The Interstate Order of Ancient Northeast Asia

Focusing on the 4th ~ 7th Centuries

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As the 4th century saw the unfolding of the chaotic Sixteen Kingdoms period in northern China, the various states and tribes in Northeast Asia grew and developed. It was a period of increased possibilities for change in the East Asian international order. However in the 5th and the 6th century, the region returned to a more stable international order due to the rise of a balance of power among the most powerful states – China's Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Rouran, and Koguryŏ. Under these circumstances, the power of the various states and tribes in Northeast Asia such as Koguryŏ, Baekje, Silla, and Wa, as well as the Mohe (K. Malgal), and the Qidan (Khitan), did not receive any influence or penetration from the northern nomads or powers in the Chinese Central Plains but constituted a separate international order. Although there was conflict among the Three Kingdoms (Koguryŏ, Silla, Baekje) of Korea, a basic balance of power was maintained.

However, after the end of the 6th century, the rise of the unified empires of the Sui and the Tang in China brought a complete restructuring of the entire East Asian international order. The international state of affairs that emerged by the 7th century in Northeast Asia represented change along two different axes. One was the war that erupted between Koguryŏ and the unified Chinese states of Sui and Tang over control of Northeast Asia. The other was the war between the Three Kingdoms in the Korean Peninsula. Although these two axes had different structures and natures, they gradually converged into one axis with Koguryŏ being the common denominator as the Sui and Tang pursued a policy of building a China-centered international order. This was realized under the Tang, so it can be said that the war between Koguryŏ and Tang and Silla's war of unification unfolded as part of the creation of such a China-centered international order. .

Among the consequences were the fall of Koguryŏ and Baekje, the growth of Silla as a unified state on the Korean Peninsula, and the establishment of Balhae (C. Bohai) in Manchuria.

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Introduction

The ancient period in Northeast Asia saw the development of a much more pluralistic history than any other time, a history that featured the ebb and flow of power from region to region and the rise and fall of many states and ethnic groups. In this paper I will survey the process of change of the international state of affairs in Northeast Asia divided into the following three periods: the 4th century, the 5th-6th centuries, and the 7th century.

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and tribes in Northeast Asia such as Koguryŏ, Baekje (Paekche), Silla, and Wa, as well as the Mohe (K. Malgal), and the Qidan (Khitan), did not receive any influence or penetration from the northern nomads or powers in the Chinese Central Plains but constituted a separate international order. Although there was conflict among the Three Kingdoms (Koguryŏ, Silla, Baekje) of Korea, a basic balance of power was maintained. However, after the end of the 6th century, the rise of the unified empires of the Sui and the Tang in China brought a complete restructuring of the entire East Asian international order. Among the consequences were the fall of Koguryŏ and Baekje, the growth of Silla as a unified state on the Korean Peninsula, and the establishment of Balhae (Parhae, C. Bohai) in Manchuria.

This paper will examine the process of change in the international state of affairs in Northeast Asia, focusing on the Three Kingdoms in the Korean Peninsula but also considering the powers in the Central Plains (northern China), the northern nomads, and the Wa in the Japanese islands.

1. The International Order of Northeast Asia in the 4th Century

The 4th century was a period of new changes for the international order of Northeast Asia. As Western Jin in the Chinese mainland fell and the Sixteen Kingdoms rose in its place, the Former Han (前漢)-centered international order collapsed. Under these circumstances, the political activity of the various states and ethnic groups in Northeast Asia intensified. Koguryŏ, in this process, developed by integrating various ethnic groups within the northern part of the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria. Within the Korean Peninsula, Baekje, Silla, and Gaya (Kaya) emerged into the forefront of history, and even the Japanese Archipelago saw distinct political development as it came into deeper political ties with the Korean Peninsula.

Those which took the lead in international relations in Northeast

Asia at this time were Koguryŏ and Baekje, as well as the Former Yan and the Later Yan. Centering on these states, here I will examine the process of change in international relations in Northeast Asia. The political unrest at the center of Western Jin at the end of the 3rd century had significant effects not only on the provincial areas of Western Jin, but also on the various ethnic groups on its periphery, leading to major change in the Northeast Asian international order in the 4th century. In particular, such northern peoples as the Xiongnu and the Xianbei invaded northern China and there were rebellions within the Guanzhong region by the Di and Qiang, resulting in the rapid decline of Western Jin power. Taking advantage of the unsettled situation in the Central Plains and Liaodong, the Murong Xianbei expanded their power, seized Liaodong, and established the Former Yan.[1]

Koguryŏ also took an aggressive stance towards Chinese commanderies. Beginning with its offensive against the Xuantu commandery in 302, in 311 Koguryŏ seized the key base of Xi'anping linking Liaodong and Lelang (K. Nangnang) and in 313-314 it took possession of the Lelang and Daifang (K. Daebang) commanderies in the northeastern area of the Korean Peninsula.[2] In 315, Koguryŏ attacked Xuantu as part of an effort to intensify its advance into Liaodong, leading to the demise of Bianjun, the advance base for Chinese power in the east. This signified a change in the relations between the Chinese and the Dongyi to one of state-to-state diplomatic negotiations.[3]

By the time Koguryŏ had begun to intensify its efforts to advance

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1 See the following re 4th century changes in northeast Asia: Ji Baesun, *Jungse dongbuk a sa yeongu* (Iljogak, 1986); Kong Seokkoo, *Koguryŏ yeongyeok hwakjangsa yeongu*, Seogyeong munhwasa; Lee Kidong, "Koguryeosa palcheon ui hoegi roseo ui 4segi – Moyong 'Yeon' gwa ui hangjaeng eul'onghaeseo," Dongguk sahak 30 (1996); Yeo Hogyu, "4segi dongasia kukje jilseo wa Koguryŏ daeoe jeongchaek ui byeonhwa – dae Jeon Yeon gwan'gye reul jungsim euro," *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 36 (2000).

