

Introduction

In 1745, the Shengjing military governor (*jiangjun*), Daldangga, wrote to the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–95) to propose building a guard post at the mouth of the Yalu (K. *Amnok*) River. The suggested place was Mangniushao, a sandbank located where the confluence of two tributaries of the Yalu River, the Caohe and the Aihe, flowed into the mainstream of the Yalu. These tributaries, both originating in Changbaishan (K. *Paektusan*), also led to the Halmin and Elmin areas, the biggest ginseng preserve in Shengjing. Daldangga's predecessors had tried to protect the ginseng mountains (*shenshan*) in their jurisdiction by building outposts and stationing soldiers on the land routes around the area, but the waterways were poorly guarded and open to illegal poachers. Eager to improve the security situation in the Shengjing area and to tighten the management of ginseng production in particular, Daldangga emphasized the necessity of a guard post on the waterways; without one, people could easily build boats, transport food grains, and approach the prohibited ginseng preserves. He was concerned that, without a guard post, it was impossible to prevent, among other things, illegal ginseng poaching. Trained naval forces in Lüshun could be mobilized and stationed at Mangniushao, added Daldangga, and for their living they could cultivate the empty land available near the Yalu River.¹

However, it was not his emperor or his rival officials in Beijing who severely objected to the military governor's idea; it was the Chosŏn court that urged the Qianlong emperor to reconsider the proposal and eventually succeeded in persuading him to drop the plan for an outpost on the Yalu River. Even though Qing officials confirmed that the sandbank was located within Qing territory, the Chosŏn repeatedly insisted that the two countries had long prohibited any

settlement or cultivation in the vast area, as wide as a hundred *li*, between the Willow Palisade and the Yalu River. The Chosŏn king, Yŏngjo (r. 1724–76), lauded the ban as “a well-designed plan by the virtue of the imperial court [K. *hwangjo*]” to prevent contacts between Qing and Chosŏn people and thus eliminate any chance of trouble with the “small country” (K. *sobang*). Rejecting the Shengjing military governor’s proposal for a new guard post to protect the ginseng mountains, the Qianlong emperor finally decided to acquiesce to the Chosŏn king’s insistence that the land near the Yalu River should remain empty and not be opened to soldiers or civilians. The eighteenth-century Qing emperor agreed to keep his territory north of the Yalu River in the state that the Chosŏn king preferred.²

The Shengjing military governor’s proposal for a guard post on the Yalu River was eminently reasonable in order to protect the Manchurian treasure and the imperial estate. But despite his full awareness of this, and even after confirmation that the sandbank was located within Qing territory, the Qianlong emperor decided to favor the Chosŏn request and reject the opening of the Yalu River to settlement. Why did the Qing emperor accept the Chosŏn king’s request over the Manchu official’s proposal? What empowered the “small country” of Chosŏn to persuade the “imperial court” to change its plans to protect its lands? This study seeks to find answers to these questions through the lens of ginseng, whose roots are entangled between the Qing and the Chosŏn and which reveals the peculiar nature of the two states’ territorial boundaries and political relations.

The jurisdiction of the Qing Shengjing military governor overlapped roughly with today’s Liaoning Province in China. It was also the sacred birthplace where Nurhaci (1559–1626) had raised himself from the leader of the Jianzhou Jurchens to the khan of the Aisin Gurun, also known as the Later Jin (*Jinguo*, *Houjin*); his son Hong Taiji (1592–1643) consolidated the Manchus, the Mongols, and the Han Chinese into the Qing empire. Even after its 1644 conquest of China proper, the Qing never lost its strong interest in Manchuria, including Shengjing, Jilin, and Heilongjiang. The Manchu homeland was to be preserved from the Han Chinese, because it was arguably the place where the Manchu ethnic identity and military prowess—the “Manchu way”—were maintained. In addition to the political and cultural significance of Manchuria, the land’s natural resources had huge economic value, since they had provided the Manchu ancestors with the material wealth to develop their own state and eventually establish the Qing empire. Pearls, sable, and ginseng, all growing in the rich mountains and rivers in Manchuria, were widely called the three treasures of the northeast. Of the three, ginseng was widely available in the Jianzhou Jurchen territory and was also the most valuable commodity in trading with the Ming. Well aware of the commercial value of this root, the Qing court paid special attention to protecting the ginseng monopoly until the 1850s through strong restrictions that allowed only people holding official permits to enter ginseng-producing

mountain areas in Shengjing and Jilin. When he proposed the erection of a guard post on the Yalu River, the Shengjing military governor sought only to be loyal to his emperor by preventing illegal poachers from accessing the ginseng crop and arrogating the profits of the imperial court.

It was their special interest in ginseng that had led the Manchus to be involved with Chosŏn Korea from the very beginning of their history, because this precious root was primarily available in the region near Chosŏn territory. Throughout the years from the initial rise of the Jurchens in Liaodong to their conquest of China proper, the issue of Korean trespassers poaching for ginseng and hunting animals north of the Yalu and Tumen (K. *Tuman*) Rivers was a constant source of trouble between the Aisin Gurun/Qing and the Chosŏn. Illegal Korean incursions into Qing territory brought the Chosŏn court nothing but trouble, in the form either of Manchu armies' attacks or of fines levied by the exasperated emperor on the Chosŏn king. In order to avoid conflicts with the great country, the Chosŏn punished illegal crossing severely and forbade its people to approach the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. The Chosŏn kings wanted to have the areas around the two rivers empty and off-limits, and so did the Qing emperors. The Manchus built the Willow Palisade, gates, and outposts to curb Han Chinese traffic into the northeastern region; the Qing emperors further told the Chosŏn court to reinforce its guards on the Yalu and Tumen Rivers and to prohibit Korean subjects from approaching the ginseng-producing mountains in Qing territory. Accordingly, the Yalu and Tumen Rivers as well as Changbaishan, as part of the sacred Manchu birthplace, were restricted and closed off from civilian access. The Qing, then, was motivated by the goal of securing its profits from ginseng, while the Chosŏn sought to avoid conflicts over the root with its strong neighbor; but the two countries settled on the same solution of clearing the sensitive areas near the two rivers. They pursued different aims through this policy, but for both it was ginseng that led them to reach the solution.

