

Beckwith, Christopher I. 2004
*Koguryo—The Language of Japan's Continental Relatives:
An Introduction to the Historical Comparative Study of the Japanese-
Koguryoic Languages, With a Preliminary Description of Archaic
Northeastern Middle Chinese.*

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Just like the ground breaking research by Lee Ki-moon on the relationship between Korean and Japanese since the 1960s, which formed the basis for many scholarly books and articles following, Beckwith's book definitely will again open up a new chapter in research into the early Korean languages and their relationship with Japanese. The wealth of material presented, and rigid methodology leading to astonishing results, would actually ask for detailed evaluations far beyond the scope of a short book review like the one intended here. However, this book is so important in the eyes of the reviewer that an early introduction, even if not a detailed one, seems to be asked for in order to call the attention of as many scholars working in Korean or Japanese studies, in comparative research, and even anyone interested in historical linguistic methodology, as possible.

To introduce one of the main merits first, a new and thought provoking scenario of the early linguistic history in East Asia and on the Korean peninsula is being proposed, criticizing and refuting most of what today has generally been accepted as standard view in Korea and beyond on "Old Korean" language(s), and the "Altaic language family" to which "Korean" is thought to belong.

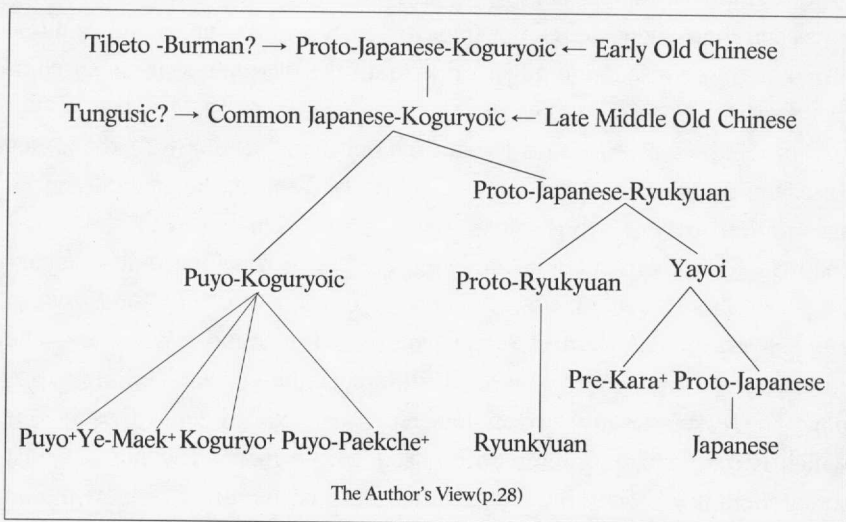
But even more important in the reviewer's eyes are the detailed critical discussions of research in the areas of reconstructing the Koguryō language, and Korean-Japanese comparative studies, which had been published in the past. These discussions are based on detailed examinations of the methodological problems which have mostly been overlooked until now. It is these

methodological aspects in the book which make it such an important publication, and which will lay the foundation for many re investigations of the Koguryō and other Old Korean linguistic data, as well as comparative research.

Another important aspect of this book is the long overdue use of international sinological research results for the reconstruction of the phonology of the Chinese characters used in transcribing Koguryō (and other Old Korean) glosses. From now on there is no excuse anymore to neglect the results of recent sinological research into the reconstruction of the phonology of older stages of Chinese, not to mention the unscholarly practice of those who base their "reconstructions" of Old Korean glosses on 15th century Korean pronunciations. There may well be room for second thoughts on the phonology as reconstructed by Beckwith for the Chinese characters which have been used as transcription characters for Koguryō words (named "Archaic Northeastern Middle Chinese," see below), but definitely from now on nobody can any longer dare to simply look up Karlgren's outdated reconstructions of over 50 years ago or Pulleyblank's revisions, even if those are only half as old. This book, in one chapter devoted exclusively to this problem, as well as *passim*, is also an introduction into to problems one encounters when reconstructing glosses of an unknown language (Koguryō) which are written down in a writing system (Chinese as spoken in Koguryō) not really known either, and also an introduction into the problems of reconstructing older stages of Chinese phonology.