2 *Samguk sagi* Vol. 17 Koguryŏ bongi 5 Micheon wang 3rd year, 12th year, 14th year and 15th year.

3 Lim Kihwan, "3segi – 4segi cho Wi-Jin ui dongbang jeonggchaek," *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 36 (2000).

into Liaodong, however, the Former Yan had already established considerable strength there. This led to conflict between Koguryŏ and the Former Yan over Liaodong. In order to contain the Former Yan, Koguryŏ allied itself with Cui Bei, the governor of Pingzhou and with the Duan and Wuwen Xianbei in 319 and also sought to establish friendly relations with the Later Zhao in northern China. In response, the Former Yan sent an emissary to the Eastern Jin requesting a northern expedition to contain the Later Zhao, while Koguryŏ, too, communicated with the Eastern Jin in 336.

In order to secure its rear flank while it was engaged with the Later Zhao, the Former Yan launched an offensive against Koguryŏ and the Wuwen Xianbei. In a major attack of 342, the Former Yan took the Koguryŏ capital at Gungnaeseong (Kungnae-sŏng) and seized over 50,000 prisoners, including the king's mother and his consort. In 344 the Former Yan destroyed the Wuwen Xianbei, after which they also destroyed Buyeo (Puyŏ, C. Fuyu) located in Nong-an in 346. Having secured control over the eastern regions, the Former Yan then took advantage of chaos in the Later Zhao to destroy that kingdom in 352 and grasp control over northern China.[4]

In 357, the Former Yan conferred letters of investiture on Koguryŏ's King Gogugwon (Kogugwŏn) and returned the king's mother, Madame Chu, to Koguryŏ. After this there was no particular conflict between the Former Yan and Koguryŏ up to the demise of the Former Yan in 370. In other words, however each side may have felt about the other, there was no significant military clash between Koguryŏ and the Former Yan for nearly 30 years after Koguryŏ suffered the major defeat of 342. During those years, Koguryŏ was focused it efforts on building a base in the Pyeongyang (P'yŏngyang) region for an advance to the south.

4 Regarding the Former Yan's advance into the Central Plains and its transformation into an imperial state, see Ji Baesun, 1986, pp. 122-128.

It is important to note that the rise of Koguryŏ as a major power within the Korean Peninsula brought major change in the international order of Northeast Asia, including both the Korean Peninsula and Japan. As will be discussed later, this meant the reappearance of the old trade routes that had once linked Lelang and Jinhan, and Daifang and Mahan/Byeonhan (Pyŏnhan)/Wa and the rise of a new structure of interstate conflict that centered on Koguryŏ and Baekje.

On the other hand, there was also a change in the situation in northern China. In 370, the Former Qin destroyed the Former Yan and gained control over Liadong and Liaoxi. Koguryŏ, which had had repeated clashes with Baekje, entered into friendly relations with the Former Qin. This meant that Koguryŏ had a period of over 40 years, from 342 to 384, during which it had peaceful relations with powers in China. This allowed Koguryŏ to consolidate its control over northwestern Korea and, apparently, to prepare for its advance to the south. In the process, Koguryŏ maintained friendly relations with Silla, while engaging in continuous and fierce conflict with Baekje.

First, Koguryŏ actively sought to align itself with Silla. One good example of this is that when Silla sent emissaries to the Former Qin in 377 and 381, they were accompanied by Koguryŏ emissaries. Koguryŏ subsequently expanded its political influence over Silla. As seen in the Gwanggaeto (Kwanggaet'o) stele, Koguryŏ sent a large force of 50,000 to Silla at Silla's request when Silla was attacked by Gaya and the Wa. This meant that Silla came under Koguryŏ's control, as seen in Silseong and Nulji going to Koguryŏ as hostages and in Koguryŏ's intervention in their subsequent accession to the Silla throne. The fact that Koguryŏ forces were stationed in the Silla capital indicates the extent to which the relationship between the two kingdoms had become one of Silla's subservience to Koguryŏ. This relationship appears to have lasted until Silla entered into an alliance with Baekje in the 430s. This friendly relationship between Koguryŏ and Silla is seen as part of Koguryŏ's

strategy to contain the allied forces of Baekje, Gaya, and the Wa.[5]

On the other hand, Baekje began to develop its diplomatic activities in the 360s.[6]

The most important elements of Baekje's foreign relations during the reign of King Geunchogo (Kŭnch'ogo) were its relations with Gaya and the Wa. Baekje communicated with Gaya in 361 and with the Wa in 369. This establishment of relations should be understood as the reestablishment by Baekje in the mid-4th century of the trade network that had been first established during the early Western Jin but had been cut off by the chaos in the Western Jin and the disturbances that arose in northern China and Liaodong. In other words, during the reign of King Geunchogo in the mid 4th century, Baekje had restored the old trade network linking the southerwestern and southern coasts of Korea and the Wa.[7]

The restoration of this trade network and these international relations formed the background to the rapid growth of Baekje under King Geunchogo. This trade network and military/political alliance built by Baekje lasted until the first half of the 5th century, as is revealed by the King Gwanggaeto stele.

Furthermore, Baekje established relations with the Eastern Jin, which provided King Geunchogo with letters of investiture. It appears, however, that the official relations between Baekje and the Eastern Jin were largely ceremonial, limited to Baekje sending emissaries and

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5 Jeon Deokjae, "4segi gukje gwangye ui jaepyeon gwa Silla ui daeeung," *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 36 (2000).