There is no doubt that considerable powers were required in order to keep people out of the vast territory near the Yalu and Tumen Rivers, where lucrative ginseng and fertile land were widely available. It was not equal relations between the Qing and the Chosŏn that enabled them to achieve this feat; rather, it was the asymmetrical tributary relationship that led the two countries to pursue the same solution and to endure the problems caused by the restriction of access to the area. The Chosŏn found that an empty buffer zone between the two states was more effective in preventing trespassing and subsequent troubles with the Qing. In order to persuade the Qing emperors to keep the land near the Yalu River uninhabited, the Chosŏn, interestingly, emphasized their asymmetrical relationship. The Koreans insisted that the benevolent rulers of the great country should embrace the inferior subjects of the small country, and therefore the Qing emperor should do the Chosŏn king a favor. The Qing was convinced by this argument. Since the

Chosŏn suggestion of banning settlement near the Yalu River corresponded to Qing restrictions on entry to Manchuria, and since Korean loyalty to the suzerain court was proved by its regular dispatch of tributary envoys, the Qing emperor was willing to accept the Chosŏn request. In this way, the Qing special interests in ginseng and Manchuria, as well as the tributary relations between the Qing and Chosŏn courts, contributed to the creation of an empty stretch of land between the two countries.

By examining the contacts and conflicts over ginseng in the region of the Yalu and Tumen Rivers and Changbaishan, this book explores the territorial boundary between the Qing and the Chosŏn and the asymmetrical tributary relationship between the two states. It discusses the process by which the two countries recognized and managed their separate realms through an analysis of the Qing policy regarding Manchuria, the Qing-Chosŏn tributary relationship, and the two states' ideas about territory and sovereignty. The Yalu and Tumen Rivers and Changbaishan were a place where the special Qing interests in Manchuria were well revealed, and it was also a location at which the Qing and the Chosŏn clashed and negotiated their respective claims to land and authority. Through the lens of the Qing-Chosŏn boundary, this study examines the ways in which Qing imperial authority sought to safeguard the special status of Manchuria within the empire while protecting its economic interests in the region's natural resources and maintaining the old relationship with its neighbor. Finally, by exploring the efforts of the Chosŏn to preserve its territory and sovereignty within the asymmetrical relationship with its more powerful neighbor, the study seeks to highlight the Chosŏn agency in the formation and development of the Qing empire.

MANCHURIA, KOREA, AND GINSENG

Recent studies of Qing history—most notably those studies that fall under the umbrella term of “New Qing History”—have cast light on the centering of the Manchus in the Qing period by exploring a variety of themes, including ethnicity, cultural diversity, empire, and ruling ideology.³ Among various elements and topics related to Manchu distinctiveness, the Qing northeast has a special importance. As earlier studies have pointed out, Manchuria was the homeland of the Manchus and thus held very different meanings for the Ming and the Qing, respectively. While the Liaodong region during the Ming period was a place where different groups of people interacted and prepared the ground for the rise of the Jurchenscum-Manchus, the Qing northeast was carefully preserved in order to maintain the Manchus' difference and separation from other ethnic groups. During the Ming period, as well as in the early twentieth century, Manchuria was a site of “the interacting migrations of peoples and cultures” and, therefore, a “reservoir” where people gathered.⁴ The Liaodong region under Ming rule was a typical zone

of “between-ness” and “transfrontier-ness,” where ethnic distinctions between the Han Chinese and the Jurchens were not clear-cut.⁵ Contrary to this trend, Qing Manchurian policy sought to keep contact among people to a minimum and to protect local ethnic groups from Han Chinese cultural and economic influence—strategies aimed at maintaining this vital region as a reserve for Manchu identity and power.

Many studies written in Chinese have examined the Qing northeast, not necessarily sharing the scholarly interests of the New Qing History in the area of Manchu distinctiveness.⁶ Their discussions of Qing policy in the northeast have mainly focused on the Willow Palisade (*liutiaobian*) and the restriction policy (*fengjin*), the specific institutions that the Qing court reinforced in Manchuria until the late nineteenth century. The Willow Palisade was built to divide Manchuria into three regions with distinct physical and cultural characteristics: a region of Han Chinese settlement in Fengtian, a Manchu preserve to the northeast, and land belonging to various allied Mongol princes. This physical barrier was designed to control people’s movements in the region and especially to limit Han Chinese immigration to Manchuria.⁷

The Qing court sought to preserve its native homeland from its Han Chinese subjects as a strategy to maintain its ethnic identity and military prowess in this restricted region. Furthermore, natural resources in Manchuria were strictly controlled as a state monopoly. Throughout the Qing years, the state endeavored to restrict access to areas of Manchuria that contained economically profitable and politically critical natural resources. The eastern part of the Willow Palisade, in particular, was designed to exclude civilian exploiters from Shengjing and China proper from access to ginseng, furs, and pearls. This restriction policy was “economically motivated to aid a politically privileged group,” namely, the Manchus.⁸ The nature of the Manchu relationship to Manchuria changed over time, as Qing power expanded from the northeastern margin to China proper. However, the special interest of the Manchus in their sacred birthplace never diminished. As the Qing state consolidated its rule in the economically rich regions of China proper, the significance of Manchuria tended to shift from material concerns to the cultural preservation of the old Manchu traditions.⁹ After the 1644 conquest and during the Kangxi era, the Qing developed a deliberate state policy to preserve, encourage, and prescribe hunting and gathering culture. The purpose of the Qing policy in Manchuria was not merely immediate material sustenance but rather “imperial foraging,” as David Bello puts it, which was intended to embody and maintain Manchu identity in Qing Manchuria. Given that the practice of archery and the activities necessary for foraging required isolated spaces, the closing of Manchuria was an appropriate strategy for Qing imperial foraging.¹⁰ In fact, the Qing efforts to define “the nature of the empire’s frontiers” continued until the late nineteenth century. As Jonathan Schlesinger explains, the three

Manchurian treasures—pearls, sable, and ginseng—were the primary items gifted by early Manchu rulers to their neighbors and followers, representing “a form of intimacy characteristic of Manchu rule.” The Qing court monopolized the three precious Manchu treasures after the 1644 conquest, because it needed them not only as commercial items but as symbolic objects of Manchu ethnicity. “The nature of this demand insisted upon authenticity, so that ginseng, pearls, and furs had to be produced the right way and gathered by the right people.”¹¹ As such, the policy of conservation of Manchurian resources reflected the unique position of the northeastern region under Qing imperial rule.

