

*Koguryŏ kobun pyŏkhwa yŏn'gu* 高句麗古墳壁畫研究  
(A Study on Tumulus Murals of Koguryŏ).

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*Koguryŏ kobun pyŏkhwa yŏn'gu* by Chŏn Hot'ae is the second book published by the author who is a leading scholar on Koguryŏ painted tombs. Professor Chŏn has published numerous journal articles and books on the subject including the most recently published book entitled the *World of Koguryŏ Mural Paintings* (Seoul University Press, 2004). While some of the author's books such as *Kobun pyŏkhwa ro pon Koguryŏ iyagi* (P'ulbit, 1999) are intend for general readers, this book is for more serious readers and researchers.

This book, based on the author's Ph.D. dissertation, consists of three parts. Each part corresponds to the three-phased evolution of Koguryŏ paintings. The author briefly explains his research methodology on Koguryŏ tomb paintings in the introduction. In parts one to three, the author explores the meaning of the changes in painting contents in each period with the assumption that tomb murals reflect the afterlife view of the deceased and his descendents as well as the cultural and social ideology of Koguryŏ people in general.

The part 1, "Development of Painted Tombs with Daily Life Scenes and the Afterlife Ideology of Kyese 繼世," combined the author's two previously published journal articles. Here the author offers case studies on the two tombs, the Tomb of the Wrestlers in the Ji'an 集安 and the Tomb of the Niche Spirit in P'yŏngyang 平壤, to explore the characteristics of the next life view in the Ji'an and P'yŏngyang regions during the initial stage of the construction of mural tombs. He used the word, *kyese* here, which literally

means a continuing world, to explain that Koguryŏ people perceived the life after the death as the continuation of the present life.

One of the cultural changes in Koguryŏ during the 4th century by the expansion of the territory to the Nangnang (C. Lelang 樂浪) and Liaodong 遼東 regions was the acceptance of a new mortuary art form, a stone-chambered tomb decorated with wall paintings. This newly accepted mortuary art then underwent the process of the assimilation with the native culture and afterlife view of Koguryŏ, and it produced wall paintings inside a tomb whose subjects reflect the traditional next life view of Koguryŏ people.

The Tomb of the Wrestling Scene was chosen as the representative among the Ji'an region tombs from the early stage. The author compared the wall paintings of the tomb with relief sculptures from the Han as well as mural tombs in Liaoyang from the Wei-Jin period. As for the case study among the P'yŏngyang region tombs, the author chose the Tomb of the Niche Spirit. According to the author, the Niche Spirit Tomb represents the incorporation of Lelang cultures into Koguryŏ tomb paintings since in the P'yŏngyang region, the Lelang culture was already established before the advance of Koguryŏ. Based on the observation of the appearance of the painting of the Queen Mother of the West in the Niche Spirit Tomb, the author explored how the ideology of ascending to heaven to the immortal world of Mt. Kunlun 崑崙 was transmitted to the region.

The format of the next two parts is a little different from that of the first part. While the first part is a case study of two important tombs from the early phase, the second and the third parts are studies on the development of a specific motif ranging from the early to the late periods. The second part is a revised version of his master's thesis (1989), which shows the initial interest of the author concerning Koguryŏ murals.

The parts two and three discuss the evolution of two major themes, a lotus flower motif in the second part and the Four Directional Animals in the third part. Due to the different ways of the description chosen by the author, the first part appears to contain more broad range of comparisons with similar Chinese examples. On the other hand, the last two parts seem to focus narrowly on Koguryŏ examples as it traces the same motif in all Koguryŏ painted tombs. Since the first part is based on journals articles written rather

recently, it might show that the author's initial interest changed as it came to include comparable Chinese funerary arts. Thus, the latter two parts are on one hand very helpful for one to find detailed information on a development of a specific motif, but they are on the other hand not easy to follow for a reader who needs in depth information other than the description of the motif itself.

