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LIAO: A MANCHURIAN HYDRONYM AND ITS ETHNOHISTORICAL CONTEXT

The river Liao 遼河 *Liao He*, which with its sources and tributaries covers a drainage area of over 200,000 sq kms, is the principal waterway of southern Manchuria (Gibert 1934 s.v. *Leao-ho*, Fochler-Hauke 1941: 42-44 *et passim*). Its main basin is located between 42° 55' N 123° 35' E and 40° 40' N 122° 10' E, and it runs in a southwesterly direction over a distance of some 300 kms. The river divides southern Manchuria into two halves known as Liaoxi 遼西 'West of the Liao' and Liaodong 遼東 'East of the Liao', respectively. The principal feature of Liaodong is the mountainous Liaodong Peninsula, located between the Sea of Bohai 渤海 on the west and the Yellow Sea 黃海 *Huang Hai* on the east. Together with the Shandong 山東 Peninsula, Liaodong has since ancient times served as a link between Korea, Manchuria, and China proper (Janhunén 1996: 3-4).

The Liao main river is formed of two source rivers, the Xiliao 西遼 'Western Liao' and Dongliao 東遼 'Eastern Liao'. The Dongliao is a rather small entity, flowing down from the mountains of the Liaodong Peninsula, while the Xiliao is a large system of rivers, which add some 1,000 kms to the total length of the Liao. The Xiliao, flowing across the relatively flat plain of Liaoxi, is, in turn, formed of two source rivers, the Laoha 老哈 in the south and the Shira Muren 西拉木倫 *Xila Mulun* in the north. Immediately above the juncture of the Xiliao and the Dongliao, the Liao is joined by another major river from the north, the Xinkai 新開. Several other tributaries join the Liao main basin from both sides. Although not a major river on the Asian scale, the Liao has always been of great regional importance, since it links effectively the interior of Manchuria with the sea. The overland crossing from the Liao river system to that of the Sungari-Amur of central and northern Manchuria is hardly more than 20 kms.

Since ancient times, the Liao has formed a political barrier between west and east. For obvious geographical reasons, the Liaoxi region has historically been linked with China proper to the southwest and Mongolia to the northwest, while the Liaodong region has been linked with Korea to the southeast and central Manchuria to the northeast. The Liao basin functioned as a state border between

the Northern Wei 北魏 *Bei Wei* (386-534) and Goguryeo 高句麗 *Gaoguli* (until 668), and again between Tang 唐 China (618-906) and the kingdom of Balhae 渤海 *Bohai* (698-926). Later dynasties in the region tended to be more expansive. Thus, the Liaoxi-based empire of the Khitan Liao 遼 (907-1125) had control also over the territory of the Liaodong Peninsula, while the Liaodong-based empire of the Jurchen Jin 金 (1115-1234) extended its rule far to the west and southwest of the Liao basin. The territory of Unified Korea, however, has never extended as far west as the Liao basin, nor even to the Liaodong Peninsula.

The political history of the region reflects ethnic and linguistic circumstances. The main players in the Liao basin in the historical period were the Khitan in the west and the Jurchen in the east. Linguistically, the Khitan represented a Para-Mongolic entity, collaterally related to the later historical Mongols of the Yuan 元 (1271-1368), while the Jurchen spoke a Tungusic language which was more or less directly ancestral to the language of the Manchu of the Qing 清 (1644-1911). Very probably, the dynastic language of the Northern Wei was also Para-Mongolic, while the dynastic languages of Balhae and Goguryeo may well have been Tungusic (Janhunen 2005). In fact, the original homeland of both Mongolic and Para-Mongolic is likely to have been located in the Liaoxi region, while the original homeland of Tungusic may be placed in the Liaodong region, probably also extending to the northern part of the Korean Peninsula.

