Ethnohistory is a branch of anthropology that analyzes the origin, distribution, and distinguishing characteristics of the races (pertaining to the speech or culture groups), especially in regard to the development of cultures, through the analysis of archeological findings. Ethnohistory tends to respond to the current political environment in East Asia as elsewhere, imposing obvious and subtle constraints on the ways ethnohistory is pursued.

The area includes the region around Shenyang and sites to the north. See Nelson (1993: 108).


In Asia, dolmen is found from India to Manchuria, but the highest density (exceeding 100,000 units) is found in Korea proper. According to Nelson, the number of dolmen in Korea suggests their indigenous origin as well as the possibility that the Ye-maek ruling elites tried "to mark their territory by means of their burial places, as..."
Ruzhen Tungus (who were the descendants of Sushen-Yilou and ancestors of the core Manchu tribes) who were the forest tigers leading a life of rather extensive hunting and gathering supplemented by patchy farming.

The central Manchurian plain around the upper Song-hua and Liao River basins (the Dong-bei Plain) as well as the mountainous areas around Hun (Dong-jia), Yalu and Tae-dong rivers were the home of the Ye-maek Tungus, including the people of Old Chosun, Puyeo, and Koguryeo, whose life involved millet farming and livestock breeding, with hunting and river fishing serving as additional means of subsistence. Definite evidence of millet is found at Xin-le sites of Liao-dong c. 5000 BC. The southern Korean peninsula was the home of rice-cultivating Ye-maek cousins who had established ancient political entities that were called collectively Chin, Han or Three Hans in the Chinese dynastic chronicles. In the ethnohistorical context, the ancient home of the Ye-maek Tungus, i.e., the central Manchurian basin and the Korean peninsula, may be defined as the “Korea proper.”

The Neolithic period of Korea proper, characterized by the comb-patterned Chul-mun pottery, began c. 8000 BC. According to Barnes (1993: 109), “the Fuhe, Hong-shan and Xin-le shared a textured-pottery tradition more similar to the incised Chul-mun of the Korean peninsula than the Neolithic cultures of the China Mainland.” A new pottery style represented by the plain Mumun pottery began to appear in Korea proper c. 2000 BC, designating the late Neolithic. Pottery from many sites of Liao-ning and Heilong-jiang is similar to the plain Mumun pottery from other Manchurian sites and the Korean peninsula.

Similarities between the Manchurian basin and the Korean peninsula, observed in the Neolithic sites in the form of comb-patterned Chul-mun pottery, continue in the Bronze Age sites in the form of plain Mumun pottery, dolmen, and bronze daggers. Dolmen, the status symbol of Ye-maek ruling elites, characterizes the Dong-yi culture of the Manchurian basin and the Korean peninsula. The dolmen sites never yield iron, so dolmen-building is thought to have been discontinued by 300 BC (see Barnes, 1993, p. 166).

The Bronze Age began c. 1500 BC in the Manchurian occurred in the British Isles.” See Nelson (1993: 159, 163). The northern-type dolmen, emerged in the late Chul-mun period, has huge slabs and capstone (weighing up to 300 tons), forming a cist-like chamber above ground, while the southern-type dolmen, emerged in the late Bronze Age, has a large capstone resting on several smaller stones at ground level with the burial in a stone cist or jar coffin in the ground underneath. Necklaces of tubular beads as well as comma-shaped beads (gok-ok) appear in burials. According to Nelson (1995: 16), dolmens in the Manchurian plain and Liao-dong peninsula reveal “close connections with those in the Korean peninsula in contents as well as construction.”

Xu Yu-lin (Nelson, 1995: 80) contends that “the Liao-dong, Shan-dong, and Korean peninsulas have influences and close relationships among them in the Neolithic.” The Dong-yi, who built dolmens around the Shan-dong peninsular region, were either absorbed or pushed into the Manchurian basin by the Han Chinese.

6 See Kim (1986: 121).
7 史記 卷四 周本紀 第四 武王… 命召公説箕子之囚
basin and c. 1000 BC in the Korean peninsula (see Barnes, 1993: 160-1). According to Barnes (1993: 162), “the peninsular Bronze Age per se is defined by the intrusion of the [broad-bladed] Liao-ning dagger from the Manchurian Basin.” Unlike the Han Chinese bronze daggers, the blade of Liao-ning daggers was cast separately from the hilt. According to Nelson (1993: 133), “Liao-ning dagger is found abundantly in the Liao-dong peninsula and around Bohai Bay, as well as in Korea, but it is not found in China south of the Great Wall.” Molds for bronze daggers, arrowheads, (fine-lined) mirrors, fishhooks, and axes, and other bronze artifacts such as bells, (animal-shaped) belt buckles, buttons, horse trappings, and chariot ornaments have appeared in the plain Mumun pottery sites throughout the peninsula. The origins of the bronze dagger and the fine-lined mirror that are abundantly found in the Korean peninsula are traced to the Upper Xiajia-dian culture (see Pai, 2000, pp. 200, 203).