Chapter 1 "Koguryo and the Origins of Japanese" s(pp.128) gives a well organized, detailed, and critical review of the roughly 100 years of research into the possible relationships between Korean or early Korean languages and Japanese. Some of the more influential proposed language families and relationships are also summarized in 5 figures (the views of Lee Ki-moon, Poppe, Murayama, Sin Yong t'ae, and the newly proposed one by Beckwith). The critical discussions of earlier and recent studies are always embedded into summaries of the respective theoretical backgrounds, the methodological and cultural assumptions, and the many problems arising from philologically incorrect use of the data available. Extensive bibliographical references make this chapter the best introduction into the subject

known to the reviewer. Beckwith's view of the linguistic relationship of the language of Koguryō is as follows:



Chapter 2 “The Ethnolinguistic History of Koguryō” (pp. 29-49) starts with a version of the Koguryō foundation myth, in which the main features of different sources’ versions are combined. The author stresses the point that the motif of the hero Chumong/Tongmyōng crossing water by help of water animals is also at home in the Wu/Yüeh region of the south eastern coast of China (King Mu crossing the Ninefold River in 899 BCE according to the *Bamboo Annals*), and in Japan (the White Rabbit of Inaba crossing the sea to Japan in the *Kojiki*). Also, the motif of abandonment to the animals at birth reminds of the legend of Hou Chi (后稷, “Lord Millet”) in the *Book of Odes* (p. 32), in which connection the *Sanguozhi* report about the yearly Koguryō festival Tung ming (*sic!* 東盟, ModKor. Tong maeng) is suggestive, where the “Ear of Rice Grain God” (Sui-shen 稷神, ModKor. Su-shin) is the object of worship (pp. 43f). Of course, these legends are not presented as being historical facts, but together with archaeological considerations relating Yayoi and southeast coastal China, and also typological similarities between Old Japanese and languages in ancient southeast China, Beckwith suggests a possible earliest homeland for his “Proto-Japanese

Koguryoic" language in this area.

This is followed by a summary and critical evaluation of the Chinese historiographers' reports about peoples surrounding the Koguryō at various times and their linguistic relationships or absence of the latter, and by a historico linguistic discussion of the ranks and titles of Koguryō transmitted in these various reports.

In Chapter 3 "The Old Koguryo Toponyms" the author discusses toponyms transmitted in the *Samguk sagi* in the frame of the methodological assumptions outlined thus far, and also those explained in the following chapters. The reconstructions are based on phonological reasoning, semantic probability considerations, reference to other sources like the *Koryōsa*, and secondary material like reconstructions by Korean researchers. The reconstructed toponyms are markedly different from the ones common up to now. The reason lies in the phonology reconstructed by Beckwith as the one which Koguryō writing habits are based on. As mentioned above, most researchers until today have based their reconstructions of toponyms on Karlgren's *Grammata Serica Recensa* of 1957, without taking note of 50 years of international sinological research since then (not to mention those who even base their research on 15th century or modern Korean pronunciations). Contrary to this, Beckwith bases his reconstructions on his "Archaic Northeastern Middle Chinese," which he outlines in the following chapter. The numbers of toponyms Beckwith selects and discusses are "The Capital Cities of the Koguryō Kingdom" (3 cities, pp. 52-54), 63 place names in "Han Chou 漢州" (pp. 54-75), 30 place names in "Shuo Chou" 朔州 (pp. 75-82), 20 place names in "Ming Chou" 溟州, 8 "Unsurrendered Cities North of the Yalü River" (pp. 89-90), 11 "Surrendered Cities North of the Yalü River" (pp. 90-1), 7 "Renegade Cities North of the Yalü River" (pp. 91-2), and 3 "Captured Cities North of the Yalü River" (p. 92). Where possible, Beckwith also refers to reconstructions of words in earlier stages like his "Puyo-Koguryoic" and "Puyo-Paekche" and also developments from "Ancient Koguryo" to "Old Koguryo" forms. Detailed explanations of the methods that lead Beckwith to establishing these earlier language stages are given from chapter 5 onwards.

Naturally all reconstructions of Koguryō language items depend on the understanding of the phonetic values of the Chinese characters which were used to write those items. Beckwith in his chapter 4 argues for an “Archaic Northeastern Middle Chinese”, an “archaic Chinese dialect, evidently the Chinese language once spoken in Korea by the descendants of the Han dynasty Chinese settlers” (p. 2), which had preserved features of older language stages already lost for centuries in the central Chinese dialects. While this chapter is crucial for all the arguments presented in the book, it is also the one which poses the greatest problems. In the words of Beckwith himself, “because most of the Chinese speakers in the Korean Peninsula lived in the Koguryō kingdom, and since the Chinese spoken in Korea is preserved almost exclusively as phonological peculiarities of the transcriptions of the Koguryō language, the reconstruction of both languages is heavily circular” (pp. 1-2), in other words, Koguryō glosses are read in phonetic values of a variety of Chinese which have been reconstructed by using Koguryō glosses. The ways out of this dilemma are—at times lengthy—discussions of variant transcriptions of the toponyms against the background of recent developments in international sinological research in the reconstruction of Middle and Old Chinese. Crucial also are comparisons with Old Japanese (but decidedly not with “Altaic” of any form). While these discussions are also scattered all over the book, in chapter 4 the main features of this “Archaic Northeastern Middle Chinese” dialect are systematically summarized, separately for onsets, nuclei and codas of syllables.