Apart from Mongolic and Tungusic, four other language families are known to have been present in the region in historical times. Two of them, Koreanic and Japonic, are, however, marginal to the Liao basin, for they seem to have been originally confined to the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. Koreanic (Korean) may have been an entity native to southeastern Korea, from where it expanded all over the peninsula, reaching its modern extension only during the Joseon 朝鮮 *Chaoxian* period (1392-1910). Japonic, by contrast, was apparently an intrusive language family, which was temporarily present in southwestern Korea on its way from continental East Asia to the Japanese Islands. Although it has been suggested that continental traces of Japonic – best identified as Para-Japonic – were present as far north as Goguryeo (Beckwith 2004), there is no reason to assume that Japonic was ever spoken anywhere close to the Liao basin.

The two other language families are Sinitic and Amuric. Of these, Sinitic (Chinese) has documentably been present on both sides of the Liao basin since Western Han 西漢 *Xi Han* (BZ 206-6 AZ) times, when the Chinese established a series of military commanderies in Korea after first defeating the tribal state of Wiman Joseon 衛滿朝鮮 *Weiman Chaoxian*. The Chinese control of the region was facilitated by the fact that the Liaoxi-based state of Yan 燕 (until BZ 222) had already become under Chinese influence during the Warring States 戰國 *Zhanguo* period (BZ 475-222), which ended with the incorporation of Yan into

the new Chinese empire of the Qin 秦 (BZ 221-206). What the original dominant language of Yan was, is unknown, though a connection with Para-Mongolic appears probable.

Amuric, finally, is a language family that has historically receded northwards along the Sungari-Amur basin towards the Amur Delta region and northern Sakhalin, where its last traces survive up to the present day as the Ghilyak language. Both the general ethnohistorical constellation of Manchuria and the specific linguistic connections of Ghilyak with the other languages of the region suggest that the original homeland of Amuric was located not far from the Tungusic and Mongolic homelands. It therefore appears not too far-fetched to link the origins of the Amuric family with the protohistorical tribal state of Buyeo 夫餘 *Fuyu*, a contemporary of Goguryeo in central Manchuria. A lot has been speculated about the possible connections of Buyeo with the states and ethnicities on the Korean Peninsula, but in any case it may be taken for certain that Buyeo had access to the Liao basin. Assuming that the dominant language of Buyeo was a contemporary form of Amuric (Pre-Proto-Ghilyak), this language family could have played a role in the formation of the local toponymy.

The question is, then, whether it is possible to determine from what language family the name of the Liao derives. The four most plausible candidates are Sinitic, Mongolic, Tungusic, and Amuric. In the following, each of these possibilities will be considered separately.

From Sinitic?

As a geographical name on modern maps, *Liao* is undoubtedly of a Chinese origin. The Chinese name of the river was well established already in Western Han times, as were the concepts of Liaoxi and Liaodong (Shiratori 1914: 106 *et passim*). Apart from the actual Liao main river, the Chinese used the same name for the Liao Shui 遼水, a relatively large left-hand tributary of the Lower Liao today known as the Hun 渾河 *Hun He* (op. cit. 100). This does not mean, however, that the name was first introduced by the Chinese. By all tokens, ethnic Chinese were secondary newcomers to the region, and their role in both Manchuria and Korea even during the time of the military commanderies was basically that of colonial rulers, rather than of indigenous inhabitants. The modern Chinese presence in Manchuria started only in late Qing times, though in some localities there may have been continuity from the Ming 明 period (1368-1644).

As a Chinese lexical item, *liao* 遼 *liáo* has the meaning 'distant'. Since this is not a primary hydronym, it is entirely possible that the Chinese applied it to the river Liao in its actual meaning, implying that the river was located in a 'distant' periphery of the Chinese world. The character 遼, simplified as 辽,

contains the ‘road radical’ 辶, also used in the semantically close item *yuan* 遠 ‘distant’, and a phonetic component 寮 corresponding to the syllable *liao* and having the meaning ‘torch; to burn’ (Karlgren 1923 No. 547), normally written with the ‘fire radical’ 火 as *liao* 燎 *liào* (also with other tones). However, even if the meaning of the river name may have had a motivation in Chinese, the hydronym need not be of a Chinese origin. More likely, as in so many other cases, the Chinese just chose a semantically suitable character to represent a non-Chinese name.

