

Koguryŏ ūi sŏbang chŏngch'aek yŏn'gu

高句麗의 西方政策 研究 (A Study of Koguryŏ's Western Policy)

By Yi Sŏngje. Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 2005. 238 pages. ₩14,000 (Hardcover)

Yi In Chŏl, Koguryo Research Foundation

The “Western Policy” in the title refers to Koguryŏ’s policy toward various dynasties in North China from 435 to the reign of King Yŏngyang 嬰陽 (590-618). During the most of this period, China was divided into Northern and Southern dynasties until the Sui 隋 (581-618) unified China in the late 6th century. The southern dynasties were Song 宋 (420-479), Qi 齊 (479-502), Liang 梁 (502-557), and Chen 陳 (557-89), while the northern dynasties were the Northern Wei 北魏 (386-534), Eastern Wei 東魏 (534-50), Western Wei 西魏 (535-57), Northern Qi 北齊 (550-77), and Northern Zhou 北周 (557-81). Here the author deals mainly with Koguryŏ’s relations with the northern dynasties. The author views the period as the heyday of Koguryŏ and focuses on its western policy to gain an insight into the Koguryŏ-centered interstate relations in East Asia. The basic premise is that Koguryŏ’s western policy changed from time to time and according to the threat of its opponents, but it always sought to maintain peaceful co-existence. He also approaches various issues in Koguryŏ’s foreign policy during the fifth and sixth centuries from the institutional framework of tributes and investitures, with much emphasis on the frontier region of Liaoxi 遼西.

The author begins with an examination of Koguryŏ’s relations with the Northern Wei around the year 435 (23rd year of King Changsu’s 長壽王 reign). That year, Koguryŏ dispatched an embassy to present a memorial and

tributes and accepted an investiture in return. This Koguryō action came about as a result of deterioration of the political situation in the Northern Yan 北燕, and the growing possibility that Northern Wei may invade Koguryō. The Northern Yan tried to elicit Koguryō's assistance when the Northern Wei attempted to assert its rule directly over it. While the Northern Wei was at its peak, its expansion to the east was blocked by Koguryō's military power. Koguryō's policy was to recognize the 'superiority' of the Northern Wei, but at the same time seek the Northern Wei's recognition of its own vested interests in the Liaoxi and *Dongyi* 東夷 regions.

Chapter two outlines Koguryō's relations with the Song and Northern Wei. When its attempt to expand into the Northern Yan and the *Dongyi* regions was thwarted by Koguryō, the Northern Wei came to view Koguryō as an enemy state and adopted an aggressive strategy. As Koguryō's relations with the Northern Wei deteriorated, it became one of the leaders of the anti-Northern Wei forces. However, Koguryō exploited its diplomatic leverage to minimize the Northern Wei's military actions at its western border by maintaining friendly relations with the Song, the Northern Wei's rival state to the south. In the end, Koguryō remained outside of the confrontation between the Northern Wei and Song or Rouran 柔然.

Chapter three examines how the Northern Wei came to recognize Koguryō's separate sphere of interest. In the later years of his reign, King Changsu resumed official relations with Northern Wei. The Northern Wei had pressured Koguryō by supporting and insinuating military cooperation with Koguryō's traditional enemies such as Paekche and Mulgil (Wuji 勿吉). Koguryō tried to improve its relations with Northern Wei, but the Northern Wei court demanded that its embassy be allowed to pass through the territory of Koguryō on its way to Paekche and that Koguryō send royal princesses to be married to the Northern Wei leader. To counteract this Northern Wei's anti-Koguryō policy, Koguryō attacked and took the capital of Paekche and forced Kumoxi 庫莫奚 and Khitans 契丹 to flee toward the Northern Wei. Koguryō's aggressive military actions were a part of the strat-

egy of indirect confrontation to bring the Northern Wei into a peaceful settlement with Koguryō. When Koguryō was seen as a force to be reckoned with, the Northern Wei changed its policy and began to recognize Koguryō's standing in the interstate relations.

