

Special Feature

Travel to Baekdusan and its Significance during the Joseon Period

Shin Ik-cheol

Introduction

Baekdusan is considered sacred to the Korean people as the foundation of Baekdudaegan, the mountain range which makes up the “spine” of the Korean peninsula. This perception of national territory existed as an abstract concept from the medieval era. It concretized in the eighteenth century along with other social changes leading to modernity. In the case of the West, the eighteenth century is often considered to be a new period of extensive expeditions, which to a great extent resulted from imperial expansionism. Joseon Korea, in the same period, is also understood as an era during which Koreans, under certain Western influences, extensively published maps due to a redefinition of their understanding of astronomy and geography, which generated a more concrete concept of national territory. The building of the Baekdusan boundary stone at the request of the Qing dynasty in 1712 also appears to have significantly influenced the Baekdusan-centered concept of national territory.

Baekdusan was also a sacred space for the Jurchens (later Manchus). For the Jurchens, Baekdusan was a sacred place in which their myth of origin took place. For the Koreans, Baekdusan was also the place where Yi Seonggye, King Taejo (1335-1408), the founder of the Joseon dynasty, and his ancestors resided for generations. It is also true that both the Korean and Jurchen peoples, for a very long time, lived to the south and north of Baekdusan. This article aims to examine transformations of perceptions of Baekdusan before the concept of the modern nation-state took root, with a particular focus on the Joseon era. The eighteenth century marked the decisive turning point in the conceptual establishment of Korean national territory around Baekdudaegan with the erection of Baekdusan boundary stone—and I therefore will examine the perceptions of Baekdusan before and after the stele’s erection. Furthermore, taking into account the trend of increased Korean elite journeys to Baekdusan from the mid-eighteenth century, I will also concretely examine their experiences by analyzing the extant records of that travel.

Sacred Space Shared by Both the Koreans and Jurchens

The Jurchens are a Tungusic people who originally lived in Manchuria. Their designation often changed—Sushen during the Spring and Autumn Period, Yilou during the era of the Han dynasty, Wuji during the North and South Dynasties, and Mohe during the time of Sui and Tang dynasties. The name Jurchen was first used during the Song dynasty. Around this time the Jurchens established the Jin dynasty (1115-1234) and expelled the Song dynasty from northern China. They ruled a vast territory stretching through all of Manchuria, Inner Mongolia and northern China. The name Jurchen continued to be used during the Ming dynasty, changing to Manchu during the Qing dynasty.

The myth of origin of the founder of the Qing dynasty centers on Baekdusan. *Huangqing kaiguo fangluo*, records on the Qing dynasty's founder Nurhaci, chronicles the myth of origin in *Faxiang shiji* (1887), in its first volume. The content of it is roughly the following. Three angels bathed in the lake on top of Baekdusan. Fogulun, the youngest of the three, ate a fruit dropped by a magpie and became pregnant. She gave a birth to the founding father of the Manchu people. He was a giant and a divine being. His family name was Aixinjueluo (Aisin Gioro) and his given name was Bukuliyongshun. He, the Zhaozuyuan emperor, is considered to be the founding father of the Qing people.

Due to the myth, the Qing people did not even catch magpies. The sacredness of Baekdusan for the Qing dynasty—the original place of their founder—is obvious.

Looking at a map of the Jurchens and reminding himself of the great feats the Jurchen Jin dynasty accomplished against the Song dynasty, Goryeo era scholar Jeong Mongju (1337-1392) exalts in a poem on the map that a great warrior was born on the Baekdusan. Looking at this, the perception that the Jurchen people originated from Baekdusan appears to have existed early in Korea as well.

The Korean perception of Baekdusan as the source of national territory existed since the Goryeo era. U Pilheung, in a written work submitted to King Gongmin, states, “Our country begins at Baekdusan and ends at Jirisan. The root of our land lies in the water and the limb is the tree” (*Goryeosa* 1357:6/9/musin). We can tell from this quote that the concept of Baekdudaegan—the

understanding that the mountain range stretching from Baekdusan to Jirisan forms the center of national territory—already existed during this period. This understanding, however, was deeply idealized through its association with geomancy. It is difficult, of course, to argue that such a view reflects realistic perceptions of national territory.