These explorations of the special position of the northeastern region and its natural resources in the Qing empire can be richly complemented by proper attention to Korean history and its connection to Manchuria. In her recent study, Evelyn Rawski correctly stresses the significance of Manchuria and the Korean peninsula for the purpose of “de-centering China from the perspective of the periphery rather than from the core.” She discusses Chosŏn Korea as well as Edo Japan in the context of “the geopolitical boundary of China’s northeast Asian frontier,” an approach that challenges the conventional narratives of national history and further highlights the Chosŏn agency in the development of the Qing empire.¹² Her analysis of the contemporary debates between Chinese and Korean scholars over Koguryŏ (C. *Gaogouli*) shows that the close connection of Manchuria to the Korean peninsula has been the defining factor in Chinese-Korean relations. Scholars of Chinese-Korean history have long emphasized that the triangular relationship among China, Manchuria, and Korea had special importance in East Asian international relations. As long as Manchuria was contested, Gari Ledyard states, stable Sino-Korean relations were impossible, and even internal Korean stability could not be maintained. This lesson was well proven in the early seventeenth century, when the rise of the Manchus radically changed the relationship among China, Manchuria, and Korea.¹³ In fact, the history of the Jurchen chieftain Möngke Temür (K. *Tong Maengga Chŏmmoga*; C. *Mengtemu*) in the early fifteenth century also provides a good example of the crucial role of Korea’s connection to Manchuria in the development of Chinese-Korean relations. This figure, who was revered as the forefather of the Manchu imperial family by the eighteenth-century Qing court, was in fact the leader of just one tribal group among many that competed with one another between the Ming and Chosŏn states. The saga of Möngke Temür is, above all, evidence of the close relationship between the Manchus and the Koreans.¹⁴ As Kenneth Robinson describes, various forms of contact between the Jurchens and the Koreans in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries showed that the Chosŏn northern region was “an economic frontier, linguistic frontier, status frontier, environmental frontier, trans-boundary frontier.”¹⁵

Of the three Manchurian treasures, ginseng holds the greatest significance for an examination of the special connections between the Manchus and Manchuria,

as well as the political relations between Qing China and Chosŏn Korea. The early Manchu state initially depended for its very existence on the natural resources produced in Manchuria, of which the most important was ginseng. Many scholars have shown that Nurhaci was active in the ginseng trade with the Ming, which strengthened economic ties between the Liaodong region and China proper. Military power was not the only basis on which Nurhaci was able to rise and build the Manchu state: he acquired his economic strength from the ginseng trade.¹⁶ Most studies have emphasized that in contrast to previous dynasties, which had no system of rule for ginseng production, the Manchus developed detailed regulations for ginseng prior to the 1644 conquest. The specific content and scope of these regulations changed over time, but the primary concern was to secure sufficient amounts of ginseng for imperial expenses and state revenue. A select group of people working for the imperial court and other imperial families were allowed to collect a given amount of ginseng; people without official permits were prohibited from accessing the ginseng-producing mountains; and traffic through Shanhai-guan, Tianjin, Lüshun, and other ports on the Yalu River was regulated to limit illegal transportation of and trade in ginseng. The Qing court maintained strict controls on all aspects of ginseng collection, transport, and marketing well into the nineteenth century, since the ginseng monopoly was an important way of preserving the traditions of the early Manchu state.¹⁷ Accordingly, some studies estimate that during the eighteenth century ginseng profits still accounted for a substantial portion of Qing government revenue.¹⁸ For the Manchu rulers, as Van Jay Symons points out, “it was crucial to have independent sources of income to assure the financial stability of the ruling house.”¹⁹

Ginseng was only one of the three treasures of Manchuria, and only one of many goods that have at different times been imported and exported from Manchuria. However, it appears more frequently than nearly any other good in the sources related to Qing-Chosŏn relations, whether as a vital diplomatic good provided by the Chosŏn court, as an important monopoly of the Qing court, or as an attractive target for smugglers. Extremely slow to mature, much valued as a medicinal root, but also small and light and easy to transport, it was chronically subject to overharvesting. The high value of ginseng inevitably brought both smugglers and legitimate ginseng diggers ever deeper into remote territories that would otherwise have been of limited concern to the Qing and Chosŏn courts. Eventually, it shaped, more than any other product, Qing-Chosŏn relations as well as Qing policy for the northeastern region.

Japanese scholarship has paid close attention to the connection between Qing Manchuria and Chosŏn Korea.²⁰ Inaba Iwakichi and Imamura Tomo, in particular, have highlighted the significance of ginseng in Chinese-Korean relations.²¹ While explaining that Korean ginseng was primarily paid to the Chinese emperors as tribute and therefore symbolized the hierarchy between China and

Korea, Imamura also emphasizes that ginseng was the primary reason for illegal crossings and poaching between China and Korea.²² The rich natural resources, combined with the close connections and interactions between the Koreans and the Jurchens, invited ginseng exploiters from both sides to the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. The area south of the Yalu River, where the Chosŏn court decided to abolish Korean settlement and cultivation by the mid-fifteenth century, had produced a good amount of ginseng and therefore attracted Jurchen poachers. After the Manchus moved to China proper, the Changbaishan region was preserved as the Manchu birthplace, but its abundant production of ginseng encouraged Korean exploiters to risk their lives to intrude into it. As long as Korean exploiters continued to harvest ginseng in Qing territories, Qing ginseng policy could not be only a matter of domestic politics and economy, narrowly applied to Manchuria; it had to be discussed as part of foreign relations with the Chosŏn. For this reason, ginseng has played an important role in Qing-Chosŏn relations.