Chapter 5 “Old Koguryo Phonology” starts with a summary of Beckwith’s reconstruction of the Old Koguryo consonant phonemes (11 phonemes) and vowel phonemes (6 phonemes), and with a description of the processes that changed 3rd century “Archaic Koguryo” (Koguryo words in the *Sanguozhi* and the *Hou Hanshu*) into 8th century “Old Koguryo” (*Samguk sagi* toponyms). In both cases representative examples of words and morphemes containing these phonemes are given, the Old Koguryo words always confronted with Old Japanese cognates. Actually this chapter could therefore well have been given the title “Old Koguryo and Old Japanese Phonology.” The chapter is rounded up with remarks on the syllable and word structures of Old Koguryo.

In chapter 6 "Toward Common Japanese Koguryoic," 103 Koguryo words and 6 grammatical morphemes are presented alphabetically together with their Old Japanese cognates. Much of this material had been discussed in other respects before, but in this chapter the focus is on summarizing and systematically presenting the attempts to reconstruct an earlier "Common Japanese Koguryoic."

Chapter 7 "The Proto-Japanese Koguryoic Homeland," is a very interesting and also rather daring attempt to establish the homeland ("Urheimat") of the earliest stage of the language family, the "Proto-Japanese Koguryoic." In chapter 2, ethno linguistic considerations together with archaeological finds relating Yayoi and southeast coastal China, and also typological similarities between Old Japanese and languages in ancient southeast China, led to the theory that this earliest ancestor of the Koguryo and Japanese languages moved into the Liao-hsi area from somewhere in southern coastal China. This idea is supported in this chapter by comparing 11 "cultural" and 5 "primary" vocabulary items in Japanese and Koguryoic with Tibeto-Burman and early Chinese word forms. The result is that "the Prot-Japanese Koguryoic people lived at one time in contact with three specific languages (or language groups): Tibeto-Burman, Old Chinese (the latter including at least three different periods or dialect areas), and latest of all, during or after the late Common Japanese-Koguryoic period, the 'Altaic' group of languages." Of greatest importance in this quote is the word "contact": These languages are seen as not being related; any similarity of words or morphemes is explained as the result of convergence, of borrowing, and not of genetic relationship.

Chapters 8 through 11 are of a more theoretical nature. Principles of historical and of comparative linguistic research are being explained against the background of violations of these principles in the existing studies on Koguryō, Korean, and Japanese languages and their assumed genetically related language families, or language groups formed by convergence.

In chapter 8 "Koguryo and the Altaic Divergence Theories" 9 "Erroneous Etymologies" and 15 "Possible Etymologies" are taken as examples in order to show problems and mistakes in the reasoning of those scholars who

adhere to one of the various theories of a genetically related “Altaic language family” or at least a “Macro-Tungusic language family.” Those Koguryo etymologies which are shared with Korean or with various “Altaic” languages are shown to be loans, and the only genetic relationship accepted by Beckwith on these grounds is the one between Koguryō and Japanese.

Chapter 9 “The Altaic Convergence Theory” discusses and again dismisses the alternate “Altaic” grouping, the anti genetic convergence theory. The argumentation in this chapter is even more theoretical than in any other chapter of the book (where also the theoretical discussions are the greatest merit). A five point model of main features supposed by “Altaists” as marking the “Altaic” group is used to test the proposal that Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungusic languages form an “Altaic” language group, however distantly related, to which both Korean and Japanese also belong (“genitive theories” in page 184 must be read as “genetic theories”).

Chapter 10 “Japanese and the Mixed Language Theory” discusses the third set of theories after divergence and convergence theories and dismisses the studies within this theoretical frame by contesting the basic assumptions about word frequency and retention rates as applied in studies on Japanese thus far. The notions of “basic vocabulary,” heavy vs. light functional and semantic load, as applied in studies on Japanese are tested against recent studies in other language families, and shown to be applied in too naive a way in the case of Japanese.

Chapter 11 “Linguistic Theory and Japanese Koguryoic” starts out with a sweeping, and very critical, summary of how basic principles of historical comparative linguistics are being violated in most studies on East Asian languages in order to save preconceived conceptions (“Linguistic Theories and Linguists in Eastern Eurasia,” pp. 214-23). This is followed by remarks on the limits of borrowing and replacement, and on which sets of vocabulary must be given separate treatment in comparative research (“Linguistic Convergence in East Asia,” pp. 223-31). Finally, after briefly touching on some basic flaws in the various proposed Japanese-XXX language families (“Divergence Theories Involving Japanese,” pp. 231-34), the important concept of distinctive and non distinctive sets of vocabulary is being stressed (“Lexical Sets and Genetic Relationship,” pp. 234-35).