Supposing, however, that this hydronym nevertheless is of a Chinese origin, we would have to look for a true hydrological term with a close enough resemblance to the form *liao*. The only serious possibility is offered by *liu* 流 *liú* ‘to flow’. This element does occur in the Chinese transcriptions of Manchurian river names, an example being the Jin period river name Lailiu 洮流河 *Lailiu He*, today replaced by Lalin 拉林河 *Lalin He* (cf. also Tang 2008: 164-165). The name of the Lailiu/Lalin, a right-hand tributary of the Sungari 松花江 *Songhua Jiang* in central Manchuria, is, however, clearly of a Jurchen origin, reflecting the Jurchen-Manchu word *lalin* ‘open, direct, straightforward’ (Norman 1978 s.v.). The same element, which may have had the connotation of ‘rapid’ (Gibert 1934 s.v. *La-lin-ho*), occurs also in the name of the river Jiliu 激流河 *Jiliu He*, a tributary of the Argun 額爾古納河 *Eerguna He* in north-western Manchuria. The latter river was formerly known as Jilalin He 吉拉林河 *Jilalin He* (Gibert 1934 s.v. *Ki-la-lin-ho*) and has also the Russian name *Bys-traia* ‘rapid’.

Consequently, in the absence of any supporting data, the possibility of a connection between the river name *Liao* with the Chinese word *liu* 流 ‘to flow’ appears unlikely. Also, the syllables *liao* and *liu* are not identical in shape, and the difference has a historical background (cf. Pulleyblank 1991 s.vv.). In the current state of Chinese diachronic phonology it is difficult to say what the original difference in Western Han times was, but it may have been contained in the vocalism (Schuessler 2007 s.vv., cf. also Baxter 1992: 772-774). It goes without saying that if the Chinese had really wished to name the river *Liao* with their word for ‘to flow’, they could have done so by using the proper form and character. By choosing the rather unexpected name *liao* 遠 ‘distant’, the Chinese signalled that it is a question of a substrate hydronym borrowed from a non-Chinese language.

The possibility of a substrate means that the name *Liao* is ultimately likely to represent either a hydronym or even a hydrological term (‘river’) in some other, more ancient, local language. Irrespective of what this language was, it is possible that the same hydronym or hydrological term also survives in the names of other rivers in the region. In that case, of course, there can also be variation in the form of the names. A possible parallel to *Liao* is present in the

names of the two rivers Liu 柳河 *Liu He*, one of which is a tributary of the Upper Sungari, while the other, also known as the Liutiaozi 柳条子河 *Liutiaozi He*, flows into the Zhaosutai 招蘇台河 *Zhaosutai He*, a left-hand tributary of the Lower Liao (Gibert 1934 s.v. *Liou-ho*). As a Chinese word, *liu* 柳 *liú* means ‘willow’, and it cannot be ruled out that the naming of these rivers was based on this meaning. However, it is also possible that the sound of the names was adjusted to a more ancient local name, which may have been related to *Liao*.

In this context, we should also consider the name of the Laoha. Even the Chinese characters 老哈 suggest that this is a non-Chinese item. In fact, this name is also used in Mongol in the shape **looka/n*, which occurs on maps with two different Mongol words for ‘river’, either **gol* (Written Mongol **Luuqe jiv Qhuul**) or **mören* (**Luuqav Muirav**). The shape †*looha* is also attested in Jurchen (Tang 2008: 169), suggesting that it was possibly used already in Khitan. However, formally **looha* < **looka* can hardly be anything else but a loanword from the Middle Chinese shape of *Liao He*, with the Chinese word *he* 河 ‘river’ incorporated into the borrowed form. Thus, the modern Chinese river name *Laoha* represents a second-degree borrowing, passed already once through Chinese.