Chapter four focuses on Contention over the issue of refugees between Koguryō and the Northern Qi. After the fall of Northern Wei, Koguryō tried to control refugee population as it sought to expand into the Yingzhou 營州 area. While Koguryō did not occupy the area directly, many refugees came under its rule. The Northern Qi and Koguryō soon confronted each other over the issue, Koguryō ultimately agreed to return the refugees in order to maintain peaceful relations with the Northern Qi. With a peaceful border, Koguryō was then able to resolve its internal problems.

The final chapter looks into Koguryō's strategy to counter the expanding Sui influence in the Liaoxi region. In 598 Koguryō took the initiative to attack the Liaoxi and the Sui retaliated with the force of 300,000 troops. It is important to note that Koguryō took the initiative as it had attacked the Sui even as it fully expected retaliation. The Sui Wendi in the 590s had sent a letter threatening attack if Koguryō prevented its expansion into the Liaoxi, and Koguryō had accepted the Sui expansion as a way to maintain a triangular balance of power with the Tujue 突厥. However, when the Sui rapidly brought the Liaoxi under its control and threatened to upset the balance of power, Koguryō attacked the Liaoxi to restore the balance of power. Koguryō's objective was the Sui recognition of its influence in the region, not the escalation of hostility. Koguryō was able to maintain a balance of power in the region until the early 7th century. The Tang replaced the Sui and gradually pacified all potential allies of Koguryō, and by the time of Tang Taizong's invasion of Koguryō, the balance of power had been broken irreversibly. Koguryō was no longer able to check the military expansion of the Tang Empire.

Since the 5th century, Koguryō was able to deal effectively against the strong Chinese dynasties. However, it also faced challenged from the northern

dynasties, Paekche, Silla, and Malgal (Mohe 靺鞨), etc. This book brings a fresh perspective by focusing Koguryō's relations with the Northern dynasties. Instead of a simplified framework of Koguryō's the "China-policy," the book takes a more complex approach of the "Western-policy." While Koguryō maintained close relations with western powers in the 5th and 6th centuries, its western policy was designed to force the northern dynasties to accept coexistence with Koguryō. The author used the terms of the "tribute" and "investiture" to in his approach toward the interstate relations, but not in a simple way to analyze institutional conventions or to represent the international hierarchy. The author carefully placed the tribute system in historical context to bring out a comprehensive view of the interstate relations.

The book attaches a great importance on the geopolitical significance of the Liaoxi, the place where Koguryō, the Northern dynasties, and the Inner Asian nomadic powers intersected. Koguryō and the Northern dynasties confronted each other here and a triangular balance of power was established with the nomadic powers. However, the multi-centered geopolitical configuration of the time and the checks and balances precluded hegemony of any single power. The Northern Wei was held in check not merely due to Koguryō's military capability, but also due to the possibility of the involvement by the southern dynasties and Rouran. As the author stresses that Koguryō's aggressive policy had neutralized Northern Wei's hostile posture toward Koguryō, it would have been helpful if he had provided more detailed historical background to the Northern Wei's situation.

Previous studies have claimed that Koguryō's southern expansion was an outcome of its frustration in the west. On the other hand, this book sees Koguryō's attack on Paekche, the Kumoxi, and the Khitans as a part of the strategy to force the Northern Wei to adopt a more friendly policy toward Koguryō. However, in view of the fact that Paekche requested military assistance from the Northern Wei, this assertion is a little questionable. Wouldn't it have been more likely that Koguryō took the preemptive strike against Paekche in order to prevent the Northern Wei-Paekche alliance? Moreover, the framework of the Koguryō-Sui-Tujue balance of power requires much

more detailed information on the Tujue advances to the Liaoxi than provided here. The author believes that the fall of Koguryo came as the Tang Taizong had irreversibly broken the balance of power that Koguryō maintained in the late 6th and early 7th centuries. However, we cannot overlook other factors such as Koguryō's internal power struggles and the strategic misjudgments.

The author's expert knowledge in Koguryō-Northern Wei relations comes across clearly, and the book contains much insight on Koguryō's foreign relations and policies in the 5th and 6th centuries. However, his exclusive focus on Koguryō-Northern Dynasties relations may hinder a more comprehensive understanding of the interstate relations of the time involving various states in Northeast Asia. It is hoped that future studies will approach Koguryō's foreign policy from wider ranging and more diverse perspectives.