Koguryo: Kingdom or Empire?

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The emergence of the empire and the persistence of the "imperial system" that lasted for two centuries represent a unique phase in the political development of ancient Korea. As an empire is an entity whose status is based not on the title of a monarch (that is, emperor) but the creation of an international hierarchy centered upon itself, it will provide powerful rebuttal to the claim that Korea is simply a constituent of the dominant Sinitic civilization, as well as those fixated on monarchical titles that refuse to understand that an empire is a political entity with certain defining features.

It should be noted, however, that the formation of states and empires has much to do with expansion and conquest. Because an ordinary state and an empire are different entities, their policies and strategic perspectives will be different, and empires in Korean history were not exceptions to this general rule. Empires rise, thrive, and inevitably decline. The purpose of this paper is to illuminate how this process unfolded in the ancient Korean empire of Koguryo.

Keywords: Empire, Koguryo, State formation, Three Kingdoms of Korea, Warfare, Gwanggaeto, Jangsu

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Foreword

Sinocentrism, which dominated political and historical thinking in East Asia, has created a singular worldview—a regional political hierarchy with China, or at least large political entities based in modern Chinese territory, at the top. Other states or non-state entities (chiefdoms, tribes) were bound to the Chinese state in a tributary or suzerain relationship, in acknowledgment of China's military and cultural superiority. While such a worldview took a hit with China's defeat to the western powers and its subsequent fall to the status of what Fukuzawa Yukichi would call "the sick man of Asia," China's dominance over East Asia has long been accepted as a historical axiom.

Chinese preeminence in East Asia can also be translated in modern political terminology as "imperial dominance," where a state has such power and achieved a power disparity so great that it creates a concentric force that realigns the region, where the dominant power becomes center with other states and entities forming the periphery (or frontier) surrounding the imperial metropole from which political, economic, and

cultural power radiate outward.

By virtue of its coexistence with China in the political-cultural space known as East Asia, the history of Korea is not commonly associated with anything "imperial." This is probably due to a tendency to equate "empires" as a certain set of stereotypical images—vast territories, emperors, splendid imperial capitals, stolid imperial troopers battling wild barbarians, tributary relationships and so on; things that China is thought to have possessed, but not the dynasties that appeared in Korean history.

But relying on images to describe and define empires is a clear example of allowing the tail to wag the dog. It is the existence of empires that gave rise to those images, not the other way around. Instead of relying on images, this paper will borrow from political science a more precise definition that describes "empires" as political entities that have extended centralized power over vast territories encompassing a multitude of ethnicities, and organized themselves in a manner conducive to maintaining that control over great distances. Utilizing that definition allows greater latitude in determining which states were empires and it also reveals the existence, in Korean history, of a state that satisfies the conditions to be considered an imperial power: Koguryo.

I. The Question of Empire: What are Not Empires?

In order to prove that Koguryo was an imperial power, it goes without saying that we must first elaborate on what an empire is. "Empire" is not a random term ascribed to a seemingly powerful country, but rather possesses certain features. However, there are notions and misconceptions that must be dispelled regarding empires before moving on to the factors that actually qualify a state as one. In other words, understanding what are not empires is an essential precondition to recognizing what are empires. Listed below are types of countries that are often equated with empires, but fail to justify the rigorous definition of imperial status.

1. A state with an "emperor" as sovereign
2. Large territorial state
3. An "imperialist" state
4. Hegemonic power

An "empire" is commonly regarded as a state headed by a sovereign with the title of "emperor." While many bona fide empires were indeed ruled by "emperors," the correlation is not automatic. *Princeps, huangdi, khahan, shahan-shah*, or other equivalent titles are assumed by rulers who engaged in territorial expansion and succeeded in establishing an international hierarchy centered on their state; as they believe that their state has attained a status equal to no one, they thus assume a ruling title superior to rulers around them. This has led to some rulers to assume imperial titles in hopes of enhancing their states' international stature, without first acquiring the requisite conditions of empire. As a case in point, though Jean-Bedel Bokassa declared himself emperor in 1976 and his country (Central Africa) an empire, no one would seriously consider Central Africa an empire. To say that an empire is what it is because it is ruled by an emperor is to put the cart before the horse. It also creates a problem with modern states such as the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that were often referred to as empires, though they were not ruled by monarchs.

The case for equating large territorial states with empires seem to be stronger, as many empires in history did have extensive territories, including Achaemenid Persia, Rome, Han China, Mongol, Romanov Russia, Great Britain, and others. However, such a definition would exclude those states in history that did not possess much in terms of land area but were nonetheless empires. For example, the empire of Sargon of Akkad, considered to be the first empire recorded in history, was not large territorially when compared to later empires; Athens is widely considered to have created a maritime empire following its defeat of the Persians at Salamis; the Portuguese *estados* did not consist of extensive

territory initially but were a network of ports in Africa and around the Indian Ocean. Because empires manifested in many different forms, positing extensive land area as the sole criterion for imperial status is not logical or justified.

There is also a tendency in modern political discourse to assume "imperialism" as the defining feature of imperial status. Although imperialism itself is a term with a multitude of definitions, the imperialism discussed here is the type of imperialism theorized by the likes of J.A. Hobson and Vladimir Lenin, where policies of industrialized, capitalist states are heavily influenced or controlled by financiers and industrialists. Financiers seek opportunities for investment outside of their countries, and industrialists want new markets aside from the saturated home markets. These financiers and industrialists then dictate policy by means of political contributions, and governments send out troops and immigrants to establish overseas possessions. The problem with identifying empires with modern imperialism is not with the latter per se, but with its errant focus. While appropriating the term "empire," the focus of modern theories of imperialism is actually not the political entity (empire) but the economic system (capitalism). Because of this focus on capitalism, theorists of imperialism are not actually concerned with how empires are constructed and maintained, but how capitalists expand their interests to other regions through the state apparatus. This focus on capitalism makes it safe to dismiss modern theories of imperialism from the present discussion on empire, in spite of the fact that empires do include a significant economic dimension.

As opposed to the three points mentioned above, the distinction between an empire and a hegemonic power is slightly more difficult. Both an empire and a hegemonic state have power that far outstrips states in the vicinity. They also seek to use that power to bend states in the vicinity to their will, and hold the region under their sway. Yet despite apparent similarities, there are differences that set empires apart from mere hegemonic powers. In a hegemonic international environment, the

hegemon remains formally equal in status with its neighbors, whereas imperial status dissolves this guise of formal equality and reduces subordinate states to vassalage or client states.[1] In other words, an empire is *superior* in both real and formal terms, and fully displays its superiority in ideology and ceremony, while a hegemon makes no such claims in spite of its strength. This can be seen in Greece just prior to and during the Peloponnesian War, examples being rival city-states of Sparta and Athens. Sparta had unquestioned military superiority over its neighbors in the Peloponnese, and fought to maintain its position, yet its peculiar social structure ensured that it would keep to itself and not intervene in the internal affairs of other states. In addition, the Spartans did not claim formal suzerainty or force formal vassalage upon its neighbors. This was not the case with Athens, which thought itself superior to other city-states by the level of culture achieved as well as by virtue of its (relatively) democratic political system. Herfried Munkler describes Athenian supremacy as follows:

> Athens provided the commander of the fighting forces and the treasurer of the League, determined the size of contributions, dominated commercial jurisdiction and ensured that its own weights and measures were binding throughout the League. It maintained garrisons in the cities of its partners and thus wielded influence over their internal affairs. And finally it moved the League's treasury from Delos to Athens, changed the object of the League's oath of allegiance from "Athens and its allies" to "the people of Athens," and moved the decisions on war and peace from the League assembly to the Athenian popular assembly.[2]

Basically, Athens imposed its standard and way of life upon other city-

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[1] Herfried Munkler, *Empires*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 6.

[2] Munkler, *Empires*, 7.

states that were not always willing to do so, because Athenians believed Athens stood at the center of the vast network it created in the form of the Delian League. Also, as can be seen in its "negotiations" with the island state of Melos, Athens did not recognize Melos as an equal or even as a neutral. As far as empires are concerned, other tribes or states in the vicinity are either first part of its world or second part of another empire. There is nothing in between, because aside from the fact that a tribe or state not part of its imperial hierarchy can easily add to the strength of a competitor, failure to subordinate a smaller power can represent a loss of prestige for the imperial power. Because prestige lies in the realm of perceived power, a loss of prestige can be seen as a loss of authority or strength even if they were not actually lost. This can trigger a cascade effect where other states or tribes in the imperial orbit seek to become "neutral," in short, remove itself from the imperial hierarchy, which the imperial power will not tolerate, and will often "overreact" to early attempts of its satellites to extricate themselves from the imperial order.

II. What are the Characteristics of Empires?

After a lengthy elaboration of what does not constitute empires, an explanation as to what actually does constitute an empire should follow. Is it merely a state that combines all the factors from above? Is an empire simply a country that is ruled by emperors, possessed of extensive territory, imperialistic in its policy, and hegemonic? In accordance with the adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, an empire is not just a conglomeration of the factors above but a holistic system with the following characteristics.

1. Different Peoples Ruled Differently

As one might expect, researchers are not in agreement as to what to call the constituent parts that make up an empire. Michael Doyle divides

empires into two parts, the metropole and the periphery. As Doyle's definition of empires is a modern one, the metropole represents a "ruling country" whereas the periphery is the "subject country."[3] For Alexander Motyl, an empire is composed of a "core" and periphery, offering the following definition: "a hierarchically organized political system with a hub-like structure—a rimless wheel—within which a core elite and state dominate peripheral elites and societies…."[4] Another noted scholar of empires, Shmuel Eisenstadt, uses the terms "center" and "periphery" in his discussion of empires.[5] Though not offering an explicit definition, Stephen Howe also speaks of a "core territory" and "an extensive periphery of dominated areas."[6]

These "multiple layers" separates empires from modern states and is the first defining feature of empires. The concept of "territorial sovereignty," meaning a government has the exclusive right to exercise its authority within clearly-defined borders, does not readily apply to empires. In a state, the government's authority is (or at least should be) identical everywhere. Whatever laws that were instituted in the center, it is expected to be followed exactly down to the tiniest hamlet in the remotest province. However, because pre-modern states were without means of expeditious communication and transportation available today, "extensive territories" combined with "diverse ethnicities" created problems with administration. Forces of imperial authority often took a long time to reach its remote frontiers, where populations were linguistically and culturally different from imperial citizens at the center. Therefore, ruling heterogeneous populations along the periphery required measures and rules adapted to regions that were different from the center.

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[3] Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 11.

[4] Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 4.

[5] S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (New York: The Free Press, 1969).

[6] Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14.

People in the center and those in the periphery, in short, were ruled differently. Unlike modern states that try to integrate its population and subsume whatever ethnic identity people have are subsumed within the "national identity"; in an empire, people are allowed to keep their ethnic identity and culture as long as they acknowledge the authority of the emperor.

