



Humanities

REVIEW

The problems of *meng'an* and *mouke* on the basis of Jurchen studies in Russia

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Meng'an and *mouke* were the main social institutions in Jurchen society. They existed until the end of the Jurchen state, but were reestablished in the Manchurian period. Usually research by East Asian studies specialists into *meng'an* and *mouke* is based only on Chinese materials, but Russian scholars have actively used written sources and archaeological materials in their study of these Jurchen social institutions. The rich materials and tradition of Russian research into East Asia give a basis for interesting results. In spite of this, these studies remain practically unknown in the Western academic world, largely because most Russian scholars do not publish in English. Moreover, Soviet and Russian historians consider *meng'an* and *mouke* from different perspectives than Chinese or Western specialists. This article uses Soviet and Russian studies to trace the development and ultimate decay of *meng'an* and *mouke* in order to provide a uniquely Russian perspective on these Jurchen social institutions.

KEYWORDS: Jurchen; East Asia; Social History; Russian Far East; Manchuria; *Meng'an*, *Mouke*

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In spite of *meng'an* (猛安) and *mouke* (謀克) being the main elements of the social system of the Jurchen and the availability of Chinese annals from the nineteenth century, many Soviet specialists only began to pay attention to the social system of the Jurchen society only in the 1960s. At first these studies were fraught with problems. For example, some Soviet scholars confused Jurchen and Manchurian social institutions because they presumed the Manchurians must have inherited their social system from the Jurchen. They also considered many aspects of Jurchen history from Chinese sources and positions (9, 14).

Sino-Russian relations had long been strained, and in 1969 armed conflict erupted on the island of Damanskii (Zhenbao). Thus, uneasy relations between the USSR and China had great influence on

research activity in the area. Due to their territorial claims in the Russian Far East and southern Siberia, the Chinese tried to find historical evidence across Bohai and Jurchen history which would support their claims. For their part, Soviet scholars tried to refute these statements and were likely under constant political pressure to do so. It is not unusual for archeological material to be used by contending nationalisms, but in this particular case the intensity of the conflict and the authoritarian nature of political regimes in both states made the confrontation particularly bitter and ensured that only "politically useful" findings and conclusions could be made public. Jurchen studies were not left outside these politically driven polemics. As a consequence of the political climate, Soviet scholars wrote of the independent character of the Jurchen state in Chinese areas and tended towards deep research of this subject. In spite of this, A. P. Okladnikov and A. P. Derevianko mistakenly wrote that the Jurchen *meng'an* consisted of 1000 households, and the Jurchen *mukung* 100 households (12). While the *mukung* did indeed

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consist of 100 households, it was a social institution of the Manchurians (17). Only from Mihail Vasiil'evich Vorob'ev did Soviet specialists begin to write on *meng'an* and *mouke* as parts of Jurchen social life. Vorob'ev was a prolific scholar who wrote about Jurchen social institutions more than any other Soviet specialist. As a historian he translated many Chinese and Japanese annals, but also had an interest in the study of archaeological materials. In 1975 Vorob'ev published the first part of his doctoral dissertation, "The Jurchens and the Jin state (X-1234)" (17). In this work he used then available Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Western materials dealing with the Jurchen, and researched the Jurchen social system by comparing it with the Manchurian *mukung*, the social system of 100 houses of Manchurian tribes. For a long time this work remained the most detailed study of the political, social and cultural history of the Jurchen. In 1983 Vorob'ev published the second part of dissertation, "The culture of the Jurchens and the Jin state (X-1234)" (18).

Vorob'ev considered Chinese information on the *mouke* and concluded that the *mouke* consisted of 50-100 warriors. However, the number of warriors in a *mouke* was not standard. For example, in "Jin shi" we can see information on 117 soldiers, who were members of a military unit from one Jurchen village and who fought against an army of the Wanyan tribe (10). In the opinion of Vorob'ev, the *meng'an* and *mouke* were established by Jurchen society in a period when kinship relations were in deep crisis and society needed social institutions that could support and replace kinship relations (17: 56-57).

