

Special Feature

# The People of Joseon's Perception of Baekdusan Viewed through Geographical Materials

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## Introduction

One cannot conjure up images of scenery in Korea without thinking of mountains. This is why our ancestors referred to Korea's territory as *gangsán* (江山, land of rivers and mountains) or *sancheon* (山川, land of mountains and streams). For our ancestors, mountains constituted places where life originated, the source of man's vitality. They were also the places where life ended. Mountains greatly influenced the national spirit, daily life, and culture of Korea. Put differently, mountains were regarded as a maternal entity that nurtured the life and culture of the Korean nation.

On the other hand, mountains have since ancient times been perceived as sacred and divine beings. The precipitousness and profoundness of mountains aroused a sense of mystery and mysticism that, in effect, transformed mountains into an object of worship. Mountains connected humans with the heavens and were regarded as divine beings that greatly influenced mankind. Among the various mountains, Baekdusan was the most sacred and divine in the eyes of Korea's ancestors. Perceived as a sacred mountain, it over time became an object of worship. Furthermore, Baekdusan was also perceived as a natural symbol for the Korean peninsula. More to the point, our ancestors compared the shape of the Korean peninsula to that of a crouching tiger preparing to pounce on the Asian mainland. While the Baekdudaegan (白頭大幹, Baekdu mountain range) which formed the backbone of the Korean peninsula was compared to the backbone of the tiger, Baekdusan was situated in the area that constituted the head of the tiger. As such, our ancestors regarded Baekdusan as the point of origin of all Korean mountains.

Although the perception of Baekdusan as the spiritual mountain of the Korean nation, as the point of origin of all Korean mountains, and as the basis of the Korean homeland originated from the ancient era, these perceptions were further strengthened during the Joseon dynasty. The emergence of this phenomenon can be traced back to two key developments that occurred during this era. The first was the location of the hometown of the founder of Joseon, Yi Seonggye, in the same Hamgyeong Province that is also home to Baekdusan; the other key factor was Qing China's

growing emphasis from the seventeenth century onwards on the divine status of Baekdusan as the point of origin of the Jurchen nation. In this regard, this second factor had the effect of greatly increasing the importance of Baekdusan as far as the issue of the border between Qing and Joseon was concerned. The people of Joseon's perceptions of Baekdusan are saliently exposed in the geographical materials produced at the time. For example, the majority of the ancient maps produced during the Joseon era described Baekdusan as being much bigger than its actual size, and used white or golden hues to express the mountain, thus evidencing the Baekdusan-oriented perception of the national territory.

Based on a review of geographical materials, this study analyzes the people of Joseon's perceptions of Baekdusan. More specifically, the study begins with an analysis of how Baekdusan was drawn and described in ancient maps, topographies (*jiriji*), and *Silhak* (Practical Learning)-influenced geographic texts. Second, by analyzing the depictions and descriptions of Baekdusan included in geographical materials, this study delves into the nature and extent of the people of Joseon's objective knowledge and subjective perception of Baekdusan. Third, based on a chronological approach to geographical materials, this study traces how the perceptions of Baekdusan changed over time.

This study, which begins with the collection of the ancient maps of Joseon, topographies, and *silhak*-influenced geographical works that included descriptions of Baekdusan, also encompasses a review of existing studies on Baekdusan. Various kinds of maps were collected and analyzed. These included maps of Korea, maps of Hamgyeong Province, maps of counties and prefectures, and maps created for such purposes as defense and the delineation of borders. In contrast to modern maps that are manufactured based on precise measurements, ancient maps reflected such elements as the producer's perception of values, the social atmosphere at the time, and the relative importance of individual regions. As a result, they actively reflected the perceptions of Baekdusan that existed at the time.

The topographies examined in this study include national topographies such as the *Sejong sillok jiriji* (世宗實錄地理志, Geographical Appendix to the Veritable Records of King Sejong), *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽, A Revised Edition of the Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea), and the *Yejidoseo* (輿地圖書, Detailed Records of

Geography) as well as the *eupji* (邑誌, Gazetteers of the Counties and Prefectures) compiled for the areas around Baekdusan. The main focus in this regard was on how Baekdusan was described in these topographical materials, the accuracy of the content and periodic changes.

The perceptions of Baekdusan of late Joseon *Silhak* scholars are clearly exposed in their compilations. To this end, the present study analyzes Yi Ik's *Seongho saseol* (星湖僿說, Essays of Seongho), Yi Junghwan's *Taengniji* (擇里誌, Ecological Guide to Korea), Sin Gyeongjun's *Sansugo* (山水考, A Study of Mountains and Rivers), Jeong Yakyong's *Abang gangyeok go* (我邦疆域考, Historical Geography of Korea) and *Daedong sugyeong* (大東水經, Book of Waterways in Korea) in order to gain a better understanding of the knowledge and perceptions of Baekdusan possessed by this group of scholars.

## Perceptions of Baekdusan Prior to the Joseon Era

While this study predominantly focuses on the people of Joseon's perceptions of Baekdusan, it is necessary to begin with a basic summary of the people's perceptions of Baekdusan prior to the Joseon era. To date, no records related to Baekdusan produced prior to the Goryeo era have been uncovered. However, that being said, we can nevertheless surmise that a geographical perception of Baekdusan existed during the Three Kingdoms era. More to the point, the fact that the Baekdusan area fell within the territory of Goguryeo means that it must have been of some significance to the denizens of that ancient state.

