

From Map to Holy Mountain: Dual Functions of Mapping Engineering and Sacrifice Practice in Changbai Mountain in the Qing Dynasty in the Empire Construction

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Abstract: Changbai Mountain, as an important geographical symbol and cultural symbol in Northeast Asia, showed the dual attributes of natural geographical entity and political and cultural symbol in the process of national construction in the Qing Dynasty. Taking the cartographic engineering and sacrificial system of Changbai Mountain in Qing Dynasty as the breakthrough point, this study systematically investigates how the Qing court brought Changbai Mountain into the visualization system of imperial territory through modern surveying and mapping technology, and strengthened its sacred position as the birthplace of Manchu through sacrificial ceremonies, thus realizing the political integration and ethnic identity construction of the northeast frontier region. The study further discusses the dispute between China and North Korea over the distribution of ginseng resources and the demarcation of the border in Changbai Mountain, deeply analyzes the interactive relationship among the mapping of the Qing court, the sacred mountain sacrifice and the declaration of sovereignty, reveals the historical process of how Changbai Mountain changed from a vague border area to a symbol of imperial sovereignty, and provides a new research perspective for understanding the territorial governance and identity construction mechanism of multi-ethnic countries in Qing Dynasty.

Keywords: Qing Dynasty; Changbai Mountain; Map; Sacrifice; Empire construction; China-DPRK border

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1. Introduction

As an important geographical symbol of the border between China and North Korea, Changbai Mountain is an important part of the volcanic belt in Northeast Asia in geology ^[1], and is regarded as a “sacred mountain” by Manchu, Korean and other ethnic groups in culture. From the perspective of the rulers of the Qing Dynasty, the significance of Changbai Mountain transcends the simple geographical concept: it is not only regarded as the geographical carrier of the birthplace of Manchuria, but also an important political symbol for the Qing Empire to consolidate the northeast frontier and shape ethnic identity. The research on the history of the New Qing Dynasty emphasizes that the ruling feature of the Qing Empire lies in its “pluralistic and unified” governance model, rather than simple cultural assimilation ^[2]. Under this theoretical framework, the Qing court’s cartography and sacrificial practice of Changbai Mountain is of typical significance-establishing territorial sovereignty through scientific map mapping and building cultural identity through institutionalized

sacrificial ceremonies, which complement each other and jointly strengthen the imperial control over the northeast frontier. It is worth noting that China and North Korea fought for ginseng resources in Changbai Mountain for a long time^[3], which further promoted the Qing court to organically combine map drawing, sacrificial activities, and border negotiations, and formed a trinity border governance strategy of “space definition-cultural identity-sovereignty declaration.” This paper aims to explore the dual functions of Changbai Mountain in the process of imperial construction in Qing Dynasty through this analytical framework.

2. Cartographic Engineering: “Visualization of Imperial Territory” in Changbai Mountain

The Qing Dynasty was the heyday of the development of ancient map drawing technology in China, and its drawing activities surpassed the simple geographical record function, which had important political significance. As scholars have pointed out, the cartography practice in the Qing Dynasty is essentially a political tool for the empire to establish territorial sovereignty and integrate multi-ethnic groups^[4]. In this context, the mapping project of Changbai Mountain as the birthplace of Manchuria has special significance. From the early Qing Dynasty to the late Qing Dynasty, the drawing of Changbai Mountain experienced a transition from rough marking to precise definition, which not only reflected the progress of surveying and mapping technology but also reflected the spatial governance strategy of the Qing court to gradually bring the northeast frontier area into the effective jurisdiction of the empire.

