

The Frontier Expansion Movement of Goryeo in the 10-12th centuries

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 10th century, the Goryeo kingdom set up in Korean peninsula and formulated the Northward Strategy which to expand its territory, thus launched more than 200 years of war and peace contacts with Jurchen tribes, Jurchen Jin Dynasty and Khitan Liao Dynasty. During the reign of Taejo of Goryeo to Seongjong of Goryeo, Goryeo had controlled the area between the Taedong River and the downstream Yalu River depend on Operation" Expulsion of Jurchens", fortification and immigration. With the outbreak of the Liao-Goryeo Wars and the establishment of subordinate relations between Liao and Goryeo, the strategy of the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo was adjusted. Its approaches of implement became more diversified, and its objective began to move from northwest to northeast. However, influenced by the rise of the Jurchens, the frontier expansion movemen of Goryeo had little effect even it had been amended. On this basis, along with the profound changes of the domestic and foreign situations, the frontier expansion movemen of Goryeo was finally abandoned by Goryeo's monarchs and ministers in the beginning of the 12th century.

1. Introduction

In 918, Wang Geon, the general of Taebong in the Korean peninsula, launched a coup, and established the Wang's Goryeo regime (which claims to be the successor of Goguryeo [1]) in Chorwon (now Cheorwon County, South Korea). In order to develop national strength, the Goryeo's rulers cast their eyes on the expansion of the territory to the north of the Korean peninsula, thus developing Northward Strategies aimed at expanding the territory to the north. Over the next two hundred years, the Goryeo Kingdom gradually began a long-standing political, military, and diplomatic interaction with the Jurchen, Liao, and Jin empires.

Up to now, only a few scholars such as Kim Tae-min, Kim Yoo-shin, Jang Hak-geun, Cao Zhongping, Yi Gi-baek and Jeong hae-eun have studied the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo before the 12th century.

Kim Tae-min (1986) mainly discussed the "Northward Advance" activities of Goryeo during the period of King Taejo's reign [2], but rarely studied the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo after the King Taejo era.

In his paper, Kim Yoo-shin (1981) opened a special chapter to introduce the frontier expansion movement of the Goryeo Dynasty [3]. However, his comments with personal opinions were rarely seen.

In their respective works, Jang Hak-geun (2004) and Cao Zhongping (2009,2010) continued to pay attention to Goryeo's frontier expansion movement issue, focused on Goryeo-Khitan War during 10-11th centuries and the war between Goryeo and the Jurchen early in the 12th century [4] [5] [6]. However, they failed to conduct a holistic and systematic discussion on the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo in the 10-12th centuries.

In addition to this, from his article, Yi Gi-baek (1980) focused on the construction of military castles in the process of territorial expansion of Goryeo [7]. Meanwhile, Jeong hae-eun (2009)

discussed Goryeo's "Northward Advance" activities from the perspective of warfare and explored its connection with Reconstructionism of Goguryeo [8], but talked less about non-war actions during the implementation of Goryeo's Northward Strategy.

On the basis of previous researches, I hope to carry out overall and multi-faceted analysis of the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo in each stage of 10-12th centuries in chronological order, and to discuss its impacts.

2. Northward Strategy and its Practices in the 10th Century

Since 918 to 991, the ruling class of the Goryeo Kingdom designed a series of programs to conquer the region from the north of the Taedong River to the south of the Yalu River (also called the Amrok River or Amnok River), that was named as Northward Strategy by later scholars.

With the pretence of Restoring the Sovereignty of Goguryeo territory", Goryeo had launched military activities in the northern part of the Korean peninsula.

Taking advantage of the decline of Balhae and the decentralization of the power of Jurchen tribes, Goryeo launched a series of military attack on the Jurchen. Relying on force, Goryeo seized areas of Taedong River basin, Chongchon River basin and Daeyeong River basin, and pushed the national boundaries to the lower reaches of the Yalu River.

During that period, many Jurchens were subjected to severe persecution and expulsion [9], their homesteads became the new conquest of Goryeo. For establish forward military bases and developing the frontier region, monarchs of Goryeo ordered a collection of elite troops to built a series of new towns (such as Anju, Sukju, Maengju and so on [10]) in the North of the Korean Peninsula and ordered them to garrisoned there. In the meanwhile, large numbers of Koreans were forced to move into new towns as replenishment of the population for the newly conquered land. Against this background, many public facilities, educational institutions, industrial workshops and other buildings were gradually built in each new town.