The following entry related to Baekdusan during the Goryeo era can be found in *Goryeosa* (高麗史, History of Goryeo):

An ancestor of the founder of the Goryeo dynasty Wang Geon whose name was Ho Gyeong embarked on a trek of all the land's mountains and rivers that commenced at Baekdusan. He eventually arrived in a valley situated to the left of Busosan, where he married and lived out the rest of his life.  
(*Goryeosa* 1451)

Thus, we can see that the name of Baekdusan was employed as far back as early Goryeo, and that the people of Goryeo were clearly aware of the

existence of Baekdusan. Furthermore, the conception of Baekdusan as a divine place appears to have existed during the Goryeo era, at which time it was regarded as the point of origin of the homeland. In the birth myth of Wang Geon, one finds a reference to the fact that the veins, or *jimaek* (地脈, geographical position based on the principles of *feng shui*), of the Gaegyeong area where Wang Geon was born originated from Baekdusan. The birth myth of Wang Geon also includes the story of how he received the spirit and energy of Baekdusan at birth. In addition, the use of Baekdusan as a tool to divinize Wang Geon can be construed to mean that the majority of the people at the time already perceived Baekdusan as a sacred object, and that the mountain was accepted as a symbol of the integration of the nation (Yang 2000:32). In addition, evidence has also been uncovered supporting the possibility that ritual ceremonies for Baekdusan were in fact carried out during the Goryeo era. In 1131 (9<sup>th</sup> year of King Injong), Myocheong established a shrine within the walls of Imwon Palace in Seogyeong where eight saints were to be worshipped. The first of these saints was a god related to Baekdusan (Song 2007:142).

The perception of Baekdusan as the point of origin of Korean mountain ranges and the phenomenon of the sanctification of the mountain during the Goryeo era were rooted in the theory of *feng shui* or geomancy which was very popular at the time. The following entry taken from the *Goryeosa* (高麗史, History of Goryeo) was part of a document written by a man named Wu Pilheung for submission to the king in 1357 (6<sup>th</sup> year of King Gongmin):

According to the *Oknyonggi* (玉龍記), the Korean peninsula starts from Baekdusan and ends at Jirisan. While the root of this geographical feature can be compared to water, the vein can be likened to a tree. (*Goryeosa* 1451)

The *Oknyonggi* (玉龍記) was a representative *feng shui* text. While Chinese *feng shui*-based works asserted that all the mountains under the heavens originate from Mount Kunlun (崑崙山), Korean *feng shui* works regarded Baekdusan as the point of origin of all mountains.

## Descriptions of Baekdusan in Ancient Maps

The history of Korean map production can be traced back to the Three Kingdoms Era. However, all of the ancient maps that can be found today were produced during the Joseon era. The ancient maps produced during the Joseon era can be divided into maps of the world, maps of Korea, *dobyeoldo* (maps of provinces), *gunhyeondo* (maps of counties and prefectures), and *jujedo* (theme-based maps). Baekdusan is described on all of these maps. However, a chronological look at such maps yields some cases during early Joseon in which Baekdusan is not, in fact, included. A typical example of this phenomenon is the *Honil gangni yeokdae gukdo jido* (混一疆理歷代國都地圖, Map of Integrated Lands and Regions of Historical Countries and Capitals) manufactured by Gwon Geun and Yi Hoe in 1402 (2<sup>nd</sup> year of King Taejong). This map of the world, the oldest map in Korea that is still extant, has been hailed as one of the most outstanding maps of the world, in that it not only included Joseon and Japan in the east, but also and Europe and Africa to the west. However, Baekdusan is not described on this map, but is rather simply made reference to in small letters (Yang 1994:74-75). In addition, instead of being described as individual mountain peaks, the mountains of Joseon were expressed as mountain ranges using connecting lines. Nevertheless, Baekdusan was described as being detached from the mountain ranges in the south. Thus, we can safely surmise that no clear perception of the Baekdudaegan had been formed amongst the public at the time. However, the *Honil yeokdae gukdo gangni jido* (混一歷代國都疆理地圖) produced during the mid-sixteenth century describes Baekdusan in a different manner. Although the overall outline of this map is similar to that found in the *Honil gangni yeokdae gukdo jido* produced during the fifteenth century, there is a much greater emphasis on Baekdusan in the later work. The mountain ranges originating from Baekdusan are linked together by a long line that encompasses Seoul and the southern provinces. In other words, the Baekdudaegan is clearly expressed on this map.

In addition to the maps of the world, Baekdusan is also clearly described on the maps of Korea. Figure 1 is the *Paldo chongdo* (八道總圖, Map of Eight Provinces of Korea) included in the *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽, A Revised Edition of the Augmented Survey of the

Geography of Korea) compiled during the sixteenth century. Although the outline of the Korean peninsula is quite distorted, the location of Baekdusan is described in a relatively precise manner. However, in terms of size and scope, Baekdusan was not rendered in a manner that set it apart from other mountains described on the map, such as Baekaksan, Jirisan, and Chiaksan. The fact that the Amnok (Yalu) River and Duman (Tumen) River originated from Baekdusan is not clearly expressed. The *Joseon bangyeok jido* (朝鮮方域地圖, Map of Korea) produced in 1557, and as such during relatively the same period as the *Paldo chongdo*, expresses mountains and rivers using lines, the notable exception being Baekdusan, which is described as an independent mountain peak and has its name inscribed on the map. As such, this map can be said to emphasize the significance of Baekdusan. However, while the mountain ranges flowing to the north of Baekdusan are connected, those running southwards are detached beneath Baekdusan before being reconnected further south.

