

*Gaogouli lishi wenti yanjiu lunwenji*

高句麗歷史問題研究論文集 (The Question of Koguryō: A Collection of Historical Papers)

By Li Sheng (厲聲), Piao Wenyi (朴文一) et al., Yanbian daxue chubanshe,

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The articles gathered in this book were papers presented at an academic conference on Koguryō history jointly hosted by the Center of China's Borderland History and Geography Research of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Yanbian University, and held in Yanji on August 9-10, 2004. *The Question of Koguryō: A Collection of Historical Papers* (高句麗歷史問題研究論文集; Gaogouli lishi wenti yanjiu lunwenji), published by Yanbian University in 2005, includes all fifteen papers presented at the conference, a closing address by Li Sheng (厲聲), who is an associate researcher at the Center of China's Borderland History and Geography Research of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and a member of the Northeast Project Expert Panel, and a summary of the papers by Li Guoqiang (李國強), Po Cankui (朴燦奎), and Yu Fengchun (于逢春).

In "Thoughts on the Northeast Project (東北工程; Dongbei Gongcheng) and Koguryō History Studies" Li Sheng presents the background to the Northeast Project and outlines his position concerning the history of Koguryō. The Northeast Project, he states, was officially selected as one of the key research areas for the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in February 2002, and was allocated a budget of 15 million yuan. Li Sheng defends the Northeast Project against its casting by some Koreans as an attempt to incorporate Koguryō into Chinese history, calling that an unsubstantiated claim. He reminds us that only eight of the ninety-four papers published by the CASS (8.5% of the total papers) between 2002 and 2004 deal with the history of the ancient Korean state. His argument, however,

falls short of establishing how the number of papers dedicated to the subject can explain the nature of a project or the agenda behind it.

The contributions to *The Question of Koguryō: A Collection of Historical Papers* fall into three major categories. The first is composed of articles subscribing to the Chinese view that Koguryō belongs solely and exclusively to the history of China. The stance is more moderate among the papers in the second group. These voice the view that the ancient Korean kingdom constitutes a shared past between Korea and China. The proponents of the former view are generally Chinese historians of Han ethnic origin, whereas those adhering to the latter view are ethnic Korean scholars at Yanbian University. Finally, papers dealing with historical perception, comparative historical studies, and histories of historical studies make up the third group.

The contributors who advance the view that Koguryō belongs exclusively to Chinese history are Liu Ju (劉炬), Liu Zimin (劉子敏), Wang Mianhou (王綿厚), Li Dalong (李大龍), Miao Wei (苗威) and Geng Tiehua (耿鐵華). Liu Ju, in "On Criteria for Determining the Political Status of Ethnic Minority States in Chinese History," asserts that Koguryō was a local regime of China (割據政權) under the rule of Chinese dynasties, basing his argument on the limited level of sovereignty and power he believes the ancient Korean kingdom enjoyed and exercised. The fact that Koguryō was under the direct rule of the Chinese government for some 100 years before it acceded to independence for the next six centuries, he contends in a somewhat counterintuitive argument, was another reason that makes it difficult to consider this kingdom a fully independent state. He writes, "Everything that we know about Koguryō indicates that this kingdom was a local regime of China. Being a state within the sphere of sovereignty of China, Koguryō's history is undoubtedly part of Chinese history."

To understand the Chinese stance on the issue, one must first understand what Chinese historians mean exactly by "local regime." Liu Zimin, in "The Chinese World Order and Koguryō," proposes as criteria for determining the status of independence of a neighboring state of China whether its sphere of domination was originally Chinese territory and whether its people are ethnically Chinese, rather than whether the state is an administrative unit

of China, such as a commandery or prefecture, or whether a tribute-investiture relationship exists. Local regimes typically obtained independence and defended it through armed resistance which, he maintains, is precisely how Koguryō, a former Chinese province, earned its autonomy.

However, it is unclear how Liu Zimin arrived at the conclusion he reached following this logic. For one, Koguryō was not a state within Chinese territory. Nor were its people ethnically Chinese. Koguryō thus does not qualify as a so-called "local regime." The arguments brought forth by Liu Ju and Liu Zimin to support their claims that Koguryō is part of Chinese history are too fraught with contradictions and internal inconsistencies to deserve serious attention.