Looking at records on Baekdusan before the eighteenth century, early Joseon records are largely concerned with defense against the Jurchens with Baekdusan forming a border area. For example, Yu Sun (1441-1517) spoke in a poem bidding farewell to Yi Janggong (who was posted in Hamgyeong province), “Jangbaeksan (Baekdusan) stands touching to the sky. The south of it is our gate to the north. Different peoples conveniently live next to each other, and absorb each other according to their strengths” (Sin 1518: *gwon* 6). He is discussing the Baekdusan region as a border area where the two peoples coexist, and says that the border moves according to the collective strengths of the peoples. Yu Sun’s poem therefore argues that the status of the areas around Baekdusan depends on national strength—emphasizing the need to protect Korea’s northern border.

The perception that Baekdusan is the guardian mountain of the Korean people and forms Korea’s northern border appears to have existed since early Joseon. Choe Bu (1454-1504), a Seongjong era scholar-official, was lost at sea during his trip back home for his father’s funeral in 1488. He had been on official duty on Jeju Island. He and his entourage drifted to Ningbo of Ming China’s Zhejiang province. He and his entourage were moved to Shaoxing, where they were investigated by Ming officials. To prove that they were Koreans, Choe Bu was asked to speak of Korea’s history, geography, famous people, customs and rites. Speaking of Korea’s geography, Choe Bu first mentioned Baekdusan—“for mountains and rivers, Jangbaeksan is in the northeast and it is also called Baekdusan. Its width is some 1000 *li* and the height is some 200 *li*. The lake on the top of it has a circumference of some 80 *li*. It flows east becoming the Duman River, flows south becoming the Abrok River, flows northeast becoming the Suping River, and flows northwest becoming the Songhua River. The lower part of Songhua River is Huntong River (Choe 1488: *gwon* 1). Choe Bu clearly views Baekdusan as the guardian mountain of Korean national territory. His knowledge of Baekdusan and the rivers that originate from Baekdusan are surprisingly accurate.

Kim Seryeom (1593-1646), who went to Japan as a member of the Korean diplomatic mission in 1636, mentions Baekdusan in a poem on Fuji Mountain of Japan—“I hear that it has permanent snow dating from antiquity, does it want to measure its height against Baekdusan?” It shows that he recognizes Baekdusan as a representative of Korean national territory. Kim Yuk (1580-1658), in a written work of dedication to the private academy built in honor of Jo Heon (1544-1592), mentioned Baekdusan of the north in addition to Pungaksan (Diamond Mountain) of the east, Taebaeksan of the west, Duryusan (Jirisan) of the south as the four guardian mountains of Korea.

Baekdusan, considered a guardian mountain of the Korean people from early Joseon, received official status by the time of Yeongjo by being added into the book of official state rituals. In 1767, King Yeongjo accepted the petition of Han Ikmo that rites must be performed for Baekdusan as it forms the origin of national territory and is also a place where the dynasty’s founder Yi Seonggye began his career (*Seungjeongwon ilgi* 1761:37/1/30). This elevation meant that Baekdusan officially became sacred as the origin of Korean national territory and the guardian mountain of the Korean people. This incident is noteworthy as a definite expression of the steady growth of national territorial consciousness. I will take a detailed look in the next section.

The Establishment of the Baekdusan Boundary Stone and the Formation of the Perception of National Territory Centered around Baekdudaegan

As mentioned above, the geomancy-related perception that Baekdusan constitutes the root of Korean national territory dates from the Goryeo period. Although this perception continued into the Joseon era, such an understanding was not based on accurate observations based on actual climbing and investigation of the mountain and its surroundings. At the time, climbing Baekdusan was a difficult and risky business that required enormous manpower and equipment. Perhaps due to the technical difficulty of climbing, records of Korean elites climbing Baekdusan cannot be found prior to the eighteenth century. The only extant pre-eighteenth century

records are from those who climbed the mountain for the purposes of hunting and finding ginseng.