2. Notions of Superiority

The second characteristic that defines empires concerns images, in that those living in the empire consider themselves culturally superior to those around them, as "barbarians" around the empire failed to achieve the level of civilization found in the empire. This is an attitude that persisted since the time of the very oldest of empires, such as in Old Akkad, which considered the Gutians, a mountain-dwelling people of the present-day Zagros Mountains (Iran) as "subnormal beings, not conforming to the customs and laws of civilization."[7] Jean-Jacques Glassner describes what Akkadians (and Mesopotamians in general) thought of Gutians:

> They lived in non-civilized areas. They had the intelligence of dogs and the appearance of monkeys. Their languages were confused babble. They were ignorant of agriculture, of cooked foods, of fermented drinks, and of table manners. They knew nothing of houses and cities. They did not bury their dead, and, having no scruples, they knew nothing of prohibitions or how to keep their word. They showed no respect for the gods.[8]

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[7] Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian* Chronicles, ed. Benjamin R. Forster (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 117.

[8] Ibid.

The same attitude prevailed among the royalty of the Inca Empire, who told the Spanish friars after their subjugation by the Spanish that the reason that the first *Sapa Incas* created the realm they called *tahuantinsuyu* (a Quechua term for the Inca Empire, translated as "four realms together") was to bring order to a world full of chaos, and to spread their true religion based on the worship of the sun.[9] In addition, they believed the people of *tahuantinsuyu* to be the most civilized on earth and that it was their duty to bring civilization to "barbarians" around them. Similar attitudes emerged among the Chinese, manifesting themselves in terms such as *zhonghua* (中華) and *zhongguo* (中國) where China was the center that all other states in the vicinity revolved around and paid homage to.

Notions of superiority are just that, a refusal to see those around the empire as equals. Because the builders of empires believe they have created not just a state but a well-ordered world, any country or tribe not of that world have not been exposed to its superior culture, and were assumed to be living in an uncivilized state. It was imperative that empires make other states acknowledge the superior status of the empire and accept a subordinate status within the imperial hierarchy, for this would obviate the cost of sending over officials to directly administer those areas, or worse, maintain a permanent body of troops, which would drive costs even higher. Last but not least, notions of superiority pervade the imperial metropole at all levels of society. This means it is not only royalty and aristocratic elites that bear such attitudes, but are shared by the general population in their interactions with persons from other countries or tribes.

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[9] Gordon McEwan, *The Incas: New Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2006), 31.

3. Frontiers, not Borders

Unlike straight and dark "lines" that march across maps that define borders of modern states, empires were separated from the outside world by "frontiers," which are broad zones where power and influence of the empire exist in different gradations depending on the position within the zone. It should be noted that when clear natural features, such as large rivers, were present, empires often made them *de facto* borders with the outside world. The term "de facto" has been used because ancient borders formed by natural boundaries are still not borders in a modern sense. Where clear natural features are not present, modern states still try to demarcate them with precise measurements and markers. In such areas without a clear natural boundary such as those between the north Asian steppe and China proper, the only signs of imperial authority were garrisons or small market towns few and far between, with people living as before.

Unlike modern borders that require "documentation" and "permission" to cross, frontiers were much more porous. Even for the strongest imperial power, keeping frontiers completely closed to the outside world was simply impossible. Though empires attempted to maintain some measure of control with military garrisons and occasional sallies to drive barbarians away, frontiers were never airtight, with constant movement in and out. Also, since frontiers were places where the application of administrative authority was intermittent, fighting was frequent, and violence was rife. Frontiers were often set in hostile natural environments where farming or trading was difficult; the populations had to fend for themselves in the hostile environment, and thus tended to be tough and independent. Moreover, since the forces of authority were not always present to resolve disputes, the enforcement of law was often taken into private hands.

These frontiers could either be open, meaning it led directly into areas the empire regarded as barbarian zones; or they could be middle

areas that formed between contending empires. In the latter case, frontiers resembled what would be termed in international relations as *buffer zones*, where a state or a region is purposely left alone so that two strong powers do not interact directly and thus reduce chances of conflict. Empires often do not war against each other directly, often preferring a war of words or sometimes employing barbarian tribes against the other empire in what is essentially war by proxy. This happens more often when two empires exist within a larger region, in other word, in a single "world." When one empire engages in a display of power, the other empire will likely not back down, as it would constitute a loss of face toward subordinates in its hierarchy. Combined with the fact that they do not formally recognize each other as equals, when empires go to war, it is often a fight to the finish. Hence, empires do not war on each other unless "everything" is at stake.

4. King of Kings

As empires consider themselves superior to those polities around them, so should their sovereigns. If other countries around them had kings, an imperial sovereign must be referred to by a title that displays superior status. The first of these titles to appear in ancient records was the term *sar saranni*, a word derived from the ancient Assyrian language that means "king of kings." While eventually becoming a mighty empire, Assyria was at first a city-state in competition with other city-states. As the word "*sar*" denoted king or sovereign of a single city-state, when the Assyrians began their conquests and their *sar* (king) became ruler over a number of other city-states, a new term had to be invented. He had become *sar* over other smaller *sars*, which is what *sarsarrani* means. The term was adopted later by the rulers of the Persian Empire and became the more familiar *Shahan-shah*.

In China, when the king of the state of Qin unified the Warring States under a single banner, he believed that the old title for sovereign

was not majestic enough for his achievements. Although the idea of the "son of heaven" already existed as was the title for it, *wang* (king 王), the title was reserved only for the King of Zhou, supposedly suzerain over rulers of the warring states. Rulers of the each of the warring states were originally vassals with titles such as *gong* (duke 公), *hou* (marquis 侯), *bai* (earl 伯), *zi* (count 子), and *nan* (baron 男). However, many rulers would appropriate the title wang for themselves during times of ascendency. Thus all the rulers of the warring states came to be called wang, after which the title lost much of its supreme status. Foregoing the title wang, the king of Qin combined the term *huang* (皇), which denoted demigods of Chinese mythology with *di* (帝), the title for ancient sage-kings, into the title known today, *huangdi* (皇帝), commonly translated as emperor. But it should be noted that the title of a sovereign is an outward feature of imperial status, not an indispensable requirement.

5. Hierarchical International Order

As already explained in the previous chapter, this is what distinguishes empires from mere hegemonic states. Empires do not only create gradations of power within the territory they rule, but also beyond. It can be likened to a pyramid, where the empire forms the apex while its vassals, satellites, and subordinate tribes form the middle and the base depending on their level of power and civilization. The superior status of the empire is ultimately enforced militarily, but there are also institutional and ceremonial devices that affirm such superiority.

One such example is the so-called tributary-suzerain system, whereby the kingship of lesser states is given recognition and legitimacy by empires and the lesser state offers regular payment to the empire. While initially done so due to the sheer power disparity between the empire and the tributary, it later takes on a cultural and ideological dimension, and is done so simply because it is the proper order of things and the way it is. In order to obviate the need for constant military

reconquest, empires attempt to emphasize this hierarchical order and prevail upon the lesser power to accept it as natural. Again, in a hierarchy, there are no equals. An imperial hierarchy is not a collection of "equal" sovereign states, but a rank-order system based on how loyal the lesser state is in serving the empire and adhering itself to it.

III. Early Koguryo's Growth into Empire

Imperial histories are filled with tales emphasizing the predestined nature of their greatness, but empires generally have very humble beginnings. In fact, there is nothing that sets other types of states apart from empires at the starting line. States and empires start out the same way, both expanding at the expense of other political entities. Before the modern era, there was nothing to hold state expansion in check save for military forces of other states. A state that was able to overcome the checks placed upon it and expand on a consistent basis would cross the threshold to imperial status. However, if the state was successfully blocked from expanding beyond a certain point, it would be stopped short of the said threshold. In other words, there was no predestination involved as to whether a political entity would become an empire or not. There was simply no way to predict successful imperial expansion until it had actually occurred. An observation of states that went on to become great empires serves to underlie this fact.

Table 1. Beginnings of Major Empires of the Ancient World

Empire	Started as:	Starting location	Size at beginning	Peak size
Rome	City-state	Capitoline Hill, modern Rome	~1km^2	5,000,000km^2
Carthage	City-state	Modern Tunis	>1km^2	300,000km^2
Macedonia	Small kingdom	North of Greece	~100km^2	5,200,000km^2
Qin	Small kingdom	Western China	~100km^2	2,300,000km^2
Kshatriya-Maurya	Small kingdom	Northern India	~50km^2	3,400,000km^2
Achaemenid Persia	Small kingdom w/in Medea	Present Iran	~500km^2	5,500,000km^2

Source: Combination of various data from Rein Taagepera, "Size and Duration of Empires: Growth-Decline Curves, 600 BC-600 AD," *Social Science History* 3, no. 3/4 (1979), 115-138.

Examples from history further highlight the fact that ordinary states (kingdoms) and empires have the same humble beginnings. Rome was simply one of the city-states of Italy busy fending off Etruscan and Samnite incursions, fighting for its survival. Though it does not appear in this list, the first seventeen kings of Assyria in the Assyrian King List supposedly "dwelt in tents."[10] Macedonia before Philip II was an unknown, semi-barbaric (as regarded by Greeks) kingdom before catapulted into historical prominence by the conquests of Alexander. At the beginning of the Spring and Autumns Period of China (771 BCE), the state of Qin, which would unite all of China under a single ruler in the third century BCE, was just one of the dozens of kingdoms vying for survival.

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[10] Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, ed. Benjamin R. Forster (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 137.

1. The Issue of Time Sovereignty

Likewise, there was nothing that made Koguryo different from other kingdoms or political entities in the vicinity when it was founded in 37 BCE. This article, however, will show why Koguryo went on to become an empire while competing states or entities in the vicinity did not. A question that arises when claiming imperial status for Koguryo is: What sets Koguryo apart from the kingdoms of Baekje and Silla, which to get her comprised the so-called "Three Kingdoms" of Korea? The answer to the question lies in time sovereignty whether a polity is given time to expand by virtue of absence of strong powers in the vicinity. Munkler writes that throughout history, rival powers of equal status are usually lacking on the margins of the main political centers, where large wars do not break out and the rise to empire can occur through a series of "small wars" in which the resistance of organizationally and technologically inferior opponents are broken down.[11] Following the defeat of Gojoseon by Han forces in 108 BCE, there was no polity of significance in the northern Korean peninsula and southern Manchuria. Though Han China attempted to establish commanderies in Gojoseon territory, its grip on the region was intermittent at best, with frequent uprisings against Chinese attempts at administration. During this period, the Xiongnu and other northern nomads remained the chief security concerns for China, and the former Gojoseon territory did not receive the same degree of attention. The chaos resulting from the Former Han-Later Han transition (8-23 CE) and Later Han's division into China's Three Kingdoms further impeded China's ability to intervene in the east. The less-than-firm political grip by the imperial power and the lack of strong polities in the region afforded early Koguryo time sovereignty to expand.

This simply was not the case with Baekje and Silla. These two

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[11] Munkler, *Empires*, 35.

states also engaged in expansion, as all early states do. In the *Samguk sagi*, Baekje and Silla are to have come into contact in the first century CE. Of course, many scholars have reservations concerning the credibility of early records in the *Samguk sagi*, especially whether the events actually happened in the dates recorded. These reservations have led some to believe that events of war between Baekje and Silla from the first to the third centuries actually took place in the sixth and seventh centuries but were "retroactively" given an earlier date. Bak Dae-jae claims that charges of retroactivity in the *Chronicles* that pushes events in the first, second, and third centuries to the sixth and seventh centuries is exaggerated, and constitutes a simplistic denial of early records.[12] Bak also posits that some of the battles recorded between Baekje and Silla were actually between Baekje and statelets allied with and that would later merge with Silla, and that those events were incorporated into Silla records as their own.