Figure 1. *Paldo chongdo* (八道總圖, Map of Eight Provinces of Korea)



However, by the time future generations came into existence, the description of Baekdusan found on the maps of Korea was one that

gradually revolved around the emphasis on the mountain itself. Figure 2 is a rendering of Baekdusan found in the *Daedong chongdo* (大東摠圖) included in the eighth volume of the *Haedong jido* (海東地圖, Atlas of Korea) produced during the eighteenth century. In contrast to other mountains, Baekdusan is rendered in a whitish hue and boasts a greatly amplified size. Cheonji Lake is referred to as *Daetaek* (大澤); the *Baekdusan jeonggyebi* (白頭山定界碑, Baekdusan Boundary Stone) erected in 1712, the *mokchaek* (木柵, wooden fence) that marked the boundary, and the Tomun (土門江) and Bungye Rivers (分界江) are also depicted as located around Baekdusan. While the Tomun River is described as flowing into the Duman River, the waterway known as the Bungye River that flows towards Onseongbu, is separately described. All the mountains on the Korean peninsula are described as being connected to the ranges emanating from Baekdusan. While the Baekdudaegan is clearly depicted as running all the way to Taebaeksan in the Bonghwa area, the ranges flowing to Jirisan are relatively less emphasized. It is interesting to see how the *Nakdong jeongmaek* (a range running from the southeastern Korean city of Busan to Taebaeksan), which branches off from Taebaeksan toward Dongnae in Gyeongsang Province, is emphasized more than the range running toward Jirisan. In fact, the depiction is

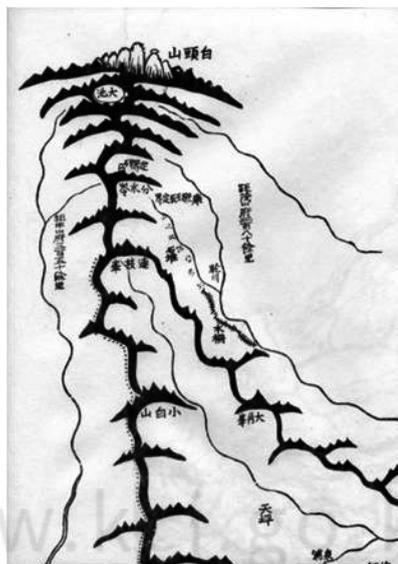
Figure 2. Depiction of Baekdusan in the *Daedong chongdo* (大東摠圖, Map of Korea)



such that one can surmise that the Nakdong range was in all likelihood regarded as the main range of the *Baekdu daegan*. Another interesting fact is the organic perception of the homeland as a human body evident in the explanations found on the lower right side on the map, where Baekdusan is introduced as the head of the nation, and Jeju and Daemado (Tsushima) Islands as its two legs.

Figure 3 showcases the description of Baekdusan contained in the wooden block-printed map of Korea known as the *Daedong yeojido* (大東輿地圖, Detailed Map of Korea) produced by Kim Jeongho during the nineteenth century. This map also amplified the size of Baekdusan. Although Cheonji Lake, which is recorded within as Daeji (大池), is described as flowing into the Songhua River in the north, it is not depicted as flowing into the Amnok River to the southwest and the Duman River to the southeast. On this map, the Baekdusan Boundary Stone is marked at the watershed located beneath Baekdusan. The inscription “康熙壬辰定界,” which refers to the establishment of a mutual border between Joseon and Qing in 1712, a year that coincides with the reign of Emperor Kangxi of Qing and the 38<sup>th</sup> year of King Sukjong of Joseon, is also included on the map. One of the main debates over the Baekdusan Boundary Stone revolves around the issue of what river actually constitutes the Tomun River. More to

Figure 3. Depiction of Baekdusan in *Daedong yeojido* (大東輿地圖, Detailed Map of Korea)



the point, as can be seen from the use of terms such as *seoktoe* (石堆, rubble mound fence) and *geoncheon* (乾川, dry stream) on the map, the debate that emerged over this river was based on the fact that it flowed underground. Given these difficulties using streams as the standard for a border, a wooden fence, which is clearly rendered on the map in both pictorial and written form, was installed to mark the border.

An examination of some the *dobyeoldo* (maps of provinces) and *gunhyeondo* (maps of counties and prefectures) which were produced during this period follows. Figure 4 shows the depiction of Baekdusan contained in the *Hamgyeongdo jido* (咸鏡道地圖, map of Hamgyeong Province) produced during the late eighteenth century. The ranges emanating from Baekdusan are clearly described on this particular map. A sacred atmosphere is created by rendering Baekdusan in a white pigment presented against a green background. While Cheonji Lake is depicted in the shape of a wave, the Baekdusan Boundary Stone, *seoktoe* (rubble mound fence), and *mokchaek* (wooden fence) are depicted in a realistic manner. As Baekdusan belonged to the jurisdiction of Musanbu during later Joseon, it naturally appeared on the *Musanbu gunhyeondo* (Map of Musanbu). In this regard, Figure 5 is the *Musanbu jido* (茂山府地圖, Map of Musanbu Jurisdiction) found in the *Haedong jido* (海東地圖, Atlas of Korea) produced during the mid-eighteenth century. Baekdusan is also rendered with a white pigment on this map, and

Figure 4. Depiction of Baekdusan in *Hamgyeongdo jido*  
(咸鏡道地圖, Map of Hamgyeong Province)



the Baekdusan Boundary Stone and *mokchaek* (wooden fence) are once again described in a realistic manner. Although the Tomun River is depicted as originating from Cheonji Lake, it does not flow in a contiguous fashion. The Eoyun River, a tributary of the Duman River, is depicted, and the name Jangpa (長坡) is inscribed along the upper reaches of the river.

Figure 5. *Musanbu jido* (茂山府地圖, Map of Musanbu Jurisdiction) found in the *Haedong jido* (海東地圖, Atlas of Korea)



One also find many cases in which Baekdusan is depicted in the type of *jujedo* (theme-based map) known as *gwanbang jido* (maps created for such purposes as defense and the delineation of borders) that were used to demarcate the northern border area. Figure 6 is a *gwanbang jido* called *Seobuk pia yanggye jeondo* (西北彼我兩界全圖, Map of the Northwest Border Area) that is found in the *Haedong jido* (海東地圖, Atlas of Korea). In this particular map, Baekdusan is depicted in a manner reminiscent of a real-scenery landscape painting, and Cheonji Lake is once again referred to as *Daetaek* (大澤). Figure 7 is the *Yogye gwanbang jido* (遼薊關防地圖, a military map of Liaodong and the northern border area) produced by Yi Yimyeong in 1706 (32<sup>nd</sup> year of King Sukjong). This map was manufactured by referencing other geographical materials on China such as the *Shengjing zhi* (盛京誌, Records of Shengjing City). It contains obvious errors such as a description which states that Baekdusan is 200-*ri* in height. However, it is very similar to other maps in that it depicts Baekdusan using a whitish hue and overemphasizes its size.

