

Mapping Russia with Korean Eyes: The *Aguk Yejido* Revisited¹

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Aguk Yejido 俄國輿地圖 (“Map of Russia”) is a rare late-nineteenth-century Korean manuscript of considerable significance for understanding border interactions among Russia, Korea, and China, as well as the early history of Korean settlement in the Russian Far East. Produced at a time when the Joseon court sought alternatives to Chinese suzerainty, Japanese expansion, and Western pressure, the map reveals Korea’s strategic engagement with shifting imperial frontiers. This study interprets the manuscript through the lens of critical cartography, treating it not as a neutral geographic record but as an ideological instrument of statecraft and intelligence. By combining close reading of its cartographic and textual elements with a historical-philological methodology – cross-referencing annotations against newly identified archival materials from Japan and Taiwan – the analysis demonstrates that the map was compiled between 1883 and 1886, most plausibly by Kim Gwanghun and Sin Seonuk. Functioning as a hybrid cartographic–textual genre, the *Aguk Yejido* recorded military installations, border conditions, and Korean settlements in the Primorskii Region, while simultaneously conceptualizing Russia as a strategic counterweight in Korea’s evolving foreign policy. Ultimately, the manuscript exemplifies how late Joseon cartography operated as a dynamic tool of geopolitical negotiation and intelligence gathering.

Keywords: Critical Cartography; Russo–Korean Relations; *Aguk Yejido* (“Map of Russia”); Korean Migration in the Russian Far East; Geopolitical Intelligence in Late Joseon

Introduction

A map is inherently an invaluable repository of socio-cultural, political, and spatial data. Rather than merely recording the objective location of physical objects on the Earth’s surface, cartographic artifacts provide critical evidence of scientific advancement, state-level ideological evolution, and the shifting dynamics of international relations. Throughout the history of East Asia, map-making was never a neutral scientific pursuit; it was treated as an integral

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component of statecraft, territorial administration, and intelligence gathering. Under the long reign of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1897), Korean cartography combined cosmological traditions with pragmatic surveys, exemplified by Kim Jeong Ho's 金正浩(1804–1864) monumental 1861 *Daedong Yeojido* 大東輿地圖. Yet by the late nineteenth century, Korea's isolation collapsed under the pressures of imperial rivalry. The Treaty of Aigun (1858) and Convention of Peking (1860) abruptly placed Russia on Korea's northern frontier, forcing the court to recalibrate its diplomacy amid Chinese suzerainty, Japanese expansionism, and Russian ambitions.

It was in this volatile context that the *Aguk Yeojido* was produced. Preserved in the Jangseogak Library (Treasure No. 1597), the ten-leaf accordion album offers a uniquely Korean perspective on the Russian Primorskii Region. Though titled “Map of Russia,” its focus lies on the borderlands where thousands of destitute Korean migrants had crossed the Tumen River since the 1860s to settle under Russian jurisdiction. The scientific importance of this map for studying Korean-Russian-Chinese relations cannot be overstated. As one of the few surviving Korean color manuscript maps documenting foreign military installations and demographic shifts, it provides invaluable evidence of Korea's geopolitical imagination.

Research Objectives and Methodological Framework

This study addresses how the Joseon dynasty deployed the *Aguk Yeojido* as a strategic intelligence tool rather than a neutral geographic record. Guided by the framework of Critical Cartography (J.B. Harley), the manuscript is analyzed as an ideological construct – an artifact that actively shaped Korea's diplomatic positioning between Russia, China, and Japan. While earlier historiography treated the *Aguk Yeojido* as a descriptive geographic curiosity or a simple census record of early Korean diaspora, this paper argues that the manuscript represents a sophisticated, covert effort by King Gojong's court (r. 1863–1907) to gather military intelligence and evaluate Russia as a potential geopolitical counterweight to Chinese interference and Japanese aggression.

Methodologically, the paper employs a historical-philological approach, cross-referencing the map's annotations and calligraphic notes with newly recovered archival materials from Japan and Taiwan. This dual strategy allows the map to be read as a “textualized space,” revealing how the Joseon court conceptualized shifting geopolitical boundaries and mobilized cartography as a form of statecraft.