While the debate over the historicity of early records in the *Samguk sagi* is a legitimate one, ascertaining the exact dates at which the battles between Baekje and Silla took place is not important for the purposes of this article. What is important is the fact that the respective spheres of influence of Baekje and Silla began to overlap before they were able to cross the imperial threshold. Each had essentially become the other's greatest obstacle to expansion and near-constant wars naturally followed. Though the competition had its ebbs and flows, neither Baekje nor Silla were able to completely dominate each other. They would remain locked in perpetual competition, and were denied the time sovereignty necessary for greater expansion. Time sovereignty is a must for continued expansion of a polity until it crosses the threshold of imperial status. Favorable international environment and a weakened Buyeo ensured

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[12] Bak Dae-jae, "*Samguk sagi* chogi gisa e boineun Silla wa Baekje ui jeonjaeng" [Baekje-Silla wars in early records of the *Samguk sagi*], *Hanguksa hakbo* 7 (1999), 13.

time sovereignty for Koguryo. Baekje and Silla's adjacent location and approximate parity in power precluded rapid expansion beyond a certain point, and along with it, imperial status.

2. Koguryo's Early Expansion

Koguryo expanded quickly after its foundation in modern Huanren, China. Koguryo first initiated military action against the kingdom of Biryu, which was conquered in 36 BCE. It was followed by the conquest of Haengin and Northern Okjeo in 34 BCE and 28 BCE, respectively.

The encounter with Biryu is one of the significant events recorded in the *Dongmyeong wangpyeon* (The Lay of King Dongmyeong), an epic prose contained in a collection compiled by Yi Gyu-bo in the late twelfth century. In the epic, King Dongmyeong (Chumo) engages in an archery contest against Songyang, the king of Biryu, and defeats him. When Songyang hesitates about conceding defeat, Chumo subdues the latter by calling rain from the skies and flooding his kingdom. This likely suggests a military subjugation of the natives (Biryu) by the newcomers (Koguryo). However, judging from the fact that Songyang's daughter is married to Yuri, Chumo's son and the second king, efforts were obviously made to incorporate the vanquished. There is a slightly different version in the Baekje Annals in the *Chronicles*, where Chumo marries Soseono, the daughter of the king of Jolbon Buyeo and has two sons by her. This also suggests efforts on the part of Chumo to remain on friendly terms with the native population and integrate them into his new kingdom. Whereas Chumo was careful regarding Jolbon and Biryu, Okjeo was a different story. Okjeo was a collection of tribes/chiefdoms living along the northeastern coast of the Korean peninsula. According to the Chronicles, there is no effort at integration, as they were conquered outright and made part of Koguryo territory. The same fate would befall Eastern Okjeo in 56. Relatively well-organized polities such as Jolbon were accommodated, whereas those deemed inferior were simply

overrun. The early conquests of Koguryo confirm the aforementioned tendency of empires to develop along the periphery of strong states, at the expense of weaker, less powerful polities such as Biryu or Okjeo.

Koguryo also struck against the Xianbi, who were defeated and subjugated in 9 BCE after taking their "fortress" with a successful ruse.[13] As Koguryo was not inclined to pay the costs of administering nomadic territory, it only established indirect rule over the Xianbi. This is significant in that Koguryo gained an outlet to the nomadic steppes, which became a source of horses for its cavalry.[14] The most organized of polities in the vicinity capable of checking Koguryo's early expansion, was Buyeo, from where the Koguryo founder Chumo (Jumong) is supposed to have originated and had remained an enemy after Chumo's escape. Buyeo led a major invasion of Koguryo in 5 BCE with 50,000 troops, but Koguryo defenses stood firm and Buyeo troops retreated after many froze to death at the onset of winter. In 9, Buyeo threatened that Koguryo would not be able to sustain itself lest it serve Buyeo with "propriety and good reason," to which the prince (and future King Daemushin) retorted that the Buyeo ruler "mind his own kingdom first."[15] In 13, Buyeo decided to force the issue through war with another major invasion. But this invasion force was ambushed by Koguryo troops at Hakballyeong Pass and suffered a crushing defeat. Koguryo conquered the Yangmaek in 14, along with territory in the Xuantu Commandery (玄菟郡高句麗縣). King Daemushin would retaliate for the earlier invasion by leading troops into Buyeo in 22. Though the invasion was a military failure, the invaders did manage to kill Daeso, the Buyeo king, and the resulting political chaos meant that Buyeo would not

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[13] *Samguk sagi* [Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms], Koguryo Annals, King Yuri, year 11 (三國史記高句麗本紀琉璃王11年).

[14] Bak No-seok, "Koguryo chogi ui yeongto byeoncheon yeongu" [A study on the territorial transitions in early Koguryo], (PhD dissertation, Jeonbuk Daehakkyo, 2003), 15.

[15] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Yuri, year 28 (三國史記高句麗本紀琉璃王 28年).

interfere with Koguryo expansion for over a century.

Koguryo's defeat of Buyeo roughly coincided with political convulsion in China, as the Han Interregnum began when Wang Mang usurped the Chinese throne in 8 to set up the Xin Dynasty, which prompted constant wars against those who sought to restore the Han Dynasty until 23. This impaired the ability of the Chinese metropole to intervene in events along its periphery. King Daemushin continued his campaign to expand territory, conquering Gaema-guk (蓋馬國) in 26 and pressuring the king of Guda-guk (句茶國) to relinquish his kingdom later that year. The Later Han troops from Liaodong Commandery invaded in 28, as the turmoil in China settled down. The Chinese were compelled to retire by a tactical ruse, after which Daemushin established diplomatic relations with Later Han in 32 even as he was attacking the "kingdom of Lelang" (K. *Nangnang-guk* 樂浪國). When the Lelang kingdom was destroyed in 37, the territory of Koguryo had been enlarged far beyond its founding borders. The map below shows the expansion that took place between the foundation by Chumo and the end of the reign of Daemushin. Jo Beop-jong describes Nangnang-guk as one of a number of small statelets established in the Korean peninsula by Chinese immigrants.[16]

The fact that Lelang fell to Koguryo in 37 brings up the question as to whether it was the same Lelang that fell to Koguryo in 313. Lelang in the *Chronicles* is ruled by a "king," which sets it apart from a district ruled by a *taishou* (太守, Han) or a *dayin* (大尹, Xin). Also, records in the *Chronicles* related to Lelang after 37 make no references to the Choi (崔, Cui) clan in relation to Lelang. For example, the Lelang attacked by King Goi (古爾王) of Baekje in 246 is ruled by a *taishou* named Liu Mao (劉茂) and there is also a *taishou* that sends an assassin to kill Baekje's King Bunseo (汾西王) in 304. Baekje obviously came in contact

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[16] Jo Beop-jong, "Wiman Joseon ui daehan jeonjaeng gwa ganghan jehuguk ui seonggyeok" [Studies on war between Wiman and Han and the nature of countries that surrendered to the Han], *Seonsa wa godae* 14 (2000), 185.

with Lelang much later than Koguryo, and there are no references to Lelang as a monarchy in the Baekje Annals, which confirms that the Lelang faced by King Daemushin was not the Lelang that fought with Baekje in the third and fourth centuries. Claims of Lelang kingship could be made in relation to a rebellion by Wang Diao (王調), by reading it as "Diao, king of Lelang" (樂浪土人王調), but such claims are in the minority, as most agree that Wang Diao is a personal name.Wang Diao's rebellion is said to have killed the magistrate (郡守) of Lelang named Liu Xuan (劉憲). The rebellion ended in 30 when Guangwudi (光武帝) sent Wang Zun (王遵) to restore order.[17] Nowhere in the above records appear references to Choi Ri (Cui Li 崔理), who died in 37 as the ruler of Lelang. Therefore, there is little contradiction between the fact that a Lelang statelet ruled by a king fell in 37 and the Lelang Commandery administered by a *taishou* was destroyed by King Micheon's forces in 313. Daemushin had conquered a Chinese statelet, and his territory now abutted those of the Chinese commanderies.

The map below represents territorial expansion during early Koguryo. Horizontal lines indicate Koguryo territory at its foundation in 37 BCE, while the vertical lines show conquests made during the reign of Yuri with the diagonal lines being territory at the end of Daemushin's rule. But such rapid expansion, especially strikes against Chinese settlements, drew a response from the rejuvenated Han dynasty. Aside from quelling a rebellion by Wang Diao in 30, the first Eastern Han emperor Guangwudi (光武帝) launched a seaborne invasion across the Yellow Sea in 44, and succeeded in reestablishing Han presence in areas south of Salsu, often identified with the modern Cheongcheon River in North Korea's Pyeongan Province.[18]

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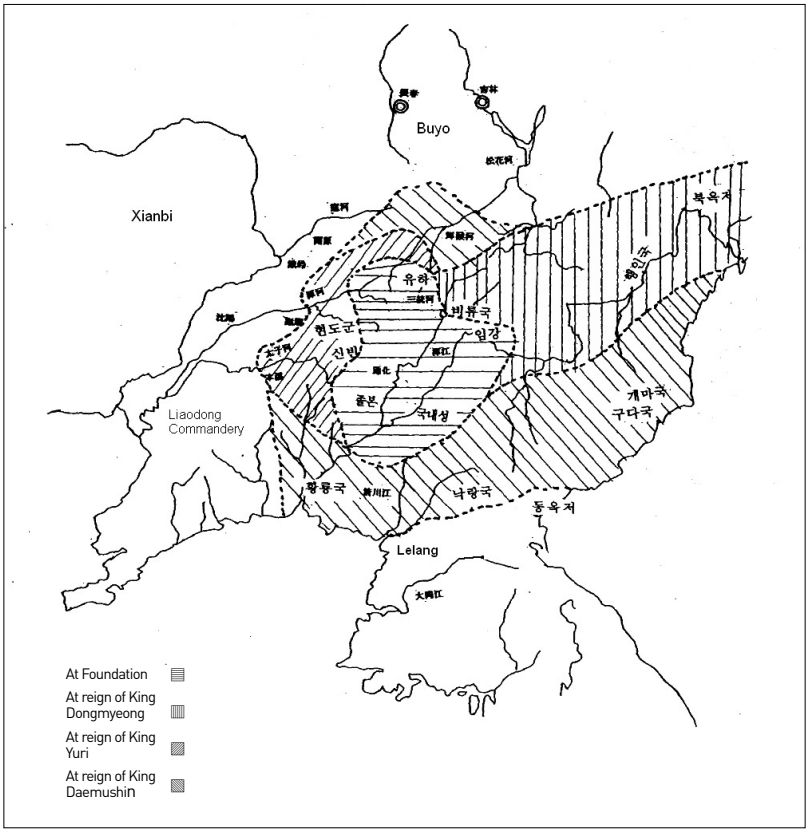
[17] *Houhan shu*, Biography 76: Benevolent Officials, no. 136: Wang Jing (後漢書列傳 卷76 循吏列傳 第36 王景).

[18] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Daemushin, year 27 (三國史記高句麗本紀大武神王 27年).