In a word, Goryeo had moulded a complete network of towns in the northern border region by sending the garrisons and immigrating, which helped Goryeo established effective rule in the region from the north of the Taedong river to the south of the Yalu River.

3. The Use of Multiple Methods and Achievements of the Northward Activities

After Goryeo–Khitan Wars(993,1010), Goryeo became a vassal state of the Liao Empire. But changes in the international geopolitical situation had not deterred Goryeo from expanding northward. Faced with the new situation, Goryeo gradually adopted a variety of flexible means to conquering lands far and wide.

From the end of the 10th century to the end of the 11th century, Goryeo continued to expand the ruling area in the north of the Korean peninsula through a range of diplomatic, military and political measures. Through a series of activities, the northern boundary of Goryeo was moved to the line that west to the estuary of Yalu River and east to Hamhung Bay.

First of all, in order to occupy the Jurchen residential area on the east bank of the Yalu River under the Liao rule, King Seongjong of Goryeo sent diplomat Seo Hui to negotiate with senior officials of the Liao Empire to claiming that the Jurchen residential area on the east bank of the Yalu River is the legal territory of the Goryeo kingdom [11]. For maintain the friendly relations between the two countries, Emperor Shengzong of Liao promised to reward the above region to Goryeo [12]. In this way, the Goryeo kingdom had acquired the land ownership in the east of the lower reaches of the Yalu River.

Secondly, Goryeo continued to rally troops to crusade against surrounding Jurchen tribes which were unwilling to surrender, and deported Jurchens to the region of the Changbai Mountain and the Tumen River basin, and strengthened the management in the homeland of these Jurchens by building castles, Cheolli Jangseong (also called "Thousand Li Wall", a famous military defensive project in Korean history) and increasing the number of immigrant population.

Thirdly, relying on trade and diplomatic assistances to the Jurchen, Goryeo gradually established

a stable suzerain-vassal relationship with the nearby Jurchen tribes, and on this basis, the tributary system of the Korean Peninsula centered on the Goryeo has formed in the mid-11th century. With surrendering the Goryeo rulers, many Jurchen chiefs received official ranks and titles of nobility from Goryeo, a lot of Jurchens were assimilated into the Goryeo culture. As a result of these above events, Goryeo established the Jimi system (an autonomous administrative and political organization system which can establish the authority and legitimacy of the central government on subordinate administrative areas management [13]) in northwest and northeast Korea, it led many Jurchen tribes (they were divided into “the East Jurchens” and “the Western Jurchens” by the rulers of Goryeo [14]) to accepted the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Goryeo smoothly.

4. The End of the Frontier Expansion Movement

The period from the reign of King Sukjong to King Injong (1095-1146) was the last stage of the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo in the 10-12th centuries.

During this period, the Goryeo’s rulers ordered their excellent generals to lead a large number of troops to invade the Jurchen tribes in the Helandian (lied on the Hailan River basin [15]) Although they once won, they finally chose to withdraw their troops and stopped conquer the east of Songchon River basin(lied on the northeastern part of the Korean peninsula) under the violent resistance of the alliance of Jurchen tribes. Hereafter, Goryeo wrested control of the Baozhou area from the Liao while the Liao–Jin Wars, which sparked retaliation from the Jin Dynasty. After King Injong ascended the throne, Goryeo finally decided to stop the frontier expansion movement with influenced by the severe reality of both domestic strife and foreign aggression.

Faced with the situation that unable to broke the excellent military defense system on the west bank of the Yalu River established by Liao empire [16], the Goryeo rulers decided to revised the plan of the frontier expansion movement. Backed by its growing national power, Goryeo gradually set its sights on expanding its territory to the northeast of the Korean peninsula in the early 12th century. In order to eliminate the obstacles of Jurchen aborigines, Goryeo sent several troops to attack Jurchen tribes, but failed. For righting past humiliations, King Yejong took the advices of marshal Yun Gwan, and made the whole nation into state of near-war. In 1107, King Yejong ordered Yun Gwan commanded more than 300,000 soldiers invaded the area of Jurchen settlement “Helandian”, and occupied there by built nine fortresses to the northeast of the Goryeo-Jurchen borders. Face to this situation, all Jurchens around the Northeast Asia united to stand against Goryeo for revenge. In 1109, Goryeo was forced to give up its control of the Helandian region by destroyed Goryeo’s fortresses and withdrew their garrisons and migrants when the Jurchens fight back fiercely. From then on, the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo had been stopped forward in Northeast Korea peninsula.