Figure 6. Depiction of Baekdusan in the *Seobuk pia yanggye jeondo* (西北彼我兩界全圖, Map of the Northwest Border Area) found in the *Haedong jido* (海東地圖, Atlas of Korea)



Figure 7. Depiction of Baekdusan in the *Yogye gwanbang jido* (遼薊關防地圖, Military map of Liaodong and the northern border area)



As such, the emphasis on Baekdusan as a natural symbol of Joseon had by the late Joseon era become a generalized phenomenon that was

reflected even in the maps of counties and prefectures (*gunhyeon jido*) and maps created for such purposes as defense and the delineation of borders (*gwanbang jido*). Three overarching expression methods were used to distinguish Baekdusan from other mountains: First, is the use of methods to emphasize the size of Baekdusan. Although it is actually bigger than other mountains, the size of Baekdusan was exaggerated on maps. Second, different colors were employed to separate Baekdusan from other mountains. While Baekdusan was colored in white on the majority of maps, it was rendered in golden yellow in other cases; meanwhile, other mountains were colored in green. There were cases in which the mountain was coated in white based against a green and blue background. Third, while Baekdusan was described in a realistic manner, the other mountain ranges were described using lines. One point which should be noted is that Cheonji Lake located at the top of Baekdusan was always incorporated in such works.

## Baekdusan as Described in Topographies

A lot of topographies (*jiriji*) were compiled during the Joseon era. Depending on the scope of the region that was analyzed, topographies can be divided into national and provincial topographies. They were also called *yeoji* (輿誌) and *eupji* (邑誌, Gazetteers of the Counties and Prefectures). *Eupji* were compiled based on local administrative units such as the *bu*, *mok*, *gun*, and *hyeon*. To this day, one thousand kinds of *eupji* are still extant. In addition, topographies can also be divided into government-led topographies and individual topographies. The government-led topographies were compiled at the state, provincial, and local government levels. Individual topographies were produced by those in the private sector such as individuals and local Confucian scholars. These topographies were generally based on the principle of including objective and precise facts.

The *Sejong sillok jiriji* (世宗實錄地理志, Geographical Appendix to the Veritable Records of King Sejong) produced in 1454 (2<sup>nd</sup> year of King Danjong) was the first topography to mention Baekdusan. This text mentions Baekdusan in the *Hamgildo* (Hamgil province) and *Gyeongwon Dohobu* (慶源都護府) sections. The *Hamgildo* begins by describing the

geography of Hamgil province.

Steep and precipitous mountain ranges originate from Baekdusan and stretch all the way down to Cheolnyeong in the south, some 1000-*ri* away.  
(*Sejong sillok jiriji* 1454)

As such, Baekdusan was regarded as the point of origin of Korean mountains. The *Gyeongwon Dohobu* section explains about Baekdusan in a more detailed manner.

One can find Baekdusan 60-*ri* west of Yeonggasaori. It consists of three layers of mountains. There is a huge lake at the top of Baekdusan. This lake is the point of origin of the Duman River in the east, Soha River (currently Songhua River) in the north, Amnok River in the south, and Heuknyong or Heilong River in the west. All the birds and animals that inhabit this mountain are white and the hillsides of the mountain consist of pumice.  
(*Sejong sillok jiriji* 1454)

As such, it rather accurately describes the facts that Baekdusan is a stratovolcano composed of lava and pyroclastics that erupted from a crater after the formation of a lava plateau; that there is a lake (Cheonji) on top of the mountain; that Cheonji Lake is the point of origin of various rivers and streams; and that the peak is adorned with grayish-white pumices. However, it also contains some erroneous information, such as claims that all the animals that inhabit Baekdusan are white. Based on this information, we can surmise that the public at the time instinctively thought of white whenever they heard about Baekdusan, and that they regarded the mountain as being a divine one.

In contrast to the *Sejong sillok jiriji*, the *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽, A Revised Edition of the Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea), another government-led topography compiled in 1531, includes an abundance of cultural content. This book included a poem and essay related to the mountains or rivers in each province as part of its introduction and explanations about the location of a river or mountain. To this end, the *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* includes the following entry related to Baekdusan in the Mountains and Rivers of Hoeryeong Dohobu section:

Baekdusan is called Changbaisan (長白山) in China. It is located seven to eight days to the west of the Hoeryeong Dohobu. The mountain is composed of three layers. It stands some 200-*ri* tall and more than 1000-*ri* wide. There is a lake at the top of the mountain. The circumference of this lake is approximately 80-*ri*. The Amnok River flows to the south, Songhwa (Songhua) and Hondong River to the north, Soha and Sokpyeong Rivers to the northeast, and the Duman River to the east. The *Daming yitongzhi* (大明一統志, Geography of the Great Ming) states that the river flowing to the east is the Ayekuhe River 阿也苦河. This would appear to be a reference to the Sokpyeong River (速平江). (*Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* 1530)

In addition, the Mountains and Rivers of Gyeongwon Dohobu section clearly identified Baekdusan as the point of origin of the Duman River.