TRIBUTARY RELATIONS AND BOUNDARIES

It is actually the theory of tributary relations, not the idea of Manchu distinctiveness or Korean connections to Manchuria, that has long dominated the historiography of Chinese-Korean relations. The conventional understanding of the tributary relationship between the two, based on John K. Fairbank's interpretation, has emphasized the Sinocentric worldview, or "the Chinese world order," in Qing foreign relations.²³ The Fairbank model became overwhelmingly influential in studies of China and Asia, not only in US academia but in China and Korea as well. Many scholars of Qing history, however, have challenged this essentialized interpretation of China's foreign relations and stressed that the definition of China has been ever-changing, dependent on China's current relations with its neighbors.²⁴ Recent studies of the Qing relationship with nomads on its own northwestern margin highlight the variety of ways in which the Qing dealt with its neighbors, including political marriages, religious patronage, commerce, diplomacy, and war.²⁵ Nicola Di Cosmo states that the tribute trade in the northwest "was not a system, but rather a political, ritual, and economic environment that enabled the Qing to interact with native peoples."²⁶ As Peter Perdue puts it, tributary relations in the Qing period were therefore "a kind of intercultural language, serving multiple purposes for its participants."²⁷ Diversity in Qing foreign relations is also found in the court's contacts with various countries in Southeast Asia. Anthony Reid emphasizes that "each of China's relationships with neighboring countries was unique and these relations changed radically over time; none can be said to have been understood in the same light on both sides."²⁸

Among the many neighbors of China, the Chosŏn, in particular, has long maintained a reputation as the preeminent and ideal tributary. Proponents of

the Sinocentric thesis have stressed that political powers in China and Korea have always maintained markedly hierarchical relations with one another and that the Chosŏn court dutifully preserved the practice of paying tribute to the Qing emperors during the period from 1637 to 1895.²⁹ However, recent studies of Korean history have begun to explore a new way of looking at Qing-Chosŏn relations from the perspective of Manchu distinctiveness. In contrast to the Sinocentric understanding, which tends to erase stories of the violent beginnings of Qing-Chosŏn history, this new research highlights the history of conflict and tensions under the disguise of tributary rituals. Anti-Manchu sentiment was prevalent at the Chosŏn court and was expressed in various ways, including the movement for a “northern expedition” (K. *pukpŏl*) to avenge the Manchu invasions and the establishment of a shrine for the Ming emperor in memory of his support for the Chosŏn against the Japanese invasions. As a way of overcoming the shame of their submission to the Qing and of dealing with a crisis of legitimacy, the Chosŏn literati began to claim that they were the last true heirs to the Ming and Chinese culture and, indeed, to civilization itself, which they believed the Manchus took away from China.³⁰ As Kye Seung explains, “Even though the Manchus ruled China, the Chosŏn elites lived in an imaginary Ming order, [by means of which] they [prolonged] Ming times under the reality of Manchu dominance.”³¹ The Chosŏn elites privately despised the Manchus as barbarians, even though the Chosŏn court continued to participate in the same tribute practices with the Qing that it had engaged in with the Ming. The practice of paying tribute and receiving rewards—although maintained for centuries between China and Korea—had notably different implications at different times.

Appreciation of Manchu distinctiveness in Qing history can also be traced back to a new understanding of the status of the Chosŏn in the Qing world order. By challenging the conventional placement of the Chosŏn among the societies of the southeastern crescent,³² Ku Pŏmjŏn stresses instead that Qing policies concerning Chosŏn affairs showed some similarities with those concerning Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet in the northwest. While the Ryukyu and Vietnam, two other southeastern crescent societies, built a peaceful relationship with the Qing after the 1644 conquest, the Chosŏn joined the Qing imperial order as a result of violent wars. The Qing emissaries visiting the Chosŏn were, in fact, selected from among bannermen, not Han civil officials, and the same practice was followed for imperial envoys dispatched to the northwestern region of the empire. In addition, the copperplate “Map with a Complete View of the Imperial Territories” (*Huangyu quanlan tu*), made in 1719, displayed the place names of China proper in Chinese characters but those of Manchuria and Korea in Manchu script.³³ All these features demonstrate that Qing-Chosŏn relations under Manchu rule differed from those of the preceding era.

Among the various issues that affected the two countries, their geographical adjacency—and the consequent debates over the movement of people—was a defining characteristic of Qing-Chosŏn relations. In fact, the name of the river between the respective realms of the Manchus and the Koreans, *Yalu*, means “the boundary between two fields” in the Manchu language.³⁴ After the first Manchu invasion of Korea in 1627, Hong Taiji articulated a territorial division in their peace agreement with the Koreans, saying, “We two nations have now established peace. From today onward, let us each respect this agreement, each should observe the territories [*geshou fengjiang*], and refrain from disputing small matters and excessive requirements.”³⁵ The Aisin Gurun/Qing and the Chosŏn were separated by the Yalu and Tumen Rivers, an agreement that the two states mutually recognized. Despite Hong Taiji’s statement, however, the Qing-Chosŏn boundary would be subject to debate from the beginning to the end of their relations. Scholarly discussions of the Qing-Chosŏn boundary have largely focused on two related events: the 1712 investigation of Changbaishan, and the surveys of the Tumen riverhead in the 1880s. The Kangxi emperor sent his Manchu official, Mu-ke-deng, to investigate the Changbaishan region together with Chosŏn officials, and they set up a stone stele at a place that they estimated to be the origin of the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. By the late nineteenth century, however, Korean immigrants north of the Tumen River argued that they actually lived in Chosŏn territory because there were two different Tumen Rivers. This debate over the Tumen riverhead—and thus the exact location of the Qing-Chosŏn territorial boundary—led the Qing and the Chosŏn to launch two surveys of the region in 1885 and 1887.