Wang Mianhou presents a similar argument as Liu Zimin, linking Koguryō to Koi (句麗). In his "Koi, Kuryō, Koguryō and the Xuantu Commandery during the Western Han Dynasty: Territorial Evolution, Affiliation and Hierarchy," Wang Mianhou states that evidence from China's official history sources and archeological findings suggest that the valleys of the two rivers in the Liaodong region were initially inhabited by the Koi tribe, and were subsequently occupied successively by Koguryō Prefecture and Koguryō County of the Xuantu Commandery. He writes that in 37 BC Koguryō declared itself a nation of Koguryō people and a local state of the Xuantu Commandery with Cholbon Puyō, founded by Chumong, as its capital. The association of Koguryō with Koi is ostensibly a way of suggesting that Koguryō territory was part of China's northern territory since as early as the end of the Shang Dynasty and the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty.

Li Dalong, of the Center of China's Borderland History and Geography Research, as the author of "Koguryō and the Han-Tang Tribute-Investiture System" and as another proponent of the thesis according to which Koguryō is a local regime of China, argues for the supposed subordinate status of the ancient Korean state to its Chinese neighbor, evoking the fact that Koguryō neither challenged its relationship with China under the Han-Tang tributary system, nor broke off the relationship even during the Wei, Chin and Northern and Southern Dynasties, a period in which it ruled Northeast Asia as a self-proclaimed regional power. He further states that Koguryō's evolution throughout its entire existence took place under the rule and patronage

of the Han and Tang Dynasties, from its early rise to its ultimate decline. But, as he writes, Koguryō indeed never challenged nor ended a tributary relationship with China for the simple reason that the ancient Korean kingdom had never entered into such a relationship.

Miao Wei, of Yanbian University, maintains in “Characteristics and Cultural and Ethnic Identity of Koguryō According to Kim Pusik” that the Koryō historian included Koguryō in the history of Koryō, alongside Silla and Paekche, only because the ancient kingdom was one of the “three states east of the big sea” (海東三國), the intended subject matter of *Samguk sagi*, as is stated in the “*Chin Samguk sagi p’yo*” (進三國史記表), a report submitted to the king upon the completion of the book, not because Koryō claimed the heritage of Koguryō.

Miao Wei attributed this inclusion also to the fact that the political sphere of Koryō during Kim Pusik’s lifetime extended all the way to the southern river valley of the Amnok (Amur) River to include sections of the Koguryō plateau. Further, he interprets the statement in the discussion section at the end of the “Chronicles of Koryō” in the *Samguk sagi*, describing Xuantu and Lelang as the original territory of Chosŏn where Kija became the king, as an acknowledgement by Kim Pusik that Koguryō’s domain was a province under the rule of the Han Dynasty, and hence part of Chinese territory. However, as has been pointed out by Pak Chinsŏk (朴眞奭), ancient Chinese historiographies describe Koguryō people as belonging to the same ethnic group as Paekche and Tongye, and sharing the same customs, clothing styles, and diet with the latter. We also find in a 651 entry in the *Hou Tang shu*, a collective reference to Koguryō, Paekche, and Silla as the “three states east of the big sea.” Hence, Kim Pusik’s rationale for including Koguryō in the *Samguk sagi* is most probably not simply because of this kingdom’s geographical location east of the “big sea,” as Miao Wei would like us to believe.

With regard to Miao Wei’s second point relating to Kim Pusik’s remark concerning the Xuantu and Lelang commanderies and Kija, first of all, it is not historically established that Kija became the king of Chosŏn. Secondly, for King Wu of Zhou to install Kija as the king of Chosŏn presupposes the existence of the state of Chosŏn. If so, the Chosŏn referred to here is clearly

Ko-Chosŏn, founded by Tan'gun. Hence, Kim Pusik could not have implied that Koguryŏ's domain was Chinese territory.

Geng Tiehua, of Tonghua Teachers' College, claims in "Registration of Koguryŏ Heritages on World Heritage List and the Question of Koguryŏ's Identity" that there exists a common perception dating back to 1998 that Koguryŏ people were an ancient tribe from northeastern China and their state, a local regime of China. He further states that the fact that both China and Korea registered Koguryŏ's archeological sites that are located in their respective territories should not be taken as an indication that both countries have a legitimate claim to Koguryŏ's heritage. Neither Chinese scholars nor the international community of historians, he maintains, find it desirable to split the ownership over the heritage of a single historical state, dividing it according to shifting geographical borders. According to him, the 705 years of Koguryŏ history form an indivisible whole. Even after the transfer of capital to P'yŏngyang, he writes, no fundamental changes occurred to Koguryŏ in terms of the nature of its society, its political affiliation or allegiance. Even the surname of the royal family remained the same.