From Mongolic?

When it was founded (907), the Liao dynasty originally bore the name of its dynastic ethnic group, the Khitan 契丹 *Qidan*. It is not quite clear when the dynasty adopted the name *Liao*, but this may have happened only four decades later (947). The ethnonym was once again used as the dynastic name for several decades in the middle period of the dynasty (983-1066), but in the final period (1066-1125) the name *Liao* was reintroduced (Wittfogel & Fêng 1949: 38). It is also not clear why these changes of the official dynastic name took place, and whether they were significant or not. However, the very fact that *Liao* was not the original and first name of the dynasty suggests that the Khitan may not have seen the river Liao, or its Chinese name, as a primary point of identification for themselves.

From the geographical point of view it may be noted that of the Khitan five capitals, only one, the Eastern Capital 遼東京 *Liao Dongjing*, was located in the actual Liao main basin, or immediately to the southeast of it, at the location of the historical and modern city of Liaoyang 遼陽 ‘South of the Liao’. The Supreme Capital 遼上京 *Liao Shangjing*, which was supposed to indicate the original homeland of the Khitan, was located on a local tributary of the Shira Muren, far to the west of the Liao main basin, while the Central Capital 遼中京 *Liao Zhongjing* was located at some distance to the south, close to the sources

of the Laoha (cf. Wittfogel & Fêng 1949 map). Even so, all these Manchurian capitals of the Liao were located within the confines of the Liao drainage area. The remaining two capitals were located outside of the original Khitan territory, though still well within the historical realm of the Northern Wei.

However, the Khitan did not perceive of the river system of the Liao in exactly the same way as the Chinese today. For the Khitan, like for the historical Mongols, the principal course of the river was formed by the combined lengths of the Shira Muren and the Liao main basin. This total waterway was known in Liao times as the ‘Yellow River’ 黄河 *Huang He*, a name that was taken over by the historical Mongols in the form **sira-mören* (Written Mongol **Sire Muirav**, cf. Gibert s.v. *Sira mouren*). In modern usage, this term mainly refers to the Shira Muren, but it may also have the connotation of the Liao river system as a whole. The identification of the Liao as the ‘Yellow River’ has apparently never been current in Chinese, but it causes no problems for speakers of Mongol (Mongolic), who traditionally refer to the actual Yellow River of China as the ‘Empress River’ (**Qaduv Qhuul**). It is unclear whether the Khitan made any conceptual difference between their ‘Yellow River’ and the Liao.

Unfortunately, we do not seem to know what the Khitan wording for ‘Yellow River’ was. Many of the Khitan words that can be reconstructed today, either on the basis of the Khitan scripts or Chinese transcriptions, are surprisingly far from any possible cognates in regular Mongolic, suggesting that the genetic difference between Mongolic and Para-Mongolic may have been considerable. Interestingly, among the proposed reconstructions there is a word, or a root, having roughly the shape †*liau-* and meaning ‘red’ (Kane 2006: 130-131). This seems to be a homonym of the dynastic name *Liao* and would also have been a homonym of the Chinese river name *Liao*. There is, however, no indication that the Khitan would have called the Liao not the ‘Yellow River’ but the ‘Red River’. Even so, the word for ‘red’, if correctly reconstructed (as it seems), would have served as a pun for the dynastic name and the corresponding Chinese hydronym.