Gari Ledyard has analyzed in detail the dispatch of the Kangxi emperor’s emissary Mu-ke-deng, his joint survey of the mountain ranges with Chosŏn officials, and the discussions that took place at the Chosŏn court after the survey; however, his analysis is situated in the context of the history of Korean cartography.³⁶ Andre Schmid explores the survey in the wider historical context of Korean territoriality and sovereignty, emphasizing “the territorial limits of the Qing empire together with the rather ambiguous, and contested, position of the Chosŏn within that empire.”³⁷ By connecting the investigation of 1712 with the boundary debates of the 1880s, Schmid reveals an active interaction between nationalist and prenationalist discourses on Korea’s spatial understanding. Earlier investigations of Changbaishan had already developed Korean ideas about territorial sovereignty, and the later debates over the Kando territory show that late nineteenth-century Chosŏn officials used the same vocabulary of sovereignty as had early eighteenth-century Korean scholars.³⁸

Scholars of China and Korea have examined these events in detail, but they still contest the boundaries and claim territorial losses suffered by one or the other side. Zhang Cunwu argues that the Kangxi emperor and his Manchu official were ignorant about history and geography: they did not know that the

Tumen River, where the Jurchens had lived, should be part of Qing territory, and they were unaware of the fact that Chosŏn territory was limited to areas south of Changbaishan, not demarcated by the rivers on the mountaintop. These mistakes on the part of the emperor and his man led to a substantial loss of Qing territories, Zhang argues, since the Chosŏn had always sought to expand north of the Tumen River and took advantage of the 1712 investigation of Changbaishan for territorial extension.³⁹ Li Huazi explains that the survey of 1712 confirmed the Yalu and Tumen Rivers as the Qing-Chosŏn boundary, but its failure to identify the correct location of the Tumen riverhead brought on a series of territorial debates and diplomatic conflicts in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Yang Zhaoquan and Sun Yumei discuss in detail the Qing-Chosŏn boundary surveys of the 1880s, noting that after the inspections, Korean immigrants and the Chosŏn court agreed that there was only one Tumen River. Korean immigrants in Qing territories changed their hairstyles and clothing and were registered as Qing subjects. In 1909, China and Japan reached an agreement that the Tumen represented the Chinese-Korean boundary. In spite of such clear historical evidence, Yang and Sun argue, some Korean scholars and newspapers have raised false claims on the Kando territory north of the Tumen, an area that has always been “an inseparable part of China’s territory since the ancient time,” where “various nations [*gezu renmin*] in China, such as the Manchu, Han, Korean, Mongol, and Hui peoples, have developed together.”⁴¹

Equally, some Korean scholars have insisted that the Chosŏn lost its northern territories as a result of the surveys and agreements of the nineteenth century.⁴² However, Kim Hyŏngjong criticizes such Korean claims on the northern lands as a nationalist argument and instead stresses the need for a more careful analysis of the processes involved in the Chinese-Korean boundary investigations of the 1880s on the basis of relevant documents issued by the Qing and Chosŏn courts.⁴³ Recent Korean studies have, in fact, considered the 1712 investigation in the context of the Chosŏn court’s and elites’ perceptions of their territory. Kang Sŏkhwa explains that for the eighteenth-century Chosŏn, the investigation of Changbaishan did not necessarily imply clear demarcation of the boundary with the Qing; instead, the Koreans saw it as official confirmation by the Qing that the south of Changbaishan was Chosŏn territory. Only after the erection of the stone stele on the mountaintop, nearly a hundred years after Hong Taiji’s statement that “each should observe the territories,” did the Chosŏn court finally begin to pay delayed attention to its northern provinces.⁴⁴ By analyzing a variety of Korean maps, Pae Usŏng has also examined how the Chosŏn court and literati understood their northern provinces after the 1712 investigation and how the Koreans described the geography of the boundary in visual images. The eighteenth-century Chosŏn had increasing interest in Qing Manchuria as well as in its own northern provinces, and it sought to import new geographic knowledge from China. As Pae Usŏng points out, some

Korean maps from this period, evidently influenced by Qing geographic references, are a reflection of Korean conceptions of territories and boundaries, which were shaped by their understanding of Qing-Chosŏn relations and the place of the Chosŏn in the world.⁴⁵

The responses of the Chosŏn court and literati to the 1712 Changbaishan investigation show that a seemingly unexceptionable statement—"The Yalu and Tumen Rivers serve as the Chinese-Korean boundary"—was not taken for granted by the courts or the people of the Qing and the Chosŏn, and that therefore their ideas about territoriality require more careful scrutiny. Since Nurhaci and Hong Taiji built the Jurchen/Manchu state, the Aisin Gurun/Qing and the Chosŏn agreed that the Yalu and Tumen Rivers separated the two states. However, the exact ways in which their spatial realms and limits of rulership were to be conceived, managed, and enforced were open to interpretation. Furthermore, their discussions about how to control the movement of people in the areas near the Yalu and Tumen Rivers and how to maintain security at the boundary varied depending on the specific locations and contexts of their concerns. The Qing-Chosŏn conversations about their shared boundary had always followed the norms and rhetoric of the tributary relationship; however, their ideas about how to protect and maintain their territories and sovereignty, masked by the words of the tributary relationship, were not the same. The ways in which the Qing and Chosŏn courts discussed and managed the Yalu and Tumen Rivers and Changbaishan in the eighteenth century differed from those in the late nineteenth century, when the two states' relations were undergoing significant change. Consequently, the nature of the Qing-Chosŏn boundary needs to be explored within the specific context of Qing-Chosŏn relations, which were distinct from Jurchen-Chosŏn relations as well as from the Chinese-Korean relations of modern times.

TERRITORIALITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

The debate over the Mangniushao guard post in 1745 provides an excellent illustration of the respective conceptions and practices of territory and sovereignty of the Qing and the Chosŏn. Conventional studies have explained restrictions on access to the boundary (C. *bianjin*; K. *pyŏngŭm*) and the creation of the empty space (C. *outuo*; K. *ku't'al*) at the Yalu River as an outcome of either Qing imperial benevolence toward the inferior Chosŏn court or the two states' negligence in securing the boundary. As for the failed attempt to erect a guard post on the Yalu River, Zhang Cunwu, Li Huazi, and Zhang Jie and Zhang Danhui all contend that the emperor's well-intentioned decision became a misguided precedent that constrained Qing efforts to open up the Yalu River and invited only confusion regarding the boundary with the Chosŏn. As a consequence, they argue, the Qing lost control over its own territory, while the Chosŏn succeeded in protecting its

territory against the Qing.⁴⁶ Sun Chunri explains that the empty space was a good reflection that the Qing imposed a tolerant policy in the Qing-Chosŏn boundary and respected the concerns of the Chosŏn in many aspects.⁴⁷ In contrast, Inaba Iwakichi has described the empty land as a result of undefined boundaries, claiming that “the boundaries at that time were not a clear line but something similar to a zone.” Inaba further argues that Hong Taiji endorsed the uninhabited zone at the boundary as a way of protecting his territory from Korean trespassing and that the Qianlong emperor’s decision to reject the Mangniushao post was not only due to “the favor of the emperor in Beijing” but also related to “the capability of the Chosŏn” to safeguard their territory.⁴⁸

As for the guardpost at the Yalu River, Pae Usŏng addresses the particular nature of Qing and Chosŏn ideas about their boundaries and territories. The primary strategy of the Chosŏn in boundary negotiations with the Qing was to emphasize the hierarchical nature of their tributary relations and to remind the great country of its obligation to protect the small country. As Pae points out, “Today it is generally considered unacceptable for a modern nation-state to solve issues related to territorial boundaries through petitions to its neighbor.”⁴⁹ The two states agreed that the imposition of an uninhabited zone at the boundary neither undermined Qing imperial authority nor violated the territorial sovereignty of either party; instead, both concluded that the restrictions on access to the boundary would prevent people from trespassing and eventually help protect their territories and relations. This idea of territory and sovereignty cannot be fully explained only by the rhetoric of the tributary relationship, such as imperial benevolence toward a small tributary state. The creation and maintenance of an empty space at the boundary should be seen as a reflection of Qing and Chosŏn conceptions and practices of territorial boundaries, which differ from those that we find among modern states.

The history of Siam provides a useful example of how different conceptions and practices of territory and sovereignty emerged, confronted, and negotiated with each other. Nineteenth-century Siam experienced a clash between its traditional ideas about boundaries and those of the British. While the modern boundary, as the British understood it, lay between neighboring countries, the boundary of sovereign authority in premodern Siam was well inside the margins. If modern boundaries must be clear-cut and leave no space between states, premodern margins of states were often “a thick line with a broad horizontal context,” “ambiguous and overlapped.” Therefore, “sovereignty and border were not coterminous. . . . The political sphere could be mapped only by power relations, not by territorial integrity.”⁵⁰ Different conceptions of boundaries are also found in nineteenth-century Japan. Bruce Batten explains that the boundaries of modern societies refer to clearly demarcated lines, whereas premodern societies such as Tokugawa Japan had zonal frontiers with poorly defined territorial limits.⁵¹ David Howell has also explored Japan’s transition to a modern state by analyzing the transformation of

the Ainu ethnicity and its boundaries. While the Tokugawa shogunate treated its peripheries, such as Hokkaido and the Ryukyu Islands, as something between a subordinate part and an independent entity, the Meiji government claimed full sovereignty over these areas and therefore “redefined Japan’s political boundaries in terms of Western notions of international laws.”⁵² The cases of Siam and Tokugawa Japan demonstrate that a country’s conceptions and practice of boundaries can be different at different times and that new ideas about territory and sovereignty reflect changes in relations with its neighbors.

In order to clarify the nature of Qing-Chosŏn territorial boundaries and political relations, it is useful to refer to the various terms for boundaries that have been applied to different times and places.⁵³ Bradley Parker and Lars Rodseth define a border as “a legally recognized line, fixed in a particular space, meant to mark off one political or administrative unit from another—a boundary between sovereign polities such as states and empires.” “Frontier” is different from “border,” because the former is “a vaguely defined boundary—a region rather than a line, and a zone of transition between two core areas.”⁵⁴ Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron put forward the terms “borderland” and “bordered land” in an effort to revise old frontier narratives: “While frontiers are cultural meeting places where geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined, borderlands were zones of interaction and rivalry among empires and contested boundaries between colonial domains.” With the rise of modern nation-states, the fluid and inclusive space of borderland became the more bounded and territorialized space of bordered land.⁵⁵ In the context of imperial China, Peter Perdue points out that the term *bianjiang* was frequently used to mean both a broad zone (*bian*) and a defined border (*jiang*). This term shows “a consciousness both of remote zones beyond the realm of orderly rule, and the awareness of the need to construct fortified borders to defend against attacks by rival states.”⁵⁶

Throughout their long relationship, the Qing and the Chosŏn agreed that the Yalu and Tumen Rivers constituted the boundary between them. The boundary was not necessarily vaguely defined, given that the two states tried to conduct a field survey, as shown by the 1712 Changbaishan investigation, and also dispatched soldiers to patrol the riverbanks, as suggested by the debates over the Mangniushao guard post at the Yalu River. However, their efforts to investigate and control the boundary, though similar to those of modern states, did not make their territorial limits into clearly drawn lines. The exact location of the Tumen riverhead remained unclear largely because of the Chosŏn court’s reluctance to clarify it; the vast expanse of land at the Yalu River was kept off-limits and empty by the agreement between the two states. The Qing-Chosŏn boundary thus had features of both a vague zone and a distinct line. Some parts of the boundary were clearly demarcated; other parts, especially the upper Tumen River, remained unclear. The nature of the Qing-Chosŏn boundary was shaped by the deliberate plans

and mutual agreement of the two states for the purpose of protecting the territory and rulership of each.