6 See the following re Baekje's 4th century foreign relations: Kim Taesik, "Baekje ui Gaya jiyeok gwangyesa: gyoseop gwa jeongbok," *Baekje ui chungang gwa jibang* (1997); Pak Sunbal, "Hanseong Baekje ui daeoe gwangye," *Baekje yeongu* 30, (1999); Kang Jonghoon, 2001, "4segi Baekje-Wae gwangye ui seongnip gwa keu baegyeong," *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 40; Lim Kihwan, "Hanseong-gi Baekje ui daeoe jeongchaek," *Hanseong-gi Baekje ui mullyu siseutem gwa daeoe gyoseop* (Hansindae haksurwon, 2004).

7 This situation is explained by the record of the dispatch of Wa forces to the Korean Peninsula in *Nihon shoki* Jinggo Kogoki year 49.

receiving letters of investiture when a new king took the throne. Simply put, Baekje does not seem to have put much effort into its relations with the Later Jin. Rather, it appears that Baekje was focused primarily on its relations with Gaya and the Wa.[8]

On the other hand, there was another change of dynasties in northern China. After the Former Qin failed into its attempt to conquer the Eastern Jin, it collapsed and the Later Yan occupied northern China, Liaoxi, and Liaodong. During the change from Former Qin to Later Yan, Koguryŏ also attempted to advance into Liaodong, leading to continued clashes with the Later Yan. In particular, after the ascension of King Gwanggaeto Koguryŏ sought stability on its southern front as a condition for pursuing complete control over Liaodong.

After stabilizing its southern front with repeated victories over Baekje during the early part of Gwanggaeto's reign, Koguryŏ set forth to attack the Later Yan in Liaodong. The result was that Koguryŏ appears to have gained control over all the major strategic bases in Liaodong after 402. The war between the two states came to an end after a coup d'etat in the Later Yan in 407 that resulted in the demise of the Murong royal family and the establishment of the Northern Yan. After that, the front along the Liao River stabilized and Koguryŏ enjoyed complete control over the Liaodong region.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the contents of the Gwanggaeto stele show us the opposition between the two great trade networks/military and political alliances constructed by Koguryŏ and Baekje. In other words, it was the standoff between Koguryŏ and Silla on one side and Baekje, Gaya, and the Wa on the other.

The historical origins of these two great axes can be traced back to the trade networks constructed during the Later Han, Wei, and Jin years: the overland route that linked Lelang with Jinhan (Chinhan) and the

8 Lim Kihwan, "Hanseong-gi Baekje ui daeoe jeongchaek" (2004).

maritime route that linked Daifang, Mahan, Byeonhan, and the Wa. These were, of course, trade networks that had been built with China as the base and with Lelang and Daifang as intermediaries, but their reconstruction in the 4th century by Koguryŏ and Baekje was done with each of those two kingdoms as base or central axis for what were both trade networks and military and political alliances.[9]

Even though these two trade networks, which had been established as complementary routes centered on Lelang and Daifang as part of China's policy toward the Dongyi, were maintained up until the early 4th century, after the demise of Lelang and Daifang they now became two mutually hostile axes as a consequence of the growth of Koguryŏ and Baekje and of their seizure of the trade routes. This indicates the historical significance of the reordering of the Northeast Asian international order brought by the growth of the states of Koguryŏ and Baekje in the mid- and late 4th century.

2. The International Situation in Northeast Asia in the 5th and 6th Centuries

The establishment of Liu Song in southern China in 420, the relocation of Koguryŏ's capital to Pyeongyang in 427, the formation of an alliance between Silla and Baekje in 433-34, and the 439 unification of northern China by the Northern Wei were all events that symbolized new change in the international situation of Northeast Asia. The Northern Wei's 439 conquest of the Northern Liang and its establishment of unified rule over northern China brought to an end the 130-year long Sixteen Kingdoms era in China. With the rise of the Northern Wei as the strongest power, the various neighboring states struggling against the Northern Wei began

9 Lim Kihwan, "3segi~4segi cho Wi-Chin ui dongbang jeongchaek," *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 36 (2000).

to seek a way to survive within the new international situation. As a result, the states surrounding the Northern Wei – Liu Song on the south, the Rouran on the north, the Tuyuhun on the west, and Koguryŏ on the east – sought to ally with each other to encircle the Northern Wei and keep it in check, even as they formed their own relations, friendly or hostile, with the Northern Wei.[10] It was the power relations between these various states that determined the nature of international relations in Northeast Asia at that time, including the foreign relations of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, which developed in ways that were partially influenced by the larger Northeast Asian situation.

At that time, the primary axes of hostility among these states were the Northern Wei versus the Southern Dynasties and the Northern Wei versus the Rouran. Accordingly, the Southern Dynasties and the Rouran joined together to threaten the Northern Wei from the south and the north. Both the Northern Wei and the Southern Dynasties considered themselves to be the inheritors of Chinese civilization and both sought to reunify China, leading to continuous fierce fighting. The reason why the Northern Wei, the strongest state, was unable to conquer southern China was the threat from the Rouran on the north. The rise of the Rouran was marked by a continuing confrontation with the Northern Wei as the Rouran sought to get out from under Northern Wei control. Hence there were frequent clashes between the two states. In particular, the Northern Wei repeatedly launched campaigns with considerable success against the Rouran as a precondition of its southern strategy. Nonetheless, the threat from the Southern Dynasties prevented the Northern Wei from fully attaining its goals. Thus a balance of power was achieved among these three states that permitted stable maintenance of the international order of the 5th century Northeast Asia.

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10 See Noh Taedon, "5~6segi dongasia ui gugje jeongse wa Koguryŏ ui daeoe gwangye," *Dongbang hakji* 44 (1984).