It is well known that a pun was also applied when the dynastic name of the Jurchen was created. The Chinese name of the Jin dynasty suggests an immediate connection with ‘gold’, Chinese *jin* 金, but the Jurchen actually implied the local river Alchuka ‘Gold River’, derived from Jurchen †*alcu/n* ‘gold’, in whose basin they established their own Supreme Capital 金上京 *Jin Shangjing* (Chan 1991, cf. also Tang 2008: 160, 162). Thus, although the dynastic name was based on a hydronym, it also had another connotation. It happens that a pun has also been assumed to underlie the name of the Kingdom of Bohai. In this case, the native word would have been a cognate of Manchu *butha* ‘hunting’ (Menges 1968: 13-14, Miller 1989: 135-139). This is, however, a hypothesis that has too many unknown factors. There is no reason why the kingdom could not have

simply taken over the Chinese hydronym *Bohai*, in which the element *bo* 渤 seems to be an old Chinese hydrological term for ‘large basin of water’.

Irrespective of whether any pun was involved or not, the dynastic name *Liao* is clearly primarily based on the hydronym *Liao*, which, in turn, must have been understood by the Khitan as being the Chinese name of the river that they themselves knew as the ‘Yellow River’. The Chinese origin of the dynastic name is also indicated by the fact that it was written with the same character as had been used by the Chinese since Western Han times to denote the river Liao. In taking up a river name as a dynastic name, the Khitan followed an old Chinese tradition, continued after them by the Jurchen. Thus, in spite of the unexplained changes in their dynastic name, the Liao river system was certainly the geographical context with which the Khitan wished to associate their dynastic power.

From Tungusic?

The possibility that the hydronym *Liao* could be of a Mongolic origin is rendered even less likely by the circumstance that native Mongolic words normally do not begin with the lateral *(*)l*. This is, however, a tangled question, since we do not know how long, exactly, Mongolic has had this phonotactic restriction. The non-occurrence of the liquids *(*)l* and *(*)r* in initial position is an areal feature shared by most members of the Ural-Altaiic typological complex. There are, however, regional differences within the Ural-Altaiic belt. In Turkic, neither **l* nor **r* seem to have occurred in initial position in native words, while both Uralic and Tungusic originally permit initial **l*, but not initial **r*. Pre-Proto-Mongolic may have belonged to either type, and, in particular, we have no conclusive information concerning the status of Para-Mongolic in this respect. Reconstructed Para-Mongolic items like †*liaw-* ‘red’ (phonologically perhaps simply †*law-*) would rather suggest that there was an initial **l* in at least Khitan.

The problem is also connected with the number and type of liquid consonants in each language concerned. Both Korean and Japanese as well as many forms of Chinese are synchronically single-liquid languages, but the situation need not always have been so. The initial *l* of Chinese is today normally derived from earlier **r*, or from clusters of the type **gr* (Schuessler 2007: 80-87), but it is not clear what the actual pronunciation in, for instance, Western Han times was. In any case, Chinese originally did permit at least one initial liquid, while for Korean and Japanese no initial liquid can be reconstructed. In fact, it has been speculated that the hydronym *Liao* might be recorded in the Korean ‘History of the Three Kingdoms’ 三國史記 *Samguk Sagi* with the Chinese characters 烏列 *wulie*, allegedly representing the pronunciation of the item in a local

language with a prothetic vowel (Beckwith 2004: 89-90). This is, however, another hypothesis with too many uncertain parameters to be taken seriously.

What is certain is that Proto-Tungusic had native words beginning with the lateral **l* (Benzing 1955: 44-45). In terms of absolute chronology, Proto-Tungusic may be placed at a level more or less corresponding to the Han period of Chinese history, a very rough estimate based on the mutual similarities and differences between the Tungusic languages (cf. Doerfer 1978). Very probably, Proto-Tungusic was first differentiated into a southern (Jurchenic) and a northern (Ewenic) branch, with two intermediate varieties (Nanaic and Udegheic) arising later. The separation of Para-Mongolic from the Proto-Mongolic branch represented by the historical Mongols may have a similar depth, though this is still difficult to confirm. In any case, assuming that the forms of Chinese spoken in northern China at the time of Proto-Tungusic had an initial liquid of the type **l*, Chinese could easily have borrowed lexical items with an initial **l* from Tungusic.