The Duman River is located 25-*ri* to the east of Gyeongwon Dohobu. This river originates from Baekdusan ... after snaking through many local areas, it flows to the south from Hoejilga and reaches Sachamado in Gyeongheungbu. It eventually joins the sea after flowing for an additional 5-*ri* after forking off at Sachamado. (*Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* 1530)

However, contrary to the descriptions of other mountains, there are almost no poems in which Baekdusan is referenced in this book. In fact, the only poem related to Baekdusan is the one written by Yun Jaun (1416-1478) found in the description of Jyeongjo in the Deokwon Dohobu section:

When the god of the earth exhaled,  
the waves of the blue seas flowed from side to side,  
the mountains were contorted and gathered at Baekdusan.  
(*Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* 1530)

A look at information related to Baekdusan contained in the *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (1531) lends itself to the conclusion that very little new geographical knowledge about Baekdusan was gained between the compilation of the *Sejong sillok jiriji* (1454) and this latter work. As there were very few instances in which people travelled to Baekdusan directly, given its status along the border, we can conclude that most of the knowledge pertaining to Baekdusan was gleaned from Chinese topographies such as *Daming yitongzhi* (大明一統志, Geography of the Great Ming).

A wider variety of topographies were compiled during late Joseon. The most well-known government-led topography produced during this period is the *Yeojidoseo* (輿地圖書, Book of Geographical Information about Korea with Maps). The *Yeojidoseo* is a collection of *eupji* compiled by individual counties and prefectures during the period spanning from 1757-1765. It includes more socioeconomic content than the *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam*. The Baekdusan-related content found in the *Yeojidoseo* can be summarized as follows.

- A. Baekdusan is located 350-*ri* to the west of the government office. It is shaped like an earthenware piece on top of an iron pot. The external part of the mountain is covered with earth while the interior is composed of rocks. The top of the mountain is covered with white elements that make it look as if the mountain pierced the heavens. Baekdusan's circumference is approximately 80-*ri*. A big lake is situated in the center of the peak. The four sides of this lake consist of precipitous cliffs of 1,000-*gil* in height that almost look like a folding screen. A waterway is located on the north side of the lake. This waterway that flows down from a waterfall is called the Hondong River. (*Yeojidoseo* n.d.: Natural Features of Musanbu)
- B. The mountain range inside the county stretches from Baekdusan. It passes through Huchi Peak in Bukcheong before reaching Wancheonsa, which marks the northern border of the county. It finally becomes Taebaeksan. (*Yeojidoseo* n.d.: Mountains and Rivers of Hamheungbu)
- C. Baeksan (白山) is located 110-*ri* west of the government office. Its range stretches from Baekdusan. Snow starts to melt in May. It starts to snow once again in July. The rocks on the top of the mountain are also white. Local residents also refer to this area as Jangbaeksan (長白山). (*Yeojidoseo* n.d.: Mountains and Rivers of Gyeongseong Dohobu)
- D. The Duman River is located 6-*ri* to the west of the government office. It originates from the eastern foot of Baekdusan and forms a boundary with Musan to the south. (*Yeojidoseo* n.d.: Mountains and Rivers of Hoeryeongbu)
- E. The southern branch of Baekdusan originates from the area east of Gapsan, forming Durisan. The branch splits into two 300-*ri* north

of the government office. One turns to the northeast, where it forms the ancestral mountain of all the mountains in Hamgyeong Bukdo, Jangbaeksan. (*Yeojidoseo* n.d.: Mountains and Rivers of Dancheonbu)

F. Baekdusan is located 330-*ri* north of the government office. It is the backbone of Korean mountains. Bodahoesan is located 290-*ri* to the northeast of the government office. It sits in front of Baekdusan. The mountain is split into two branches, one of which forms Jangbaeksan that lies 100-*ri* to the southeast. (*Yeojidoseo* n.d.: Mountains and Rivers of Gapsanbu)

G. The Amnok River is located 30-*ri* to the east of the government office. A stream originating from Majukdong that lies right beneath Baekdusan eventually, via Gapsanbu and Hyesanjin, joins the Heocheon River in Gapsan. (*Yeojidoseo* n.d.: Mountains and Rivers of Samsubu)

A review of the above entries reveals that a tremendous improvement took place when compared to early Joseon in terms of the geographical knowledge possessed about Baekdusan. First, as can be seen in Entry A, the knowledge of the overall shape of the mountain and Cheonji Lake became more precise and profound. The description of Dalmun, which is the only point of exit of Cheonji Lake, as the point of origin of both Jangbaek Falls and the Hondong River is indeed a correct one. In addition, in a clear departure from the belief during early Joseon that these rivers originated from Cheonji Lake, the origins of the Duman and Amnok Rivers are more precisely explained in Entries D and G. Meanwhile, in entries B, C, and E, Taebaeksan, Baeksan, and Jangbaeksan are introduced as separate entities rather than as different names for Baekdusan. Furthermore, new descriptions of Baekdusan that were not dependent on those found in Chinese materials emerged. The expansion of geographical knowledge was motivated by a heightening of the interest in Baekdusan following the emergence of the issue of the border with Qing during the late seventeenth century. In particular, the erection of the Baekdusan Boundary Stone in 1712 provided an opportunity to greatly amplify the importance of Baekdusan. The report on the trek to Baekdusan written by Kim Jinam (1654-?) and Pak Gweon (1658-1715), both of whom participated in erecting the Baekdusan Boundary Stone, also contributed to increasing interest in the mountain.

It was commonplace for the topographies compiled during the nineteenth century to include the content of the Baekdusan Boundary Stone. In this regard, both the *Daedong jiji* (大東地志, Geography of the Great Eastern State) compiled by Kim Jeongho in 1860 and the *Musanbu eupji* (茂山府邑誌, Gazetteers of the Counties and Prefectures of Musanbu) compiled in 1872, included not only the content of the inscriptions found on the Baekdusan Boundary Stone, but also the context under which the stone was erected. The Mountains and Rivers section of the *Musanbu eupji* describes the natural topographic characteristics of Baekdusan and the content of the Baekdusan Boundary Stone.

