

Panel Discussion:

The *East Sea* from Invasion and Exploitation to Peace and Co-prosperity: Lessons from Japanese Imperialism

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Around the 1930s when Imperial Japan was exercising colonial rule over Korea and invading China, the Duman River region by the Korean peninsula's northeastern frontier and the *East Sea* (also known as the *Sea of Japan*) drew attention as a potential stage of economic development in Northeast Asia and a new arterial route for military transportation. This new route was referred to as the "North Korean Route," one that systematically connected Manchurian railways, the "North Korean railway" (北鮮鐵道), the "three North Korean ports" (北鮮三港), the "North Korean sea route" (北鮮航路), and Japanese railways. Calls were pouring out in Japan to tie the individual economies bordering the *East Sea* into a single bloc and develop it. Such calls were identified as the idea of "turning the *Sea of Japan* into a lake" (日本海 湖水論), recasting the *East Sea* as an inland sea (內海) of Japan. This atmosphere seems to have influenced the International Hydrographic Organization to mark the *East Sea* as "Japan Sea" in the *Limits of Oceans and Seas* published in 1929, which subsequently contributed to the dissemination of the name "Sea of Japan" in the international community.

Before proceeding any further, it seems necessary to go over a few main terms that shall recur throughout this presentation. The North Korean railway begins at the port of Chongjin (清津) on the Korean peninsula's east coast, passes through Suseong (輸城), an intersection on the Hamgyong line, before reaching Hoeryong (會寧), a border city at midstream of the Duman River. From there, the railway heads further up north along the river and connects to the Tumen line (圖們線) as well as Sangsambong (上三峰) that

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joins the Chaokai line (朝開線). After passing Namyang (南陽), the railway route turns southeast downstream along the Duman River, passes through Hunyung (訓戎), where the East Manchurian railway (東滿洲鐵道) branches out, and arrives at the ports of Unggi (雄基) and Rajin (羅津). The "three North Korean ports" refer to the ports of Chongjin, Unggi, and Rajin situated up north along the east coast of the Korean peninsula, and these port cities are either starting or end points of the North Korean railway and the North Korean sea route. The North Korean sea route refers to a route on the *East Sea* that runs between the three North Korean ports and ports such as Fushiki (伏木), Tsuruga (敦賀), and Niigata (新潟) on the west coast of Japan (裏日本).

Therefore, the "North Korean route" can be defined as the shortest arterial transportation route between the Japanese archipelago and Manchuria by connecting Manchurian railways, the "North Korean railway," the "three North Korean ports," the "North Korean sea route" (北鮮航路), and ports on the west coast of Japan.

Arterial transportation routes that directly connected Japan and Manchuria during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea were the Yellow Sea route across the Yellow Sea, the Trans-Korean route running vertically through the Korean peninsula via the Gyeongbu railway and the Gyeongui railway, and the North Korean route linking the North Korean sea route on the *East Sea*, the North Korean railway of North Hamgyong Province, and Manchurian railways. Whereas the Yellow Sea route and the Trans-Korean route had already been established around 1900, it was only after the Mukden Incident of 1931 when the North Korea route began to actually materialize from the middle of the *East Sea*, past the northernmost of the Korean peninsula, directly through the center of Manchuria and up to its northeastern frontier areas.

Once Imperial Japan took over Manchuria and established the puppet state Manchukuo (滿洲國), the North Korean route emerged as a transportation route closest to the borders of an economic and military bloc combining Japan, Joseon, and Manchuria. Imperial Japan promoted the North Korean route as a national policy, and on site, the Government-General of Joseon and Manchukuo actively cooperated in developing the route. In August 1938, Imperial Japan came to designate the North Korean route as a new arterial route connecting Japan, Joseon, and Manchuria.

Meanwhile, Koreans and Chinese in areas along the North Korean route fought to resist Imperial Japan's aforementioned policy of a new arterial route (新幹線政策).