The research objectives are threefold:

1. Chronology and Authorship — To establish a precise timeline and plausible authorship by triangulating internal textual cues with external diplomatic and intelligence archives.
2. Strategic Intent — To decode the military and intelligence motivations underlying the map's production, showing how surveillance and statecraft outweighed geographic accuracy.

3. Hybrid Genre — To theorize the *Aguk Yeojido* as a cartographic-textual hybrid, analyzing how its layout and annotations served late Joseon geopolitical agendas.

These objectives are consistently pursued in the subsequent sections: the chronology is reconstructed through historiographical debate and new archival evidence; the strategic intent is revealed in the documentation of military installations and migrant settlements; and the hybrid genre is demonstrated through the interplay of cartographic imagery and textual commentary.

The *Map of Russia*: Description and Historical Context

The *Map of Russia*, preserved in the Jangseogak Library (藏書閣 stock number 2-4611), is a large accordion-fold album consisting of ten map leaves and two leaves with a table of contents and notes. Each sheet measures 35.8 × 27.2 cm when opened. The orange front page bears the vertical inscription “Map of Russia” and a subtitle: “*The state of Russo-Chinese relations, the number of our people, the number of troops guarding the border, and a comparison of the borderline*” (Fig. 1). The phrase “our people” (我民) refers to Koreans who had begun settling in the southern Primorskii Region from the 1860s.



Figure 1. The title page of the 'Map of Russia'.²

The table of contents lists 29 settlements and districts, with household and population figures. The map itself depicts dwellings, churches, armouries, ships,

² *Aguk Yeojido* 俄國輿地圖, edited by Gukak Jinheung Yeongu Saep Chujin Wiwonhoe. Seongnam: Jangseogak library, Academy of Korean Studies, 2007.

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bridges, fortifications, and port facilities, alongside terrain features, vegetation, rivers, and lakes. Distinctive colors—blue, green, red, and brown—are used throughout. Yet the legend is unclear, cardinal directions are absent, and many geographical features are only approximately rendered, reflecting limited surveying skills and reliance on oral information. Marginal notes in brush-written Chinese characters accompany the illustrations; some characters cannot be found in Chinese dictionaries and were exclusively used in Korea.

The final page of the album map is a text titled 'Foreword with notes on the Map of Russia and China [and comments on] the current state of affairs', signed by Kim Gwanghun 金光薰 and Sin Seonuk 申先郁. The pages are fairly well preserved.

The map was rediscovered³ in 1972, when Professor Yu Yeong Bak informed scholars of its existence.⁴ In 1994, photocopies were published in the *Collection of Materials on Korean Studies*,⁵ accompanied by commentary from Synn Seung Gwon, a renowned scholar at Hanyang University.⁶ A facsimile edition followed in 2007, prepared by the Academy of Korean Studies,⁷ Dr. Lee Wang Moo, a Jangseogak Library staff member, took notes.⁸ Despite these publications, the identity of the map makers and the precise date of production remain uncertain, prompting further scholarly inquiry. To attempt an attribution of the map, let us first briefly examine the period when, presumably, it was created.

The second half of the nineteenth century was marked by significant shifts in Russo-Chinese and Russo-Korean relations. The Treaty of Aigun (1858), the Treaty of Tianjin (1858), and the Convention of Peking (1860) defined the eastern border between Russia and China, unexpectedly placing the Tumen River as a boundary.

The Korean government paid heed to its northern borders. However, the fact that the Russo-Chinese Treaty had been signed was probably not communicated promptly to the royal court by the Chinese negotiators, who traditionally viewed Korea as a dependent territory of China. Similarly, the decision to use the Tumen River as the border turned out to be unexpected news for the Korean court.⁹ Meanwhile, Russia's newly acquired Far Eastern territories were in urgent need of a rapid population increase so that the land could be farmed and the population provided with food, which had been scarce. Recognizing this, the Russian

³ The discovery of the map at Jangseogak Library is ascribed by scholars to Tae Geun Park 朴泰根, a Dongguk University graduate student.

⁴ Yu, Yong Bak, “‘Aguk-yeojido.’” 柳永博. 俄國輿地圖. *Kukhak charyo* [Materials for Korean Classical Studies], 1 (1972): 18–21.