Map 1. Territorial Expansion in Early Koguryo (Bak No-seok, 2003)

3. The Augustan Threshold

The reign of King Taejo (53-146) probably represents the decisive moment in the early phase of Koguryo's expansion. It is a well-known historical fact that empires are not exclusive to sedentary states, as there are numerous instances where nomads conquered vast territories and formed imperial conglomerations. It is also true that nomadic empires generally are not known for their longevity. While the longevity of sedentary empires is by no means guaranteed, they do have a number of

means at their disposal to make their state apparatus more enduring.

Thomas Barfield states that empires are entities that have the ability to "centralize power and to maintain control at a distance."[19] Of course, all states, regardless of size, require some measure of centralization in order to achieve statehood. Be they city-states or large states (empires), power needs to be centralized so that it can be exercised effectively. However, what sets empires apart from small states is the second element stated by Barfield, the ability to maintain such control and authority at a distance. As stated earlier, because communication was difficult in ancient times, the amount of territory a ruler could control was limited. Many rulers chose to control only its chief cities and its immediate environs, as they could not handle the burden of administering large territories. A state can choose to conquer and leave conquered territories for promise of tribute, but this may require periodic reconquest, as there is no permanent sign of authority. The first empire to resolve the dilemma of having to rule large territories was the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Instead of the promise of tribute, the Persians came up with a system known as a *satrapy*. The Persian *Shahan-shah* divided up his empire and sent out officials, called *satraps*, who were given powers to exercise authority in his name. Satraps often came with a complement of troops, and could take military action in case of trouble. The rule by proxy through a system of governors allowed imperial rulers to control much wider areas by obviating the need for constant reconquest. This is succinctly demonstrated by Rein Taagepera, who divides the history of empires into four phases. The size of empires grow with each successive phase, but the greatest growth in terms of size of empires take place between first phase (2850 BCE–700 BCE) and the second phase (700 BCE–1600 CE). The largest state in the world during the first phase, the early Chinese state of Shang (商), had a land area of 1,100,000 km^2, but

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[19] Susan E. Alcock et al., eds., *Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40.

the Persian empire would rule a total land area of 5,500,000 km^2 by 500 BCE, a feat that was simply impossible for any state during the previous period.[20]

In East Asia, an example of the Augustan Threshold can be seen after the unification of China by Qin. Wang Guan (王綰), a prime minister in the government of the first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi, suggested sending imperial princes to distant provinces for pacification, but the famous legalist minister Li Si (李斯) noted that the enfeoffment of princes in early Zhou China led to their estrangement from the imperial house and eventual descent into chaos, and claimed no one under heaven should be "of a different heart" if the realm is to find peace. Qin Shihuangdi concurred with Li Si, stating that enfeoffment of vassals would be tantamount to "planting the seeds of war again" and applied the Qin system of commanderies (郡) to the rest of China.[21] The governors sent to the commanderies were imperial appointees, meaning the governors were beholden to the emperor for their position and prestige.

In Rome, sending out officials to rule an area in place of the emperor began in earnest after the establishment of the Principate by Emperor Augustus, hence the term Augustan Threshold. The Augustan Threshold is important in that it displays the willingness of rulers to expand their realm beyond what the monarch can control in person. The reason the rule of King Taejo of Koguryo is emphasized is because this is when the expanding Koguryo state appears to have crossed the Augustan Threshold according to a passage in the *Chronicles*:

> Year 46 (98 CE), spring, third month, on his way east to Chaekseong (柵城), the king arrived in Gyesan in the west of Chaekseong and captured a white deer. The king feasted and drank with his officials after arriving

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[20] Rein Taagepera, "Size and Duration of Empires: Systematics of Size," *Social Science Research* 7 (1978), 119-21.

[21] *Shiji*, Annals of Qin Shihuang, no. 6, Shihuangdi, year 28 (史記本紀秦始皇本紀第6始皇二十八年).

> in Chaekseong, bestowed gifts on officials (吏) at Chaekseong with appropriate differences according to rank, and had their merits inscribed in stone before returning.[22]

Chaekseong was one of Koguryo's major cities, located along the banks of the Duman (Tumen) River near modern Hunchun, China. This passage points to the presence of officials appointed by the king to govern Chaekseong in his stead, rather than leaving local magnates in power in a tributary relationship.

King Taejo's appointment of officials is natural given the pace of territorial expansion during his reign. Taejo's conquests include Liaoxi (55),[23] Eastern Okjeo (56), Galsa (68), Jona (72), and Juna (74). In 105, Taejo ordered a raid on the Liaodong Commandery, and though his troops suffered a severe repulse, he obviously felt strong enough to challenge Chinese power. In 118, Taejo sent troops under his younger brother in an invasion of the Xuantu and Liaodong commanderies, and succeeded in killing the governor of the Liaodong Commandery along with his two officials. Having defeated Chinese provincial authorities, he went on a tour inside Buyeo to pay homage to Yuhwa, mother of the founder Chumo. Buyeo allowing the entourage of a foreign king inside their territory suggests that Buyeo was not in a position to challenge Koguryo at this juncture. It was such rapid expansion and growth in international power that warranted the posting of officials to govern Koguryo's newly-acquired territories.

But Koguryo's regional dominance would not last, as Han China and Buyeo joined forces to check Koguryo expansion. An attack on Xuantu in 121 was defeated when Buyeo sent 20,000 troops to aid the Chinese, and another invasion force in 122 was again crushed by the

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[22] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Taejo, year 46 (三國史記高句麗本紀太祖王46年).

[23] The exact location of "Liaoxi" where King Taejo is to have built his ten fortresses is uncertain, and warrants further investigation.

Han-Buyeo alliance. In 123, Koguryo was again sending tribute to the Chinese. But the very fact that Han and Buyeo came together is a testament to Koguryo's growth, which had already crossed the Augustan Threshold and was well on its way to imperial expansion.

4. Consolidation of Monarchical Power

Imperial expansion and crossing of the Augustan Threshold usually means consolidation of the power of the center, which naturally comes at the expense of vassals and local powers. Making regional officials beholden to the monarch by directly appointing them has historically been the strategy employed by every expanding power, but when local powers do not relent, a power contest then ensues over who assumes primacy in ruling the country and such competition can sometimes escalate into civil war. The king of kings or emperors must be able to quell local challenges to his power if he is to exercise his authority effectively. The most representative of such incidences in Koguryo happened during the reign of King Gogukcheon, the ninth ruler:

> King Gogukcheon, year 12 (190), Autumn, ninth month. Lords Eobiryu (於畀留) and Jwagaryeo (左可慮) held power as blood kin of the queen.[24] Their power made their sons and kin utterly arrogant and extravagant. They ravished the daughters of other men and seized land and houses with impunity. The people were resentful and angry. Word about them infuriated the king and they were sought for execution, upon which Jwagaryeo and four other Lords rose in rebellion.…[25]
>
> King Gogukcheon, year 13 (191), Summer, fourth month. Jwagaryeo

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[24] Jwagaryeo's title was *pyeongja* (평자, 評者), a title denoting high rank in each of the *bu* (five constituent units of the Koguryo aristocracy) for which there is no exact English translation, hence the use of the generic term "lord."

[25] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Gogukcheon, year 12 (三國史記高句麗本紀故國川王 12年).

collected his ilk and attacked the capital. The king raised soldiers and horses from near the capital and vanquished the rebels.[26]

Past literature posits that the passage from the twelfth year of King Gogukcheon's reign is evidence of weak royal power, but nothing could be further from the truth. The two nobles obviously had power bases outside the capital, given the fact that they attacked the capital from outside; but the annals make it clear that their power was boosted significantly by their relations with the queen. The situation might not have been unlike what happened following the founding of Goryeo, where twenty-nine local magnates married their daughters to founder Wang Geon in an effort to bolster their power. But whatever the potency given to early Koguryo aristocrats by their local power bases and their ties to the queen, it did not compare with the forces that could be mobilized by the king.

The entry from year 13 (191) demonstrates that the king had sufficient military power near the capital (and therefore at his disposal) to quell challenges originating in the provinces. In other words, royal power had grown to a point where it could not be overcome by an alliance of provincial aristocracy. While there could be opinions that the lords could have collected their troops from the capital, it would be unreasonable to believe that local aristocrats would raise forces in the capital instead of their respective power bases, which would be much easier. Also, the year 13 entry from above states that the rebels attacked the capital, and not the palace, meaning the capital itself was attacked from the outside. Monarchical power was exercised explicitly when King Gogukcheon made an obscure figure named Eulpaso his prime minister. When the aristocrats took issue with Eulpaso's appointment, the king made it clear that he would not brook any challenges, declaring that "anyone who

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[26] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Gogukcheon, year 13 (三國史記高句麗本紀故國川王 13年).

disobeys the prime minister will be killed along with the rest of his kin," essentially enforcing his will in the face of noble opposition. Possession of military power and the concomitant ability to dictate policy shows that power was more centralized in early Koguryo than previously believed.

IV. Crossing the Imperial Threshold

Having described in Chapter I the component features of polities known as "empires," I will now attempt to assess whether the state of Koguryo fulfills the criteria of imperial status. Any claim that confers imperial status to Koguryo is necessarily brought into conflict with the traditional view of East Asia, where only Chinese dynasties are considered empires without equals in the region. In *Dong Asia ui jeonjaeng gwa pyeonghwa* (War and peace in East Asia), Yi Sam-seong argues that dynasties that arose in the Korean peninsula voluntarily resigned themselves to the sinocentric regional order. Under this international order based on a system of tribute, chances of conflict between Korean states and Chinese dynasties were reduced.[27] Yi also stresses that although such a relationship confirmed the regional hierarchy and made Korean dynasties vassals, it actually gave the latter independence in terms of domestic policy within what he terms a hierarchic peace regime. However, Yi qualifies this claim by mentioning that the lessening of conflict between China and the Korean kingdoms occurred after the fall of Koguryo, implying a greater frequency of conflict when the Koguryo imperium existed alongside Chinese dynasties.

The scholarly verdict on Koguryo's imperial status is divided. Although being one of the first scholars to bring the concept of a "worldview" (K. *cheonhagwan*), which is commonly associated with

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[27] Yi Sam-seong, *Dong Asia ui jeonjaeng gwa pyeonghwa* [War and peace in East Asia], vol. 1 (Seoul: Hangilsa, 2009), 167.

imperial hierarchies, into the discourse on Koguryo; No Tae-don stops short of calling Koguryo an empire. In his discussion of Koguryo's relationship with peoples in Manchuria, Mark E. Byington makes no references to Koguryo as an imperial power, though his article deals with how Koguryo subjugated other states and tribes in the region.[28] In contrast, Bak Gyeong-cheol and Pankaj Mohan boldly state that Koguryo was an empire. According to Bak, Koguryo first became a "despotic military state" and transitioned into an empire by the middle of the fourth century, firmly establishing its lebensraum in Northeast Asia.[29] Mohan describes a growth process where Koguryo started out as a chiefdom state, expanded into an early state, and finally transformed itself into an imperial state.[30]

Like Mohan, this article also describes Koguryo's imperial expansion as a process. However, there is the formidable problem of identifying when Koguryo actually became an empire. Attempts to ascertain the exact moment when a polity crossed the threshold into imperial status is difficult. Finding exact dates is difficult if not impossible, and the best one can hope for in this regard is a close approximation. For Koguryo, the crossing of the imperial threshold seems to have occurred during the reign of Gwanggaeto (391–413).

