

Constructing "Korean" Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories.

By Hyung Il Pai. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2000.

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This book is a revision of the author's 1989 doctoral dissertation (Harvard University) titled "The Lelang Interaction Sphere in Korean Prehistory." Because the book made only selective use of studies up to the early 1980s (works published after 1990 are mostly absent in the work), it should be reviewed in the context of the late 1980s, when postmodernism and deconstructionism were in vogue. That the book strongly criticizes nationalism and racism reflects the academic milieu of the time. In the fifteen years since then, postmodernism and deconstructionism has been generatively overcome, and it may look inappropriate to review the book now, four years after its publication.

The book includes 287 pages of text and 256 more pages of appendices and reference matter. Readers may be surprised first by the sheer volume of the book and then by the relatively small quantity of the text in the book. The book's glossary and index are of little use to readers as the glossary lists only 150 terms (actually 149 because P'aesu(溟水) was listed twice) and the index lists only 134 terms. Many important terms that appear in the main text are missing in the glossary and it is very difficult to understand some of them without Chinese characters. Due to inadequate glossary, the main text is full of ambiguous and unexplained romanizations in italics. Even among the few terms listed in the glossary, we find serious mistakes such as *sŏnmin* 善民 and *Wŏn Samguk* 元三國. They should properly be 選民 and 原三國, respectively.

In the introductory chapter, the author first discusses nationalist cultural policy of the Korean government and nationalist activities of Korean scholars, and then explains how they “invented” Korean identity. The second chapter is on achievements of Japanese archaeologists in finding the Korean origin during the colonial period. The third chapter provides a critical review of the Tan’gun myth and how nationalist historians such as Sin Ch’aeho, Ch’oe Namsŏn, Paek Namun, and Kim Chaewŏn interpreted the myth in the nationalist framework. Pai also writes that Korean archaeologists such as Kim Chŏnghak, Kim Wŏllyong and Kim Chŏngbae “reconstructed Korean identity” by focusing on the Bronze Age. Pai once again emphasizes that the efforts of Korean scholars were nationalist projects to historicize the Tan’gun myth. The fourth chapter criticizes the views of Yi Kibaek, Yi Chonguk, and others that take the Kochosŏn (Old Chosŏn) as the first state in Korean history. The Korean state-formation theory was said to have failed to go beyond the imperialistic racism of the Japanese researchers and Confucian ideas of the Chosŏn dynasty.

The contents of the first four chapters represent selective summary of previous studies (only to the 1980s) on the topic, and we hear the actual voice of the author in the next two chapter. Here the author analyzes archaeological sites and remains of the Han Lelang Commandery and claims that Lelang had directly or indirectly influenced peripheral Korean people. Along with the “acculturation,” there was formed an interaction sphere with Lelang as the core. Pai claims that “the formation of early states in the Korean peninsula was a gradual process occurring over four hundred years of contact and interaction with Lelang” (p. 234). Thus, the interaction sphere with Lelang as the core existed from 108 BCE to the 7th century CE and the process of Korean state-formation should be understood in the context of the sphere. With this, Pai concludes that the period of state-formation in Korea was the 4th century CE (p. 234). Regarding Pai’s view of the period of state-formation, there is no difference with a previous study (Gardiner 1969) that the author quotes, but the author wants to emphasize the interaction sphere theory in which Lelang core greatly influenced the process of Korean state-formation. In the final chapter, Pai points to the destruction of the National Museum (former headquarters of the Japanese

Governor-General) in August 15, 1995 as the example of Korean nationalism that uses history and archaeology as political tools to establish nation's identity. She ends the chapter with the assertion of limitations of ancient history in postcolonial nations like Korea. According to her, "in all postcolonial national narratives, the 'ancient' is an indispensable and unavoidable source of a nation's identity, for it defines its origins, its past, and its future" (p. 287).

Before I discuss her main thesis, I would like to point out numerous factual errors in the book. Pai writes that the Kwangju Uprising took place in 1981 (p. 244) and that the Declaration of Korean Independence was read in Sajik Park (p. 120). The term "Kwijok kukka" (aristocratic state) was also incorrectly rendered as "wangjok kukka" (royal state) (p. 101). There are further careless mistakes where the text and note did not match (p. 121 and p. 452 n26) and misinterpretation of scholarly works and incorrect quotations (p. 82, and p. 179). The mistakes are too numerous to list them all here, and this problem had been pointed out in previous reviews of the book (see Maliangkay 2001, Larsen 2001, Xu 2001, and Oppenheim 2002). Here my review will focus on main thesis of the "Lelang interaction sphere theory" (pp. 127-236).