During the Kangxi period, the Qing court carried out a nationwide mapping project with epoch-making significance. From 1708 to 1718, the geographical coordinates of Changbai Mountain were accurately measured by using advanced Western surveying and mapping techniques^[5]. The Imperial Panorama marked Changbai Mountain as “Baitou Mountain”, and its main peak, Tianchi and the source of Songhua River were recorded in both Chinese and Manchu, among which the Manchu version was established as the final authoritative standard. This marking method not only embodies the ruling idea of the Manchu standard in the Qing Dynasty, but also successfully transforms Changbai Mountain from a “sacred symbol” in traditional cognition into a controllable actual space within the imperial territory through accurate geographical coordinates. In the map, Manchu is the main way to label the geographical names of the northeast frontier, supplemented by Chinese. This differentiated labeling strategy actually locates Changbai Mountain as “the land of Longxing exclusive to Manchuria”^[6], which provides a geographical basis for the later implementation of the “closed policy.”

During the Qianlong period, the Qing court further improved the mapping system of Changbai Mountain. Compared with the surveying and mapping results of Kangxi dynasty, the map of Changbai Mountain in Qianlong period showed two remarkable characteristics: first, it achieved a major breakthrough in spatial scope, including the surrounding border areas of Mongolia and North Korea; Secondly, it has been strengthened at the level of political symbol, and the map has specially added the Manchu inscription of “the birthplace of Manchuria” next to the main peak of Changbai Mountain^[7]. After the Qing army put down the Junggar rebellion in 1759, the Qing court immediately carried out a detailed survey and mapping of the surrounding areas of Changbai Mountain. In the attached map of Shengjing Tongzhi compiled in 1762, Changbai Mountain was established as an important geographical reference for the boundary between Shengjing General and North Korea, and the connection between its main peak and the source of the Tumen River was regarded as an informal boundary. This mapping practice provided an important basis for Mukden’s action of demarcating the boundary of Changbai Mountain and setting up boundary markers in 1712.

After entering the 19th century, with the invasion of Western powers and the escalation of border disputes between China and North Korea, the sovereignty declaration function of Changbai Mountain maps has become increasingly prominent. During the Daoguang and Xianfeng dynasties, the Qing court revised the map of Changbai Mountain many times. The attached map of Jilin Tongzhi, published in 1855, clearly marked the main peak of Changbai Mountain as “the boundary mountain between China and North Korea,” and divided the boundary between China and North Korea with a red dotted line, with an inscription of “Great Qing State Boundary” in Manchu and Chinese^[8]. In fact, this kind of border

visualization is a dual strategy of the Qing court to deal with the trade conflict between China and North Korea and the territorial expansion of Russia.

It is worth noting that the map of Changbai Mountain in the late Qing Dynasty also showed the characteristics of countering the claim of North Korea's territory. In response to the claim of the Li Dynasty in Korea that Changbai Mountain was regarded as "the holy land of the founding of ancient Korea," the map of Jilin drawn by the Qing court in 1885 marked the specific location of "Mukden Boundary Monument," and explained in detail the historical process of surveying and defining the treaty in 1712 in Manchu, Chinese and Mongolian languages. Through this means of "map diplomacy," the mapping project of Changbai Mountain finally developed into a key political tool for the Qing court to safeguard the sovereignty of the northeast frontier.

3. The practice of offering sacrifices: The "sanctification of national identity" in Changbai Mountain

By bringing Changbai Mountain into the national sacrificial system, the rulers of Qing Dynasty endowed it with the sacredness of "the birthplace of Manchuria," strengthened the legitimacy of Manchu ethnic identity and the rule of Qing Empire, and realized the purpose of "cultural identity serving political integration." This cultural construction process cooperated with cartographic engineering, which consolidated the Qing court's governance of the northeast frontier.