The north province (Hamgyeong province) has a number of enormous mountains and great mountain ranges. Those that reach the sky, sink into the sea, and stretch thousands of *li* into the southern seas all originate from Baekdusan. I once strolled at Sonongbo of Sansu County. I went up to Janggyeongryeong and looked—Baekdusan is located within the land of barbarians. It was only a few days' walk away from our border. The mountain is so uniquely white—looks like it has either been snowed upon or made out of ice. It seems like it is looking down on other mountains around it. The scene of smaller and steep mountains surrounding it reminds me of children surrounding a dignified adult. ... The people of this region often pass by Baekdusan when trading with the barbarians. However, to the end, they never tell anyone from other regions information about the mountain. ... When the barbarians pass by this mountain on their way to pillage Chinese lands, they present a silk roll and perform rites out of fear of the mountain's ghost. Barbarians do not dare to take the silk after the rites, leaving it there to rot from snow and rain. (Yu 2006:706–707)

This record, present in Yu Mongin (1559-1623)'s *Eou yadam*, is collected from what he heard from the locals living near Baekdusan. Through his mention of how the mountain ranges stemming from Baekdusan form the backbone of Korean national territory, we can deduce that his view of Korean national territory centers on Baekdudaegan. It also says that locals of the area trade with the barbarians (Jurchens) and often enter Baekdusan. It also mentions that they keep their secret from the people of our country to their deaths. By “the people of our country,” it refers to the people under the Joseon jurisdiction—positioned vis-à-vis people of the border area. As we can see from the quote discussed, we can tell that Korean and Jurchen peoples of the areas around Baekdusan secretly traded with each other.

It is highly likely that, at the turn of the seventeenth century when *Eou yadam* was written, the areas around Baekdusan were areas unreached by the state powers of either Joseon Korea or Ming China. Joseon was preoccupied with recovering from devastations caused by the Japanese invasions of Korea, and China lost its control over Manchuria through the turmoil of the Ming-Qing transition. As the area around Baekdusan was a base of Manchu

(Jurchen) people who later established the Qing dynasty, it is more likely that they ruled this area. The quote, “Baekdusan is located within the land of barbarians. It was only a few days’ walk away from our border,” shows that the Jurchens were the actual rulers of the area around Baekdusan at the time. It also shows their way of performing rites to the ghost of Baekdusan.

The perception on Baekdudaegan, that Baekdusan comprises the source of Korean national territory, becomes clearer by the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century Korean envoys to China often visited the Catholic Church of Beijing and came into contact with Western learning. Objects the Korean envoys displayed the most interest in were the Western astronomical calendar and paintings. The Western astronomical calendar, in particular, drew a great amount of attention from Korean envoys due to the Korean interest in adopting the new Chinese calendar. Korean envoys, startled at the precision of Western tools such as a model globe, compass, telescope and map, bought them and brought them into Korea (Shin 2006:18-20). Western world maps and astronomical tools became the stimulants that transformed the traditional Korean worldview as well as the perception of national territory. Diverse sets of maps were produced in response. The eighteenth century proliferation of poems on travel and landscape are closely related to the expanded production and distribution of maps. Proliferation of poems and travelogues on Baekdusan should also be understood in this context (Jin 2000:123). With the increased production of maps based on accurate measurements, perceptions of Baekdudaegan—the backbone of the Korean peninsula—also became clearer.

To take an example from Yi Ik’s work, he describes Baekdudaegan in the *Baedu Jeonggan* section of his book *Cheonjimun* (later part of his collected works) as the following:

Baekdusan is the ancestor of all of our country’s mountain ranges. Different mountain ranges that are stretching west from Cheolryeong all run to the southwest. They all rose to the sky at Taebaeksan and Sobaeksan—they are the main branches. Minor branches in the middle have all stretched west. ... To the outside, mountain ranges that went around to Japan encircled the body of water and created the small and big [Japanese] islands. The range to the east stretched to Jiri[san]. Its magnificent and energetic appearance is as if the mountain ranges cut through the sea. ... The straight and big mountain range started from Baekdusan, became Taebaeksan in the middle,

and turned into Jirisan at the end, which shows how the mountains have been named.