Rice discovered in the western peninsula dates from 2400 and 2100 BC (see Nelson, 1993, p. 147). A group of southern Chinese who were cultivating rice perhaps crossed the Yellow Sea and found a similar ecological niche in the southern peninsula. By taking advantage of northeasterly winds, ships could sail in summer directly from the mouth of Yang-zi River toward the southwestern tip of the Korean peninsula.

According to Shi-ji, King Wu, the first king of Zhou, commanded the Duke of Shao to release Kija from the imprisonment imposed on him by the last Shang king. The Shi-ji created the legend that King Wu enfeoffed the Duke of Shao as the ruler of (Northern) Yan, and also enfeoffed Kija as the ruler of Chosun, an eastern neighbor of Yan, in about the eleventh century BC. With a few strokes, Si-ma Qian installed two ancient Han Chinese royal scions as founders of both Dong-hu and Ye-maek Tungus states. The Shi-ji states that the Lord of Zhou ruled Shaan and its west, and the Duke of Shao the east of Shaan. Shi-ji notes that there must have been another Yan (called Southern Yan).

Chosun appears in the records on the ruler of Qi (685-43 BC) in the Guan-zi that was compiled during the Warring States Period. Puyeo and Chosun both appear in the Shi-ji records on (Old) Yan in the fourth century BC. The
History of Later Han records that the area of Ye, Ok-jeo and Koguryeo originally belonged to the territory of Chosun.9

The Zhou court (1122 or 1027-256 BC) fell into complete decay and the Warring States period began in 403 BC. According to the Wei-Lüe (quoted in the Three Han section of Dongyi-zhuan), when the Zhou became weak, the ruler of Yan assumed the title of king [in 323 BC]; then the “Lord of Chosun, a scion of Ji-zi” also declared himself king; and these two states were on the brink of fighting each other. The armed conflicts between Chosun and Yan at last occurred c. 300 BC: the Yan dispatched a general named Qin Kai (who was active during 311-297 BC) to invade Chosun. The Xiong-nu section of Shi-ji notes that the Yan greatly expanded its territory, established five provinces, and constructed a Long Wall from Zao-yang to Xiang-ping.10

According to the Shi-ji, the walls built by the Yan and rebuilt by the Qin reached Laio-dong. As shown in the twelfth century map of Di Li Tu, however, the present-day Luan River was called the Liao River in old days, and the present-day Liao River was called the Lesser Liao River. Hence the “Liao-dong” in the Shi-ji must have implied the east of Luan River.11 That is, the Liao-xi and Liao-dong provinces established by the Yan must have been located around the modern-day Luan River, while the provinces of Shang-gu, Yu-yang, and Youbei-ping were located in northern Hebei.

Remains of a line of fortifications (built with stamped earth and stone), comprising of lookout posts, ramparts, ditches, small and large forts, beacon towers, and stone walls blocking mountain passes, were found running approximately from the Karachin Banner in the west to the Fu-xin district in the east. This line of fortifications is alleged to be the “Long Wall” constructed by the Yan. Many people imagine that the walls extend further to the west and east. The following are the archeological findings reported by Di Cosmo (2002: 148-50, 157), minus his own interpretation of these findings.

Several citadels and round habitations built in stone on high terrain were discovered along the line of the walls from where archeologists have recovered artifacts attributed to the Upper Xiajia-dian culture. Both outside and inside this line of fortifications, the only cultural remains are “non-Chinese.”

**A.2.3. Location of “the Long Wall built by Yan”**
(Di Cosmo, 2002, p. 141)

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11 See also Yoon (1986: 43-58).

史記 卷第一百十 匈奴列傳 第五十 燕有賢將秦開 …襲破走東胡 東胡卻千餘里…燕亦築長城 自造陽至襄平…置上谷漁陽右北平遼西遼東郡而拒胡
the area in the Luan and Daling River valleys as Chosun.” Shim quotes Huai-nan-zi, which was written in the second century BC:

“At the eastern end [of Han], beyond Jie-shi mountain, [we] pass through Chosun, a state of benevolent and great people.” Shim also quotes Yan-ti-lun, compiled in the first century BC:

“the state of Yan is said to have been blocked by Jie-shi mountain.” The Jie-shi mountain is located in Chang-li prefecture to the east of the lower Luan River.

11 The excavation of a large number of bronze objects, such as knives with ringed handles, horse- and bird-motif ornaments, bell ornaments, buttons, earrings, and belt hooks places this area in a cultural context that is fully outside the Central Plain sphere.