⁵ *Gangbuk Ilgi, Gangjwa Yeojigi, Aguk Yeojido* 「江北日記」 「江左輿地記」 「俄國輿地圖」. Korean Studies Materials Series. Seongnam: Academy of Korean Studies, 1994.

⁶ Synn, Seung Gwon. “Gangjwa Yeojigi, Aguk Yeojido haeje” 幸承權. 「江左輿地記」, 「俄國輿地圖」 解題 [Commentary on *Gangjwa Yeojigi* and *Aguk Yeojido*] in *Gangbuk Ilgi, Gangjwa Yeojigi, Aguk Yeojido* (Seongnam: Academy of Korean Studies, 1994), 38–51.

⁷ *Aguk Yeojido*, 2007.

⁸ Lee, Wang Moo. “Aguk Yeojido wa 19 segimal Joseon-ui gwanbang uisik [Aguk Yeojido and the Concept of Border Defense Late Nineteenth-Century Joseon]. In *Aguk Yeojido*, 2007, 58–65.

⁹ Synn, 1994, 38.

government encouraged Korean immigration to the Primorskii Region, providing land, grain, and livestock.¹⁰

In a memorandum to the government in 1874, the Minister of Communications, Konstantin N. Posiet (1819–1899), wrote, 'As the Primorskii and Amur regions suffer from a lack of grain, cattle, and labour, it is necessary to have close relations with Korea, which has all of these'.¹¹

At the same time, the Russian government was discussing the possibility of signing a peace treaty with Korea. This treaty was to include articles regulating frontier trade and the settlement of ethnic Koreans in Russia. However, when the Treaty on Trade between Russia and Korea was signed in the summer of 1884, these issues were not addressed.¹² These developments created the geopolitical and demographic backdrop against which the map was compiled.

In 1884, following the failed Gapsin coup, King Gojong sought to counterbalance Chinese dominance and Japanese ambitions by cultivating ties with Russia. He dispatched high-ranking officials Kwon Dongsu 權東壽 and Kim Yongwon 金鏞元, accompanied by Kim Gwanghun 金光薰 and Sin Seonuk 申先郁, to the Primorskii Region. Scholars believe that the mission gathered information later incorporated into the *Map of Russia*. The foreword signed by Kim Gwanghun and Sin Seonuk strengthens the attribution of authorship to them.

The identities of the map's compilers remain obscure. Contemporary chronicles describe them as being of "unknown descent" and note that they "meddled in various affairs" resulting in their exile for political misconduct.¹³ Synn Seung Kwon cites sources that refer to the supposed authors' visit to the Primorskii Region in 1882, which was probably the reason they were included in the 1884 mission.¹⁴ Sources differ on the date of their return from Russia – either 1885 with the other emissaries,¹⁵ or 1888 independently.¹⁶ These inconsistencies complicate attribution, but the prevailing scholarly view links the map to the 1884 mission and to the figures who signed its foreword.

The *Map of Russia* thus emerges as both a cartographic record and a political document, reflecting Korea's diplomatic imagination at a pivotal historical moment. Its distinctive format and iconography reveal the practical concerns of late nineteenth century Korean emissaries, while its rediscovery and publication history underscore its enduring scholarly value. Yet its unresolved questions of

¹⁰ Malozemoff, Andrew. *Russian Far Eastern policy, 1881-1904*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 9.

¹¹ Posiet, Konstantin N. "Prekrashchenie ssylki v Sibir'" [The Abolition of Exile to Siberia]. *Russkaya starina*, 49 (July 1899): 59.

¹² For more detailed information about the events preceding the signing of the Russo-Korean Treaty, see: Synn, Seung Kwon, *The Russo-Japanese Rivalry over Korea, 1876-1904*. (Seoul: Yuk Phub Sa, 1981); Narochnitskii, Aleksei L. *Kolonial'naya politika kapitalisticheskikh derzhav na Dal'nem Vostoke, 1860-1895* [Colonial Policy of Capitalist Powers in the Far East, 1860-1895] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1956).

¹³ Joseon Wangjo Sillok (朝鮮王朝實錄). Gojong reign, 22nd year (1885), 6th month, 13th day; entry for 1900. National Institute of Korean History. <http://sillok.history.go.kr> (sillok.history.go.kr in Bing).