In order to stress the particular characteristics of the Qing and Chosŏn conceptions and practice of boundary and sovereignty, this study differentiates the Qing-Chosŏn borderland from the Jurchen-Chosŏn frontier as well as from the modern Chinese-Korean border. “Frontier” refers to an undefined zone between distinct political or social entities, such as the Jurchen tribes and the Chosŏn or the Jurchens and the Ming, whose power relations were often asymmetrical, with one being more powerful and tending to extend its influence over the other. “Border” is a defined boundary between two neighboring powers, such as modern China and Korea, a product of the emergence of the nation-state with its attendant consciousness of sovereignty and territory. “Borderland,” the term I use to denote the nature of the boundary between the Qing and the Chosŏn, includes features of the frontier and of the border.⁵⁷ “Borderland” in this book refers not to the concrete strip of land between the two countries but to the significance of this area as a zone of demarcation, a site at which the two neighbors encountered one another and clashed but nonetheless recognized their mutual boundary. Beyond the specific meanings and contexts of frontier, borderland, and border, “boundary” in this study is a general term for the territorial limits of a country, and “trespassing” means a violation of a neighboring country’s territory.

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This book explores the ways in which the Qing-Chosŏn borderland was managed under the dual principles of Qing restrictions in Manchuria and the Qing-Chosŏn tributary relationship. The special status of Manchuria in the Qing empire and the attendant constraints on entry to the region, together with the active agency of the Chosŏn court within its asymmetrical relationship with the powerful Qing, created an uninhabited stretch of land at the Yalu River and unclear territorial claims on the upper Tumen River. These two defining features of the Qing-Chosŏn borderland were the source of persistent confusion and disagreement regarding the two neighbors’ territorial sovereignty over the next century. First, the study explores the transition from frontier to borderland, which took place in the early seventeenth century. It then analyzes three topics in close detail to highlight the characteristics of the Qing-Chosŏn borderland: the 1712 investigation of Changbaishan, control of areas to the north of the Yalu River, and the Chosŏn embassy’s trade at the Fenghuangcheng gate. Finally, it examines the process through which the Qing-Chosŏn borderland was replaced by a border, as the two states faced a new political situation in the late nineteenth century.

The first chapter, “From Frontier to Borderland,” addresses the early history of Qing-Chosŏn relations. By the late fourteenth century, various groups of Jurchen tribes had settled near the Yalu and Tumen Rivers and the Changbaishan

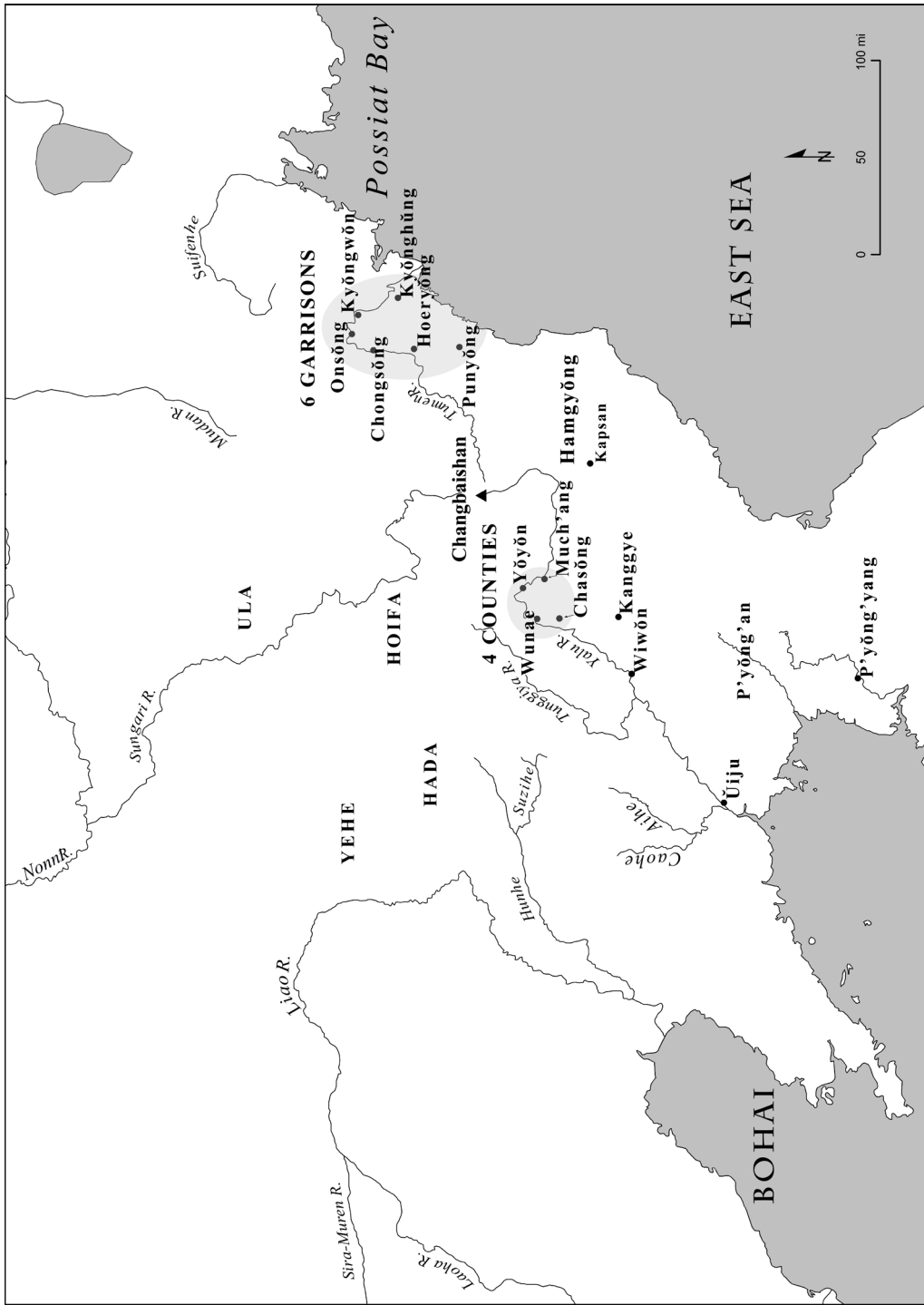
mountains. Ming authority beyond the Liaodong region was largely symbolic; the Chosŏn established its own hierarchical relationship with the Jurchens and shared with the latter the territory and its natural resources, most notably ginseng. By the end of the sixteenth century when the Jianzhou Jurchens emerged, the triangular relations among the Ming, the Chosŏn, and the Jurchens were no longer maintained, and their unclear frontiers were in need of redefinition. As a result of its two military campaigns against Korea in 1627 and 1637, the Aisin Gurun/Qing successfully imposed a hierarchical tributary relationship on the Chosŏn and agreed to make the Yalu and Tumen Rivers the boundary between the two. The Manchus were no more the uncivilized “wild people” but rather became the rulers of the imperial court; the Koreans, on the other hand, were no longer allowed to cross the rivers in search of ginseng and animals. Manchuria and its natural resources came to belong exclusively to the Manchus, a monopoly that remained intact until the mid-nineteenth century.