First, the author divided the area forming the Lelang interaction sphere during the first stage (to 3rd century CE) into three regions of Koguryō (Puyō) in the North, Samhan in the South, and Wa of Japan (Fig. 6.11 in page 209). I am not sure if we can classify Koguryō and Puyō as the regions that interacted with the Lelang core. According to the "Dongyi" chapter of the *Sanguozhi* (Record of the Three Kingdoms), Koguryō and Puyō interacted with the Xuantu commandery, not with the Lelang. Geographically, it would have been difficult for Lelang to have maintained direct contacts with Koguryō and Puyō. Moreover, the *Sanguozhi* also recorded that Samhan and the Wa came under the jurisdiction of the Daifang commandery, not Lelang. Thus, incorporating Koguryō, Puyō, Samhan, and Wa into the interaction sphere centered on the Lelang core goes against the written historical sources. It remains only a conjecture and a non-historical approach.

Second, the main point of the interaction theory on state-formation is that such "interactions" take place between "peer" polities or clusters

(Renfrew 1986). However, interactions between Lelang and its regional polities described in the book were definitely not between peers. Especially in the first stage (108 BCE to 3rd century CE), all we find are “peripheries (hinterland)” directly or indirectly influenced by the Lelang “center (core)” (pp. 149-51). After the elimination of Lelang in the second stage (4th to 7th centuries), we can say that there indeed existed peer interactions between Koguryŏ, Paekche, Silla, and Kofun Japan (p. 210). Therefore, if there were an interaction sphere, it came into existence only after the fall of Lelang, and one cannot then justifiably call it “Lelang interaction sphere.” The author sees the first stage of the Lelang interaction sphere in terms of the center-periphery relations, and I find her approach to be closer to the regional world system theory (Rowlands 1987; Denmark et al. 2000) rather than the interaction theory. Her theoretical approach is a regional world system structure in which Lelang was the center and other regions represented the periphery. Thus, applying the interaction theory to the first stage represents inappropriate methodological choice. Of course, I do not find that there existed a world system centered around Lelang from 108 BCE to 3rd century CE. While the space limitations would not allow me to go into a lengthy discussion here, it would be difficult to assume the existence of Lelang-centered world system in view of the study (Pearson 1979) that examined the role of Lelang using almost the same archaeological data. As mentioned above, the Sanguozhi recorded that Koguryŏ and Puyŏ interacted with the Xuantu commandery, whereas Samhan and the Wa interacted with the Daifang commandery. Lelang’s interaction was mainly with Okchŏ and Ye (Tongye), and it will be difficult to view the situation as a single unified structure centered around Lelang. Thus, historical and archaeological sources suggest that the structure of the relations between the Chinese commanderies and the native polities was segmentary.

Third, there are problems in the author’s use of archaeological data. In the Appendix E (Han versus Native Cultural Index), the author failed to mention iron weapons and tools for the native culture (pp. 404-5). This suggests that iron did not exist in Korean peninsula before Lelang or Han dynasty, and it fits into her argument that iron came into Korea only because of Lelang (pp. 178-79). However, the author apparently omitted iron arti-

facts dating from the 2nd century BCE excavated in North Korea (Nelson 1993). Quite contrary to Pai's interpretation, iron products were in Korea before the establishment of the Lelang commandery. The author's dichotomy of Han Lelang culture (iron culture) and native Korean culture (bronze culture) is incorrect. This is perhaps due to that fact that the author utilized archaeological site sources only up to 1983 (see Appendix C and Bibliography). The author made use of only selected archaeological data (especially on the native culture), and this is one of the most serious limitation of the book.

Finally, Pai asserted that the first Korean state was not Kochosŏn but the Three Kingdoms of the 4th century CE (p. 234). However, this assertion was based on the author's neglect of written historical sources, inappropriate application of theory, and inadequate use of archaeological data. In contrast to such a view, a more recent work has suggested the Wiman Chosŏn of the 2nd century BCE as the first Korean state (Barnes 2001). In the end, without a comprehensive examination of historical and archaeological sources and proper theoretical framework, the author merely calls for overcoming nationalism and racism. As it is, a more appropriate title of the book may be "Deconstructing "Korean" Origins: Discourse on Korean State-Formation."

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