The quote above clearly displays the perception of Baekdudaegan—the idea that the mountain range stretching from Baekdusan to Taebaeksan and Jirisan makes up the spine of Korean national territory. Yi Ik argues that, beyond the Korean peninsula, even the Japanese islands across the East Sea are affected by the geomantic forces of Baekdudaegan. The inclusion of Japan into the geomantic forces of Baekdudaegan was a geographic perspective a number of other scholars also shared. Other outstanding geographers of this era such as Yi Junghwan (1690-1752) and Sin Gyeongjun (1712-1781), in their works *Taekriji* and *Sangyeongpyo*, also emphasize the significance of Baekdudaegan in describing the Korean peninsula's geography.

In addition, eighteenth-century intellectual circles started to pay attention to Manchuria in terms of perceiving national territory. Yi Ik, An Jeongbok, Sin Gyeongjun, Hong Yangho, and Yi Junghwi are representative in this case. Practical attention to the northern region had been increasing with the increased migration into Hamgyeong province and the northern edges of Pyeongan province from the South. The establishment of the Baekdusan boundary stone in 1712 was an additional catalyst that called Koreans' attention to Korea's northeast (Bak 1996:76-77).

The Baekdusan boundary stone refers to a stele demarcating the boundary between the Qing and Joseon erected at the Qing court's request. Although the Qing court at the time maintained that their motive was to crack down on those who climbed over Baekdusan to poach wild ginseng, its real intention was to take back Baekdusan—the sacred site of their origin. With a number of Western missionaries participating, the Qing dynasty at the time, under the orders of Kangxi Emperor, was already researching and surveying for a national map covering the entire Qing territory. In particular, the Qing official Mu Kedeng explored and climbed Baekdusan to survey the Heilongjiang region with Western missionaries Xaiver Fridelli, J. B. Regis and Petrus Jartoux in 1710 (Fang 2007:432-433). The Qing map, *Huangdi quanyutu*, was completed in 1718 after decades of researching and surveying. We can deduce from these facts that the Qing leadership closely researched the territories under its rule with particular attention to Baekdusan—the “place of origin” of their ancestors.

Processes that led to the erection of Baekdusan boundary stone are carefully documented in a number of historical sources. Kim Jinam, the chief interpreter of the Korean side erecting the stele, recorded his experiences in *Bukjeongrok*. Bak Gwon (1668-1715), another official of the Korean mission, left his records in *Bukjeong ilgi*. Hong Setae (1653-1725)'s *Baekdusangi* is also a relevant record—it includes records of Kim Gyeongmun, son of Kim Jinam, who climbed to the top of Baekdusan.

The head Qing representative Mu Kedeng prevented the Korean representatives Bak Gwon and Yi Seonbu from climbing Baekdusan pointing to their advanced age and health. Mu Kedeng, after climbing to the top of Baekdusan, inscribed on the stele that “the western tributary becomes Abrok River and the eastern tributary becomes Tumen River.” His inscription was based on a misconception—he mistook the Tumen River, which was a tributary of Songhua River, for the Duman River. His misconception led to a territorial dispute on some 700 *li* of territory inside the Duman River border. Scholars who later climbed the mountain, Bak Jong (1735-1793), Seo Myeongeung (1716-1787), Yi Ik, Yi Junghwan, Sin Gyeongjun, Hong Yangho (1724-1802), and Jeong Dongyu (1744-1808) all pointed out that Joseon lost some 700 *li* of territory due to the Baekdu boundary stone. A sense of indignation over the loss of territory is most evident in the poem *Duman River* by Sin Gwangha. He writes, “I hear that Mu Kedeng broke the older agreement in determining the border. Who saw the Seonchunryeong? Yun Gwan’s name pointlessly continues to be passed down. They did not even lift a finger while we lost 700 *li* of land (Jin 2000:148-149).