Baekdusan is located 306-*ri* to the west of Musanbu. It serves as the boundary of our nation. Baekdusan boasts a sublime spirit. While there is always ice and snow, and this even in summer, it does not have any trees or grass. The mountain also features a lot of pumice. The name Baekdu can be regarded as emanating from these facts. A big lake is located at the top of the mountain. One cannot measure the depth of this lake whose circumference is approximately 80-*ri*. The lake is surrounded by cliffs. The cliffs become gradually lower as one moves toward the north, and it is in this direction that the lake flows for about 10-*ri*, where it becomes a waterfall. In the year of Imjin of the reign of King Sukjong, Mukedeng erected an epitaph that read, “Mukedeng was ordered to investigate the boundary. In this regard, he reached an agreement with Joseon to erect a demarcation epitaph along the watershed (*bunsuryeong*) that is the origin of the eastern stream that becomes the Tomun River and of the western stream that becomes the Amnok River.” It is about 30-*ri* from the watershed where the epitaph was erected to the Tomun River; moreover, an earthen mound and a wooden fence run all the way to Cheonpyeong where the Duman River starts. (*Musanbu eupji* 1872)

Meanwhile, the *Daedong jiji* (大東地志, Geography of the Great Eastern State) describes the topographical features of Baekdusan in a more detailed manner. Although the source of the content included therein is not revealed, the majority of the facts found are consistent with the content of the *Baekdusan gi* (白頭山記) section of the *Yuhajip* (柳下集, Collection of Essays of Yuha) written by Hong Setae (1653-1725). Hong Setae's *Baekdusan gi* (白頭山記) is a travelogue of a trek to Baekdusan that was undertaken from April 29 to May 12, 1712. The travelogue is not an account of Hong's

own visit to Baekdusan, but rather based on the personal experience of an individual who participated in the erection of the Baekdusan Boundary Stone in his capacity as an interpreter. The factual nature of the content of this travelogue resulted in Hong's essay being subsequently quoted by many *Silhak* scholars. As such, the topographies produced during the nineteenth century not only described the topographical situation of Baekdusan in a more detailed manner, but also encompassed the context around which the Baekdusan Boundary Stone was erected. The ability to compile such precise knowledge was greatly aided by the growing number from the eighteenth century onwards of works left behind by those who had actually traveled Baekdusan. One of the most representative works in this regard is Seo Myeongeung (1716-1787)'s *Yubaekdusan gi* (遊白頭山記, Baekdusan Travelogue).

## Baekdusan as Depicted in Silhak Scholars' Essays

The growing importance of Baekdusan during the late Joseon era resulted in the inclusion of facts about Baekdusan in many essays of *Silhak* scholars. Viewed from a chronological standpoint, the first such essay of note which can be mentioned is the *Seongho saseol* (星湖僿說, Collection of Essays of Seongho) compiled by Yi Ik (1681-1763) in 1740. The second volume of *Seongho saseol* dealt with Baekdusan under an independent title. It began with the statement that a guest whose family name was Cheon had visited him to talk about Baekdusan. Yi Ik then proceeded to reproduce some of the information about Baekdusan contained in works such as the *Dongguk yeoji seungnam* (東國輿地勝覽, Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea) and *Daming yitongzhi* (大明一統志, Geography of the Great Ming), and then introduced the content of the *Baekdusangi* (白頭山記) section of Hong Setae's *Yuhajip* (柳下集, Collection of Essays of Yuha).

The first volume of the *Seongho saseol*, *Cheonjimun* (天地門) includes separate entries on the *Baekdu jeonggan* (白頭正幹) and Baekdusan. The former is described follows:

Baekdusan is the ancestral mountain of all Korean mountain ranges. Many of the ranges stretching westward from Cheolnyeong run towards the

southwest. ... The generally straight-lined huge mountain range starting at Baekdusan continues until it forms Taebaeksan in the middle of the Korean peninsula, before finally ending at Jirisan in the south. (Yi 1967)

As such, Yi Ik regarded all the Korean mountain ranges which originated from Baekdusan and continued all the way down to Jirisan as forming what he referred to as the *Baekdu jeonggan*.

Yi Junghwan (1690-1752) started the second section of the *Taengniji* (擇里志, Geographical Records), a section which was entitled *Paldo chongnon* (八道總論, Introduction of Eight Provinces) with the following comments about Baekdusan.

A branch of Mount Kunlun (崑崙山) passes south of a huge desert and reaches the east, where it becomes Mount Yiwulu (醫巫閭山). The Liaodong Plain stretches from the area to the south of Mount Yiwulu. Baekdusan is located across the Liaodong Plain. In this regard, the Mount Buxian (不咸山) referred to in the *Shan Hai Jing* (山海經, Collection of Mountains and Seas) is in fact Baekdusan. The spirit of Baekdusan stretches 1,000-*ri* to the north. While one of the ranges where the watershed between the two rivers is located stretches toward the south, where it becomes Yeonggotap (寧古塔), the other range stretches toward the Korean peninsula, where it becomes the head of all the mountain ranges in Korea. (Yi 1912)

Thus, Yi Junghwan perceived Baekdusan as the head of Korean mountains and as originating from Mount Kunlun (崑崙山) in China. Moreover, the Hamgyeong Province section of the *Paldo chongnon* (八道總論, Introduction of Eight Provinces) also introduces the story of how the tomb of a Song dynasty emperor—discovered at Undusan Fortress in Hamgyeong Province's Hoeryeong after Mukedeng had erected the Baekdusan Boundary Stone—was buried again. Furthermore, in the *Sansu chongnon* (山水總論, Introduction of Mountains and Rivers) section of the *Taengniji*, Baekdusan is described as “a beautiful national mountain.” In addition to an explanation of Cheonji Lake, this particular entry also made mention of the fact that the mountain ranges of the Korean peninsula ran all the way from Baekdusan to Gyeongsang Province.