Armed struggles against Japan frequented areas along the North Korean railway and Manchurian railways. Attacks to sabotage Imperial Japan's railway construction and operation often occurred, sometime resulting in murders of Japanese people or destroyed railways and trains, which in turn caused Imperial Japan to recurrently exercise retaliation and oppression. That was how areas along the North Korean route came to be stained with blood from such aggression and resistance, forcing railways to be constructed and operated under Imperial Japan's military cover.

Located along the Duman River at the rising center of distribution in Northeast Asia, the North Korean railway served as a link that tied Japan with Manchuria. The railway was directly connected to the Keito line (京圖線) penetrating central Manchuria between Hsinking (新京), or present day Changchun (長春), and Tumen (圖們), as well as to the Tujia line (圖佳線) running between Tumen and Jiamusi (佳木斯), leading up to Manchuria's northeastern boundary. Express trains were operated through these lines that stopped by Seoul, the three North Korean ports, Hsinking, and Jiamusi.

Passengers and freight aboard the North Korean railway would pass in and out of the three North Korean ports, which were connected to Japanese ports such as Fushiki, Tsuruga, and Niigata. Hence, the three North Korean ports served as nodes of the North Korean railway and North Korea sea route.

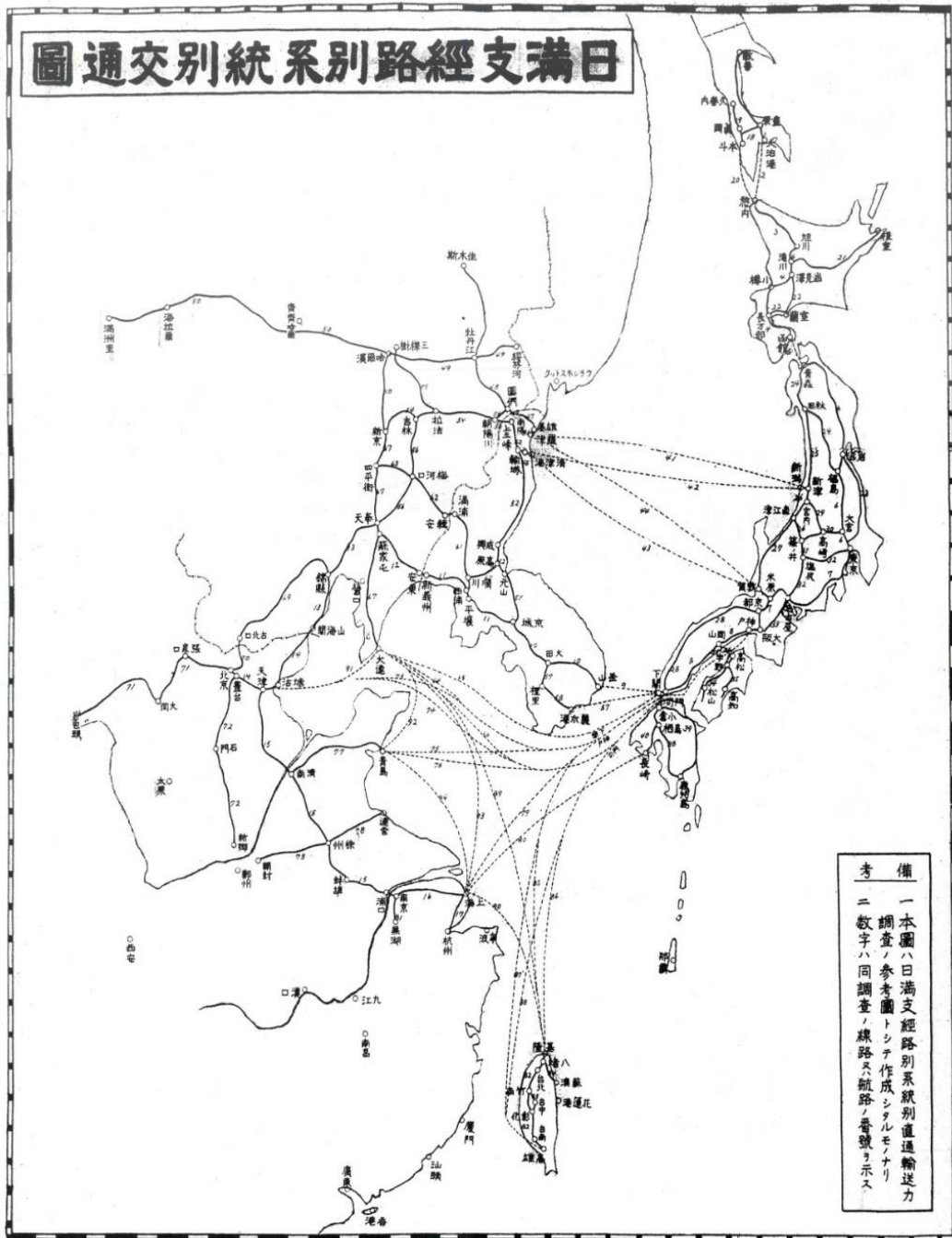
There were five steamship lines operating along the North Korean sea route in the *East Sea* under the authorization of the Japanese government and the Government-General of Joseon. These companies each sailed about one to three times per month between the three North Korean ports and Japanese ports including Fushiki, Tsuruga, and Niigata. In 1938, the Japanese government specifically designated the route between the port Niigata and the three North Korean ports as a sea route of emigration (移民輸送 航路). In February 1940, the government-run Japan Sea Steamship Co., Ltd. (Nihonkai Kisen Kabushiki Kaisha) was established in order to monopolize the operation of all ships operating along the North Korean sea route.