The border dispute between the Qing and Joseon reemerged in the 1870s when the Qing court strengthened its control over Korean residents of the Jiandao region after realizing the region’s geopolitical importance. In 1883, the Qing notified the Korean court that it will expel Korean residents of the Tumen River region—aiming to establish direct control of the region. The Koreans of Jiandao protested that the Qing court is mistaking the Tumen River, the actual boundary the two countries agreed on, with the Duman River. They took their case to the Korean magistrate of Gyeongseong. The dispute led to another visit and ascent of Baekdusan in 1885—in order to determine the source of the Tumen River. Yi Jungha (1864-1917), the Joseon representative, recorded his experience in *Baekdusan ilgi*. This record speaks of the tale of the Korean mission which

climbed Baekdusan despite the extreme cold and snow in order to confirm that the source of the Tumen River is not Baekdusan but upstream of the Songhua River.

Conditions and Significance of Late Joseon Travels to Baekdusan

As we have discussed above, the establishment of the Baekdusan boundary stone in the midst of the expansion of map production and the proliferation of a culture of travel greatly expanded general interest in Baekdusan. Furthermore, the previously abstract and ideal perception of Baekdudaegan also became more concrete and formed the backbone of a new perception of national territory. Reflecting these changes, records on those who climbed Baekdusan began to appear frequently by the early eighteenth century. Yi Jae (1680-1746) wrote of Baekdusan in the early eighteenth century as he heard of it as follows:

Hearing your description of the grand sight is cathartic.
 The topography of Baekdu Mountain rivals that of Kunlun Mountain.
 There is no other land to the north but this mountain.
 Mountain ranges stretch to its east as if they are its children.
 Gentle hill thinly opens up, forming a path at Samsu.
 The deep lake becomes the source of two rivers.
 To take a look at it from the southern mountaintop in the clear morning
 My vision ends in the midst of its piled energy. (Yi 1803:18)

This poem appears to have been composed in 1709 while Yi Jae was in the charge of the military of North Hamgyeong province. It says that the description of Baekdusan rivals that of Kunlun Mountain, and Manchuria appears to have been formed by its topography. The phrase on mountain ranges stretching east appears to be discussing Baekdudaegan, which gives rise to the mountain ranges of Korea. The path through the three rivers is referring to the travel path towards Baekdusan. The phrase on Baekdusan being the source of two rivers seems to be referring to Abrok and Duman Rivers with the Baekdusan's lake being the water source. Yi Ik, in his *Seongho saseol*, records what he heard about Baekdusan. He wrote, "A long time ago, a guest named Mr. Jeon came to me and said, 'I have visited all the

mountains and rivers of our land no matter how remote they were. When I climbed to the top of Baekdusan, Musan was not far away.' He then explained it in detail."

Secondhand records dominated the mode of writings about Baekdusan until the early eighteenth century. After the mid-eighteenth century, however, the firsthand recordings on Baekdusan began to proliferate. Travelogues on Baekdusan can be categorized into two types. The first type is those recorded by the individuals who participated in erecting the Baekdusan boundary stone in 1712. The second type is travelogues left by those who climbed the mountain for leisure. Of records related to the Baekdusan boundary stone, extant records include the mission head Bak Gwon's *Bukjeong ilgi*, the head translator Kim Jinam's *Bukjeongrok*, and Song Setae's *Baekdusangi*. *Baekdusangi* is a record of the words of Kim Gyeongmun, who was a son of Kim Jinam and who had climbed to the mountain top. For records from those who traveled to Baekdusan for pleasure, there are Yi Euicheol (1703-1778)'s *Baekdusangi*, Bak Jong's *Baekdusan yurok*, and Seo Myeongeung's *Yubaekdusangi*.