There is one word in Tungusic that very obviously could be relevant in this context. This is Proto-Tungusic **laamo* ‘sea, ocean’. The word is attested all over the Tungusic family (Cincius 1977 s.v. *lāmu*) and refers, in practice, to the various coastal seas in the Pacific belt, notably the Sea of Bohai, the Sea of Japan, and the Okhotsk Sea. In the Ewenki dialects spoken in the Baikal region, the word can also refer to Lake Baikal. In several languages and dialects, as in Ewen, Udeghe-Oroch, Ulcha-Orok, and Manchu (cf. Norman 1978 s.v. *namu*), the initial lateral has been secondarily nasalized (**l > n*) due to the assimilatory impact of the medial nasal, but this nasalization is a relatively recent development.

Tungusic **laamo* is a general hydrological term, which, depending on the locality, can also have become a hydronym. This word has often been compared with Chinese *lan* 藍 ‘indigo’ < (**lam*), but a connection seems difficult to substantiate due to the semantic difference. The Chinese item has parallels in Southeast Asia (Schuessler 2007 s.v.), and it has, in fact, been borrowed into Jurchen-Manchu (probably via Khitan) in the shape *lamun* ‘blue’ (Cincius 1977 s.v.). A more plausible distant comparison for **laamo* is offered by Samoyedic **yām* (<? **lām*) ‘sea, large river; the Ob’ (Janhunen 1977 s.v. **jām*). Since Proto-Samoyedic has a chronological depth comparable to that of Proto-Tungusic, it is not impossible that the concept of ‘sea’ was introduced to its speakers from Proto-Tungusic, though the borrowing may have taken place via intermediate languages.

There is, however, no possibility to derive Chinese *liao* directly from Tungusic **laamo*. Assuming that the Chinese item had an original structure more or less similar to its modern shape, that is, with a labial final and with or without a palatal medial (**lyaw* or **law*), the main difference is contained in the medial or

final consonant, which is a nasal (**m*) in Tungusic and an oral continuant or glide (**w*) in Chinese. However, since the consonants on both sides are labials, the difference is not insurmountable and could, in principle, be explained by postulating early unknown varieties of either Chinese or Tungusic. It may be taken for certain that the forms of Chinese once spoken in the northeast were not identical with the forms normally used for reconstructing Ancient Chinese (cf. also Beckwith 2004: 93-105). On the other hand, it is almost equally certain that there once existed languages related to, but not identical with, the surviving lineage of Tungusic. Such languages would be best termed Para-Tungusic.

It is, consequently, possible that the Chinese hydronym *Liao* is simply a borrowing from some early Para-Tungusic language that possessed a cognate of the Tungusic word **laamo* and possibly even used it to denote the river Liao. The transferring of hydronyms from the meaning ‘sea’ to that of ‘large river’, or vice versa, is a well-known and common phenomenon. However, the interference of non-Tungusic languages should also not be ruled out. Among these non-Tungusic languages there were certainly also those representing the Amuric family.

From Amuric?

There is, indeed, a word also in Amuric that may have a connection with both Tungusic **laamo* and the Chinese hydronym *Liao*. This is Ghilyak *la*, which is normally used as a hydronym referring to the river Amur (Saveljeva & Taksami 1970 s.v.). In spite of the relatively shallow depth of the Ghilyak dialectal diversity, the former stages of the language can be approached exceptionally well by the method of internal reconstruction, based on synchronic morphophonology (Austerlitz 1972). Ghilyak has synchronically a system of three liquids, a lateral *l* and two vibrants *r rh* (voiced vs. fricative), all of which can stand in initial position. However, the vibrants *r rh* can be derived from the corresponding stops **t* **th* (plain vs. aspirated), with which they alternate morphophonologically, leaving only the lateral (**l*), which is the initial segment of the hydronym *la*.