Koguryŏ, which had built a separate sphere of power for itself within Northeast Asia under these international circumstances, formed equal relationships with these three states and contributed to the maintenance of the balance of power in East Asia. Of course the basic direction of Koguryŏ's foreign policy was first and foremost negotiation with and containment of the powerful Northern Wei with which it shared a border.

The Northern Wei, having brought northern China under its control, gathered its forces and began to pressure the Northern Yan in the Liaoxi area. In response to the Northern Wei's eastward advance, Koguryŏ initially sent an emissary in 435 and accepted letters of investiture from the Northern Wei, thereby opening diplomatic relations. However, once the Northern Yan, which whom Koguryŏ had had comparatively good relations, began to be pressured by the Northern Wei, Koguryŏ felt a major threat and supported the Northern Yan, thus adopting active measures against the Northern Wei. When the Northern Wei army besieged the Northern Yan capital at Holong-cheng, Koguryŏ sent a large force to face off against the Northern Wei before returning to Koguryŏ with the Northern Yan King Feng Hong and large numbers of his subjects. Although relations between Koguryŏ and the Northern Wei were extremely tense at that time, the threat from the Ruoran meant that the Northern Wei had to adopt a passive stance toward Koguryŏ and there was no military clash.

Nonetheless, Koguryŏ was not in a position to maintain indefinitely relations of confrontation with the powerful Northern Wei. In particular, after Koguryŏ moved its capital to Pyeongyang in 427, it began to focus on a southern advance. Due to that, Koguryŏ needed to secure its western frontier, so it linked with the Liu Song and the Rouran to contain the Northern Wei while also making direct efforts to improve its relations with the Northern Wei.

Koguryŏ's efforts notwithstanding, relations between the two states were not always friendly and smooth. When Koguryŏ refused a Northern

Wei request for a royal marriage in 466, relations turned temporarily cool. Also, when the Wuji, with whom Koguryŏ had had frequent disputes, began to make contacts with the Northern Wei, Koguryŏ showed a very sensitive response.

The Northern Wei faced a similar situation. The Northern Wei openly expressed its unhappiness when Koguryŏ established relations with the Liu Song and the Northern Wei also issued warnings when Koguryŏ and the Rouron joined forces to conquer and divide among themselves the Didouyu area of Inner Mongolia. The two states regarded each other as dormant threats and there were no few instances when their interests came into conflict.

However, even in a situation where both states confronted each other militarily, they did not wish to intensify the conflict. In particular, when Koguryŏ sought to ally itself with the Northern Wei's enemies in the Southern Dynasties, and when surrounded by enemies the Rouran, the Northern Wei, sought to avoid conflict with Koguryŏ. Accordingly, each state recognized the other's sphere of power. Through frequent exchanges of envoys and trade, the two countries were able to maintain the friendliest among the various states of Northeast Asia at that time.

Koguryŏ, as mentioned above, entered into relations with the Southern Dynasties as part of its policy to contain the Northern Wei. Although the issue of Koguryŏ's support for the Northern Yan King Feng Hong resulted in an instance of military conflict with the Liu Song, both soon restored good relations because of the threat from the Northern Wei. Even after Koguryŏ established improved relations with the Northern Wei, it continued to have contact with the Southern Dynasties as part of its policy to contain the Northern Wei.

We cannot be sure just when Koguryŏ and the Rouran began to make contact. We can, however, tell that the two states had good relations at the time when, in 479, the two joined forces to conquer and divide the Didouyu region.

Under these international conditions of Northeast Asia, Koguryŏ

built its own separate sphere of power and established a southern advance policy while rejecting the influence of powers in China and the nomads of the northern regions. Koguryŏ mobilized some of the Khitan and Malgal in the outer fringes of its domain to occupy part of Didouyu and also supplied iron to Nashiwei, thus extending its influence to the northeastern region of Inner Mongolia. Furthermore, within the Korean Peninsula, Koguryŏ pursued its southern advance policy to put pressure on Baekje, occupying the north central stretch of the Korean Peninsula and even exercising broad political and military influence on Silla.[11] It was this international situation in East Asia that provided the background for the formation in Koguryŏ of a distinctively Koguryŏ-centered view of the world.[12]

Although Baekje had had diplomatic relations with the Southern Dynasties from the time of Liu Song, this was not a strategy for containing Koguryŏ. From the Southern Dynasties' point of view, Koguryŏ represented a much more useful diplomatic partner than Baekje because the Southern Dynasties were intent on containing the Northern Wei. From the perspective of keeping Northern Wei in check, the diplomatic interests of Koguryŏ and the Southern Dynasties coincided because Koguryŏ also needed the Chinese Southern Dynasties to contain the Northern Wei. Thus the powers in China were not in a position to intervene in the international relations of Northeast Asia and the Three Kingdoms in the Korean Peninsula.

Within the Korean Peninsula, the alliance of Baekje and Silla became a major variable in the international state of affairs. Due to Koguryŏ's southern advance, the situation in the Gaya region changed with the collapse of Geumgwan Gaya (Kŭmgwan Kaya). After 421,

11 Regarding the Three Kingdoms' foreign relations at this time, see Noh Choongkook, "Koguryŏ-Baekje-Silla sai ui yeokgwangye e daehan il gochal," *Dongbang hakji* 28 (1981).