Manchuria in general, and the special interest in ginseng in particular, largely defined Qing policy in the northeastern region and shaped Qing ideas and plans for its boundary with the Chosŏn. The second chapter, “Making the Borderland,” explains that the Kangxi emperor’s interest in Changbaishan was part of his efforts to preserve Manchuria and its ginseng for the Manchus only. Commercial profits from Manchuria’s natural resources and its political significance as the Qing court’s sacred birthplace granted Changbaishan special status in the Qing empire. Korean trespassing for the purpose of ginseng poaching in Qing territory prompted the Kangxi emperor to launch the investigation of Changbaishan as well as of the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. The investigation left an unclear area on the upper Tumen River. This outcome enabled the Qing emperor to demonstrate his imperial authority at the margins of his empire, while the Koreans received confirmation of Chosŏn territorial sovereignty over areas to the south of the Yalu and Tumen Rivers. Chapter 3, “Managing the Borderland,” shows that the ginseng monopoly continued to define Qing restrictions in the northeast as well as the boundary with the Chosŏn throughout the eighteenth century. The Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors initially agreed with their Manchu officials who sought to build a military guard post on the Yalu River in order to strengthen security in the ginseng-producing preserves. However, the Qing emperors eventually decided to clear the vast territory to the north of the Yalu River and to maintain the empty buffer zone that separated the Qing realm from that of the Chosŏn. This uninhabited and restricted land made the Qing-Chosŏn boundary a thick demarcating line. Chapter 4, “Movement of People and Money,” describes the unexpected ways in which the empty space at the boundary attracted people and goods and became a meeting place between local Qing people and Chosŏn visitors. The gate into Qing territory was officially opened to the Chosŏn tributary embassy, and Korean merchants took advantage of the enforced vacuum at the boundary to increase

opportunities for trade with the Qing. As a consequence, the tributary relations disruptively commercialized the Qing-Chosŏn borderland.

Until the end of their tributary relations in 1895, the Qing court stressed the inferior status of Chosŏn Korea in order to demonstrate the emperor's prominence and legitimacy as the Son of Heaven. The Chosŏn government, in turn, used this relationship to protect its territory, sovereignty, and commercial profits. The Chosŏn court relied on the rhetoric of the tributary relationship in every discussion with the Qing. When the Kangxi emperor sent his emissary to investigate the Changbaishan mountain range, the Chosŏn court complimented the emperor on his care for the small country, on the one hand, but intentionally left the source of the upper Tumen River unclear, on the other. During a series of efforts on the part of the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors to strengthen security at the Yalu River, the Chosŏn court again employed the language of the tributary relationship and eventually succeeded in preventing Qing soldiers from approaching Chosŏn territory. The development of trade in the area near the Yalu River was the direct result of regular and frequent visits by Korean embassies to Beijing. The Chosŏn king was not intimidated into letting the Qing court rule his country. Instead, by repeatedly stressing the fundamental principle of the tributary relationship—namely, the great country's unlimited benevolence toward the small country—the Chosŏn court actually endeavored to secure the Qing empire's recognition of Chosŏn authority in Korea.

As long as the Qing court saw a complementarity between the empty space at the Chosŏn boundary and its policy of restricting entry to Manchuria, the potential of confusion over territorial limits and the concrete difficulties in boundary control were not a serious concern. That the origin of the Tumen River was left unclear, that the vast terrain between the Willow Palisade and the Yalu River remained off-limits and uninhabited, and that Korean merchants were actively engaged with Qing merchants in Fenghuangcheng were not overly threatening to Qing-Chosŏn relations. In fact, a certain level of confusion and ambiguity was acceptable if it served the asymmetrical relations between the two countries. Chapter 5, "From Borderland to Border," traces the changes that took place at the Qing-Chosŏn boundary in the nineteenth century. After centuries of exploitation, wild ginseng became scarce in Manchuria; instead, people multiplied and occupied the land. A massive influx of Han immigrants circumvented Qing restrictions and settled in the supposedly restricted areas of Manchuria, including those at the Chosŏn boundary. Later, increasing numbers of Korean immigrants crossed the Tumen River in order to inhabit Qing territory. Before, the ambiguity inherent in the empty space between the great country and the small country had been endured and perhaps even respected. But it was no longer acceptable in the late nineteenth century, when the two countries had to redefine their relations based on the modern international order. The Qing-Chosŏn borderland was eventually transformed into a clear border.



MAP 2. The Jurchen-Chosŏn frontier.