12 三國志 魏書 烏丸鮮卑東夷傳 濁傳 … 陳勝等起天下叛秦 燕齊趙民避地朝鮮 數萬口 燕人衛滿 魏結夷服 复來王之 韓傳 … 及紇反 入匈奴 燕人 衛滿亡命 為胡服 … 諸準降誅 準求居西界 攻中國亡命 … 令守西邊 … 逐還攻準 準…走入海 居韓地 自號韓王

The archeologists believe that the original dwellers were Dong-hu. Archeological excavations in the proximity of the section of the wall near Chi-feng also reveal the presence of the Upper Xiajia-dian and the Ordos bronze cultures.11 It is obvious that the whole area was inhabited exclusively by non-Chinese, mostly pastoral people.

The wall was not built to separate nomad and farmer, but to establish a strong military presence to control the movement of people. The wall was mostly defending the non-agricultural territory. There is no evidence to support that the wall was protecting the Han Chinese settlements in areas traditionally inhabited by alien peoples engaged mainly in pastoral activities. We still do not know the precise function of the wall, and what it was actually defending.

The only basis of attributing this line of fortifications running from Karachin Banner to the Fu-xin to the work of the Yan (dating to no later than 299 BC) rests solely on the “Long Wall” mentioned in the Shi-zhi.

The Ye section of Dongyi-zhuan states that, at the end of the Qin dynasty when the empire was plunged in chaos by rebellion (in 209 BC), tens of thousands of people started to flee from northeastern China (Qi, Zhao and Yan) to Chosun, and a Yan person named Wei-Man came (c. 206-195 BC) “with a topknot wearing barbarian clothes.” Wei-Man was entrusted with the custody of refugees in the western frontier district, but he eventually usurped the throne of Chosun. The Han section of Dongyi-zhuan records that the king of Chosun who was thrown out by Wei-Man fled south to the [Three] Han (old Chin) area and called himself the King of Han.12

On the mainland China, both “low-carbon” wrought iron and “high-carbon” cast iron were present from 500 BC onwards, and “medium-carbon” steel was common after 300 BC. It is believed that the iron culture of China, in the form of iron weapons, horse trappings, bits, axle caps, hoes, plowshares, and sickles, was transmitted to Korea through Old Yan c. 400 BC.13 Artifacts found together with iron implements in Korea proper include the finely wrought bronze daggers (slender stabbing swords, the blade still being cast separately from the hilt) and the Scytho-Siberian style animal-shaped belt buckles.

The conflicts between Old Chosun and Old Yan that
were formally recorded in the Chinese dynastic chronicles suggest a fairly intimate relationship (in the form of incessant warfare, as usual between any good neighbors) having been maintained between the Mongolic Xianbei and Tungusic Yemaek people. According to Barnes (1993: 152), the Yan kingdom was the weakest of the seven major Late Zhou feudal states, and yet produced a greater abundance of iron artifacts than Qin, the strongest state, as manifested by the several iron foundries excavated: “The earliest-known iron armor is also from Yan, and this state has played a major role in initiating the Korean iron Age around 400 BC—only a century after iron production became a viable industry on the Mainland itself.”

Old Chosun had so grown in strength and domain as to interrupt, in the second century BC, the contact between the Former Han dynasty and the petty walled town states of Chin (the later period Three-Han) located south of the Han River (see Lee, 1984, p. 17). In early 109 BC, the King of Chosun invaded Liaodong [located east of the Luan River] and killed a Han Chinese officer. Being seriously concerned about the possible alliance with the Xiong-nu, Han Wu-di (141-87 BC) launched an attack on Chosun in autumn. The King of Chosun was killed in summer of 108 BC, and Wu-di established four commanderies, thus “severing the left arm of the Xiong-nu.”

Within three decades, however, only the Le-lang commandery in the Tae-dong River basin remained (until about 313 AD, together with the Dai-fang Commandery that was established by the Gong-sun rulers some time between 204 and 220). BC 108 represents the historical date of the Han Chinese debouchment into the lower basin of the Liao River and the northwestern coast of the Korean peninsula for the first time in East Asian history. After the fall of the Western Jin in 316 AD, the Han Chinese settlers who became isolated in the Liao River basin blended alternately with the Xianbei and the Tungus as advantage dictated. The formal Han Chinese presence in the Liaodong area was repeated during 668-755 under the Tang dynasty. Most of the time, however, the Liaodong had been a land contested among the Turko-Mongol, Xianbei-Qidan and Yemaek-Ruzhen Tungus peoples.

14 See Barnes (2001: 83-4). Nelson (1993: 174) notes that: “Iron artifacts were produced in small furnaces which have been found along the North Han River, dating to the third century BC or earlier. These sites are all near sources of iron.” From the old Kaya sites on the southern Korean coast, primitive iron-working furnaces have been found and dated to 1st and 2nd centuries BC.

15 漢書 卷六 武帝紀 第六 元封二年... 朝鮮攻殺遼東都尉 乃募天下死罪擊朝鮮 六月…秋…還... 灣船將軍…將應募罪人擊朝鮮 三年…夏... 朝鮮斬其王右渠降 以其地為樂浪臨屯玄道眞番郡

1. Ebrey (1996: 87)