At the beginning of the 12th century, the Liao Empire declined gradually, continued territorial expansion along the Yalu River has re-emerged as the main objective of the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo. While the rise of the Jurchen Jin Empire and the Liao–Jin Wars (1114-1125), for occupied the area of Baozhou (a town which closes the lower reaches of the Yalu river, belong to Dongjing Province of the Liao in 1019-1117), Goryeo actively organized its armed forces to prepare for combat and tried to summoned the top officials of Baozhou to surrender [17]. Under heavy pressure, the generals of Baozhou’s garrison decided to surrender town Baozhou to Goryeo, which aroused the wrath of the rulers of the Jin who also considered the region of Baozhou to a part of territory in the Jin Empire. The Jin and Goryeo turned against each other because of a dispute over sovereignty of Baozhou until 1126 when Goryeo became a vassal state of Jin Dynasty. For consolidate the suzerain-vassal relationship between the Jin and Goryeo, Emperor Taizong of Jin eventually generously approved Goryeo ownership of the Baozhou region [18].

Although Goryeo won the battle with the Jin Empire for the sovereignty of Baozhou, the Goryeo’s monarch and his ministers gradually realized the strength of the Jin and dared not continue to promote the frontier expansion movement.

In addition, the constant domestic political struggles in Goryeo in the 12th century also greatly hindered the northward expansion of the Goryeo Kingdom. With Yi Ja-gyeom, Chok Jun-kyung,

Master Myocheong and other powerful ministers had taken control of the Goryeo central government, political and military elites of Goryeo were repeatedly purged, so that Goryeo can no longer fully engage in territorial expansion. More importantly, the ruling class of Goryeo was divided over the dispute to continue the frontier expansion movement. Therefore, high officials were divided into two groups: those in favor, led by Master Myocheong, and those in opposition, led by Kim Bu-sik. Finally, with the support of King Injong, the opposition eliminated another faction through the "Suppressing Myocheong's Rebellion"[19], thus completely stopped the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo.

Conclusion

In 10-12th centuries, the Goryeo kingdom succeeded in taking over most of the Korean peninsula through the use of political, military, diplomatic and other measures, and made the Yalu River, Rangrim Mountains and Songchon River its northern borders. However, under the obstruction of the neighboring Jurchen tribes, the Liao and the Jin, and the political chaos, Goryeo had to stop the expansion of its territory in the early 12th century.

In any case, the frontier expansion movement that lasted for more than two hundred years has exerted some profound influences both for the history of the Korean peninsula and the history of East Asia.

Firstly, the implementation of the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo directly led to the reshaping of the geopolitical pattern in northeast Asia in the 10th to 12th centuries, making Goryeo a unified kingdom on the Korean peninsula with its huge territory and a great geopolitical power that could not be ignored in East Asia at that time.

Secondly, during the period of the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo in the 10-12th centuries, the ethnic population structure of the Korean peninsula changed significantly as the Korean people replaced the Jurchens as the main residents in the north of the peninsula. In addition, the northern part of the Korean peninsula had been developed and operated by immigrants.

Thirdly, the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo had long threatened the stability of the geopolitical security pattern in northeast Asia. Due to the irreconcilable territorial disputes between the Goryeo kingdom and the Liao Dynasty, the Jurchen tribes and the Jin Dynasty, the relations between Goryeo and the Khitan and the Jurchen had been in opposition for a long time, which seriously hindered the peaceful exchanges between Goryeo and the Liao, Jurchens, the Jin and other foreign forces.

All in all, as the first large-scale and long-term external expansion launched by the country from Korean peninsula, the frontier expansion movement of Goryeo in the 10-12th centuries undoubtedly has important historical significance, and the historical experience and lessons presented by this historical phenomenon deserve our in-depth reflection.

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