Imperial Japan promoted the North Korean route as a national project for the purpose of tying Japan, Joseon, and Manchuria together. Consequently, the North Korean route was able to function as a lever pulling Japan, Joseon, and Manchuria into a single military and economic bloc around the 1930s.

Seven decades later, the current situation of Northeast Asia and the North Korean route in particular has changed entirely. The Duman River's downstream region, where Hunchun (琿春) in China, Khasan in Russia, and Rajin–Seonbong in North Korea can be triangularly linked, has entered the spotlight nowadays as a candidate to serve as an integrated logistics base for Northeast Asia. Products manufactured in China and resources from Russia could be shipped out through the region to Korea, Japan, the southern parts of China, and other destinations all over the world. Competition between China and Russia over this region has been growing fierce. Since announcing the "Outline of the Tumen River Cooperative Development Plan" in 2009, China has been focusing its efforts on developing the areas of Changchun (長春), Jilin (吉林), and Tumen (圖們). Russia has included the Duman River basin as part of its development project in the Far East, and has laid tracks on the Trans–Siberian Railway between Khasan in Russia to Rajin in North Korea. In 2013, South Korea announced its "Eurasia Initiative" aimed at sustaining peace on the Korean peninsula by drawing the Eurasian continent into a single economic bloc and inducing North Korea to open up. The initiative has been presented in the hopes of forming an electricity, gas, and oil energy network, and of activating a so–called "Silk Road Express" passing through Busan in South Korea, then North Korea, China and Russia, past central Asia, and into Europe. Japan seems to be observing trends in each country as it seeks a way get its foot in the door. On the other hand, it seems that North Korea's intention is to attract foreign capital to develop the Duman River basin under the most advantageous conditions possible by prompting countries to compete with one another for investment opportunities. Amid all this, the *East Sea* now seems to be on its way to becoming a mediterranean sea destined to steer Northeast Asia toward peace and co–prosperity.

With the world undergoing such changes, until when will Japan cling on to the name *Sea of Japan*? It is time for the *East Sea* to be freed from the name *Sea of Japan*, an epitome of Imperial Japan's invasions and exploitations, and to be reborn as a sea that ships peace and co–prosperity to all the different countries it borders. For the *East Sea* is not an inland *Sea of Japan*, but a mediterranean sea of Northeast Asia. Therefore, the name *Sea of Japan* naturally should be discarded. That would be in line with the international state of affairs and with the spirit of the times.

Figure 1.



Source: 日滿支交通懇談會, <<大東亞共榮圈內交通ニ關スル調査>>, 1943.6(對外極秘).