In addition to Koguryo imperiality, this article also seeks to prove that the imperial hierarchy that came to signify East Asia's political landscape was incomplete during the historical period under discussion

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[28] Mark E. Byington, "Control or Conquer: Koguryŏ's Relations with States and Peoples in Manchuria," *The Journal of Northeast Asian History* 4, no. 1 (2007), 85-115.

[29] Bak Gyeong-cheol,"Koguryo gunsa jeonryak eul wihan ilsiron: Pyongyang cheondo yihu Koguryo gunsa jeonryak ui jihyangjeom eul jungsim euro" [An essay on observations of Koguryo military strategy: Emphasis on the direction of Koguryo military strategy after the relocation of the capital to Pyongyang], *Sahak yeongu* 40 (1989), 1-2.

[30] Pankaj Mohan, "Gwanggaeto daewangbi e boineun Koguryo wanggwon gwa jeongdangseong" [Royal authority and legitimacy in the late fourth-early fifth century Koguryo], *Koguryo Balhae yeongu* 21 (2005), 524.

and that China was not the sole imperial power in East Asia. East Asia at this point in history was a region in contention, between the nomadic imperial confederations and Chinese dynasties, and from the end of the fourth century onward, eastern powers headed by Koguryo. The "ideal" tributary system, which meant that the Chinese held military superiority over other powers, did not exist at this time.[31] As a case in point, that the relationship between the Xiongnu and the Han during the initial stages was not tributary at all, but was more akin to extortion and appeasement where Xiongnu attacks were averted usually through promises of "gifts." Over the historical period being covered here, China's relationship with the outside world existed in various forms, from outright Chinese rule (northern Vietnam), to parity (Han-Xiongnu, Northern-Southern dynasties), to actual "barbarian" superiority. There was no dominance and hegemony that China would achieve later in history. Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula, was not a part of the sinocentric world order from the fifth to the seventh centuries, due to the emergence of Koguryo as an empire.

1. Conquests Prior to Gwanggaeto

Again, the conquests of Gwanggaeto did not represent a new era or something out of the ordinary, but were merely a continuation of a trend that had started when King Dongcheon (227-248) joined hands with Sima Yi (司馬懿) of Wei China in attacking the Gongsun (公孫) clan of Liaodong, hoping for some Gongsun lands in return for cooperation. When Koguryo was denied, however, Wei and Koguryo went to war in 246. The war opened well for Koguryo, but its two initial victories were reversed when the king's arrogance led him to underestimate the enemy,

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[31] Piteo Yun, "Seogu hakgye jogong jedo iron ui Jungguk jungsimjeok munhwaron bipan" [Critique of Sino-centrism in Western theories of the tributary system], *Asea yeongu* 45, no. 3 (2002), 273.

and the Koguryo capital of Gungnaeseong was sacked by Wei troops.[32] After driving out the Wei forces, King Dongcheon turned his attention south and secured territories in the northeast and north-central Korean peninsula.[33] Koguryo's advance toward Liaodong seemed to have been thwarted for the time being, and off-limits to subsequent expansion. Expansion thereafter took place in other directions. The thirteenth king, Seochon, sent his brother Dalga in subjugating Sukshin (C. Sushen 肅愼) tribes, located northeast of Koguryo territory around the Songhua and the Ussuri rivers, where "many towns were taken" and Dalga became a viceroy (安國君) appointed to the region, indicating the conquest and incorporation of these areas. Expansion accelerated during the reign of King Micheon (300-331), who invaded and stamped out Lelang and Daifang in succession, thus eliminating the last Chinese enclaves in the Korean peninsula, in addition to successful attacks on Xianping (西安平) in Liaodong and Xuantu. King Micheon's successes were apparently reversed during the reign of Koguryo's sixteenth king, Gogugwon. Koguryo's capital was sacked by the Yan (燕) army of Murong Huang (慕容皝), stopping Koguryo's attempts at advancing further into Liaodong. The king attempted to invade Baekje but was defeated in 369, and was killed defending Pyongyang against Baekje troops in 371.

In spite of the defeats, Koguryo territory at this time stretched approximately from the Liaodong peninsula south of the Qianshan (千山) range to the northern Gangwon province area in the Korean peninsula, and from the Songhua River to the mouth of the Tumen River. Expansionism would come to a temporary halt during the reign of the seventeenth king, Sosurim, whose focus was more inward than outward. Sosurim's standout policies include the introduction of Buddhism, the enactment of laws (律令), and the creation of a state academy (太學).

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[32] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Dongcheon, year 20 (三國史記高句麗本紀東川王 20年).

[33] Bak No-seog, "Seogi 3 segi ui Koguryo ui dong haean jiyeok jinchul" [Koguryo's expansion into the East Coast in the third century], *Jeonbuk sahak* 23 (2000), 84-88.

These policies should be understood in their proper context, as efforts to reorganize and stabilize the country after successive defeats to Yan and Baekje.[34] They should not be considered, as earlier studies suggest, as evidence of Koguryo's earnest establishment as an ancient kingdom, as the centralization of governmental and monarchical powers was already complete by the second century. Though Sosurim did send troops into battle, they were not earnest attempts at expansion, and that policy did not change until 385, when King Gogugyang dispatched troops in an attempt to take Liaodong.

2. Gwanggaeto's Conquests

Gwanggaeto's rule began with a series of wars and swift conquests. In the year that he took the throne, the king struck Baekje with 40,000 troops and succeeded in taking nearly all territories north of the present Han River. Koguryo troops also struck the Biryeo (C. Beili 卑麗), a branch of the Khitan living along the Siramuren River. The king also took Gwanmi Fortress, at present-day Ganghwa Island. Baekje attempts to take back the areas from 392 to 394 were all checked and repulsed.

When the Biryeo tribes did not desist from their raiding, the king mounted an earnest expedition, destroying six to seven hundred hamlets and taking much livestock. The subjugation also had the effect of gaining access to the resources of the nomadic steppe. In 396, Gwanggaeto launched a full-scale invasion of Baekje, driving deep into Baekje territory and eventually encircled Hanseong, the capital. According to the Gwanggaeto Stele in Ji'an, China, the king of Baekje surrendered to Gwanggaeto, paid a tribute of 1,000 rolls of fine cloth and 1,000 slaves, and promised to serve Koguryo "forever" as its vassal.[35] This was in

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[34] Jung Woon Yong, "Trends in Koguryŏ's Relationship with Paekche and Silla during the 4th-7th Centuries," *International Journal of Korean History* 8 (August 2006), 89.

[35] 而殘主困逼歸出男女生口一千人細布千匹跪王自誓從今以後永爲奴客太王恩赦

addition to Koguryo taking fifty-eight fortresses and 700 villages from Baekje. In 397, Koguryo attacked the Yan and conquered the long-coveted area around the Liao River estuary including Yodong Fortress (Liaoyang 遼陽) and Pingzhou (平州). Yan would temporarily recover Pingzhou but it would revert to Koguryo control after Gwanggaeto's campaign of 402, with the Liao River becoming the border between Koguryo and the Chinese dynasties thereafter until 667. In 399, Silla called for aid, pleading that "our castles are full of men from Wa." Gwanggaeto sent 50,000 infantry and cavalry, the largest concentration of Koguryo troops in any record, destroyed the Wa (倭) invaders, and drove on to Gaya, which likely instigated the invasion of Silla at the behest of Baekje. Gaya, especially Geumgwan Gaya, was dealt a severe blow from which Gaya never fully recovered. The Silla king also promised to be a vassal of Koguryo and Koguryo's sphere of influence was successfully extended down to the southern coast of the Korean peninsula.

Koguryo's cause was helped by a *coup d'état* in Later Yan (後燕). According to the *Chronicles of Jin* (*Jin shu* 晉書), a noble named Murong Yun (慕容雲) killed the Later Yan king and took the throne for himself, [36] creating the state of Northern Yan (北燕). Murong Yun's real name was Gao Yun (高雲), whose ancestors came from Koguryo.[37] Hearing of Gao Yun's accession, Gwanggaeto treated him as a countryman. Northern Yan thus became a buffer zone between Koguryo and the Sinitic powers. Gwanggaeto then campaigned against the declining state of Buyeo in 410, taking sixty-four fortresses and 1,400 villages. This severely weakened Buyeo, which Koguryo would incorporate completely into its territory in 494.

Gwanggaeto Stele [gsm.nricp.go.kr/_third/user/viewer/viewer01.jsp?ksmno=2512].

[36] *Jin shu* 124, Chronological records, no. 24, Murong Yun (晉書卷124載記第24 慕容雲).

[37] Ibid.

Gwanggaeto, a name commonly translated as "the expander of the realm," earned the moniker through his conquests and territorial expansion outlined above. However, in spite of his seemingly impressive series of conquests, he was not unique in his achievements in the long history of Koguryo. Expansion had been a longstanding policy of Koguryo, and Gwanggaeto's exploits were merely an extension of what had been a general historical trend. What actually sets the reign of Gwanggaeto apart from the Koguryo monarchs that came before him is the fact that he translated his conquests into a multilayered international order with Koguryo at the center. It was during his reign that the display of imperiality of the Koguryo state became actual; militarily, politically, and most importantly, ideologically.

Several lacunae could be pointed out in this regard. First, it can be noted that Koguryo is not the only state that thought of itself as special. All ancient states, to some degree, emphasize their uniqueness and superiority. Second, the international hierarchy that supposedly is the hallmark of empires is found at all levels, even in small kingdoms where the monarch forms a feudal relationship with local lords. But such notions of superiority mean nothing until that state achieves a preponderance of power vis-à-vis other states/tribes in the region; actually imposing that superiority on others and making them acknowledge it. What is more, the imposition and acknowledgment of superiority must take place over a geographically vast area, and over an ethnically diverse population, and the polity has to be successful in sustaining that control for an extended period. This is how a given polity stops being just another state, or a feudal kingdom, and becomes an empire. Koguryo was successful in this regard while Baekje, Silla, and Gaya were not.

3. Post-conquest Maintenance and Imperial Ideology

Though military power provides the ultimate reminder of imperial power,

imperial rulers also recognize the costs associated with wars and sustained military presence. This is where ideologies and ceremonies enter the picture. Ideologies of superiority, born of successful conquest and constituting the "soft" side of imperial power, actually serve a practical purpose. Imperial rulers utilize ideology and ceremony in many different forms, including co-option of local elites along with unilateral taking of hostages for "education" in order to reduce expenses associated with using military force. Ideologies are promulgated and emphasized in relations with other countries for purposes of bringing them in line with the imperial order without overt military action (and related costs), and with associated ceremonies to perpetuate and inculcate them among vassal states.

The story of imperial formation is the same everywhere and throughout history: imperial territories are first conquered militarily, then connected economically and maintained ideologically (and/or culturally). The conquests of Gwanggaeto stretched Koguryo territory as well as spheres of influence very far from its traditional core. Even by more conservative estimates, Gwanggaeto's additions to Koguryo include: the Liao River estuary, the Han River Basin, the central Korean peninsula to the Sobaek Range, present-day Hunchun, some parts of Russia's Maritime Provinces, and beyond Songhua River into parts of northern Manchuria. As Barfield notes, empires are political entities that centralize power and maintain control at a distance. Just as King Taejo dispatched officials to administer his new territories, and as King Seocheon made his brother viceroy over the newly-conquered Sukshin (Sushen), Gwanggaeto also set about establishing firm rule over far-flung territories.

