

*Wigurŭ yumok cheguksa (744-840)*

위구르 遊牧帝國史 (A History of the Uighur Nomadic Empire)

By Chŏng Chaehun. Seoul: Munhak kwa chisŏngsa, 2005. 500 pages. ₩28,000 (Hardcover)

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*Wigurŭ yumok cheguksa* is an illuminating account of the history of the Uighur Empire (744-840) in Mongolia. This is the first book by Professor Chŏng Chaehun who has published numerous articles on the history of the Uighur and the Tujue since the mid-1990s. This book, a revision of the author's doctoral dissertation, includes 373 pages of text and 127 pages of appendices and reference matters.

The Uighur (Huihu 回紇) empire represents one of the most important periods in Central Eurasian history. The Uighur history is divided into the Uighur Empire from 744 to 840 and the West Uighur Kingdom after 840.<sup>1</sup> The Uighurs had replaced in the mid-8th century the Turkish (Tujue 突厥) Empire that had previously ruled the nomadic world for 200 years. The transfer of power from one Turkic speaking tribe to another and the creation of one empire within the territorial limits of its predecessor could be viewed as a simple change in the ruling class. Under the leadership of talented rulers, the Uighurs took advantage of divisions among the powerful peoples of Central Asia, and they took the supreme position by founding a stable and united empire.

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1 Important introductory books on the Uighur history includes, Colin Mackerras, *The Uighur empire According to the T'ang Dynastic Histories: A Study in Sino-Uighur Relations (744-840)*(Canberra, 1972), Abe Takeo, *Nishi-uguru kokushi no kenkyū* (Kyoto, 1955); Annemarie von Gabain, *Das Leben im uigurischen Königreich von Qočo 850-1250* (Wiesbaden, 1973); and Özkan İzgi, *Uygurlarin Siyası ve Kültürel Tarihi* (Ankara, 1987).

However, the Uighur Empire, after having prospered for a century, fell to the Kirghiz, another Turkic people in 840. Unlike their predecessors in Mongolia, such as the Xiongnu 匈奴, the Ruanruan 蠕蠕 and the Tujue, the Uighurs were not absorbed by their successors. One group of the Uighurs fled southwards with their last Qaghan 可汗 as they hoped to be welcomed into China. However, they were decisively refused by the Tang 唐, and they wandered along the Great Wall and then disappeared, most probably absorbed by the Khitans 契丹.

The majority of the dispersed Uighur tribes, however, made their way toward west and created the West Uighur Kingdom. Their territory spread over the northern and southern skirts of the East Tianshan range 天山山脈 where they chose the sedentary mode of life. They occupied an important strategic area for traffic and trade between China and Inner Asia and functioned as a bridge the cultural exchange between the East and West. The Uighurs exerted great cultural influence upon the Mongols during the early stage of the Mongol Empire. The Mongol language was indeed recorded with the Uighur alphabet, and they were also instrumental in the shaping of the Mongol administration. Among the non-Muslim Turkic peoples, none had reached the degree of civilization attained by the Uighurs, who developed a culture in many respects more sophisticated than Muslim Turks.

Chapter 1, "the early period (744-755): the process of building the nomadic states," examines the formation of the Uighur Empire. The author utilized the Old Turkic Inscriptions,<sup>2</sup> important sources that have often been overlooked by most previous studies, to provide a detailed portrayal of the process of the nomadic state formation. He emphasizes the role of Qarlıgh Qaghan 葛勒可汗 (747-759) in the early Uighur Empire. To organize the people (bodun) as member of state (el), the Qaghan reorganized other clans of the Uighur tribe as "federate group" 聯盟集團 ruled by the "core group"

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Old Turkic Inscription, see Talât Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic* (Bloomington, 1968), and Hüseyin Namik Orkun, *Eski Türk Yazıtları* (Ankara, 1994).

中核集團, that is, the Yaghlaqar clan. He also seized Turks and non-Turkish nomad tribes and organized them as "subordinate group" 從屬集團. He set up the ruling structure and mobilized the subject people by installing his sons as "feudal lords." However, the author claims that Qarlıgh Qaghan's efforts were not enough to ensure his elevation to the position of supreme ruler in the nomadic world. He was only able to seize the area of Ötüken and failed to obtain the recognition by the Tang of his status as the Qaghan. The Qaghan had to suppress the rebellion of other tribes in the nomadic world and adjust his policy toward the Chinese.