¹⁴ Synn, 1994, 39.

¹⁵ Joseon Wangjo Sillok, 1885.

¹⁶ Lee, 2007, 58.

authorship, dating, and purpose have continued to intrigue scholars. These uncertainties have generated a sustained historiographical debate, in which different methodological approaches – textual analysis, biographical reconstruction, and geopolitical contextualization – have produced competing chronological models.

Historiographical Approaches to Dating

The earliest attempt to establish a chronology for the *Map of Russia* was made by Professor Yu Yeong Bak in 1972. His initial proposal offered only a broad timeframe, situating the document within the later years of King Gojong's reign by correlating it with the period of Kim Gwanghun and Sin Seonuk's stay in Russia.¹⁷ This reasoning, however, rested on external biographical references rather than internal textual evidence, rendering the conclusion more conjectural than firmly substantiated. Moreover, Yu's accompanying commentary – that “most of the Map is dedicated to the territories of our country that were incorporated into the Soviet Union at one time, ... which we must reclaim”¹⁸ – illustrates the influence of contemporary political discourse on his interpretation, raising questions about the objectivity of his analysis.

Yu refined his position in 1980 by introducing a comparative framework. He juxtaposed the *Map* with another rare document, the *Notes about the Lands Located on the Left Bank of the River* (Kangjwa Yōjigi 江左輿地記), discovered in connection with the 1884 expedition.¹⁹ The two texts share significant thematic overlap, yet diverge in place names, territorial dimensions, and demographic data, suggesting that they were produced by the same authors at different times. By comparing the texts, the researcher concluded that the *Map* was compiled later than *Notes*. Yu's decisive argument rested on a passage in the *Notes* referring to the death of a Russian Tsar. He interpreted this as a reference to Alexander III's death in 1894, thereby dating the *Notes* to 1895 and situating the *Map* after that year.²⁰ However, the use of the character “斃” (“to be killed”) permits an alternative reading: the passage may instead allude to the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. If so, the *Notes* would date to 1882, and the *Map* to a correspondingly earlier period than Yu proposed. This ambiguity underscores the fragility of Yu's argument, which hinges on a single, semantically contested term.

A different line of reasoning was advanced by Synn Seung Kwon, who drew upon evidence of the authors' presence in the Primorskii Region in 1882 and their subsequent participation in the 1884 mission. On this basis, he dated the *Map* to 1885 – 1886, following Kim Gwanghun and Sin Seonuk's return from Russia.²¹ This approach is more coherent, as it anchors the dating in biographical trajectories,

¹⁷ Yu 1972, 21.

¹⁸ Yu 1972, 19.

¹⁹ Yu Yong Bak. “Jangseogak sojan Gangjwa Yeojigi nongo” 柳永博. «藏書閣所藏江左輿地記論改» [Discussion on the “Notes about the Lands Located on the Left Bank of the River”, held at the Jangseogak Library]. *Kukhak charyo* [Materials for Korean Classical Studies], 38 (1980): 6-13.

²⁰ Yu 1980, 12-13.

²¹ Synn 1994, 39, 47-48.

though it remains dependent on reconstructed itineraries that are not always corroborated by documentary evidence. Lee Wang Moo, adopting a similar logic, proposed a slightly broader range of 1884 – 1886.²²

The historiography of the *Map of Russia* ultimately reveals two principal chronological models. The first is the late dating (post 1895) proposed by Yu Yeong Bak, whose interpretation rests on a contested textual reference and is weakened by semantic ambiguity as well as ideological inflection. The second is the intermediate dating (1884 – 1886) advanced by Synn Seung Kwon and Lee Wang Moo, which aligns more closely with biographical evidence of the authors' travels, though it remains partly reconstructive. By contrast, the year 1882 pertains to the *Notes about the Lands Located on the Left Bank of the River*. Thus, the historiographical debate narrows to two competing models for the Map's dating, while the earlier text provides a separate chronological anchor.