For his northern territories, he created the office of the Governor of Northern Buyeo (K. *Yeongbuk Buyeo susa*) and appointed a man named Moduru to the post. A passage from the epitaph of Moduru found in Ji'an clearly identifies Gwanggaeto as the sovereign at the time Moduru became governor.[38]Also, Gwanggaeto simply returned to Koguryo after

accepting surrender from the Baekje king. Aside from that fact that Gwanggaeto did not conquer Baekje outright because it was militarily impractical to do so, Gwanggaeto found promises of submission and payment of tribute to be sufficient, as they were affirmation of his superior status. In the context of empire, making conquered nations actually accept the conquering sovereign's superior status is often considered more important than the material benefits of conquest. Such imperial policies of accepting submissions and leaving nations alone do appear more "benevolent" than pillage and forced extraction of resources, yet empires also make sure that tribes and nations that submitted do not leave the imperial orbit. A telling proof of this in Koguryo can be seen in Gwanggaeto's policy toward Silla. In addition to fighting and destroying the Wa and Gaya forces at the request of its "ally," Koguryo left garrisons throughout Silla territory,[39] just as Athens posted troops in cities of its supposed allies to ensure loyalty to the Delian League. Also, Koguryo took Silseong, a member of the Silla royalty, as hostage. Silseong later returned to Silla and became its eighteenth monarch, most likely after having been "educated" in Koguryo. Silseong also sought Koguryo aid and approval in eliminating Nulji, a potential rival to his throne whom he had sent to Koguryo as a royal hostage. However, Koguryo aided Nulji in assassinating Silseong, probably under the assumption that Nulji would express gratitude by staying loyal to Koguryo. There are further examples of imperial vassalage involving Koguryo in its relationship with Silla. The ceremonial bowl inscribed with Gwanggaeto's posthumous title found in the Houchong (壺杅塚) tomb is a relic that suggests that Silla held official rituals in honor of Gwanggaeto long

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[38] …如此遝至國上大開土地好太聖王緣祖父■, 尒恩教奴客牟頭婁■■, 牟教遣令北夫餘守事… Moduru Epitaph [gsm.nricp.go.kr/third/user/viewer/viewer01.jsp?ksmno=3085].

[39] Kim Yong-man, "Jido reul jungsim euro salpyeo bon Koguryo yeongto" [Koguryo territories viewed on a map], *Bibliophilie* 12 (2004), 84-103.

after his passing, just as Joseon, a vassal of Chinese dynasties, held rituals to China's emperors.

Figure 1. The *Houmyeong* Vessel[40]

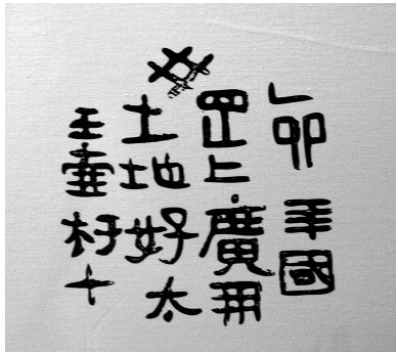

Figure 2. Ink print of *Houmyeong* inscriptions

In addition to binding vassals to the imperial orbit, the soft power of the empire also attracted "barbarians" into the imperial service. The Malgal (Mohe 靺鞨) in Koguryo's northeastern frontier entered the Koguryo military en masse and bolstered Koguryo's military manpower base. In fact, they were a major element in Koguryo's main army of 150,000 that took the field against the invading Tang army in 645. At the Battle of Jupilsan (C. Zhubishan 駐畢山) and other battles, many fought and fell alongside Koguryo troops. Records also indicate that Khitan tribesman, even after some of their fellow tribesman defected to Tang, fought alongside the Koguryo army. In addition, there is the example of the Balhae founder Dae Jo-yeong. Even if he was of Malgal ethnicity, as some suggest, it only serves to underscore Koguryo's "imperial tolerance," as his father Dae Jung-sang rose to a high military rank in the Koguryo army, and Dae Jo-yeong also served in a command capacity.

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[40] The images above (figures 1 and 2) have been downloaded from the public realm.

While much has been made of the Sillan Seol Gye-du's service in the Tang army as a visible sign of Tang openness to foreigners, it is surprising that Dae Jo-yeong's service in the Koguryo army has not been given similar attention.

Imperial ideologies that drive state policy do not exist in a vacuum, but are recorded in histories and state monuments. They form a body of state propaganda with which empires justify their conquests. Most imperial ideologies emphasize that the empire does what it does not out of mere desire for conquest or even simple state interest. Empires have taken upon themselves to right the world gone wrong by bringing order to a chaotic world, as can be seen in the aforementioned example of the Incas. As for evidence of Koguryo's imperial ideology in written form, perhaps the most visible is the Gwanggaeto Stele along with several other epitaphs and relics. The writing on the Gwanggaeto Stele states, "The grace of the *taewang* (great king 太王) reached the high heavens and his martial ardor shook the four seas" (恩澤洽于皇天武威振被四海). Expressions such as "high heavens" (皇天) and "the four seas" (四海) are abstract terms that denote realms beyond the secular world. At least according to the stele, Gwanggaeto's conquests were not exercises of power aimed at the expansion of territory, but the righteous administration of force to create a world in which "the evildoers would be swept away, and the people can go about their livelihoods and live in peace." A realm thus created would be "at peace, the people satisfied and the five grains would ripen bountifully" (掃除■■庶寧其業國富民殷五穀豊熟昊天不). This was the same sort of mission propounded by the rulers of the Roman Empire; the acts undertaken by the Empire were efforts to create a *Pax Romana* where peace and civilization would reign.[41]

The use of the term "four seas" in the Gwanggaeto Stele to denote his realm deserves special mention. The term "four seas" is an abstract

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[41] Munkler, *Empires*, 86.

term that supposedly surrounds the *cheonha*, or all under heaven (*tianxia* 天下), which lays in the middle. The middle here means more than a geographical center, but the center that stands above the "inferior" states. This notion of Koguryo's "*cheonha*" is made clear by the Moduru epitaph, in which Gwanggaeto's ancestor and Koguryo founder Chumo (Jumong) is given divine status as the "son of the sun and moon" (*irwol jija* 日月之子) and "grandson of the River Earl" (*habaek ji son* 河伯之孫); Chumo's birthplace (Northern Buyeo) is described as being "the most hallowed."[42] The message in the stele and the Moduru epitaph is clear: Koguryo is hallowed country ruled by monarchs of divine lineage, and superior to those around them. The derogatory term "Eastern Barbarian" (東夷) used to refer to Silla in the Jungwon Stele, is just one manifestation of such imperial ideology.[43]

V. Consolidation and Southern Independence

Following broad-ranging conquests, empires need to be consolidated. There are many empires that occupied large tracts of territory on the map but that failed to sustain themselves because of the inability of imperial successors to consolidate the empire's territorial gains. Much of the responsibility for solidifying the conquests of Gwanggaeto fell to his son, Jangsu, who had assumed the title *taewang*. The use of the title Great King was an affirmation, on the part of Jangsu, of his superior status over other "kings" in the vicinity. While detractors claim that *taewang* was a posthumous title, it is refuted by the fact that the Jungwon Stele, which contain records of interaction between Koguryo and Silla during the fifth century, is widely recognized as having been erected in 449, during

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[42] 河泊之孫日月之子鄒聖王元出北夫餘天下四方知此國郡最聖
Moduru Epitaph [gsm.nricp.go.kr/third/user/viewer/viewer01.jsp? ksmno=3085].

[43] 教諸位賜上下[衣]服教東[夷]寐錦遝還來節教賜寐錦土內諸衆人…
Jungwon Stele [gsm.nricp.go.kr/third/user/viewer viewer01.jsp?ksmno=2513].

Jangsu's lifetime.[44] As the Great King of his realm, his main priority was to maintain Koguryo's newfound international paramountcy. When necessary, Great King Jangsu did not shy away from overt military action, but policies during his reign placed a greater importance upon political maneuvers. His policies can be divided in terms of direction, northern and southern, each with a different focus. His policy regarding the powers to the north (and west) was a mixture of appeasement, military posturing and diplomatic action; to prevent the emergence of a dominant power that might pose a threat. Jangsu's policies to the south, other hand, was much more forceful militarily and probably aimed at eventual conquest and annexation of the two states (Baekje and Silla).

1. Imperial Reorganization

The work of consolidation also meant reorganization of power internally. The vestiges of Koguryo's tribal origins were phased out even further, with the expansion and integration of the *hyeong* (兄) within the bureaucracy. Formerly denoting tribal leaders serving in government, they were subdivided (*sohyeong* 小兄, *daehyeong* 大兄, and *widu daehyeong* 位頭大兄) as official bureaucratic ranks. The *saja* (使者), who were tax collectors for tribal leaders, also became officials in the service of the monarch.[45] This can be taken as a sign that even more power was being accrued to the king, especially with the king increasing the number of his tax collectors. The most visible effort at national reorganization came with the relocation of the capital from Gungnaeseong to

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[44] Shinohara Hirokata, "Koguryo ui taewangho wa taewangga insik ui hwagin" [The title of Taewang during the Koguryo Dynasty and the development of the perceptions of the Taewang lineage], *Hanguksa yeongu* 125 (2004:6), 4-5.

[45] Gang Sun, "4-5 segi Koguryo ui yeongto hwakjang gwa Pyongyang cheondo" [Koguryo's territorial expansion in the fourth and fifth centuries and relocation to Pyongyang], *Sungmyeong Hanguk saron* 2 (1996), 79.

Pyongyang in 427. As moving the capital usually entailed uprooting those who had become entrenched in the old capital, there would have been much resistance, as seen in the letter that King Gaero of Baekje submitted to the emperor of Northern Wei in 472. The letter is an indication of the political chaos set off by King Jangsu's change of capitals.[46]

Though some believe that moving the capital to Pyongyang is indicative of King Jangsu's southward policy, this probably was not the case. Gungnaeseong was probably chosen as the early capital because it was easily defensible, being located in a river valley at the end of narrow, mountainous trails. The large fortresses that are prominent in Koguryo military history appeared relatively late in its history. According to Toshiaki Tanaka, Koguryo's early defenses were centered on walled gates that blocked narrow mountain roads, especially to the northwest of the capital where the strongest early threats to Koguryo existed.[47] The fact that Koguryo made Gungnaeseong, which could only be reached through mountain pathways, and that it once served as Koguryo's capital is indicative of the priority placed on defense in early Koguryo history.

With territories stretching more than 1,000 kilometers from one end of the realm to another, immediate survival was not what concerned Great King Jangsu. Whereas defense was the primary rationale for the situation of capitals for states that feel vulnerable, imperial capitals place a premium on accessibility. When a small kingdom expands into an empire, the capital is either moved to a more accessible location or is

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[46] 今<璉>有罪, 國自魚肉, 大臣彊族, 戮殺無已, 罪盈惡積, 民庶崩離, 是滅(十亡)㊀之期, 假手之秋也. "Presently, (the Koguryo king) Yon committed many sins and turned his country to ruin, and strong vassals and families slaughter without end. The populace is downtrodden and scattered, and the country sits on the verge of collapse." (*Samguk sagi*, Baekje Annals, King Gaero, year 21 / 三國史記百濟本紀蓋鹵王 21年).