Kangxi dynasty pioneered the institutionalization of Changbai Mountain sacrifice. On May 16th, 1677, after Emperor Kangxi sent Umuna, a minister, to investigate Changbai Mountain on the spot, he officially proclaimed Changbai Mountain as the "God of Changbai Mountain", stipulating that "the ritual is like five mountains", and General Shengjing would make sacrifices on his behalf in spring and autumn every year. This move upgraded the sacred mountain of the Manchu tribe belief to a sacred space at the national level, which not only strengthened Manchu identity, but also declared the legitimacy of "divine right of monarchy" to Han, Mongolian and other nationalities. The sacrificial ceremony highlighted the national characteristics: Manchu officials presided over the ceremony, and the Manchu language was used in the text. The sacrifices were deer and wild boar (different from cattle and sheep in the Central Plains). In 1682, when Kangxi visited Jilin in the east, he visited the Songhua River to pay homage to Changbai Mountain, and the message clearly stated: "Changbai Mountain is the birthplace of Manchuria, and the gods of mountains and rivers help me in the Qing Dynasty" ("A Record of the Holy Father of Qing Dynasty"), which strengthened the special connection between Manchu and Changbai Mountain through ceremonies.

During Qianlong period, the sacrificial system was further improved. The sacrifice of Changbai Mountain was included in the Qing Dynasty Code, and it was classified as "middle sacrifice," which was juxtaposed with Sheji and Xiannongtan. At the same time, multi-ethnic cultural elements are integrated, such as inviting Mongolian princes and Tibetan lamas to participate, using Tibetan Buddhist instruments, and shaping the image of a sacred mountain that is shared by many ethnic groups.

While promoting pluralistic integration, Emperor Qianlong made great efforts to maintain the characteristics of Manchuria: in 1743, he wrote "Shengjing Fu," emphasizing that "Changbai Mountain is thousands of miles high and is the ancestor of Manchuria" and published it in Manchu and Chinese; Ordered the construction of "Manchu Ancestral Temple" to worship ancestral tablets such as Nurhachi, and combined geographical worship with ancestor worship. This design not only strengthens ethnic identity but also reflects the Qing court's "ability to maintain multiculturalism"^[9].

In the face of the invasion of Western powers and the border dispute between China and North Korea, the function of the sovereignty declaration of Changbai Mountain is prominent. In 1889, Emperor Guangxu rebuilt the memorial hall and added a stone tablet of "the Great Qing State Boundary." The content of "guarding the territory" was added in the congratulatory message, which made the sacrifice directly related to the frontier defense. At the same time, sacrifice has become a key tool to unite all ethnic groups in Northeast China. After the Qing court reformed the administrative system in Northeast China in 1907, sacrificial altars were set up in Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang provinces, requiring local

officials to offer sacrifices regularly. Although the ceremony retained the Manchu greetings, Chinese was added to try to transform the Manchu belief in “Holy Mountain” into a common cultural symbol of all ethnic groups in Northeast China^[10]. This adjustment aims to integrate the forces of various ethnic groups and jointly resist the threat of Japanese and Russian aggression.

The evolution of sacrifice in Changbai Mountain reveals the core strategy of “politicizing culture” in the Qing court: Kangxi laid the foundation stone: promoting tribal belief to national sacrifice and establishing the legal narrative of “the birthplace of Manchuria”; Deepening of Qianlong: balancing national characteristics and imperial integration through multicultural integration and ancestor worship; Transformation in the late Qing Dynasty: Strengthening the symbol of sovereignty by offering sacrifices to cope with the border crisis. From the Jin Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty, the deification of Changbai Mountain always served the legitimacy of political power and territorial integration. Sacrifice practice and cartographic engineering together constitute the “space-culture” dual rule of the Qing empire over Changbai Mountain, which shows how cultural identity is deeply embedded in the political governance system.

4. Ginseng resources, border disputes and sovereignty construction

The interactive mechanism between China and North Korea in the governance of Changbai Mountain in the Qing Dynasty; The mapping and sacrificial activities of Changbai Mountain in the Qing Dynasty were not purely internal governance, but a systematic project closely related to the evolution of China-North Korea relations. The competition for ginseng resources around Changbai Mountain and the border disputes caused by it prompted the Qing court to organically combine map drawing, sacrifice ceremony, and sovereignty declaration, and formed a trinity border governance model of “resource control, spatial governance, and cultural identity.”