It is important to recognize that the system of *meng'an* and *mouke* was established in the complicated context of the East Asia in the tenth to twelfth centuries. The aggressive policies of Koryo and Khitan had a major influence on the East Asian region as their armies invaded Jurchen lands and destroyed Jurchen settlements (15: 20). Part of the Khitan military expeditions, which were directed against Koryo, came to Jurchen areas and killed the local population. Furthermore, sometimes Koryo invaded Jurchen territories (17: 21). Jurchen tribes were caught between strong enemies and were forced to choose one side, Khitan or Koryo. Jurchen tribes had to prepare an effective defense against the Koryo and Liao Empire. One such way of organizing themselves was the system of *meng'an* and *mouke*. Thus, while it could be argued that the *meng'an* and *mouke* had a number of functions, military activity was most important to them. In this system, there does not seem to have been a great deal of support for kinship relations, though *meng'an* and *mouke* played a major role in the crisis of archaic Jurchen

society during wars against the Liao and Southern Song empires (discussed below). Jurchen *meng'an* and *mouke* had analogies with other tribal systems in the East Asia, but at that time only the Jurchen group Wanyan consolidated many tribes and directed activity towards conquering neighbor states and tribes.

These archaic social institutions of Jurchen were influential in all aspects of Jurchen activities. The heads of *meng'an* and *mouke* were a part of the Jurchen aristocracy and military elite. In times of war, a *meng'an* sent one thousand warriors to the army, while *mouke* sent one hundred warriors. In the earliest period of Jin history, because many military troops were organized by kinship or tribes, the social institutions of *meng'an* and *mouke* preserved many archaic traditions. These continued to exist and to play a role in the Imperial period of the Jurchen. Therefore many Soviet scholars think of the earliest Jin Empire as an archaic state or a "military democracy" (17: 364-366).

Based on their interpretation of historical materials, Russian scholars could not reach a consensus on when the system of *meng'an* and *mouke* began. In the opinion of Vorob'ev, the *mouke* had a connection with word *muke* (water), in Jurchen language. In the Middle Ages, the settlements were usually located near a river or lake. This theory attests that the Jurchen used the name of river or lake as part of the name of their tribe or kin. So Vorob'ev concluded that *mouke* was a military group or settlement of the Jurchen, who lived in one place, like a kinship group. *Meng'an*, in his opinion, was military troops of some family groups or one tribe (17: 56). The Jurchen governed the Chinese in accordance with traditional Chinese methods of governance while Jurchen commoners followed the *meng'an* and *mouke* system. This system played a large role in the establishment of the Jurchen Empire, but multiple military conflicts caused a crisis for *meng'an* and *mouke*. The outcome of wars against Liao (1114-1125), Tanguts (1124-1125) (8), the Song Empire (1125-1142) and Mongols (1130s) gave them Manchuria, Northeastern and Central China, as a huge amount of property was annexed by the Jurchen state. However, this had negative effects on its commoners. For 18 years *meng'an* and *mouke* took part in all battles of the Jin Empire against armies of different states and tribes and became isolated from Jurchen commoners in Manchuria. This life of military engagement had negative consequences. Certainly, Jurchen soldiers grew tired of war: The Russian scholar Goncharov wrote that the Jurchen army did not take part in military activity in many episodes of war with the Southern Song; Bohai

people, Chinese and other people fought in their place (5). However, Jurchen activity in 1139-1141 in the war with the Southern Song did not result in victories in all battles. Jin warriors had problems with heat and illness when they fought in southern part of China because they could not adapt to weather conditions. The Jurchen army won all battles against the Khitans, but had problems in 1130s when fighting against the Mongols (17). The Jurchen did not want to fight on both fronts against the Mongols and China, and so the Jurchen *meng'an* and *mouke* needed peace. The government of the Jin Empire noted the mood of Jurchen commoners and received contact from the Chinese Empire regarding peace (5: 221).