[47] Tanaka Toshiaki, "Seonggwak siseollo bon Koguryo ui bangeo chegye: Wangdo mit dae Jungguk bangeo reul jungsim euro" [Fortress walls and Koguryo's defense networks: Emphasis on Koguryo capital defenses and defense against China], trans. Kim Hui-chan, *Koguryo Balhae yeongu* 8 (1999), 210.

given greater accessibility through the construction of infrastructure such as roadways or canals. One only need to recall the adage "all roads lead to Rome" to realize the importance of accessibility for imperial centers. The capital of the Achaemenid Persian Empire was connected to distant provinces by its network of "royal roads." Even capitals located in seemingly inhospitable regions, such as the Inca capital of Cuzco or the Aztec Tenochtitlan, were opened through construction of roads. Chinese imperial capitals such as Changan, Jiankang, Luoyang, or Beijing were also located near large rivers or sat astride major road junctions. In contrast with the narrow valley surrounding Gungnaeseong, Pyongyang represented a much more accessible location. It was situated amidst broad plains supported by a major waterway (Daedong River), which facilitated irrigation for the surrounding farmland as well as transportation and logistics. In light of such a relationship between imperial capitals and accessibility, it is no coincidence that the change occurred shortly after the creation of the Koguryo imperium.

2. Northern and Southern Policies

Koguryo was also helped by the fact that the hegemony that China would create later in history was still incomplete at this time. China had not yet formed a state that would dominate the East Asian political landscape. After a brief period of unification by Western Jin (265-317), China proper was divided into north and south, and would not be reunited until 589. To the north, the nomadic world was dominated by the Rouran, or the Ruanruan. It would no doubt have been in Koguryo's interest to keep both the Sinitic and nomadic powers from becoming a threat. One power that seemed well on its way to a confrontation with the Koguryo Empire was Northern Wei. After its establishment in the late fourth century, Northern Wei rapidly expanded and soon held sway over the northern half of China by the early fifth century. By 435, Northern Yan, which acted as a buffer zone between Koguryo and the western powers, was

nearing collapse after defeat to Northern Wei. Koguryo took action and ensured that the manpower and treasures of Northern Yan did not fall into Northern Wei hands by quickly sending in troops as the capital was about to fall. Koguryo secured both the monarch Feng Hong (馮弘) and much treasure from the Northern Yan palace, leaving Northern Wei with virtually nothing.[48] However, Jangsu sent an emissary to Northern Wei immediately following the incident to smooth relations with the newly-rising power and the potentially volatile situation with the Northern Wei was defused.

When major conflict broke out in 429 between the Rouran and Northern Wei, which came to dominate northern China, Rouran was generally on the defensive and sought out other powers in the vicinity to counter Northern Wei. Koguryo was clearly aware of the threat Northern Wei might pose to its imperium, so it engaged in diplomacy aimed at offsetting Wei power in the region. This is demonstrated by Koguryo's active engagement with the southern Chinese dynasty of Liu-Song (劉宋, 420-479), to which Koguryo sent nine missions from 439 to 462[49] and which marked a long intermission in Koguryo-Northern Wei relations. Rouran attempts to contact other powers were initially unsuccessful until its ascendency under Shouluobuzhen Khan (受羅部真可汗) when Rouran applied military pressure on Wei and established relations with powers in the vicinity in an attempt to encircle Northern Wei. Rouran relations with Koguryo was probably established sometime before 473, when King Gaero sent his letter to the Emperor of Northern Wei, which states that Rouran and Koguryo "had made an alliance with the Ruanruan to the north" (北約蠕蠕). The Rouran-Koguryo alliance is made manifest by the agreement between the two powers to split Didouyu (地豆于) territory in 479. Rouran no doubt wished to apply even greater pressure on Northern

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[48] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Jangsu, year 24 (三國史記高句麗本紀長壽王 24年).

[49] Yi Seong-je, "5-6 segi Koguryo ui seobang jeongchaek yeongu" [On the Western policy of Koguryo in the fifth and sixth centuries] (PhD dissertation, Seogang Daehakkyo, 2003), 49.

Wei and crushing any tribe that could aid Northern Wei served its purpose. Koguryo's rationale for splitting Didouyu territory with the Rouran was to prevent an attempt by the Malgal from establishing ties with Northern Wei during the Yanxing (延興, 471-476) era of the Northern Wei emperor, Xiaowen.[50]

While keeping other powers (mainly Northern Wei) at bay in the north, King Jangsu implemented a far more aggressive policy toward the south. Jangsu was probably aware of the danger of having hostile forces in multiple directions and decided that some had to be eliminated. Its main threat to the north, Northern Wei, was equally matched militarily, and in the event of war the outcome would be uncertain. However, the two states to the south represented relatively easier targets. During the early part of Jangsu's reign, Silla was a vassal of Koguryo, as can be seen in the aforementioned *Houmyeong* vessel and inscriptions on the Jungwon Stele. But that did not stop King Jangsu from maneuvers that would make Silla a formal Koguryo territory. Glimpses of Jangsu's designs concerning Silla can be seen in articles from *Nihon shoki*. Though articles in the *Nihon Shoki* tend to highlight the role of the Japanese and must be taken with a grain of salt, a *Nihon shoki* entry from 463 shows what Jangsu wanted to do with Silla:

> (Emperor Yuryaku, year 8) … Not long after this that a Goryeo (Koguryo) soldier was returning to his country after earning a respite, and hired a Silla man as his horse driver. The soldier looked back and said, "The day when your country will fall to ours is not far." [Other books write that the soldier said, "Your country will be ours soon."] Upon hearing this, the horse driver fell back feigning stomach illness and ran off to his country, telling everyone what he had heard. The king of Silla realized that Koguryo's protection was a lie, and sent word

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[50] *Wei shu*, vol. 100, Biographies: no. 88, Wujiguo (魏書卷100　列傳第88 勿吉國).

and told everyone in the country to "kill the rooster in your houses." The men of Silla understood what the king said and killed all the men of Goryeo in Silla. But one Goryeo man managed to escape and ran to his country and told everyone what had happened. The King of Goryeo raised an army and gathered at Chukguryu Castle [other records call it Dogusagi fortress] and spread his camp; they sang, danced, and played music. When the King of Silla heard the songs of the Goryeo army on all sides, he realized that the enemy was inside Silla territory. He sent a messenger to the King of Imna and pleaded. "The Goryeo king is trying to conquer our country. The situation is like a tassel dangling on the banner and the country is in a peril greater that eggs stacked on top of each other. How long the country's fortunes will be is rather uncertain."[51]

If this entry in *Nihon shok*i can be trusted, it means that Jangsu was not interested in merely holding Silla in vassalage, but intended to add Silla to his territory, thus converting an "informal" sphere of influence into actual territory. Koguryo aggression toward the south continued as it took Siljik Fortress (present-day Samcheok, Gangwon Province) in 468 followed by a massive invasion of Baekje in 475. Koguryo's invasion of Baekje was an astounding success, as Koguryo troops occupied the Baekje capital of Hanseong (present-day Seoul). King Gaero was captured and killed, and Koguryo troops drove Baekje far south, forcing it to relocate its capital to Ungjin (present Gongju, South Chungcheong Province) before stopping.[52] Baekje would suffer from political turmoil resulting from the effects of the invasion for several years, including the regicide of Munju on 477, rebellion by the former defense minister in the same year, and the untimely death of the new king (Samgeun) in 479.

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[51] *Nihon shoki*, Emperor Yuryaku, year 8 (日本書紀雄略天皇 8年).

[52] *Samguk sagi*, Baekje Annals, King Gaero, year 21 (三國史記百濟本紀蓋鹵王 21年).

Thus Jangsu thought Baekje was in no position to do anything about Koguryo's full-scale invasion of Silla in 481. Seven Silla fortresses fell to Koguryo and the Koguryo army marched to Mijilbu (present-day Pohang, North Gyeongsang Province), virtually to the gates of the Silla capital of Geumseong (present-day Gyeongju). Silla's collapse was averted when Baekje and Gaya sent troops to aid Silla, and the southern alliance managed to defeat and repel the Koguryo invasion force.[53] Consideration of the international political situation was important in decisions by the Baekje and Gaya to send help, as destruction of Silla and incorporation into Koguryo would certainly have been a precursor to Koguryo's conquest of the latter two states as well. The invasion of 481 was a last concerted effort by Koguryo to conquer the entire Korean peninsula. It was also the last major attempt at conquest in general. Changes in the international power balance in East Asia afterwards would prevent Koguryo from making further such attempts. The events of 481 also mark the end of Koguryo's imperial hegemony in the southern Korean peninsula, which would be replaced by state-against-state competition thereafter.

VI. Costs of the Koguryo Empire

Joseph Tainter writes in *Collapse of Complex Societies* that large political entities usually fail due to what is referred to in economics as "the law of diminishing returns." A rapidly expanding state, after initially enjoying the surplus from conquest and pillage, come to a point where the conquered territories begin to cost the imperial government. Instead of simply taking things by force, the empire now has to send out officials to collect the surplus in the form of taxes. Cities have to be constructed as administration centers and fortresses need to be built for its distant

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[53] *Samguk sagi*, Silla Annals, Soji Maripgan, year 3 (三國史記新羅本紀炤知麻立干 3年).

garrisons. When expansion slows down, conquest no longer "pays for itself." The cost of maintaining and administering the territory no longer comes from loot or tribute, but from tax money in the imperial coffers. In the end, costs of conquered territories exceed the initial gains to the empire.

To take an example from Rome, Roman victory over the Macedonians and the occupation of Macedonia in the second century BCE brought in such wealth that Roman citizens were exempt from taxes. The conquest of the kingdom of Pergamum in 130 BCE led to a doubling of the Roman state budget from 100 million to 200 million *sesterces*. When Pompey took over Syria, the state budget was increased further to 340 million sesterces. Caesar's famed conquest of Gaul brought so much gold into Rome that the value of gold dropped by 36 percent. In essence, each conquest paid for further conquests.[54] But after the conquests were over, the army was expanded in order to defend the suddenly bigger Roman possessions, as the twenty-eight legions (about 200,000 men) at the beginning of the reign of Augustus[55] increased to over 435,000 by the later third century under Emperor Diocletian.[56] Along with the number of troops, their pay would increase as well. The pay for the individual Roman soldier prior to the Principate was 112.5 *denarii*, but was raised to 250 *denarii* under Julius Caesar. It would further increase to 300 *denarii* under Domitian in the late first century and to 450 during the reign of Septimius Severus in the early third century. Needless to say, such increases placed enormous strains on state finances, and led to massive inflation. However, it was a policy that could not be readily reversed given the extent of Rome's empire.

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[54] Joseph A.Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 129.

[55] Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 50.

[56] Geoffrey Parker, ed., *Cambridge Illustrated History: Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 65.