Even if Koguryŏ heritages were to be split between Korea and China, for the purpose of registration on the World Heritage List, it would be, he contends, a grave mistake to assume that the ancient kingdom's history consists of two separate parts hinging upon the year 427. The point he tries to drive home is that one must not confuse the ownership of cultural heritage with historical identity, for they are two distinct concepts. Geng Tiehua, therefore, adamantly opposes the idea that Korea and China may both claim Koguryŏ's legacy, which he sees as exclusively belonging to China. As a Korean studies scholar, I cannot agree more with Geng Tiehua on his view that the parallel registration of Koguryŏ heritages by China and North Korea will have no effect on the fundamental truth about the ancient kingdom. Koguryŏ solely and exclusively belongs, and shall continue to belong, to the national past of South Korea and North Korea.

The paper "Koguryŏ Capitals: P'yŏngyang, Sinsŏng (新城), and Hwangŏng (黃城)" by Zhang Fuyou (張福有), also a supporter of China's exclusive right over the memory of Koguryŏ, attempts to defend this view through supposed Chinese locations of the ancient kingdom's old capitals.

He argues that first capital of Koguryō referred to as “P’yōngyang” was the old capital of Liangmin, in the city of Jian, and that this capital was also the one referred to as “Sinsōng.” Concerning Tonghwang-sōng (東黃城), of P’yōngyang, he writes that the city was not situated east of present-day P’yōngyang, but, contrary to popular belief, east of the old capital of Liangmin, at a location corresponding to today’s Liudaogou, in the city of Linjiang, in Jilin Province. He even contends that P’yōngyang, mentioned in the context of the death of King Kogugwōn, who fell in battle against invading Paekche forces in 371, was also Liangmin, in Jian. These assertions, all serving the purpose of moving forward the date of Koguryō’s establishment in the Korean Peninsula, appear to be intended to prolong the length of time during which the ancient state was based within Chinese territory. The argument, however, is unsustainable, since, if the last assertion by Zhang Fuyou concerning P’yōngyang where King Kogugwōn is said to have died were true, this would mean that Paekche’s domain in the fourth century extended as far north as the Amnok River valley, since it was ostensibly able to strike P’yōngyang, then located, according to the Chinese historian, north of that river.

Those historians expressing the view that Koguryō is part of both Korean and Chinese history include Pak Munil, Pak Chinsōk, Sun Jinji (孫進己), and Sun Hong (孫泓). However, it should be noted that, unlike Pak Munil and Pak Chinsōk, Sun Jinji and Sun Hong, even as they acknowledge the legitimacy of the Korean claim to Koguryō, nevertheless maintain that the ancient state rightfully belongs to Chinese history.

In his “Some Thoughts on the Dichotomy of Center-Periphery in Chinese History,” Pak Munil, of Yanbian University, states that, after having held an unwavering belief for the past twenty years that Koguryō is a shared past of Korea and China, he feels more certain today than ever that this is the position most faithfully reflecting the historical truth about the ancient kingdom. The tribute-investiture system, he writes, although an important diplomatic protocol governing the relationship between a large country and a small country and an undeniable historical reality must nevertheless be considered akin to a formality. In other words, the tribute-investiture relationship China maintained with its neighbors was very often of a symbolic

nature, a convention without much practical consequence. The system was a way of building a regional order centered on China, serving as a vehicle to reinforce a China-centered world view. On the other hand, for China's neighbors, the tribute-investiture system was a routinely-used diplomatic strategy to remain in the good graces of the bigger and stronger state, thus contributing to the avoidance of unnecessary threats against their regimes. Pak Munil's stance is therefore in stark opposition to Sun Jinji and other Chinese historians, who view a supposed existence of a tribute-investiture relationship as a sufficient proof of Koguryō's status as a subordinate state of China.