Additional textual evidence complicates the picture further. The *Foreword with notes to the Map of Russia and China* (清俄輿地形情釋義序) states: "For the last 16 years, while stopping in Russian and Chinese [lands], we surveyed border fortifications, enquired about the state of affairs, and finally compiled this map and the notes based on the information we were able to obtain secretly."²³ This overlooked passage suggests that the process of gathering information and compiling the map extended far longer than the two years usually cited by South Korean sources.

Other internal references provide chronological clues. The text mentions plan to construct a railway between Vladivostok and Nikolsk (now Ussuriysk), a project inaugurated in 1891 during the visit of Crown Prince Nikolai Alexandrovich, future Emperor of Russia, Nikolai II (1868 – 1918). This sets an upper limit for the map's completion. Conversely, the discussion of Naseondong 羅鮮洞 village and the nearby Korean and Russian settlements, designated as Russian, whose ownership was contested by the Chinese authorities until the Russian-Chinese agreement of 1886, indicates that the map must have been compiled no later than that year. Similarly, the reference to events in the Guiwei (癸未) year in Dobiha 都埤河 settlement corresponds to 1883 in the Gregorian calendar, reinforcing an earlier timeframe.

Taken together, these approaches highlight the methodological challenges of dating the *Map of Russia*. Each relies on a limited evidentiary base and is vulnerable to interpretive risks. The juxtaposition of textual ambiguities, biographical reconstructions, and overlooked internal references underscores the need for a more integrated methodology – one that combines philological analysis, documentary evidence, and geopolitical context. Only through such a synthesis can the chronology of the *Map* be more securely established.

The historiography of the *Map of Russia* demonstrates the persistent difficulty of establishing a secure chronology. Yu Yeong Bak's late dating, grounded in contested textual evidence, contrasts with the intermediate model advanced by Synn Seung Kwon and Lee Wang Moo, which relies on reconstructed biographical trajectories. Internal references in the foreword and accompanying

²² Lee 2007, 59.

²³ *Aguk Yeojido*, 2007.

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notes further complicate the picture, pointing simultaneously to an extended period of information gathering, to events no later than 1886, and to later developments such as the Vladivostok–Nikolsk railway of 1891. These contradictions reveal the limits of single strand arguments and underscore the need for a more integrated methodology. Only by combining philological analysis, biographical reconstruction, and geopolitical context can future scholarship move beyond fragile conjecture toward a more reliable dating of the *Map*.

New Archival Evidence: Clarifying Chronology and Attribution

While earlier scholarship relied largely on textual ambiguities and reconstructed itineraries, recently uncovered archival documents shed new light on the authorship and dating of the *Map of Russia*.

After several months in Russia, the Korean delegation returned in the summer of 1885, only to face scrutiny from pro-Chinese ministers at court, Chinese officials monitoring events in Korea, and foreign diplomats. With royal authority weakened and Chinese influence growing, King Gojong was forced to hand over responsibility for liaising with Russia to his adviser, Paul Georg von Mölendorf (1847 – 1901), and to attribute the initiative for sending the mission to Minister Han Gyujik (1845 – 1884), who had perished during the 1884 coup. The delegation members were subsequently exiled on vague charges of “betrayal and abuse.”²⁴

This episode is documented in a confidential report compiled by Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), the Qing Commissioner of Trade for the North, based on testimony from Chen Shutang 陳樹棠, the Chinese representative in Korea.²⁵ The report highlights suspicions of a “secret conspiracy” between the Korean court and Russia, further underscoring the political tensions surrounding the mission, leading to the exile of Kim Gwanghun and Sin Seonuk. South Korean researcher Lee Min Won has suggested that the proximity of the exiled members’ locations may have enabled them to continue their mapping work.²⁶

Imperial chronicles record that Kim Yongwon, Kim Gwanghun, and Sin Seonuk were released in spring 1888 after serving their sentences,²⁷ though their subsequent lives remain obscure. Only Kwon Dongsu reemerged in official records, promoted in 1900 to serve as Korea’s representative for trade affairs (通商事務官) in Vladivostok.²⁸

Additional evidence comes from Japanese diplomatic archives, which preserve a letter written by Sin Seonuk in Vladivostok to Kurooka Tatewaki 黒岡帶刀

²⁴ Joseon Wangjo Sillok, 1885.

