How Did the Rulers of the Jin and Qing Dynasties Trace Their Ancestors?

The Manchu Origins

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The emperor Qian-long (1736-96) noted the confusion in the Chinese records over the names of the Three Hans of Korea. The “han” in Ma-han, Chin-han, or Pyon-han was clearly a reference to a ruler – a khan. The Chinese historians simply had not known that “han” was a term for a leader. “The Manchus and their immediate predecessors in the Northeast, the emperor went on to emphasize, had been subjected to just such mistreatment in the Chinese records (see Crossley, 1999, p. 302).”

The Qing rulers had identified themselves as the direct heirs of the Jin (1115-1234), calling their own dynasty by the name of Later Jin until 1636. In an imperial edict (dated September 20, 1777) commissioning the “Researches on Manchu Origins” (Man-zhou Yuan-liu Gao, completed six years later in 1783), emperor Qian-long presented his own disquisition on the history of Manchuria. According to his reading of Jin history, the ancestors of the Jin imperial clan had lived among the Mohe confederation, within the territory of the ancient Su-shens where were found the Long White Mountain and the Black Water. This was the very scene of the rise of the Manchus.
The imperial lineage of the Qing is referred to as the Aisin Gioro. In Manchu, Aisin means “gold,” and this was sufficient proof for the emperor Qian-long that the Qing imperial lineage was a branch of the original Jin Ruzhens (see Crossley, 1999, p. 303).

The Qing rulers traced the Manchu origins not only to the Sushen-Mohe-Ruzhen Tungus, but also to the Three Han, Silla and Paekche of the Ye-maek Tungus, as well as to the Parhae, the Macro-Tungus. As a common denominator, the reputation of all those Tungusic people for their excellent archery marksmanship (on horseback) and fighting capabilities was very much amplified. The Man-zhou Yuan-liu Gao, however, conspicuously excludes the Qidan and the Koguryeo because the Xianbei, on the one hand, had obviously nothing to do with the Manchu origins while the presence of Koguryeo (the Ye-maek Tungus), on the other hand, might inflict serious damage on their effort to nurture a hegemonic image of the Sushen-Mohe Tungus in Manchurian history.

Neither the Western nor the Han Chinese specialists in the history of China ever mention the following fact recorded in Man-zhou Yuan-liu Gao: the History of Jin states that the founder of the Jin dynasty came from Silla with the clan name of Wan-yan. Since the Silla royal surname of Kim (implying Golden) has been transmitted from generation to generation over many dozens of generations, the Chronicle continues, the royal surname of Silla without doubt became its dynastic name. Both the Western and the Han Chinese specialists in the history of China also fail to mention the fact that the emperor Qian-long addressed a quarter of his edict to the people of the Korean peninsula.