Pak Chinsök, also a professor at Yanbian University, in "Reconstituting the Ethnic and Cultural Identity of Koguryō from Ancient Documentary Sources," presents various passages from ancient Chinese historical writings, lending support to the idea that Koguryō is a Korean state. He cites descriptions of the ancient kingdom as deriving from Puyō, ethnically identical to Paekche and Tongye people, and similar in dietary habits and clothing styles to Paekche and Silla. He also mentions the entry for the year 651 in the *Hou Tang shu* collectively referring to Koguryō, Paekche, and Silla as the "three states east of the big sea," and in the *Samguk sagi*, grouping together the three ancient states. He concludes by noting that, given that there is ample evidence proving that Koguryō is an ancient Korean state and that the country is, at the same time, an important part of the history of China's northeastern region, its history is part of both Korea's and China's heritage (一史兩用; "one history shared by two states"). Although the positions of these two ethnic Korean Chinese scholars are closer to the Korean stance than their Chinese counterparts, they are still quite removed from it, insofar as historians of both South Korea and North Korea reject the claim that the ancient kingdom was a local regime of China, and refuse to consider its history as part of China's past in any manner or form.

In "Koguryō's Heritage in Modern Northeast Asia: The Land, People and Culture of the Ancient Kingdom," Sun Jinji and Sun Hong declare at the outset that Koguryō's identity and affiliation within the geopolitical context of the period during which this kingdom existed, and which countries subsequently "inherited" this identity are two issues entirely independent from

each other. Based on the current territorial configuration in Northeast Asia, the two Chinese historians state that China inherited the greatest part of Koguryō's ancient land, people and culture, followed by South Korea and North Korea, with little or no legacy surviving in the rest of the region. Meanwhile, concerning the status of Koguryō in its original historical context, they argue that its people were an ethnic minority of China and its state, a local regime within the Chinese sphere. According to these two scholars, Koguryō, in sum, was not a sovereign state, but a subordinate entity under the rule of Chinese dynasties. As for the succession of Koguryō's land, people and culture, China is a more legitimate heir to the memory of the ancient kingdom than are South Korea and North Korea.

In a second paper, "Koguryō's Relationship to Neighboring Northeast Asian States and Tribes," the two historians contend that the Korean kingdom maintained close ties with Chinese rulers, especially with Han regimes, throughout its existence, and that this relationship was of the suzerain-vassal type. In other terms, the ancient state was a local ethnic minority regime of China. This relationship allowed, according to the authors, for a peaceful interaction between Koguryō and Chinese dynasties in which there were no prolonged periods of tension outside of brief armed conflicts. Furthermore, Koguryō was never annexed to Silla or Paekche, and its subjects allegedly had an entirely different ethnic origin from Paekche, with no contact with the latter prior to its absorption of the Lelang and Daifang commanderies. Koguryō's transfer of its seat to the Korean Peninsula after the fifth century, according to these historians, was in fact an expansionist incursion by a Chinese ethnic group to establish a Chinese colony on the peninsula.

"China's Koguryō Policy: A Comparison between the Northern Dynasties and the Southern Dynasties" by Jiang Weigong (姜維公) deals extensively with the subject of investiture. Jiang Weigong contends that both the Northern Dynasties and the Southern Dynasties considered Koguryō a tributary state, and treated it favorably concerning investiture. The Southern Dynasties, lesser powers than the Northern Dynasties, sought an amicable and cordial relationship with Koguryō, preferring to avoid confrontation with this potent military force that they could use to counter their northern neighbors. In comparison, the Northern Dynasties, greater military powers

than their southern counterparts, with ample means to forcefully subdue Koguryō if necessary and more closely neighboring it, adopted a more hard-line policy toward Koguryō.

History, as we all know, is an aggregate of past human actions or the account of them. Any actions in history belong ultimately to their human actors. Hence, it is only natural to consider that in the case of Koguryō, its history should belong to itself and its people, and to no one else. The legitimate heir to this state founded by Korean people is without doubt Korea. Contrary to the claim made by Sun Jinji and Sun Hong, according to whom Koguryō kings received investiture or titles from Chinese emperors, or that of Jiang Weigong, who states that the Northern Dynasties and the Southern Dynasties both considered it a tributary state, the ancient kingdom seldom or never entertained such a relationship with China until the early fifth century, and during the Northern Dynasties and the Southern Dynasties, it received investiture and titles from both dynasties. If these claims were true, the logical conclusion would be that Koguryō was a tributary state to both the north and the south, which appears absurd and impossible, given how the two political spheres were mutually exclusive. What transpires from all this is that the tribute-investiture relationship practiced by China and Koguryō was a mere diplomatic formality with little practical consequence, which cannot be as such a proof that the ancient kingdom was a local regime of its Chinese neighbor or a sign of any other form of subordination.