A mountain range stretches from Baekdusan to Hamheung. At this point, the eastern branch heads towards the area south of the Duman River, while

the western branch heads toward the area south of the Amnok River. The mountain range begins to veer toward the East Sea from Hamheung. While the eastern branch of the mountain range is less than 100-*ri* in length from Hamheung, the western branch stretches some 700- 800-*ri*. Instead of ending with a valley, the main range continues straight down to the south for about 1000-*ri*, where it reaches Taebaeksan in Gyeongsang Province. (Yi 1912)

In his work, *Sansugo* (山水考, Study of Mountains and Rivers) Sin Gyeongjun (1712-1781), who was one of the premiere geographers during the late Joseon era, effectively organized the mountains and rivers of Korea, which he regarded as composing the backbones and veins of his homeland (Yang 1994:78). The *Sansugo* begins as follows:

While mountains split from one root into thousands of branches, thousands of different branches of water join into one. The nature of mountains and water can best be described using the number twelve. Beginning at Baekdusan, the nation's mountains are divided into twelve mountains. The twelve mountains are separated into eight paths. These eight paths are then combined with various streams to become twelve waterways. These twelve waterways eventually join the sea. (Sin 1976)

Sin Gyeongjun believed that the Korean territory was composed of twelve main mountains and twelve main rivers, and that these mountains originated from Baekdusan. Sin also discussed Baekdusan in a detailed manner in another one of his writings *Ganggyeogo* (疆界考, Study of National Boundaries), a work which was based on Chinese writings such as *Shengjing zhi* (盛京誌, Records of Shengjing City) and *Daming yitongzhi* (大明一統志, Geography of the Great Ming) as well as Hong Setae's *Baekdusan gi* (白頭山記). In the closing section of this piece, Sin asserted that Baekdusan was the ancestral mountain of not only the mountains in Korea, but also of those in China and Japan.

The people of Joseon refer to Jangbaeksan as Baekdusan. Baekdusan is the ancestor of the mountains of the Three Kingdoms. It stretches toward the west, towards the area south of the Hunhe (渾河) River and to the area north of the Amnok River, and then reaches various mountains in the Jinzhou (金州) area. It also stretches toward the northeast, reaching the area

east of the Hondong River, the area south of the Heuknyong (Heilong) River, the area to the north of the Duman River and the areas to the west of the East Sea, forming various mountains along the way. One of these mountain ranges stretches eastwards, where it forms various mountains in Japan. In his *Haesarok* (海槎錄) Kim Dongmyeong asserted that all the mountains of Japan originated from the ancestral mountain Mount Fuji. While one mountain range passes through Machimnyeong or Mashinryu (磨鍼嶺) and forms various mountains in the South Sea area, the other range stretches to the northwest, becoming the guardian mountain of the capital of Japan. This guardian mountain of the capital is divided into various mountains such as those in Sanyodou (山陽道). There are many plains between these mountains. Mount Fuji originates from Mutsu (陸奥), whose own topography stems from Baekdusan. (Sin 1976)

Jeong Yakyong (1762-1836) possessed a perception of Baekdusan that was similar to those of Yi Junghwan and Sin Gyeongjun. In his work entitled *Abang gangyeok go* (我邦疆域考, Historical Geography of Korea), Jeong asserted that while Baekdusan was the ancestor of all the mountains in the northeast, Mount Kunlun (崑崙山) was the progenitor of all those in the east. In the *Daedong sugyeong* (大東水經, Book of Water Ways in Korea), which he wrote three years later, Jeong analyzed the topographical knowledge of Baekdusan that was available at the time. To this end, he then set out, based on a comprehensive study of references in both Korea and China, to point out the mistakes that existed in terms of such perceptions. First, with regard to the height of Baekdusan, Jeong looked at the claim that Baekdusan stood some 200-*ri* tall made in such works as the *Daming yitongzhi* (大明一統志, Geography of the Great Ming) and *Dongguk yeoji seungnam* (東國輿地勝覽, Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea):

Even in the case of mountains that are only about 10-*ri* tall, the air at the top of the mountain becomes rare and cold. It is therefore common for such peaks to be covered with snow in spring and summer... Jangbaeksan is only a few scores of *ri* (1 *ri* = about 0.4 km) higher than the surrounding plain. However, as the multiple layers of mountains and peaks that lay to the north of Gapsan resulted in it taking a few days for people to reach the top of Baekdusan, the misconception that Baekdusan was 200-*ri* tall began to spread. (Jeong 1982)

As can be seen from his claim that, “Mount Kunlun (崑崙山) in the west does not surpass Jangbaeksan in size and topography. To this end, I maintain that Jangbaeksan is the Mount Kunlun of Joseon.” Jeong Yakyong also regarded Baekdusan to be as important as China's Mount Kunlun (崑崙山).

In addition, Jeong Yakyong also criticized the statements made in Korean and Chinese materials alike that Cheonji Lake was 80-*ri* in circumference and that the Amnok, Duman, and Songhua River originated from this lake.

The water of the Daeji (大池) does not inevitably flow out into three branches and become three rivers. There are also questions as to whether the circumference of the lake is actually 80-*ri*. (Jeong 1982)

...

The various streams found in the mountain's valleys join together to become the mouth of a river. It is impossible for the water from a big lake to become three rivers right away. (Jeong 1982)

Although these claims were not based on actual investigations, Jeong's assertions are indeed closer to the truth.