Chapter 12 “The Japanese-Koguryoic Family of Languages” presents arguments for the solution of two important questions. The first one is how sure we can be that the toponyms recorded in the *Samguk sagi* as Koguryō ones really belong to the Koguryō language and do not reflect other language(s) spoken earlier in the respective regions, like Gilyak related ones, Tungusic ones, or the Shilla language. By comparing 7 words recorded in the *Sanguozhi* and the *Hou Hanshu* (Beckwith’s “Archaic Koguryo,” of the 3rd century) with 6 ones from north of the Yalu and from Central Korea (Beckwith’s “Old Koguryo,” of the 8th century), the author comes to the conclusion that indeed “the language of the early Koguryō people, the language of the northern part of the later Koguryō kingdom, and the language of the toponyms from the southern (central Korean Peninsula) part of the later Koguryo kingdom[,] represent one and the same language, Koguryo” (p. 240). This is followed by a plea to stop thinking of a substratum or a distant relationship between “Korean” and Japanese, but to start thinking of a Koguryō-Japanese genetic relationship, and to see the few words we can find in both Koguryō and “Korean” (original Shilla language) as the result of convergence.

The other question is how archaeological data can be reconciled with the linguistic analysis presented. The proposal by Beckwith starts with a “Common Japanese-Koguryoic” in or near the Liao-hsi area, that is, just east of modern Tientsin (Tianjin)” (p. 242), which split into two, namely “Japanese-Ryukyuan” (Wa), and “Puyo-Koguryoic.” Around the 4th century BCE the culture of the people speaking Japanese Ryukyuan (Wa) arrive at Northern Kyushu (Yayoi culture) and the southern tip of Korea, having traveled not by land via the peninsula, but by sea (pp. 242-43). Shortly after this migration the Puyo-Koguryoic people started to move southward, and by the 4th or 5th cent. CE. the Korean Peninsula was more or less in their hands. Silla, however, the core of later “Korean,” remained linguistically independent, with very little contact influence.

To sum up, in Beckwith’s view there is no genetic relationship between “Korean,” which has the Han language of Shilla as its ancestor, and Japanese, but there is a close relationship between Koguryō language (extinct today) and Japanese. And there may be a very distant relationship

with Tungusic, but definitely not with a (non-existent) “Altaic” language family. This scenario is clearly depicted in the diagram in chapter 1 (p. 28).

The “Koguryo Lexicon” at the end of the book includes 1 grammatical morpheme and 19 words from “Archaic Koguryo,” and 119 ones from “Old Koguryo” (and *wi(p) “to look like” can be added, p 32, fn. 10) The reviewer would have been happier, if pages, where these vocabulary items are being discussed or mentioned in various arguments in the body of the book had been indicated. But maybe the author wanted to prevent the use of the book as easy reference for people who do not bother to read the book for its arguments. And anyway, in chapter 6, 103 words and 6 grammatical morphemes are presented in alphabetical order, and 145 place names are discussed in chapter 3 in their order of appearance in the *Samguk sagi*.

Along the same line, another editorial convention makes the book no easy reading at times. Cross references within the book are generally to whole chapters, where exact reference to pages would have saved the reader much time he or she is now wasting by thumbing through 20 or 30 pages. An extensive bibliography of 10 pages, and an index of 8 pages (excluding place names or the extra list of the “Koguryo Lexicon” mentioned above, round up the book.

This book will surely evoke much criticism, because on the one side it so heavily criticizes the more or less generally accepted view of the relationship of Korean to the “Altaic” languages, and on the other side it is so critical about the methodologies used in comparative research until now. However, critics must be very careful to be equally rigid in their methodology. And critics should also acknowledge the scope of the book: to put the reconstruction of a hitherto almost unresearched dialect of Chinese, an overall criticism of 100 years of research, and the explanation of basic principles of comparative and historical linguistics, into a book of not even 300 pages is a gigantic undertaking. And the results are overwhelming. And, referring to the subtitle of the book, it is definitely a solid “Introduction to the Historical Comparative Study of the Japanese-Koguryoic Languages,” and a more than just “Preliminary Description of Archaic Northeastern Middle Chinese.”

I hope the book will be available in translation into Korean soon. The

translator, however, must be well chosen: very few scholars are equally at home in sinological scholarship outside of Korea, in the theory of comparative linguistics, and in research into “Old Korean” and “Old Japanese.” Maybe the translation should be done by two or more colleagues, who between them could combine these three expertises.