²⁵ Li, Hongzhang 李鴻章. *Mizi tong E hanyuan Shen Xianyu deng duizhi kougong* 密咨通俄韓員申先郁等對質口供 [Confidential Report on the Interrogation of Sin Seonuk and Others Concerning Secret Negotiations between Russia and Korea]. August 9, 1885. Archives of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei. File no. 01-25-019-01-029.

²⁶ Lee, Min Won. “19 segi mar-ui Han-Rō kwan’gye wa ‘Aguk Yeojido’ [Korea-Russian relations at the End of the Nineteenth Century and *Aguk Yeojido*]. *Jangseogak* 29 (April 2013): 183.

²⁷ Ilseongnok, 1888.

²⁸ Joseon Wangjo Sillok, 1900.

(1851–1927), a naval intelligence officer of the Satsuma Domain.²⁹ In 1875, he was sent to Vladivostok “to conduct an inspection of Primorye and the Russian lands adjacent to the Korean border”.³⁰ The letter, dated ca. 1876, locates Sin’s residence in Gyesimhe, the first Korean village in the Primorskii Region, and describes the resettlement of Koreans to Russia in 1869. These details closely parallel the information contained in the Map, suggesting that Sin began collecting material as early as the 1860s and continued for the sixteen years later mentioned in the foreword.

Taken together, these documents point to a compilation period between 1883 and 1886, aligning with the mission and subsequent exile, while acknowledging extended years of information gathering. They provide a firmer evidentiary basis for dating the *Map* and attributing its authorship, while also underscoring the need for further archival research to confirm these conclusions.

Strategic Functions of the Map: Military Intelligence and Migration Records

With questions of authorship and chronology clarified by newly uncovered documents, attention now turns to the purposes for which the *Map of Russia* was compiled. A close analysis reveals that its objectives were twofold: first, to record Russian and Chinese military strength along the borderlands, and second, to document the settlement of Korean migrants in the Primorskii Region.

The cartographers devoted particular attention to Russian military infrastructure. Large settlements, garrisons, artillery positions, troop numbers, and communication lines are carefully noted, underscoring the map’s strategic intent. As Yu Yeong Bak observed, the map was created primarily for military purposes.³¹ Lee Wang Moo further emphasized that such detailed intelligence could not have been gathered by Kim Gwanghun and Sin Seonuk alone; rather, it likely relied on networks of Korean informants in the Primorskii Region who had long collected confidential information on local defenses.³²

The intelligence extends beyond Russian territory to Chinese border fortifications. For example, the Hunchun garrison is described in detail, including the command hierarchy and strict discipline of its units. Similarly, Russian outposts such as Port Posiet and Novokievskoe (Kraskino) are depicted as fortified positions with artillery, naval troops, and logistical facilities. These entries demonstrate that the *Map of Russia* was not an ethnographic sketch but a systematic effort to record military strength and preparedness across the frontier.

²⁹ Sin Seonuk. *Urajiosutoku nite kanjin yori Kurooka Tatewaki e desitaru fumi* ウラシオストツクニテ韓人ヨリ黒岡帯刀へ出シタル書 [Letter from a Korean in Vladivostok to Kurooka Tatewaki]. ca. 1876. Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, Tokyo. File no. 1-1-2-3_11_002.

³⁰ Polutov, Andrei V. “Deyatel'nost' yaponskoi razvedki vo Vladivostoke (1875-1902)” [Japanese Intelligence Activities in Vladivostok, 1875-1902]. *Rossiia i ATR*, no. 2 (2011): 216.

³¹ Yu, 1972, 20.

³² Lee, 2007, 61.

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Alongside its military focus, the map also records Korean communities in Russia. At the time, any Korean who illegally crossed the Tumen River violated royal law and was subject to the death penalty.³³ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, the royal court acknowledged the presence of Korean immigrants abroad and sought to use this fact to its advantage.

Twenty-nine settlements are listed, from Noktundo 鹿屯島 “Krasnoye Selo” near the border to Samalli 沙末里 “Blagoslovennoye”, where 2,640 households with 20,313 inhabitants were counted.³⁴ Each settlement is described in terms of location, population, agricultural products, and natural resources.