In the period before the war against the Liao, the Jurchen *meng'an* and *mouke* consisted of 1000 households and 100 households respectively, but during the twelfth century the number of households changed. In 1116 the Jurchen *mouke* consisted of 300 households, but it sent one hundred warriors to the army. In the opinion of Vorob'ev, this standard was the limit for Jurchen *mouke*. This opinion is supported by information in the "Jin shi": in 1175 the Jin Emperor promulgated an order specifying that the households of one *mouke* could not exceed 300. Vorob'ev interprets this move as Jurchen rulers wanting to limit strong *mouke* (17: 133). However the *mouke* had 300 households, but sent to the army one hundred soldiers. Nevertheless, the number of households should not be viewed as direct evidence of the power and potential of the *mouke*, especially as this number could have included households of slaves. The Jurchen *mouke* had slaves, but their number varied greatly; some *mouke* had 200-300 slaves and others had only one or two slaves. Nonetheless, we must note that slaves in the Jurchen state included several groups of non-independent categories of inhabitants in the Jin Empire who were not actually slaves¹. Certainly, all *mouke* could be divided into different categories depending on their property holdings and origin.

After 1125, the Jurchen established a dual social system in the state for the Jurchen and for the Chinese. At first, the Jurchen considered the system of *meng'an* and *mouke* as the most comfortable and effective way of governing and controlling the population (17: 123-130). Therefore Jin officials tried to unite several nations (amongst others, the Bohai, Khitan, and Chinese) within the *meng'an* and *mouke* system. The Chinese *mouke* would consist of 65 households, and the Khitan *mouke* of 150.

We would contend that those *mouke* could not send one hundred soldiers to the Jin army, leading one to suspect other, perhaps nonmilitary, functions or limitations on the number of warriors. We do not have information on other issues faced by the 150 Khitan families, but certainly in the case of the 65 Chinese households at that time, they could not provide one hundred men as soldiers. According to information by Vorob'ev drawn from the "Jin shi", the Jurchen family in the earliest period of the Jin Empire consisted of four people. In 1183, this increased to eight people. This information can be confirmed by archaeological material from the Russian Primorye region (1, 2). The Soviet and Russian archaeologist Artem'eva calculated the area of *kang*, the heating system in the houses of Jurchen, Korean and Manchurian people. She proposed that through the process of estimating the area of *kang*, we can draw conclusions on the number of family members who lived in a house. Her conclusion was that, if the area of a house was 48 square meters and a *kang* was 16 meters, eight people lived in this house, leaving two meters of *kang* for one person. She argues that the Jurchen family could not have warmed the vacant place of the *kang*, and must have used it. Certainly, this theory is only an assumption and while we can make conclusions about slaves in the household, in our opinion this should be analyzed alongside other materials. Every soldier in the Jin army had one armour-bearer (*alishi*) who could take part in battles. Certainly the officers had many *alishi*. The Chinese *mouke* (65 households) could therefore not supply the combined figure of 200 soldiers and *alishi* to the army. In most cases these activities for the establishment and development of *meng'an* and *mouke* of non-Jurchen ethnic groups proved unsuccessful, and in 1140 the Chinese and Bohai *meng'an* and *mouke* were abolished (17: 123-130). Despite this, Khitan *mouke* existed after 1140 and even took part in battles against the Jurchen state.

During the existence of the Jin Empire the system of *meng'an* and *mouke* changed several times. For example, in 1180-1183 the Jurchen government established reforms to *meng'an* and *mouke*. Many *mouke* moved to the new lands, but this activity did not stop social problems in Jurchen society. In the opinion of Vorob'ev, reforms in 1180-1183 destroyed Jurchen commons (17: 136-137). It was decreed that *mouke* must be settled only in lands according to order by Jin government. The weak *mouke* had to be moved to other districts, and relatives could have enough state lands only for nine teams of oxen. In the case of elite members of the *mouke* who had lands for ten to forty teams, the government confiscated "superfluous" lands and

¹ We considered in detail the question on slaves in Jin Empire in the article "The social system of the Jurchen state (on the base of Russian materials)".

gave it to the Jurchen who did not have land for nine teams (17: 137). This activity could not destroy the inequality in property in Jurchen society and, in fact established social conflict within the *mouke*. Though they had more property and lands than Chinese peasants, the Jurchen did not have a tradition of working in Chinese lands. Jin officers reported that Jurchen commoners did not work and only drank (19). The general opinion of Soviet specialists was that the Jurchen government understood the crisis in *meng'an* and *mouke* and tried to help them (17). The Jin state gave these social institutions further land, established regulations for Jurchen, and compelled them to work on the land. However, these measures were not effective as the Jurchen commoners apparently did not want to work or train in battle arts. This idleness foreshadowed their military losses in against the Mongols in the twelfth century (17).