*In The Question of Koguryō: A Collection of Historical Papers* we also find papers dealing with historical perception, comparative historical studies, empirical essays, and reflections on the history of historical studies. In the paper “Basic Principles for Determining the Chinese Sphere for a History of China,” Zhao Yongchun (趙永春) writes that, just as the expression “history of China” contains references to both the present (China) and the past (history), ethnic groups with which a historiography of China must be concerned with should be those that reside or resided in what is today the Chinese sphere of influence. Based on this postulate, Zhao Yongchun elaborates what he calls the basic principles for determining the historical sphere for China:

To determine the historical sphere of China, one must consider ethnic groups residing or having resided in the present Chinese sphere. All such ethnic groups, whether or not they continue to exist within it, are part of the Chinese people. Their histories, therefore, are all chapters of Chinese history (histories of ethnic groups originating from outside China may be incorporated into Chinese history, from the date they entered the Chinese sphere), and the regions they occupied and controlled all belong to the historical sphere of China.

Zhao Yongchun's argument, however, has one fundamental flaw: Chinese history as a whole is not reducible to the history of today's China, in other words, the People's Republic of China. If Chinese history were indeed the history of the People's Republic of China, the idea that the historical sphere of China should be determined based on the spheres of influence of ethnic groups residing or having resided in the current Chinese sphere is even too obvious to be stated. The reason why Zhao Yongchun has to expressly make a postulate of this idea is because Chinese history precisely is "not" the history of today's China. What Zhao Yongchun is trying to do here is find a way out of the dilemma facing Chinese history stemming from the profound rupture between today's China and the past that preceded it. Because its national history lacks coherence, the attempt is made to define it as the sum of the histories of all ethnic groups residing within the current territory of the People's Republic of China and their spheres of influence. While Zhao Yongchun's move may appear to shift the focus from nation to people, in other words, from national history to ethnic history, his vision of history, at the same time, is utterly territory-centered. The boundaries of Chinese history, for him, coincide precisely with the borders of today's China. History is not the sum of past events taking place within a defined area of land, but an aggregate of human actions and affairs. As long as China's historical community does not discard this territory-centered vision of history in favor of a human-centered one, its endeavors will inevitably be completely divorced from the fundamental stuff of history. Zhao Yongchun's definition of Chinese history as the history of all ethnic groups residing and having resided in today's Chinese sphere, however, provides quite an encouraging sign for China's historical community. Its emphasis on people suggests that

a substantial progress in this direction may be in the offing for Chinese scholarship.

In "On the Characteristics of the Nanzhao (南詔) Regime," Fang Tie (方鐵) discusses the relationship between Tang China and the Nanzhao kingdom. Nanzhao, according to Fang Tie, maintained a relationship with Tang that was amicable overall, given how the Chinese dynasty had 146 years of peace with this kingdom that lasted 254 total years, as opposed to 108 years of strife or tension. The author further states that Nanzhao was a local regime and not a state-level regime on an equal footing with Tang.

"Koguryō Studies in Korea and Research Trends," a sweeping overview of Koguryō studies in Korea by Li Zongxun (李宗勳), begins with the acknowledgement of how Korean historians excel in empirical studies, especially on subjects such as the ancient kingdom's early political system, mountain fortresses, and tomb murals, and applauds the great variety of subject areas researched and the wealth of outstanding achievements. On the other hand, he points out, works by Korean historians seldom address issues pertaining to the philosophy of history, rarely analyze historical facts from the perspective of culture or international politics, and frequently fail to provide comprehensive implications or a global conclusion of their findings. These shortcomings, he says, are weaknesses that appear to be endemic to Korea's historical scholarship. Furthermore, he says, Korean scholars take the "Koreanness" of Koguryō for granted to such a degree that they neglect in-depth inquiries into important subjects such as this dynasty's characteristics as a nation, its ethnic makeup, and its cultural identity.

Li Zongxun's comments, as an assessment by someone who conducted a rather conscientious and thorough examination of Korean research trends in ancient history studies, certainly deserve our thoughtful attention. Meanwhile, I wish to point out, in turn, a few chronic problems plaguing Chinese scholarship. At the other extreme vis-à-vis their Korean counterparts, Chinese historians have little interest in empirical evidence, favoring instead a historical discourse that remains heavily politically motivated. It is my personal hope and that of Korea's historical community as a whole that, in the not-too-distant future, the ethos of historical science will shine forth again within the Chinese historical community.