The first frontier settlement in Russia, Noktundo 鹿屯島 (also known as Krasnoye Selo), is described as follows (Fig. 2):

A vast, virgin plain with fertile soil usable for cultivation stretching for 70 *li* from south to north and 30 *li* from east to west. 30 *li* to the south is Sosura 西水羅, 15 *li* to the west is Josanbo 造山堡, 100 *li* to the north-west is Kyeongheung 慶興府, and 70 *li* to the north is Seoseontaek 瑞仙澤. To the west, it is circled by the Dugang River 豆江, and to the east, the land meets the ocean.³⁵



Figure 2. Russia, Korea and China tri-border area, showing the Tumen River in *Map of Russia*.³⁶

The above description of Russian frontier settlements led Lee Wang Moo to claim that the land historically belonged to Korea, as he explains in detail in his notes.³⁷

³³ Malozemoff, 11.

³⁴ *Aguk Yejido*, 2007, Table of Contents, 俄輿地圖目錄.

³⁵ *Aguk Yejido*, 2007, Noktundo 鹿屯島.

³⁶ *Aguk Yejido*, 2007, Noktundo 鹿屯島.

³⁷ Lee, 2007, 62–65.

The descriptions highlight the fertility of the land and the prosperity of the settlers, noting that they paid no taxes to either Korea or Russia yet preserved their customs and loyalty to the Joseon dynasty, despite settlers living beyond royal law.

Contemporary observers reinforced this picture. Andrew Malozemoff remarked on Koreans' adaptation to Russian language and lifestyle,³⁸ while Isabella Bird Bishop contrasted the poverty she had witnessed in Korea with the relative prosperity of Korean households in Russia.³⁹ Nikolai Garin-Mikhailovskiy likewise praised Korean schools and diligence, noting that many immigrants themselves believed life in Russia was superior.⁴⁰

At the same time, the map records the paradox of Korean reliance on Russian military protection. Settlements are often shown adjacent to Russian guard stations, which shielded them from *honghuzi* raids from China. Entries such as Dobiha 都埤河⁴¹ and Soseong 蘇城⁴² explicitly describe Russian troops safeguarding "our people" (我民), Koreans, though later translations mistakenly rendered this as "their own people," Russians.⁴³ Whether this mistranslation was accidental or deliberate remains open to question, but it obscures the original emphasis on Korean identity.

Taken together, these accounts reveal the dual objectives of the *Map of Russia*: to gather intelligence on Russian and Chinese military capabilities, and to document the resilience and prosperity of Korean migrants in the borderlands. The juxtaposition of military fortifications with Korean villages underscores both the strategic concerns of the Joseon court and its recognition of migration as a vital factor in regional geopolitics.

Vladivostok on the Map

Among the many settlements and fortifications recorded, Vladivostok occupies a particularly prominent place on the *Map of Russia*, where its symbolic representation, military infrastructure, and commercial vitality are described in exceptional detail.

Vladivostok, granted city status in 1880, is depicted in a detailed and picturesque manner (Fig. 3), framed through the allegorical language of *Feng Shui*. The interplay of *Yin* and *Yang* and the symbolism of the cardinal directions emphasize the city's harmonious location, leading the authors to conclude that "a large city and the main port of the Eastern Ocean are established here."⁴⁴

³⁸ Malozemoff, 1958, 11.

³⁹ Bishop, Isabella L. (née Bird) *Korea and her Neighbors. A Narrative of Travel, with an Account of the Recent Vicissitudes and Present Position of the Country*. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1898). P. 235-236.

⁴⁰ Garin, Nikolai G. *Iz dnevnikov krugosvetnogo puteshestviya (Po Koree, Man'chzhurii i Lyadunskomu poluostrovu)* [From the Diaries of a World Tour (Korea, Manchuria and the Liaodong peninsula)]. 3rd ed. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury, 1952), 86.

⁴¹ Aguk Yeojido, 2007, Dobiha 都埤河.

⁴² Aguk Yeojido, 2007, Soseong 蘇城.

⁴³ Aguk Yeojido, 2007, 49.

⁴⁴ Aguk Yeojido, 2007, Haesamwi 海蔘崴.