The fact that Ghilyak *la* ‘Amur’ is the name of a specific river does not mean that it cannot have denoted other rivers in the past. For one thing, river names are often transferred from place to place, partly because the distinction between hydronyms and hydrological terms (‘river’) is often vague. There are many other recurrent river names in Manchuria, a well-known example being *Yalu*, which denotes both 雅魯河 *Yalu He*, a tributary of the Nonni 嫩江 *Nen Jiang* in the Greater Khingan Range 大興安嶺 *Da Xing'an Ling* region (Gibert 1934 s.v. *Ya-lou-ho*), and 鴨綠江 *Yalu Jiang*, the border river between Korea

and continental Manchuria in the Changbai Shan 長白山 region (Gibert 1934 s.v. *Ya-lou-kiang*). Although the two rivers are separated by several hundred kilometres, they are occasionally confused in Western scholarship (as by Kara 2006: 143-144).

Also, the conception of river systems tends to change with time. In China, the traditional understanding has always been that the Sungari and the Lower Amur are one river, flowing in a basically northeasterly direction out of central Manchuria. What is today geographically considered to be the Middle and Upper Amur, with sources in northern and western Manchuria, is traditionally viewed as a tributary of the main river. This is likely to have been the conception of Manchurian peoples since ancient times. In practice, most ethnic groups know only one section of large river systems, and it is difficult to say how far the range of their hydronyms extends. For instance, the Lower Amur has the Tungusic name **mamgo* ~ **mangbo* (with many synchronic variants, on which cf. Ikegami 1989), which can also refer to the close-lying section of the Lower Sungari, but which can hardly be understood as a name for the whole Amur river system.

It is, then, entirely possible that the Ghilyak word *la* originally can have denoted some other river, especially the Sungari, but also the Liao. It is likewise possible that the name is originally based on an appellative term for water basins, in general. The latter assumption is supported by several other Ghilyak words, which might be derivatives of the root *la(-)* and which denote a variety of phenomena connected with ‘water’. Examples are *lar* ‘wave’ (? = **la-r*), *laf* ‘cliff’ [extending to the water] (? = **la-f*), *langr* ‘nerpa’ [type of seal] (? = *la-ngr*), and *lasq* ‘bychok’ [type of fish] (? = *la-sq*). It has to be noted, however, that the actual Ghilyak item for ‘water basin’ or ‘sea’ is *tol*, an item that has been connected with Mongolic (**)dalai* < **daloι* → Turkic **taloy* > (**)taluy* ‘sea’. It is well known that many aquatic terms used in Tungusic, Mongolic, and Turkic, seem to be ultimately of an Amuric origin, with cognates still surviving in Ghilyak.

More importantly, the Ghilyak hydronym *la* ‘Amur’ is homonymous with the appellative *la* ‘wind’. This is hardly accidental, since wind is often connected with water basins, and, more specifically, in the Ghilyak region of habitation, with the lowlands of the Amur Delta region. The connection seems to be confirmed by Ghilyak *lams* ‘easterly wind’ (= **la-ms*), which can be analyzed as a derivative of *la* in both of its meanings, ‘wind’ and ‘Amur’. One might even speculate that *lams* is based on a hydrological meaning more general than simply ‘Amur’. An easterly wind in the modern location of the Ghilyak, especially on Northern Sakhalin, would mainly imply a wind coming from the Okhotsk Sea. On the other hand, it would also be possible that the meaning ‘water basin’ or, more specifically, ‘Amur’, is based on the primary meaning ‘wind’.