The belief that Cheonji Lake was not the point of origin of the Duman River appears to have gained credence amongst *Silhak* scholars from the late eighteenth century onwards. This is evidenced by Han Chiyun (1765-1814)'s statement in the *Haedong yeoksa* (海東釋史, History of Korea) to the effect that, “Many springs flow out from Jangbaeksan, springs which eventually become the origins of Songhua, Amnok, and Tomun Rivers;” and Yi Yuwon (1765-1814)'s claim in the *Imha pilgi* (林下筆記) that, “The Duman River originates from Gapsan, which is located south of Baekdusan, and flows into Gyeongheungbu... The waters from the eastern parts of Baekdusan, and the ridges in Wonsan, Jangbaek and Musan, as well as Songjinsan and Baekaksan flow into this river.” These geographical perceptions were based on information gleaned from investigations of Baekdusan conducted by Joseon and Qing from the late seventeenth century onwards as part of efforts to erect a demarcation stone. However, even these works produced during the nineteenth century failed to provide precise geographical information on such matters as the origins of various rivers emanating from the top of Baekdusan and north of the Duman River,

as well as the flow of these rivers.

One book produced during late Joseon which included ample information about mountains is Seong Haeung (1760-1839)'s *Dongguk sansugi* (東國山水記, Mountains and Rivers of the Eastern Kingdom). As its title implies, this work includes geographical information about the major mountains of Korea. In the *Sansugiseo* (山水記序, Introduction of Mountains and Rivers) section, one finds a comparison of the prevailing images of the major mountains, "Baekdusan boasts a sacred and profound atmosphere, Hallasan is peculiar and mysterious, Jirisan is wide and virtuous, and Geumgangsan is beautiful and scenic." Despite their brevity, these descriptions saliently expose Korean people's perceptions at the time of the four most famous mountains in Korea. Baekdusan was perceived as a sacred mountain, an image that was disseminated amongst the public at large.

## Conclusion

Baekdusan is referred to as the most sacred mountain of the Korean nation and as the natural symbol of the Korean peninsula. When did Baekdusan start to have this historical and natural significance? How much did Joseon people know about Baekdusan, and how did they perceive Baekdusan? These simple questions represent the point of origin of this study. Based on geographical materials such as ancient maps, topographies, and the works of *Silhak* scholars, this study examined how the people of Joseon perceived Baekdusan. The following is a summary of the main findings.

First, a look at the descriptions of Baekdusan found in ancient maps reveals that the mountain was clearly included in such works produced from the sixteenth century onwards. However, Baekdusan was depicted as an independent peak, with no mention made of the mountain ranges that stretched out from its slopes. From the eighteenth century onwards, the size of Baekdusan began to be emphasized to differentiate it from other mountains, and the notion of the *Baekdu daegan* (白頭大幹, Baekdu mountain range) was also clearly expressed. Of particular interest is the fact that while Cheonji Lake was depicted in a realistic manner in the maps produced from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the Baekdusan Boundary Stone was always present.

A similar trend is evident where the topographies are concerned. Compared with works produced during early Joseon, such as the *Sejong sillok jiriji* (世宗實錄地理志, Geographical Appendix to the Veritable Records of King Sejong) and the *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (新增東國輿地勝覽, A Revised Edition of the Augmented Survey of the Geography of Korea), materials produced during late Joseon, works such as the *Yeojidoseo* (輿地圖書, Detailed Records of Geography) and *eupji* (邑誌, Gazetteers of the Counties and Prefectures), contain a wider range, and more precise, information as pertains to Baekdusan. The geographical knowledge of Baekdusan contained in the topographies of early Joseon was heavily based on works emanating from China. Meanwhile, the topographies produced during late Joseon were compiled based on the experiences of those who directly traveled to Baekdusan, including those who participated in the establishment of the demarcation stone.

The *Silhak* scholars of late Joseon regarded Baekdusan as the ancestor of all Korean mountains, and therefore believed that all the mountains of Korea originated from Baekdusan. They compared and analyzed the various materials produced in Korea and China as part of efforts to establish more objective knowledge about Baekdusan. On the other hand, the subjective perceptions of Baekdusan as a divine space were further strengthened.

A perusal of ancient maps, topographies, and *Silhak* scholars' writings make it amply evident that a significant change in the prevailing perception of Baekdusan began to emerge during the seventeenth century. This development was in large part the result of the emergence of Baekdusan and the Manchu areas as a mutual zone of interest for both Joseon and Qing following the latter's conquest of all of Mainland China. During the process of discussing a border between the two sides, in the form of the establishment of demarcation stone, the public began to pay added attention to the actual significance of Baekdusan, which in turn led to more interest in Baekdusan in and of itself. This interest at the social level eventually led to actual visits and literary criticism-based studies of Baekdusan. Through such activities, the symbolic meaning of Baekdusan as the root of the homeland was further strengthened.

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## Abstract

The perception of Baekdusan as the spiritual mountain of the Korean nation, as the ancestor of all Korean mountains, and as the root of the homeland, has existed since ancient times. However, this perception was further strengthened during the Joseon era. Based on a perusal of the geographical materials produced during the Joseon era, this study analyzes the perceptions of Baekdusan that prevailed at the time. To be more specific, the study analyzes how Baekdusan was described in ancient maps, topographies, and *Silhak* scholars' geographical works as part of efforts to identify the nature and level of their objective knowledge and subjective perceptions of Baekdusan. Furthermore, based on a chronological approach to the geographical materials, this study analyzes how the perceptions of Baekdusan changed over time.

The study found that a significant change in the prevailing perception of Baekdusan began to emerge during the seventeenth century. This development was in large part the result of the emergence of Baekdusan and the Manchu areas as a mutual zone of interest for both Joseon and Qing following the latter's conquest of all of mainland China. During the process of discussing a border between the two sides, in the form of the establishment of demarcation stone, the public began to pay added attention to the actual significance of Baekdusan, which in turn led to more interest in Baekdusan in and of itself. This interest at the social level eventually led to actual visits and literary criticism-based studies of Baekdusan. Through such activities, the symbolic meaning of Baekdusan as the root of the homeland was further strengthened.

**Keywords:** Baekdusan, topographies, ancient maps, *Silhak* scholars