



Guest Editor's Introduction

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There is no denying that the language (or sometimes the languages) a people in a political entity are speaking, is one of the most important elements of their culture and their identity. Research into what we can learn from various sources about the language of Koguryŏ is therefore of utmost importance for the understanding of Koguryŏ culture, especially in times when the age-old understanding that Koguryŏ is an integral part of Korean history is under attack.

However, trying to reconstruct the language or languages spoken in Koguryŏ is even much more important in an attempt to figure out the pre-history of all of the Northeast Asian realm, and the results will have a much deeper impact in a wider range of problems. Koguryŏ once was a powerful entity in the area, and a deeper understanding of the Koguryŏ language(s) touches upon open questions about migrations of the pre-historic people within the Korean peninsula, but also about early cultural ties with Northern and Southern Chinese cultures, with Manchurian and Siberian cultures, and with cultures on the Japanese islands.

Some research has recently been done about the question of a possible relationship of the Koguryŏ and Japanese languages, and the time seemed to be ripe for putting this research into a broader perspective. Therefore a conference under the title of "The Language(s) of Koguryŏ, and the Reconstruction of Old Korean and Neighboring Languages" was planned by the Koguryo Research Foundation and the Korean Studies Section at Hamburg University/Germany, which brought a small number of scholars

from Korea, the USA, and Europe together (see the conference report in the back). It is planned to publish all papers in book form, but some articles are presented here already, in order to stimulate discussions among interested researchers as quickly as possible.

The articles selected for this special edition of the *JIEAS* have been brought together under the general idea that the range of problems should be documented, and as will be seen, some questions touch upon cherished ideas of recent research (and accepted opinions in the general public):

- what precisely is “the language(s) of Koguryō”?
- is “Korean” really an “Altaic” language?
- is there an “Altaic” language family at all?
- is there something like “Old Korean”, or are there several languages in antiquity in Korea?
- is the Koguryō language related to Japanese, or not?
- is there one or more languages behind the place names of antiquity on the Korean peninsula?
- are the sources reliable at all?
- what kind of Chinese pronunciation can be used for interpreting the sources?

These and similar questions, together with serious discussions about historical-linguistic methodology and how it is applicable in the East Asian sphere, are still waiting for precise answers and must be taken up again. It is hoped that this special edition of the *JIEAS* will draw more scholars into getting involved in this kind of research, which lately seems to have come slightly out of fashion.

The guest editor wishes to thank the contributors for their easy cooperation. He feels that a couple of colleagues have become a couple of friends who can discuss their divergent views in an atmosphere of friendship and common interest. He hopes that many more colleagues will join in the discussion, and he is looking forward to many reactions, pro or contra, but interesting in any case.