Mapping Russia with Korean Eyes: The *Aguk Yeojido* RevisitedFigure 3. Vladivostok-city on the *Map of Russia*.⁴⁵

The map highlights the city's fortifications: artillery batteries along the bays, observation posts on surrounding hills, and the relocation of the military port to the eastern shore of Golden Horn Bay in 1878. Vladivostok appears as a fortified garrison complete with arsenal, hospital, and industrial facilities.

Equally prominent is the city's commercial vitality. Following the grant of *Porto Franco* status, Vladivostok became a hub of international trade. Contemporary descriptions vividly note that “the sea surface is blocked from view by cargo ships... there seems to be no room to stick an awl,”⁴⁶ with vessels arriving from across Asia, Europe, and America.

The map also records new institutions and technologies: a Japanese consulate, telegraph lines⁴⁷, and mechanical workshops that later developed into the shipyard *Dalzavod*. Such details reveal the authors' astonishment at the scale of military garrisons, industrial sophistication, and port facilities.

Unlike smaller villages or frontier garrisons, Vladivostok is presented with striking detail and symbolic richness. Its depiction combines allegorical elements drawn from *Feng Shui* with precise records of fortifications, port facilities, and commercial activity. This dual emphasis reflects the cartographers' intent to portray Vladivostok not only as a strategic military stronghold but also as a cosmopolitan hub of trade and industry, embodying the broader geopolitical significance of Russia's Pacific outpost.

⁴⁵ *Aguk Yeojido*, 2007, Haesamwi 海蔘崴.

⁴⁶ *Aguk Yeojido*, 2007, Haesamwi 海蔘崴. 'No room to stick an awl' 立錐 is a common phrase used to describe a lack of unoccupied space.

⁴⁷ Writing about the telegraph, the authors comment: “These miraculous things cannot be described by words” [*Aguk Yeojido*, 2007, Yeonchuyong 延秋營].

Conclusion

The *Aguk Yejido* (“Map of Russia”) stands as a singular artifact of late nineteenth century Korean cartography, embodying both the anxieties and ambitions of a court navigating unprecedented geopolitical turbulence. Its descriptive richness – settlements, fortifications, natural resources, and demographic data – provides a vivid record of the Primorskii Region at the very moment when Korea’s northern frontier was being redefined. Yet the manuscript is more than a geographic survey: it is a hybrid cartographic textual genre in which visual representation and written annotation converge to produce a dynamic instrument of intelligence and diplomacy.

Historiographical debates over its dating and authorship reveal the methodological challenges of working with fragmentary evidence. Early scholarship oscillated between late and intermediate chronologies, often relying on contested textual references or reconstructed itineraries. Newly uncovered archival materials, however, allow for a firmer synthesis: the compilation of the map between 1883 and 1886, most plausibly by Kim Gwanghun and Sin Seonuk, following their participation in 1884 mission to Russia. This convergence of internal textual clues, biographical trajectories, and external diplomatic records demonstrates the value of integrated methodology in resolving long standing uncertainties.

The thematic analysis underscores the map’s dual objectives. On one hand, it systematically records Russian and Chinese military infrastructure, reflecting Joseon’s urgent need for frontier intelligence. On the other, it documents the Korean diaspora in Russia, portraying migrant communities as both a demographic reality and a potential resource for the state. In this way, the *Aguk Yejido* reveals how cartography functioned as a tool of surveillance, negotiation, and identity formation – an ideological construct rather than a neutral depiction of space.

Taken together, the descriptive detail, historiographical debate, archival clarification, and thematic interpretation converge on a compelling conclusion: the *Aguk Yejido* is not merely a rare manuscript map but a strategic statement of Korea’s diplomatic imagination. It illustrates how the late Joseon court sought to reposition itself amid the collision of empires, using cartography to conceptualize Russia as a counterweight to Chinese suzerainty and Japanese expansion. Preserved today in the Jangseogak Library, the map remains one of the few extant Korean color manuscripts to depict foreign military facilities, and perhaps the only one to integrate intelligence, migration, and diplomacy into a single cartographic textual artifact. As such, it offers scholars a unique window into the intersection of cartography, geopolitics, and statecraft at a pivotal historical moment.

Mapping Russia with Korean Eyes: The *Aguk Yejido* Revisited

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