Yi Euicheol's *Baekdusangi*, written during Yi's tenure as the Gapsan magistrate, is the oldest extant travelogue of Baekdusan. Bak Jong's *Baekdusan yurok* is a record of his visit to Baekdusan, as a local scholar of Gyeongseong, with the Gyeongseong magistrate Sin Sanggwon and his group. Seo Myeongeung's *Yubaekdusangi* is a record of a trip to Baekdusan taken by Seo Myeongeung and Jo Eom. Seo and Jo, both exiled, to Gapsan and Samsu regions respectively, had traveled to Baekdusan together while in exile. In addition, a number of Korean elites who did not leave records of their trip appear to have traveled to Baekdusan. Hong Gyehui, for example, visited Baekdusan while on his trip to Gapsan and Musan in 1742 (Yi 1998:258). In the case of Sin Gwangha, Jeong Yagyong's letter *Song jintaek singong gwangha yubaekdusanseo* confirms that Sin Gwangha was visiting Baekdusan when Sin's nephew was posted to Gyeongseong. We can conclude through such examples that an increase of interest in Baekdusan resulted in a culture of travelling to Baekdusan when opportunities arose—such as being exiled to nearby regions and being able to obtain local help, or having a relative posted to the regions nearby. As mentioned already, there is also Yi Jung-ha's *Baekdusan ilgi* in 1855—a record left when Yi climbed Baekdusan to locate the source of the Tumen River. As we have already covered the conditions

surrounding the 1712 erection of the Baekdusan boundary stone, we will just generally cover Joseon scholars' travels to Baekdusan and their perception of it.

Even today, climbing Baekdusan is a perilous journey. What preparations were needed for climbing Baekdusan during the late Joseon period? Yi Euicheol's *Baekdusangi* describes the scene of departing for Baekdusan as follows:

I departed with Yi Baekheung. A handful of military officials including Gang Deukgu and Baek Suhoe followed along. Including soldiers and riflemen, the total number was around forty. In addition, an official and some hundred villagers from the towns of Unchong, Hyesan, and Byeolsa were dispatched four to five days prior to open up the road and establish temporary places of lodging for eating and sleeping. The horses, including the ones to ride and carry travel supplies such as tents and horse feed, totaled sixteen. All wore hats and military uniforms, as they could not wear normal clothes and go through the woods. (Yi 1998:229)

It can be seen from the record that a number of soldiers and riflemen accompanied the group. It is most likely that the group needed someone familiar with the geography, and the shooters were included in order to prepare against the presence of wild animals. The fact that they had to dispatch another group to prepare the road shows that the path to Baekdusan in 1751 was a difficult journey. No roads obviously meant there were no places for lodging. The places for lodging had to be prepared in advance. Other travelogues note huts made by barbarian (Jurchen) hunters. They were sometimes used by the travelers. As significant manpower and materials were needed in climbing Baekdusan, most travelers obtained help from neighboring towns such as Gapsan and Musan. Help from local officials must have been necessary in order to supply materials. Locals familiar with the geography were also needed in order to get through the often roadless path to Baekdusan.

Another source of worry for these well-prepared travelers was the unpredictability of Baekdusan's weather. It was customary that travelers would perform purification rituals and carry out rites to the mountain ghost. Near the top of the mountain, travelers refrained from laughing and chatting while taking a reverent attitude out of hopes to see the grand sight of the lake in a bright day.

According to local customs, hunters usually prayed to the mountain god before hunting animals such as roe deer, deer, and sable. On this trip, military officers and servants performed purification and carried out rites at Heohangryeong. They carried out another rite at Yeonjibong. Following departure from the lodging at Yeonjibong, nobody was allowed to laugh loudly or make jokes. When the snow cleared with their arrival at the mountain top, people claimed that the mountain ghost was helping the group. (Yi 1998:238)