12 See Noh Taedon, "5segi geumseongmun e boineun Koguryŏin ui cheonha gwan," *Hanguk saron* 19 (1988).

following the establishment of direct contact between Wa and Liu Song, the trade network and the alliance structure that had been centered on Baekje fell apart. In light of this, Baekje focused on forming an alliance with Silla. Since Silla was also concentrating its efforts to free itself from Koguryŏ's sphere of power, it readily entered into alliance with Baekje. As the threat of Koguryŏ's military southern advance grew, the Silla-Baekje alliance developed into a military alliance.[13]

The Silla-Baekje alliance of 434 forced the breakup of the confrontation between the previously existing axes of the Baekje-Gaya-Wa alliance and the Koguryŏ-Silla alliance and became the occasion for a new restructuring of the international order. This shows that at this point the factors that defined the international order now were gradually changing since the Silla-Baekje alliance formed not due to trade issues, but rather on the grounds of purely political and military factors. Hence the demise of the previous Koguryŏ – Baekje-centered trade networks and alliance structures fell apart, creating conditions favorable for the development of the Silla and Wa states. On the other hand, as the Baekje-Gaya-Wa and Koguryŏ-Silla trading networks collapsed, Gaya, Wa, and Silla had to find new trade networks or routes of contact. Under these conditions, Gaya, located at the geographic center of the trade network, came under pressure not only from Baekje but Silla and Wa as well, and in the 5th century it underwent drastic political change.

The international order of East Asia, which had been relatively stable in the 5th century, began to change gradually in the 6th century. In 534, the Northern Wei split into the Eastern Wei and the Western Wei. In 550, the Northern Qi replaced the Eastern Wei, while the Western Wei fell in 557, followed by the rise of the Northern Zhou. Subsequently, the Northern Qi and the Northern Zhou, who shared a border along the Yellow River, engaged in strife with each other. Also, in southern China

13 Lim Kihwan, "Hanseong-gi Baekje ui daeoe jeongchaek" (2004).

the Liang fell and was replaced by the Chen. Thus mainland China once again found itself with a balance of power among three kingdoms: the Northern Qi, the Northern Zhou, and the Chen.

On the other hand, the northern Rouran, taking advantage of the division of the Northern Wei, gradually grew stronger. The Northern Qi and the Northern Zhou found themselves attempting to use the Rouran to contain each other, thus opening the way for the Rouran to expand their own power.

In the mid-6th century, there was a change of power in the Mongol plateau. This was the rise of the Tujue who defeated the Rouran in 552 and emerged as the new master of Mongolia. The Tujue pushed eastward to exert their power over the Qidan and the Malgal and even transgressed the border of Koguryŏ, leading to fierce confrontation between the Tujue and Koguryŏ.[14]

At the same time, the situation also changed in the Korean Peninsula. In 551, Koguryŏ lost the Han River basin to the allied forces of Silla and Baekje, who had acted after learning of internal dissension within Koguryŏ. This constituted a serious threat to Koguryŏ's dominant position in the peninsula. As mentioned above, at this time Koguryŏ also faced the eastward advance of the Tujue while simultaneously dealing with a new situation in northern China: the Northern Wei, with whom Koguryŏ had good relations, disappeared, replaced by the new kingdoms of the Northern Qi and the Northern Zhou.

After completing its conquest of Kumoxi in 552, the Northern Qi sent an emissary to Koguryŏ to bring back 5,000 households that had gone to Koguryŏ to escape the chaos of the final years of the Northern Wei. The following year, the Northern Qi carried out a large scale expedition against the Qidan. Koguryŏ felt a large threat from the

14 Regarding the relations between Koguryŏ and the Tujue, see the following: Noh Taedon, "Koguryŏ ui Hanguk yuyeok sangsil ui wonin e daehayeo," *Hanguksa yeongu* 13 (1976); Lee Yongbeom, "Koguryŏ ui Yoseo jinchul gwa Dolgwol," *Sahak yeongu* 4 (1959).

Northern Qi's demonstration of military power in the Liaohai (Liaoning) region.

In order to deal with the crisis presented by these changes in the Korean Peninsula and the Chinese mainland, Koguryŏ overcame its internal divisions and set out to respond actively to the external threats from both north and south. To the north, it impeded the eastward advance of the Tujue and was able to maintain the old status quo without much change. In particular, even though control over the Qidan and the Malgal in the Liaohai area was the main issue of contention between Koguryŏ and the Tujue, Koguryŏ was able strengthen its control over the Qidan and the Malgal while advancing actively into the Liaohai region. Koguryŏ was also able to handle tensions with the Northern Zhou by actively pursuing an alliance with the Chen in southern China.

At the same time, Koguryŏ was also able to gain some breathing room on the Korean Peninsula. In 553, Silla suddenly attacked the Baekje forces that had recovered the Han River basin and gained sole control over that area. In the following year, Silla inflicted a major defeat on Baekje at the battle of Gwansanseong (Kwansan-sŏng) and killed Baekje's King Seong (Sŏng). These events marked the end of the alliance between Silla and Baekje. The subsequent fierce fighting between Silla and Baekje meant that Koguryŏ's southern borders were now relatively secure.[15]

Silla and Baekje also sought new ways to respond to these changes in the international situation of the mid-6th century. Baekje, which had traditionally had close diplomatic ties with the Southern Dynasties, broke with past practice and established ties with the Northern Qi in 570 and the Northern Zhou in 577. This appears to have been a strategic move to use the Northern Qi and the Northern Zhou, who – unlike the Northern Wei – had confrontational relations with Koguryŏ, to contain Koguryŏ.

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15 Regarding the interstate relations among the Three Kingdoms, see Noh Choongkook, 1981.

On the other hand, Silla, who now controlled the Han River basin and thus had direct access to the Yellow Sea, developed diplomatic activities with various states in China. At this time, Silla established diplomatic relations with the Northern Qi and even more active relations with Chen in southern China. This was probably a diplomatic policy intended to contain Baekje.

The international order of Northeast Asia became more pluralistic with the growth of Silla and Wa in addition to Koguryŏ and Baekje. The significance of the Chinese tributary system in Northeast Asia also grew in relation to the changes occurring at the time. Furthermore, in the 5th -6th centuries the international relationships of Manchuria, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan unfolded at a distance from the international power relationships of the Chinese Southern and Northern Dynasties and the northern nomadic peoples. Of course, this is not to say that the two power regions were totally unrelated, but rather that the ability of each to effect change in the other was relatively weak. And the tributary system emerged as the diplomatic form that mediated contact among the various states of the two regions.