The item *lams* is, however, also attested in Tungusic in the shape **laamos* and with the meaning ‘wind’ (Cincius 1977 s.v. *lāmus*). The word is present only in Ewenki-Ewen, where it denotes, depending on the locality, either a southerly (warm) or easterly (humid) wind, or also ‘bad weather’, ‘snowfall’, or ‘east’. The implication is clear, in that the meanings are all connected with the southeasterly direction, i.e. the direction of the sea. The phonological correspondence between Tungusic **laamos* and Ghilyak *lams* (< **lamVs*) is perfect, except that we do not know what the origin of the Tungusic long vowel is. It may represent the result of secondary doubling or lengthening (**a > aa*), contraction (**aCV > aa*), or merger with a syllable final consonant (**aC > aa*). In any case, the Ghilyak item contains no segmental signal of the Tungusic long vowel.

On the Tungusic side, **laamos* ‘wind’ could, of course, be analyzed as a derivative of **laamo* ‘sea’, though the identity of the derivative element **-s* remains unclear. However, the fact that Ghilyak *lams* can also be analyzed as a derivative of Ghilyak *la* ‘wind; Amur’ would rather suggest that the word is ultimately based on an Amuric root **la*. This means that not only **laamos* ‘wind’ but also **laamo* ‘sea’ may have been transmitted from Amuric into Tungusic, although modern Ghilyak does not preserve a trace of **laamo*. The derivative sequence on the Amuric side would have been **la : *la-mo : *la-mo-s*. If this analysis is correct, the ultimate meaning of **la* could have been either ‘wind’ or ‘water basin’. A distinction between ‘wind side’ and ‘water side’ is often only theoretical.

Although a borrowing from Amuric into Tungusic is more likely, the opposite direction of borrowing cannot completely be ruled out. In that case, the root **la* or **laa* would originally have been present in Tungusic, serving as the basis for the derivatives **laa-mo : *laa-mo-s*. This sequence could possibly be supported by the assumption that the element **-mo-* could be identified with the Tungusic word **möe* ‘water’ (Cincius 1977 s.v. *mū*). It might even be that the same element is present in the item **mamgo ~ *mangbo* < ? **mang-mo*. This is, however, highly speculative. The fact that the simple root **la* is not attested in Tungusic is a strong argument in favour of the assumption of an Amuric origin for the whole word family. This seems to be confirmed by the presence of other possible derivatives from the same basic root in Amuric, but not in Tungusic.

What is, then, the connection of the Chinese hydronym *Liao* with the Amuric-Tungusic word family **la : *la-mo : *la-mo-s*? Clearly, the Chinese shape of the hydronym cannot directly be based on any of the Amuric or Tungusic forms concerned. However, an etymological connection appears very likely, and the existence of the Amuric root **la* considerably widens the range of possibilities. Judging by the evidence of modern Ghilyak, this is a true hydronym, and it may well have referred to several major rivers in whose basins Amuric

speakers have historically been present, including the Lower Amur, the Sungari, and the Liao.

The considerable time depth between modern Ghilyak, including its internal reconstruction, and the first appearance of the Chinese hydronym *Liao* also means that the Amuric original of the item may have been closer to the Chinese shape than its modern Ghilyak reflex is. There may have been a final consonant or glide which is still present in Chinese, but which has been lost without a trace in Ghilyak. Or the pronunciation of the vowel **a* in Pre-Proto-Ghilyak may have been understood by the speakers of the local forms of early Chinese as implying a final consonant or glide. Also, we have to reckon with the possibility of many more languages in the region than are today possible to detect. There were not only Para-Mongolic and Para-Tungusic but also Para-Amuric languages, and we shall never know how different they were from the lineages that survive today. This is particularly obvious in the case of Amuric, which is today represented by a single residue of a once certainly much larger language family.

As a final word of caution it has to be said that, although the derivation of the Chinese hydronym *Liao* from the Amuric-Tungusic word family **la* : **la-mo* : **la-mo-s* appears a promising and even likely possibility, toponyms are a notoriously dangerous area of research. We can never rule out that the origins of a major hydronym lie even deeper in prehistory than would seem to be the case here. There were languages spoken in Manchuria even before the families we can reconstruct, and their traces may also be preserved in the local toponymy.

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