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As the tall Baekdusan sacredly makes its presence in our land, the people living below want to see it. This trip was truly blessed by the heavens—we traveled for some 3,000 *li* under difficult conditions to see the mountain. If the mountain god is there, he must know our sincerity. Please show the grand sight by removing the fog and clouds. Why would heaven insist on hiding? The sun and stars are brightly hanging in the sky. Why wouldn't the way of the land correspond to the way of the heavens? I here present a clean vegetable dish in place of sacrifice. (Yi 1998:287)

The quote above clearly displays the local customs of offering rites to Baekdusan. The quote below is the oration Seo Myeongeung delivered to the mountain god on his 1766 trip to Baekdusan. He clarifies his intention to see the lake under clear weather by stating, “Please show us the magnificent sight by clearing out fog and clouds.” Although some Korean elites refused to carry out the rites to the mountain god, most of the time they carried them out due to strong urging from the locals who accompanied them as guides. Gyeongseong magistrate Sin Sanggwon, who traveled to Baekdusan with Bak Gwon in 1764, had initially refused to worship the mountain ghost. However, at the behest of Jeon Tongseong of Samsan, who had climbed the mountain twelve times, Sin Sanggwon finally agreed to carry out the rites (Yi 1998:258).

What feelings did Korean scholar-elites have after arriving at the top of Baekdusan after remaining reverent and carrying out rites to the mountain god? First and foremost, they felt that Baekdusan comprised the source of Korean national territory. Seo Myeongeung wrote that “all features of our mountains and rivers, regardless of their height and steepness, originate from Baekdusan. It is similar to that of the polar star—the polar star does not move, but remains as the source of all other stars (Yi 1998:296). At that time, there were no specific names for the lake or the mountain peaks

surrounding it. Seo Myeongeung even named the twelve peaks surrounding the lake after calling the lake itself “Taeiltaek.” He was also startled by the magnificent and seemingly profound sight of the lake. He wrote of his mysterious experience by writing, “Climbing up here refreshes a man’s mind and straightens up the bodily energy. It is as if both my eyes and mind are renewed. I felt as if I were enraptured” (Yi 1998:261). On the other hand, both Bak Jong and Seo Myeongeung vented their frustration at losing some 700 *li* of territory through the erection of the Baekdusan boundary stone by Mu Kedeng.

The stele Mu Kedeng established stands at the point where the water flow splits into two. This place is the source of the Tumen River. The Duman River was to be used as the basis of the border. Because Zhong Chen and Dao Bo disliked climbing up to dangerous places, both of them remained at Samsu while only Mu Kedeng and a handful of military officials climbed the mountain. They mistakenly took the Tumen River as the border—resulting in our loss of some 700 *li* of territory. The locals still criticize this mistake to this day. (Yi 1998:259)

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The Bungye River is located 100 *li* southwest of Onseong. Goryeo era general Yun Gwan’s stele is located below Sunchunryeong. Guessing from the river’s name and the stele, it is without doubt that this place marks the border of our country. In addition, the Bungye River joins Yun Ihu’s Ugato River and enters into the Duman River. The Duman River branches out from the east of Baekdusan. The decision is easy once you take a look at the source. But we surrendered 700 *li* of territory overnight. Ah! It is so regrettable. (Yi 1998:291)

Bak Jong criticized the failure of Bak Gwon and Yi Seonbu to climb up to Baekdusan with Mu Kedeng stating that it resulted in loss of 700 *li* of territory inside the Duman River border. He also said that the locals of the area still lament the loss. The second quote is from Jo Eom, who climbed Baekdusan with Seo Myeongeung. Jo criticizes the rash decision on the border made without considering Yun Gwan’s stele which resulted in the loss of territory. Seo Myeongeung, responding to Jo’s words, criticized the acts of Bak Gwon and Yi Seonbu and lamented that a number of peasants in the area have lost their lives by stating, “The two men (Bak Gwon and

Yi Seonbu) only worried about their own bodies without valuing national territory. They did not lament this reduction of national territory, and because of that, countless peasants have died crossing over the border to collect firewood and wild ginseng. Ah! One bad job can result in such harm. How could state officials not be vigilant about this!” We can tell from the quotes that Korean elites who climbed Baekdusan firmly believed that the miscalculation led to a loss of some 700 *li* of Korean territory inside of the Duman River border.