Koguryŏ, while entering into negotiations with the Northern Wei which had unified northern China, also opened diplomatic relations with the Southern Dynasties as a diplomatic strategy to contain the Northern Wei. The Northern Wei, hoping to secure its rear, also maintained friendly relations with Koguryŏ. The Chinese Southern Dynasties shared interests with Koguryŏ in containing the Northern Wei. Baekje also engaged in contact with the Southern Dynasties, but Baekje developed a completely different relationship with the Southern Dynasties from that of Koguryŏ. Unlike Koguryŏ's approach, Baekje strategy focused efforts on strengthening its relationship with Wa and Silla as part of its Koguryŏ policy. In addition, by the 5th century the Wa also began to enter into relations with the Southern Dynasties independent of Baekje. After the middle of the 5th century, the international order of Northeast Asia had become more pluralistic with the growth of Silla, Gaya, and the Wa, and

this in turn imbued the Chinese tributary system with greater significance.

Although the diplomatic form known as the tributary system which encompassed Koguryŏ, Baekje, and various other states in Northeast Asia appears as a universal ideal, in practice it operated on many different levels of hierarchy and content. The real function of conferring titles or receiving tribute varied from situation to situation, and accordingly each party's understanding of the tributary relationship also differed. The tributary diplomacy of the Southern and Northern Dynasties developed with this difference in perception, but the concrete content of the system was the recognition by the Southern and Northern Dynasties of the independent and separate nature of the kingdoms that received letters of investiture. In fact, considering the varied contents and differences in the tributary system of the Northern and Southern Dynasties era, it is difficult to accept the view that the international relations of East Asia in that era constituted one "tributary system." It can be said that the Southern and Northern Dynasties period was a time when the various neighboring tributary states had a high degree of self-determination due to the division of the Central Plains into a number of competing states.[16]

3. Change in the Northeast Asian International Situation in the 7th Century

The reunification of China by the Sui and the Tang brought major change to the international situation in Northeast Asia.[17] The Korean Peninsula's

16 See Lim Kihwan, "Nambukjogi hanjung chaekbong jogong gwangye ui seonggyeok," *Hanguk godaesa yeongu* 32 (2003).

17 See the following for examinations of historical research on the 7th century change in the Northeast Asia international situation: Noh Choongkook, "Koguryŏ daeoe gwangyesa yeongu ui hyeonhwang gwa gwaje," *Dongbang hakji* 49 (1985); Kando Suichi, "Josho" in *Sui-To no kokusai chitsujo to to ajia* (Meicho kankokai, 2001).

Baekje and Silla were drawn into the orbit of the Sui and Tang empires. This linkage with Sui and Tang made it more possible for the Central Plains to intervene in the conflicts among the Three Kingdoms. The submission of the northern nomadic peoples to the Sui and Tang also made it more likely that China would be able to advance to the east.

The 588 unification of China by the Sui sent huge waves throughout the international order. That was because if a unified China sought to project its great power outside its borders, that would bring major change to the pluralistic system that had prevailed up to that time. In 560 the Sui subjugated Tuyuhun, the key base that controlled the Silk Road in the western region. Also, the Sui's greatest antagonist, the Tujue of the northern plains, split into the Western and Eastern Tujue in 583, with the Eastern Tujue submitting to the Sui in 599.

At the same time, Baekje and Silla were drawn into the orbit of the Sui empire and linked themselves with the Sui, thus creating conditions that enhanced the likelihood of Chinese intervention in the competition among the Three Kingdoms of Korea. In particular, Silla, in response to the intensification of Koguryŏ's offensive against itself, became active in its contacts with the Sui, as seen in the request for Sui military assistance which Silla sent in 611.

The Sui unification of China meant the end of the Koguryŏ diplomatic strategy that had been based on the division of China between the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Koguryŏ immediately began to prepare for an invasion from the Sui while also entering into negotiations to reopen traditional tributary diplomatic relations. However, the Sui, as the power that had reunified China, demanded a new international order. This can be seen in the titles the Sui bestowed on its neighboring states immediately after its founding.

King Pyeongwon (P'yŏngwŏn) of Koguryŏ was given the title "Grand General and Duke of Liaodong" and King Wideok (Widŏk) of Baekje was given the title of "Preceptor of Shangkai-fu and Duke of Daifang." The titles of investiture that the Sui gave to Baekje and

Koguryŏ were nothing more than what it gave to its own merit subjects. There were nothing like the titles such as Protectorate General indicating the status and scope of military control that had routinely been given out during the Southern and Northern Dynasties period; in particular, Koguryŏ did not receive such titles as the Dongyi jiaowei (K. Dongi Gyowi : Guardian of the Dongyi) that symbolized its independent sphere of power.[18] This suggests the likelihood that the nature of the tributary system, which from the 4th century had featured mutual recognition of each state's actual autonomy, had undergone a major transformation. This transformation was the establishment of a unitary international system centered on China.

Thus the world order that the Sui as a unified empire sought to achieve through the forms of the tributary system was notably different than the kind of tributary relations that Koguryŏ had had with other states in China. It was, therefore, predictable that there would be a direct ideological collision between Koguryŏ and the Sui.