Chapter 2 examines "the middle period (755-787): the development and limits of the nomadic state." Here the author's descriptions are limited to historical facts well-known in previous studies. The An Lushan 安祿山 Rebellion was the important event that led to the end of the Middle Age in Chinese history. In 755 when An Lushan began his rebellion and seized the capital of Tang, the Chinese emperor asked for the Uighur Qaghan's assistance. The Qaghan immediately sent troops to suppress the rebellion, and as a reward he obtained great amount of tributes from China. He was also given the Chinese princess, Ningguo gongzhu 寧國公主 in marriage and was recognized as supreme ruler of nomadic world by the Tang dynasty.

The author stresses on the role and efforts of Böğü Qaghan (759-780) who tried to reform the nomadic world. He reconstructed the Sino-Uighur relations which were aggravated after the return of the Chinese princess in 759. He received a great amount of tributes from China that reinforced his power base. By 765 the Uighurs at last took position of the supreme ruler of nomadic world as all other nomadic powers had been weakened during the rebellions of An Lushan and Shi Siming 安史之亂. After Sino-Uighur relations had been restored, Böğü Qaghan wanted to secure the goods from China, and he pressured the Tang court to allow the Sogdians, the international merchants of the time, to engage in trade freely in China.

Beginning 775, however, Sino-Uighur trade suddenly contracted due to the Sogdians' violent activities in China's main cities and the imbalance of the

silk-horse trade. Bögü Qaghan planned to press China through a show of military force, but Ton Bagha Tarqan opposed the Qaghan's plan. Ton Bagha Tarqan then led the coup d'état and took over the supreme position as Alp Qutlugh Bilge Qaghan. The author asserts that this change of power led to the isolation of the Uighurs as the Tang made peace with Tibetans.

Chapter 3, "the late period (787-839): the development and collapse of the nomadic state," represents perhaps the best part of the book. The author examines the expansion of the Uighur control to Beiting 北庭 area and the change of ruling authority. It was the Uighurs who took the initiative to bring about improvement in Sino-Uighur relations when Tibetans broke with the Tang in spring 787. The Uighur Qaghan married the Chinese princess and obtained a chance to expand his rule to the Peiting area. However, when the Uighur exacted a great amount of tributes, tribes who lived near Beiting rebelled and joined Tibetans. After the Uighur and the Chinese lost their control of the Beiting, Qutlugh led his troops to retake that region several times and successfully seized a part of Western region. At the court, the authority of ruling Yaghlarqar clan fell into the hand of Qutlugh, a member of Ediz clan, and he succeeded to Qaghan as Huaixin Qaghan 懷信可汗 (795-805).

To reinforce his authority, Huaixin Qaghan was very aggressive in pursuing the policy to expand into the Silk Road instead of depending on the Chinese aid. This policy was continued by his successors, and the author emphasizes the role of Zhaoli Qaghan 昭禮可汗 (824-832), who paved way to gain the legitimacy of the Qaghan of Ediz clan. The Qaghan also adopted the Manichaeism for the ideological enhancement and gained the support of manichees. It is noteworthy that the author attempted to restore the defaced parts of the inscription of Toquz Uighur Qaghan. While the author, who is a historian, not a linguist, made an admirable attempt to restore the inscriptions, his restored texts remains one more possible interpretation.

As for the collapse and dispersion of the nomadic state, the author argues that the anthrax epidemic may have been one of the important factors. The

anthrax epidemic is serious in that it kills both humans and animals at the same time. A massive loss of animals alone would have affected the nomads greatly, but if the humans had also been infected, it could have indeed been a crucial factor. The author's assertion can not be ruled out, but it will require more verifiable scholarly evidences.

As the author himself emphasized confidently in the preface, this is the first systematic treatment of the history of the Uighur Empire in the world. In my opinion, one of the most useful sections in this book is the appendix of the Old Turkic Inscriptions, arguably the most important materials relating to the history of the Uighur Empire. The book could have received a more careful editing, but it is still a superb work of many insights into the Uighur history that overcame the limits of historical sources. The author has made a great contribution to the development of the Central Eurasian studies, and I hope the book will soon be available in English for a wider audience it deserves.