Vorob'ev believed that the crisis in the system of *meng'an* and *mouke* had four causes: 1) social decay due to property inequality; 2) change in their lifestyle and wastefulness; 3) change for the worse in land use and style of tillage; 4) war-time loss of men in many households (17: 135). While all of these reasons no doubt had an influence on the crisis in Jurchen society, we posit that these reasons did not play a major role in the decline of the system of *meng'an* and *mouke*. The idea of property inequality contributing to social decay is not in agreement with the fact that all members of *mouke* had property and while only the elite had powerful possibilities for receiving riches, the elite were a distinct minority. The second reason can be considered as dominant, but the third point cannot be important, because many members of the *mouke* did not work in agriculture. For this work they hired Chinese peasants while they lived a life of pleasure (19). With regards to Vorob'ev's fourth cause, during the period of 1142-1210 the Jurchen army did not take part in large or lengthy wars, but the crisis in *meng'an* and *mouke* developed nevertheless. Thus wartime casualties cannot account for the crisis during this period. While the Jin Empire experienced wars, such as against the Southern Song Empire during 1161-1164, we cannot compare this military conflict with wars against the Liao (1115-1125) and Northern Song Empire (1125-1142) in terms of length of time, geographical area, or the number of casualties suffered. Yet even in these periods Jurchen society did not have problems with *meng'an* and *mouke*. It was only in 1160 that the Jurchen Emperor Digunaj mobilized all men from 16 to 60 years old (13). This activity may have had a negative influence on social system of the Jurchen. Vorob'ev wrote that in 1215 the *mouke* consisted of 25 warriors, and the *meng'an* consisted of four *mouke*, but this was as a result of

war against Mongols and relatively late in the crisis of *meng'an* and *mouke*, so likely not directly related to its decline.

The social system of *meng'an* and *mouke* changed greatly during its existence in Central and Northeastern China, and entered a state of crisis. After 1142 (the date of the Shaosin peace), Jurchen commoners received vast and rich lands, privileges and material property. Yet these military troops had been isolated from the original commons in modern Manchuria or in the southern part of the Russian Far East. In these conditions, many members of the *meng'an* and *mouke* married with Bohai and Chinese women (17). Certainly the situation provided favourable conditions for other cultures to assimilate. Consequently, the Jurchen forgot their nomadic lifestyle, did not hunt or fish, and adapted to the style of Chinese life. Therefore, out of context in a changed society, *meng'an* and *mouke* had lost part of their original functions, especially the military one. The Jin government could not understand, nor address, all of the problems within the *meng'an* and *mouke*. The Mongols, however, did apparently understand this situation. After they had destroyed the Jin Empire, the Mongols divided all the population of the former Jurchen Empire into four categories. The Jurchen who could speak in Chinese and lived in Central or northeastern China belonged to Chinese, but Jurchen who lived in eastern part and did not know Chinese belonged to the Mongols (17). This system existed not only in the Jin Empire, but other Jurchen states too. For example, Russian archaeologists in the process of excavating Shajginskoe and Krasnoiarovskoe sites, sites belonging to the Jurchen kingdom Dong Xia, found silver accreditation plate and the seal of the commander of the *Elan meng'an* (3; 4; 7: 65-66).

In spite of political pressure, Soviet scholars like M.V. Vorob'ev maintained independent positions which played a role in development of Jurchen studies in Russia. They combined the use of historical and archaeological materials while attending to stages of the development of *meng'an* and *mouke* from a perspective unique from their Western and Chinese counterparts. These studies conclude that the crisis of *meng'an* and *mouke* was a result of property inequality and the policies of a government which did not understand the problems of Jurchen society.

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