On the other hand, Koguryŏ was seeking to restore its hegemony and its sphere of power in Northeast Asia. Once the power of the Tujue diminished after it was attacked by the Sui, Koguryŏ sought to expand its influence over the Qidan and Malgal in Liaohai and also intensified its offensive against Silla in order to recover the Han River basin. Koguryŏ's efforts to extend its control over Liaohai increased the likelihood of conflict between Koguryŏ and the Sui. That the Liaohai region became the tinderbox of Northeast Asia was the consequence of the mid-6th century changes in the international order. In particular, the increase of the Sui's influence in the Liaohai region resulted in the defection of the Songmal (C. Sumo) Malgal and the Khitans, who had been under Koguryŏ rule, to the Sui sometime around 584-586.

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18 See Yeo Hogyu, "6segi mal 7segi cho dong asia gugje jilseo wa Koguryŏ ui daeoe jeongchaek ui byeonhwa," *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil* 46 (2002).

This contest over control of the Malgal and Qitan led to repeated small scale military clashes between Koguryŏ and the Sui. The 598 Koguryŏ attack in the Liaoxi region arose as part of this process. On the one hand, Koguryŏ was attempting to restore the sphere of power it had enjoyed in the 5th and 6th centuries while employing a wide range of strategies in order to counter the threat posed by the Sui. One was a military offensive against Silla and Baekje in the Korean Peninsula. Another was making contacts with the Tujue and the Wa to construct an alliance against the Sui. Emperor Yang of the Sui was aware of Koguryŏ's diplomatic strategy and set out to conquer Koguryŏ. All of his annual expeditions against Koguryŏ between 612 and 614 ended in failure; indeed the costs of those expeditions helped precipitate the fall of the Sui.

The Sui came to an end in 618. The Tang, which succeeded in reunifying China in 628, faced the task of reconstructing the China-centered world order that had collapsed with the demise of the Sui. It first moved against the Tujue, who constituted the greatest threat, and broke up the Tujue in 630. The Tang then turned its attention to the west, conquering the Tuyuhun in a large scale 634 expedition and the Gaochang kingdom in 640, thereby establishing complete control over the western region. In 641, the Tang even conquered the Syr Tardus who had arisen in place of the Tujue in the northwest, thus achieving security in both the west and the north.

Koguryŏ and the Tang had maintained comparatively good relations after the founding of the Tang, but relations gradually became strained after the Tang conquest of the Tujue. In 631, the Tang destroyed Koguryŏ's Gyeonggwan. In response, Koguryŏ built a long wall along the Liao River from Buyeoseong (Puyŏ-sŏng) to the Gulf of Bohai. Furthermore, for some time there were no diplomatic contacts between Koguryŏ and the Tang. In this context, we can see that the construction of the long wall was related to the contest between Koguryŏ and the Tang over control of

the Qidan and Malgal.[19] After pacifying the west in 641, the Tang set out in earnest to defeat Koguryŏ.

The Tang opened operations against Koguryŏ in an expedition led personally by Emperor Taizong. The Tang was unable to advance past Liaodong and turned back. At that time, Koguryŏ attempted to ally itself with the Syr Tardus in the Tang's rear.[20]

At the same time, there was yet another change in the international situation arising out of change in the power relations on the Korean Peninsula. Baekje adopted a pro-Koguryŏ stance and the two states launched a major offensive against Silla. Faced with this crisis, Silla sought to ally itself with the Tang. The Tang was also interested in establishing ties with Silla in order to deal with Koguryŏ. As a result, the two states entered into an alliance for the conquest of Koguryŏ and Baekje. The combined Silla-Tang forces decided to deal with Baekje first and destroyed that kingdom in 660. They then turned their power against Koguryŏ, which they conquered in 668.[21]

The fall of Koguryŏ led to an intensified confrontation between Silla and Tang. Mistrust between the two states rose to an extreme around the 7th month of 670 as a consequence of differences in their attitudes towards the forces seeking to restore Baekje and this led to full-scale war between Silla and Tang. It appears that changes arising in the region west of Tang closely related to Silla's offensive against the Tang and the end of the Silla-Tang war in 676.

As outlined above, the Central Plains' deep intervention brought an

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19 Yeo Hogyu, "Koguryŏ Cheolli Jangseong ui gyeongno wa chukseong baegyeong," *Guksagwan nonchong* 91 (2000), pp. 190-191.

20 Noh Taedon, "Koguryŏ-Balhaein gwa naeryuk asia jumin gwa ui gyoseop e daehan il gochal," *Taedong munhwa yeongu* 23 (1989), p. 244.

21 For a critical discussion of the theory that internal divisions led to the demise of Koguryŏ and of the international background thereof, see Kim Youngha, "Koguryŏ naebun ui gukje jeok baegyeong-Tang ui dangye jeok jeollyak byeonhwa wa gwallyeon hayeo," *Hanguksa yeongu* 110 (2000).

end to the separate sphere of international relations in Northeast Asia as the region now became incorporated into the larger flow of changing power spreading over the whole of East Asia. This resulted in an unprecedented increase in the frequency and intensity of conflict between China and Koguryŏ, and China and various other powers in Northeast Asia in the 7th century.[22]

Although it might be said that Northeast Asia, the Central Plains and the northern areas became more closely linked than before, we can see that the war between Koguryŏ and the Sui was confined only to those two states and did not involve anyone else. We do, however, need to consider how the Sui's subjugation of neighboring powers such as the Tujue Turks and the Tuyuhun and its persistent attacks on Koguryŏ may have influenced other states in the region. In other words, the influence of the Tuyuhun, Koguryŏ, and the Turks, who had been building their own spheres of power since the 5th century, grew weaker while the powers surrounding them stood ready to take advantage of the situation and develop. In other words, there was a great increase in the factors of change in the international order of East Asia.