As the core economic resource of Changbai Mountain, ginseng was brought into the state monopoly system by the Qing court. Since the Nurhachi period, ginseng trade has been an important financial source of the post-Jin regime. During the period of Kanggan, there was a “yamen in charge of killing Wula,” which specialized in the affairs of collecting ginseng. However, North Korean border people frequently cross the border to steal, causing border conflicts. For example, in the “Sandaogou Incident” in 1685, North Korean participants crossed the border and caused the death of Qing officials. In the end, the DPRK executed the perpetrators and paid 22,000 yuan. Such incidents exposed loopholes in border management and promoted the Qing court to strengthen control: geographical demarcation: Emperor Kangxi ordered “strict investigation of the border” and started the mapping project of Changbai Mountain to solve the cross-border problem by geographical means; Cultural sovereignty: in 1686, the content of “forbidden to cross the border” was added to the sacrificial message, which raised the competition for resources to the level of cultural sovereignty. This move forms a linkage mechanism of “resource conflict-geographical demarcation-cultural construction” and transforms economic resources into political capital.

In 1712, the Qing court sent Mukden to survey the border with North Korean officials, set up the “Mukden Boundary Monument” and established the Yalu River and Tumen River as the boundary rivers. This demarcation reflects the deep combination of map, sacrifice and border management: geographical sovereignty: based on the “Imperial Panorama Map”, the boundary pillar is located with the main peak of Changbai Mountain as the benchmark and marked on subsequent maps; Ritual empowerment: a sacrificial ceremony is held next to the boundary pillar to strengthen the legitimacy of the border with “mountain god witness”; Document solidification: the process of demarcation is recorded in the Qing Hui Dian, and the chain of sovereignty evidence of “historical documents-geographical indications-ritual practice” is constructed. This dual strategy effectively responded to North Korea’s sovereignty claim that Changbai Mountain was regarded as “the sacred mountain of ancient Korea” and established the actual control of the border by the Qing Dynasty.

In the late 19th century, North Korea put forward its territorial claim with the support of Japan, and the Qing court defended its sovereignty through maps and sacrifices. Geographical demonstration: During the border negotiations from 1885 to 1887, Wu Dacheng, a representative of the Qing side, systematically demonstrated that Changbai Mountain

belonged to the territory of the Qing Dynasty with historical materials such as the Map of the Inner Government of Qianlong. Cultural demonstration: citing the sacrificial records of the Kanggan period, emphasizing the long-term sacrificial right of the Qing court to Changbai Mountain; Sovereignty evidence chain: In the negotiation of the Treaty of Jiandao in 1909, Japan's territorial claim to Yanbian was successfully refuted by means of boundary markers, sacrificial records, and historical maps. This strategy highlights the core role of maps and sacrifices in the maintenance of sovereignty, and forms a deep interweaving of material basis, spatial control, and cultural construction.

5. Conclusion

When Changbai Mountain was brought into the national governance system in the Qing Dynasty, it was endowed with dual attributes: it was not only the key node of geographical territory, but also the core symbol of cultural identity. Through the mapping project, the Qing court transformed this vague border area into a territory under clear jurisdiction. Through the sacrificial system, it was upgraded from the sacred mountain of Manchu to the sacred space of the country, which not only strengthened Manchu identity but also consolidated the legitimacy of the rule. Facing the border dispute between China and North Korea, the Qing court developed a compound governance strategy, integrated geographical mapping, cultural symbols, and political demands, and formed a unique border governance model. From the perspective of the new Qing history, this practice embodies the ruling characteristics of the Qing empire's "multiple integration"-not simply assimilation, but adapting to local conditions: emphasizing the memory of birthplace for Manchu, highlighting the authority of national sacrifice for Han, and emphasizing border demarcation and sovereignty declaration for North Korea. At a deeper level, the case of Changbai Mountain reveals how natural geography has been reshaped by political power. The original natural landscape was located in space through cartography, endowed with sacred significance through sacrifice, and finally transformed into a political symbol. This process of "landscape politicization" is not only an important mechanism of national construction in the Qing Dynasty, but also provides a typical sample for the spatial governance of a pre-modern empire.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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