyeong Bak and Heuyu Hong. Seoul: Sinseowon.

Li, Cheonrok and Yonggwan Choe. 1989. *Baekdusan jeonseol*. Yeongil: Yeonbyeon inmin chulpansa.

Manzhou shilu. Vol. 1. Liaoning gugong bowuguan. Chongmoge copy.

Seo, Geojeong, ed. 1975. *Dongmunseon*. Trans. Hanguk gojeon beonyeokwon. Seoul: Hanguk gojeon beonyeokwon.

Yi, Gyubo. 1980. Dongmyeongwangpyeon. In *Dongguk Yisanggukjib*. Seoul: Hanguk gojeon beokyeokwon.

Yi, Inro. 1978. *Pahanjib*. Trans. and ed. Jaeyeong Yu. Seoul: Iljisa.

Yi, Sangtae, trans. and ed. 1998. *Joseon sidae seonbideul eui baekdusan dabsagi*. Seoul: Hyean.

Yi, Seunghyu. 1973. *Jewang ungi and Dongan geosa munjib*. Seoul: Asea munhwasa.

Zhongguo diyi lishi danganguan. 1989. *Qingchu neiguoshiyuan manwen dangan yibian*. Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe.

Zhongguo minjian wenyi yanjiuhui. 1981. *Manzu minjian gushixuan*. Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe.

2. Secondary Sources

Bae, Wuseong. 2007. 18segi cheong eui jiriji: jido wa baekdusan sugye. *Yeoksa wa gyeonggye* 65:27-62.

Bok, Dohun. 2005. Mi wa jeongchi: Gukto sunrye eui mokgajeok seosasi. *Hanguk geundae munhak yeongu* 6(2): 37-62.

Cho, Hyun-soul. 2000. Dongasia sinhwahak eui yeomyeong gwa geundaejeok simsang jiri eui hyeongseong. *Minjok munhaksa yeongu* 16:102-127.

____. 2003. *Dongasia geonguk sinhwa wa yeoksa wa nonri*. Seoul: Munhak gwa jiseongsa.

____. 2006. Geundae gyemonggi dangun sinhwa eui talsinhwahwa wa jaesinhwahwa. *Minjok munhaksa yeongu* 32:10-32.

Jeong, Jaeho, ed. 1992. *Baekdusan seolhwa yeongu*. Seoul: Goryeo daehakgyo minjok munhwa yeonguso.

Jin, Jaegyo. 2000. 18segi eui baekdusan gwa geu munhak. *Hanguk hanmunhak yeongu* 26:115-154.

Kim, Sundol. 2009. "Baekdusan haenggi" e natanan yunhwasu eui jangso insik gwa jiri jisik eui yuhyeong. *Hanguk jiyeok jiri hakhoeji* 15(1): 99-114.

Seo, Daeseok. 2001. *Hanguk sinhwa eui yeongu*. Seoul: Jibmundang.

Seo, Yeongchae. 2004. Choenamseon gwa yigwangsu eui geumgangsan gihaengmun e daehayeo. *Minjok munhwasa yeongu* 24:242-280.

Son, Hyeri. 2008. Joseon hugi munindeul eui baekdusan yuram gwa girok e daehayeo. *Minjok munhaksa yeongu* 37:134-166.

Song, Yongdeok. 2007. Goryeo-Joseon jeongi eui baekdusan insik. *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 64:127-159.

Cho Hyun-soul (soulcho@snu.ac.kr) is an associate professor of the Seoul National University Department of Korean Language and Literature. His research works include *Dongasia geonguk sinhwa eui yeoksa wa nonri* and *Geundae gyemonggi dangun sinhwa eui talsinhwahwa wa jaesinhwahwa*.

Abstract

In history of stories related to Baekdusan, Baekdusan is not simply a natural geographical space. Baekdusan is a sacred object of worship—a space of "imagined geography." Myths played an important role in cultivation of this imagined geography. According to ancient myths of the national founding, Baekdusan does not stand out as a sacred mountain for the whole of the Korean people—it was considered sacred only by the peoples of Gojoseon and Goguryeo who lived around it. A critical change in perception of Baekdusan occurred in Goryeo, with the recorded myth of Goryeo national founding in *Pyeonnyeon tongrok* being a definitive example of such transformation. The myth of Goryeo national founding places the royal family's origins in Baekdusan, opening up a possibility of it becoming a sacred site for all Korean people. This perception continued into Joseon, and its fusion with modern nationalism reinforced Baekdusan as a sacred place for the modern Korean nation. Choe Namseon's *Bulham munhwaron* of the 1920s is a strong example of its modern transformation.

Keywords: Baekdusan, imagined geography, sacred place, Pyeonnyeon tongrok, and Choe Namseon

Submission: 2010. 10. 14. Referee/Revision: 2010. 10. 15. Confirm: 2010. 10. 22.