Conclusion

We have, so far, using records left by Korean elites, examined the conditions of their perception and travel to Baekdusan. I’d like to conclude by summarizing the arguments of this article.

Perceptions of Baekdudaegan have existed in an idealized form along with geomancy since the Goryeo period. Elites of early Joseon also recognized Baekdusan as a sacred and representative mountain of Korean national territory. Such perceptions are evident in Choe Bu’s description on Baekdusan in response to the questions of Chinese officials on Korean geography as well as Kim Seryeom’s comparison of Baekdusan with Fuji Mountain of Japan during his trip to Japan as a member of the Korean state envoy. Interest in Baekdusan substantially increased in the eighteenth century—resulting in a clear perception of a Baekdudaegan-based national territory. The 1712 erection of Baekdusan the boundary stone as a border marker between the Qing and Joseon aroused further interest in Baekdusan. Contemporaneous proliferation of accurate mapmaking in this period, influenced by Western learning, further strengthened the popular perception of Baekdudaegan-centered national territory. A group of scholars strongly criticized the Baekdusan boundary stone by claiming that Korea lost some 700 *li* of territory inside of Duman River through a miscalculation of the Tumen River’s location. With the rise of a culture of traveling, as well as interest in Baekdusan after mid-eighteenth century, the overall number of people visiting and climbing Baekdusan substantially increased. Climbing Baekdusan during this period required mobilization of substantial manpower and supplies. It was a difficult journey that sometimes

necessitated the building of new roads. At Baekdusan, according to the local customs, even the elites performed rites to the mountain god. To see the magnificent sight of the mountain lake, the visitors even left records of oration to the mountain god asking for good weather.

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Shin Ik-cheol (cloudway@aks.ac.kr) is a professor at the Academy of Korean Studies. He obtained a doctorate from Sungkyunkwan University and studied the Chinese classics at the Taedong Center for Eastern Classics. He specializes in classical Korean literature and has an interest in the translation of Korean literature written in classical Chinese into contemporary Korean. Translations on which he collaborate that have recently been published include *Eou yadam* (2006), *Songcheon pildam* (2009), and *Ganong umuk* (2010).

Abstract

This article analyzed the transformations of perception on Baekdusan in the pre-modern era before the concepts of nation-state took root.

Perceptions of Baekdudaegan have existed in an idealized form along with geomancy since the Goryeo period. Elites of early Joseon also recognized Baekdusan as a sacred and representative mountain of Korean national territory. Such perceptions are evident in Choe Bu's description on Baekdusan in response to the questions of Chinese officials on Korean geography as well as Kim Seryeom's comparison of Baekdusan with Fuji Mountain of Japan during his trip to Japan as a member of the Korean state envoy. Interest in Baekdusan substantially increased in the eighteenth century—resulting in a clear perception of Baekdudaegan-based national territory. The 1712 erection of the Baekdusan boundary stone as a border marker between the Qing and Joseon aroused further interest in Baekdusan. Contemporaneous proliferation of accurate mapmaking in this period, influenced by Western learning, further strengthened the popular perception of Baekdudaegan-centered national territory. A group of scholars strongly criticized the Baekdusan boundary stone by claiming that Korea lost some 700 *li* of territory inside of the Duman River through a miscalculation of the Tumen River's location. With the rise of a culture of traveling as well as interest in Baekdusan after the mid-eighteenth century, the overall number of people visiting and climbing Baekdusan substantially increased. Climbing Baekdusan during this period required mobilization of substantial manpower and supplies. It was a difficult journey that sometimes necessitated the building of new roads. At Baekdusan, according to the local customs, even the elites performed rites to the mountain god. In order to see the magnificent sight of the mountain lake, visitors even left records of oration to the mountain god asking for good weather.

Keywords: Baekdusan, Baekdusan boundary stone, Baekdudaegan, perception of national territory, and Baekdusan travelogue