In the second part, the author argued that by the acceptance of a foreign religion, a new afterlife view influenced by Buddhism began to replace the traditional view called *kyese*. It made a certain contribution to the divergence of the traditional next life view and changed the course of the evolution of major themes in Koguryō. He suggested that the Buddhism, which was transmitted in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, might be related to the frequent appearance of the lotus flower motif during the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The author believed that the lotus motif in Koguryō murals might have been derived from the ideology of the Pure Land Buddhism and represented the acceptance of the Buddhist next life view in Koguryō.

The third part is entitled "the Tomb Murals with the Subject of the Four Directional Animals and the Afterlife Ideology Showing the Mixture of the Buddhism and the Daoism." In this part, the author discussed the reason why the lotus flower pattern lost its significance as a major tomb decoration by the 6<sup>th</sup> century. He explained that it probably reflected the change in the significance of Buddhism in Koguryō society. The power of this state-supported religion weakened around the 6th century. On the other hand, there were the deification of Chumong 朱蒙, the founder of Koguryō, and the diffusion of the Chumong belief in late Koguryō society. The author used a term, *sūngsōn* 昇仙, literally meaning ascending to heaven and attaining the immortality, in order to explain the afterlife ideology in late Koguryō. Here, the reader might find a difficulty following his argument in that the distinction between these afterlife terminologies used by the author is not clearly drawn and appear to be a little obscure.

The late phase Koguryō tombs are usually decorated with motifs showing the fusion of Buddhist and Daoist influences, for example, the Four Directional Animals on a wall as well as a Buddhist or Daoist inspired heavenly being on a ceiling. The author explains that the decrease of a Buddhist

theme and the prevalence of the Four Directional Animals, a so-called Daoist theme in late Koguryō were due to the fact that Buddhism lost its major support from the state. The conclusion entitled “the Acceptance and Incorporation of the Diverse Next Life View” summarizes his argument suggested in the book.

In this book, the most important concept in understanding Koguryō murals is *naesegwan* 來世觀, the view on the next life after the death. As is well known, it is also the most basic concept essential in understanding the funerary arts in East Asia, but it may also actually obscure our understanding of the ideas presented in the book. To explain the major subject changes in Koguryō paintings, the author tried to examine the ideological changes in Koguryō society and culture. The problem with this methodology is that it is hard to find concrete historical evidence for the ideological changes in Koguryō history. Because literary records from the Three Kingdoms period including Koguryō are rarely found and because most Koguryō painted tombs lack inscription texts, one usually encounters a difficulty in interpreting a meaning of a paintings and must depend heavily on the reading (or description) of the painting itself. Thus, there is some doubt that there were only three types of the afterlife ideology in Koguryō or that the evolution of the funerary ideology of Koguryō followed this simple and linear development as asserted by the author.

The terminologies such as *kyese* are not clearly defined, and it is not easy to grasp a distinctive meaning of each term. It is of course partly because of the fact that there are not enough written records concerning the culture and ideology of Koguryō people. The book has its strength in that it provides many informative and well-organized research and tables as well as the exhaustive descriptions of the painting contents on each wall of Koguryō tombs, but these strong features also represent the weakness of the book because main parts of the volume are plain descriptions of paintings.

One of the most useful sections in this volume is the appendix which compiled a tremendous amount of essential information about Koguryō painting tombs. Before this book was published, it was almost impossible to find this type of comprehensive information on each painted tomb's structure and paintings in a single volume. Thus, for this reason, this book is cer-

tainly the required reading and the most helpful reference for anyone who wants to get the most basic and solid understanding on the subject.

The book provides many useful tables concerning Koguryō murals. One of the useful tables lists several different names of painted tombs including names given during the Japanese occupation and given by North Korea. There is also a table compiling different opinions on the approximate dates of painted tombs by scholars in the Republic of Korea, North Korea, China, and Japan. Finally, at the end of the book is an exhaustive list of bibliography on Koguryō tombs in Korean, Chinese, and Japanese from 1908 to 1999. A result of 20 years of pioneering research, *Koguryō kobun pyōkhwa yŏn'gu* makes a significant contribution to the research of Koguryō tomb paintings.