In the case of the Korean Peninsula, the weakening of Koguryŏ's hegemony and Silla's development intensely accelerated the fighting among the Three Kingdoms, and with the passage of time the likelihood of Chinese intervention in the conflict among the Three Kingdoms increased. In other words, the distinction the Chinese made between hostile and friendly powers provided the basis for a possible restructuring of the international order that eventually occurred during the Tang era. In the case of the Tujue, their power weakened early due to internal divisions and Sui attacks; even though they momentarily restored their power immediately after the Sui's collapse, they could not match the

22 Lim Kihwan, "7segi dongbuk asia gukje jilseo ui byeondong gwa jeonjaeng," *Jeonjaeng gwa dongbuk asia ui gukje jilseo* (Iljogak, 2006).

power of the Rouran who had once been strong enough to threaten the Central Plains from the north.

The decline of Tujue and Koguryŏ power gave room for the Khitan, Malgal, and various other ethnic groups to grow and develop in the Liaohai region, and the eventual destruction of Koguryŏ accelerated the growth of the Khitan and Malgal. This led to great change in the historical activities of these ethnic groups.

Geographically removed by one step from the changes in the political order in Northeast Asia, the Wa had traditionally relied on Baekje for its primary contacts with the mainland. However after Sui appeared on the scene, new diplomatic relations between Koguryŏ and Wa brought them closer, and the probability of Wa being connected with the changes in the political situation of the Korean Peninsula increased. A good illustration of this appears in the fact that, although the Wa could have kept their distance from the war, immediately after Baekje's collapse, in 663 they sent a large-scale force to join the battle at Baekchon (Paekch'on) River.

In this way, Silla, Baekje, and Wa, as well as various neighboring entities such as the Khitan and the Malgal, grew and developed. The changes in their international position resulted in a different aspect that appeared during the process of the war between Koguryŏ and Tang. This new aspect was a great expansion in the number of actors participating in the war. Although the basic axis of this war originally was made up of the Tang and Koguryŏ, Tang was able to mobilize a large force for war by mobilizing the Tujue and the Khitan. Additionally, Silla made itself a major player even before the conquest of Baekje, thus increasing the number of actors and changing the fundamental nature of the wars that had once been confined just to Koguryŏ and the Sui.

On the other hand, these changes in the international situation brought the deepening of power relations among the various states centered on the Tang. In other words it can be said that there was an intensification of foreign strategies and wars unfolding across the whole

of East Asia. For example, although Koguryŏ did not have an aggressive strategy to build alliances to contain and resist Sui and Tang, it did make some attempts to create alliances with the states of the northern nomads and Central Asian peoples.[23] In 607, Koguryŏ made an attempt to work with the Tujue which Sui Emperor Yangdi used as a pretext for invasion and in 645, Koguryŏ's Syr Tardush allies attacked Tang's rear. On the other hand, after the Tang brought the troublesome Tujue and Syr Tardush under its control, it used them to attack other hostile powers.[24] This strategy, which can be called a policy of "using the barbarians to control the barbarians," was also a consequence of the growing interconnectedness among the various states in East Asia at the time.

The situations in the north and west of the Tang also directly and indirectly influenced the Tang's wars against Koguryŏ and Silla. In particular, Silla's offensive of 670, after the collapse of Koguryŏ and Baekje, closely related to the change in the situation of the states to the west of China. While Tang had been preoccupied with military affairs in the Korean Peninsula, between 660 and 670 its hold on the western states and the north region grew weaker, giving rise to the development of the Tibetans and the reemergence of the Tujue. In addition, when the war situation to the west of China became pressing, Tang's military turned its main force to the west giving Silla and Koguryŏ refugees room to prepare for a war against Tang. It can be said that the cessation of the Silla-Tang war in 676, the urgent war with the Tibetans after 676, and the revival of the Western Tujue in alliance with the Tibetans significantly framed developments in the international order. Disorder in the northern region and the west continued for some time afterward, and again

23 Noh Taedon, "Koguryŏ-Balhaein gwa naeryuk asia jumin gwa ui gyoseop e daehan il gochal," (1989).

24 For example, in 630 the Tang allied itself with the Syr Tardush to carry out a successful conquest of the Eastern Tujue and in 646 it joined forces with the Uighurs to destroy the Syr Tardush. Also, the Tang used the Tiele to quell an Eastern Tujue rebellion. And the Tang allied itself with Silla to defeat Baekje in 660 and Koguryŏ in 668.

influenced Northeast Asia, as can be seen in events that occurred in the final years of the 7th century. In 696, Malgal and Koguryŏ refugees, taking advantage of a revolt by the Khitan Li Jinzhong in the northeast, broke away and established Balhae in 698.

Conclusion

The international state of affairs that emerged by the 7th century in Northeast Asia represented change along two different axes. One was the war that erupted between Koguryŏ and the unified Chinese states of Sui and Tang over control of Northeast Asia. The other was the war between the Three Kingdoms in the Korean Peninsula. Although these two axes had different structures and natures, they gradually converged into one axis with Koguryŏ being the common denominator as the Sui and Tang pursued a policy of building a China-centered international order. This was realized under the Tang, so it can be said that the war between Koguryŏ and Tang and Silla's war of unification unfolded as part of the creation of such a China-centered international order.

As a result, when the reshuffling of power ended in the Korean Peninsula in 680, the political situation of East Asia featured anti-Tang sentiment among the increasingly powerful Tibetans in the western regions, and among the Eastern Tujue as they reemerged in the north. By contrast, in Northeast Asia, Silla re-established friendly relations with the Tang and the two states remained on a friendly basis thereafter, while Japan, which had adopted the Tang legal codes, also adopted a pro-Tang position. For a time Balhae confronted the Tang, but came to maintain peaceful relations with the Tang and actively adopted Tang culture. The way in which these various northeastern states clung to a pro-Tang attitude represents but one consequence of Koguryŏ's collapse after consistent hostility toward the Sui and the Tang.