As the cost of administration and military conquest rose, Rome became comparatively inactive after the establishment of the Principate regarding new conquests. The last major effort at conquest by the Principate occurred during the reign of Emperor Trajan, when he conquered the Kingdom of Dacia in 106. Though Emperor Marcus Aurelius went to war against the Germanic Marcomanni in the 160s, this was more frontier pacification than earnest conquest. As mentioned in Section II, states continue to expand until they cross the imperial threshold, as ancient states do not have set limits to their growth aside from the power of other states. However, one important check on unlimited expansion does exist—military and economic power available to the state. If a state attempts to expand beyond what its military and economic capability can afford, it constitutes what Paul Kennedy called "imperial overstretch." Though it can happen to political entities at every level, it is most likely to involve empires with more territories and frontiers to defend, where too much resources are diverted from wealth creation and allocated instead to military purposes.[57]

Koguryo managed to expand somewhat even after its debacle in the south, as evidenced by the incorporation of Buyeo in 494. Records in *Tongdian* (通典) note that Koguryo stretched 6,000 *li* (里) from east to west during the Sui period.[58] However, there were no rapid conquests reminiscent of Koguryo's early years or expeditions of Gwanggaeto. Like all empires, the vast territories and the international hierarchy that Koguryo created had become expensive to maintain. Though no exact figures exist on Koguryo's state finances, the cost of its empire can be deduced from other records. As Koguryo expanded into the Liaodong peninsula, a defensive system centered on walled road blocks that blocked off paths to the Koguryo capital was converted into a system

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[57] Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), xvi.

[58] *Tongdian*, vol. 186, Border Defense 2, Eastern Barbarians, second chapter (通典卷186 邊防二東夷下).

based on walled towns and fortresses along the border. These fortresses numbered 200,[59] all of which had to be garrisoned and stocked with food in case of siege. They also represented towns where the local population resided.

The sizes of the garrisons and populations from some of these fortresses can be seen in records on Koguryo's wars with Sui and Tang. When Yodong Fortress fell to Tang forces in 645, 10,000 were killed in battle, with 10,000 soldiers and 40,000 civilians captured as prisoners. In addition, 500,000 sacks (*seok*/*shi* 石) of grain were secured by the invaders.[60] Since it is uncertain what the grains actually were, the assumption here is that they were rice, for the sake of calculation. A traditional "sack" is 160 kilograms, and a simple calculation (160× 500,000) would provide a figure of eighty million kilograms, or 80,000 tons. If we assume the rice to be unmilled, as they frequently were in ancient times, a sack would be 120 kilograms. One half-million sacks of unmilled rice would be 60 million kilograms or 60,000 tons. Assuming that male/female numbers among the 40,000 civilians prisoners were equal (20,000 men and 20,000 women), adding the 20,000 soldiers from the record would add up to 60,000 persons in Yodong Fortress. Food consumption can be gauged by converting the rice into calories and dividing it by the average caloric intake of males (2,500 Kcal) and females (2,000 Kcal). As one gram of rice contains 3.6-3.7 Kcal, an average man would require 675 grams of rice to meet his daily caloric need and 540 grams for an average woman. Thus the amount of rice consumed by 40,000 men in the fortress (675 grams×40,000) in one day would total 27 million grams or 27,000 kilograms in addition to 10.8 million grams[61] (10,800 kilograms) consumed by the women. The

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[59] Kim Yong-man, *Koguryo ui balgyeon* [Koguryo: The discovery] (Seoul: Bada chulpan, 1999), 220.

[60] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Bojang, year 4 (三國史記高句麗本紀寶藏王 4年).

[61] 540 grams×20,000=1,080,000 grams.

fortress's population of 60,000 would have required 37,800 kilograms of rice (food) daily. This obviously is a very crude estimate, as the populace would be consuming other foodstuffs as well, but it does give us a rough idea.

This calculation can be criticized for use of modern data, thus a second calculation was done utilizing more traditional figures for food consumption. The *Seungjeongwon ilgi* (承政院日記), or *The Daily Records of the Royal Secretariat*, contains comments from Left Secretary (左承旨) Yu Ui-yang during the reign of King Jeongjo of Joseon (1778-1800). Yu states that the Joseon capital of Hanyang has a population of 200,000, and the people consume about 1 million *seok* of rice each year.[62] These figures applied to 60,000 residents of Yodong would mean an annual consumption of roughly 300,000 *seok*. Thus 500,000 *seok* of grain at Yodong would mean sufficient food for 1.6 to 1.7 years.

In addition to Yodong Fortress, other fortresses maintained a considerable complement of troops along with their provisions. Gaemo Fortress, which fell prior to Yodong, is also recorded as having 100,000 *seok* of rice. Other related details from the Koguryo-Tang War include 8,000 Koguryo troops killed at Bisa Fortress (present-day Dalian), and 100,000 troops were stationed in Baegam Fortress and Shinsong Fortresses (present-day Fushun). The population of Yodong Fortress, Gaemo Fortress, and Baegam Fortress, all of which fell to Tang, combine for a total of 70,000.[63] Given that there were over 200 fortresses in the Liaodong area, the cost to maintain them would have been staggering. The fortresses were of different sizes, but for the purpose of this article, let us assume a garrison of 1,000 people. In terms of rice, the garrison alone would consume 20,250 kilograms (675 grams×1000×30 days) monthly. Multiply this figure by two hundred and the total becomes 4.05

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[62] *Seungjeongwon ilgi*, King Jeongjo, year 7, ninth month, ninth day (承政院日記正祖 7年 9月9日丁酉).

[63] *Samguk sagi*, Koguryo Annals, King Bojang, year 4 (三國史記高句麗本紀寶藏王 4年).

million kilograms per month. When this figure is multiplied by the number of months in one year (12), the result is 48,600,000 kilograms—for troops alone. The ratio of troops to male and female civilians at Yodong Fortress being 1:1:1, and applying this to our hypothetical fortress, 1,215 grams must be added to the daily consumption rate. One soldier plus a male and female resident would consume 1,890 grams per day, and the garrison and the population (3,000) would thus consume 56.7 million grams (56,700 kilograms) in one month. This rate of monthly consumption multiplied by 200 hypothetical fortresses of equal size yields a total monthly figure of 11.34 million kilograms, or 11,340 tons per month. A total of 11,340 tons multiplied by twelve produces an annual figure of 136,080 tons.

To put this figure into perspective, let us refer to one of the few agricultural production figures in traditional sources. The chart below lists production of grains in the provinces of Joseon during the reign of King Sejong. According to the list, the total production for the entire country adds up to 72.18 million kilograms or 72,180 tons. This is much less than the aforementioned 136,080 tons that would have been required to maintain Koguryo's 200 fortresses. It should be noted that the 136,080 tons is a hypothetical figure, assuming that fortresses are all of equal size and counting only fortresses in the Liaodong area. Taking fortresses spread over the entire Koguryo Empire and larger garrisons into the equation would likely result in numbers many times greater than the aforementioned 136,080 tons. These provisions would have required periodic re-stocking after each harvest. While historical records indicate that Koguryo still managed to expand into the seventh century, it is highly probable that the expenditures required in maintaining its frontier defenses, the army, and the bureaucratic apparatus was the chief reason that rapid expansion no longer took place after the early fifth century, after which Koguryo declined rapidly following a series of drawn-out wars with Chinese dynasties.

Table 2. Grain Production in the Early Fifteenth Century

Province	Land under Cultivation (*gyeol*[64])	Total Yield: Seok	Yield (*seok*) per *Gyeol*
Gyeongsang	301,147	169,811	.56
Jeolla	277,588 (rice paddies: 110,000)	158,184 (11 *du*[65])	.57
Chungcheong	236,300	90,451 (12 *du*)	.38
Gyeonggi	200,347 (rice paddies: 76,173)	37,390 (3 *du*)	.19
Hwanghae	104,072	41,573 (10 *du*)	.40
Gangwon	65,916	20,099 (13 *du*)	.32
Pyeongan	308,751	54,746 (12 du)	.18
Hamgyeong	130,413	29,244 (8 *du*)	.22

Source: *Joseon wangjo sillok, Sejong sillok*

VII. Conclusion

In the annals of Korean history, Koguryo occupies a unique place. Not only does it seem to provide a lone example of a state that was truly large territorially, but also occupied what is now foreign territory. For some, Koguryo exists as an example of bygone glory that shines as the bright spot upon an otherwise dismal history. Koguryo also exemplifies, for others, everything that is "Korean"; which had martial traditions and by virtue of its military strength, feared none. Both of these perspectives have chosen to focus not on Koguryo as it was, but for the meaning it holds for the present, for what it tells us about Koguryo's role in the crafting of modern Korean identity.

Past research has demonstrated, time and again, that Koguryo was a strong military state. Recent literature, however, has sought to expand on this and take the research on Koguryo in a slightly different direction. According to this perspective, Koguryo had a "worldview" that emphasized its uniqueness and its superior status among states. Such notions of superiority are common in a type of state that appeared

throughout world history: an empire. Empires are differentiated from states and polities for a variety of reasons, including the aforementioned notions of superiority, a monarchical title that affirms such superiority and the international hierarchy over a vast geographical area as a result of their conquests. Most important, empires set themselves apart from other states by their ability to centralize power and maintain that power over great distances.

However, despite highlighting the unique worldview possessed by Koguryo, recent studies stop short of declaring Koguryo what it was: an empire. From the standpoint of political science, Koguryo bears all the hallmarks of an empire. A fragmented China and weaker states or tribes in the vicinity afforded Koguryo the "time sovereignty" necessary for rapid expansion. While it did not attain imperial status for the first several centuries, Koguryo did manage to accumulate much international influence and power. During its progress toward imperial status, Koguryo centralized its power much earlier than previously believed, already crossing what researchers of empires refer to as the Augustan Threshold during the reign of Taejo (53-146). Power thus centralized far outstripped the checks placed on monarchical power by the aristocracy, as King Gogukcheon soundly defeated a coalition of rebellious aristocrats with military resources available near the capital. Even significant defeats such as those to the Murong Yan and Baekje represented only temporary setbacks to continued Koguryo expansion.

The most decisive moment came with the wide-ranging conquests by Gwanggaeto in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, which allowed Koguryo to cross the imperial threshold and become a full-fledged empire. While his conquests secured for Gwanggaeto a permanent place in the annals of Korean history, conquest is not what makes Gwanggaeto a standout among Koguryo's monarchs. As expansion was actually a consistent feature in Koguryo state policy, Gwanggaeto's conquests did not represent anything new. It is not for his conquest of territory that Gwanggaeto should be remembered, but for what his conquests wrought.

The real meaning of Gwanggaeto's conquests lay not in lands he gained but in the new international status he attained for Koguryo. Gwanggaeto actually forged an international hierarchy, conquering and thus bending other polities to the will of Koguryo, and making them acknowledge the superiority of Koguryo. Koguryo's superiority was more than just military, as Koguryo was able to make other states acknowledge its superiority in ideological terms (in the case of Silla) which had the effect of bringing other people into its imperial service (that is, Malgal and Khitan).

Koguryo was able to become an empire not because it was "unique." This is because Koguryo did what any other state would do when faced with a similar international environment. Koguryo chose to expand rather than be content with self-sufficiency, pushing frontiers outward rather than sitting content and insulating itself within a given territory. This happens to be the basic logic that drives all ancient states, because there were no rules forcing states to respect others' territories. Ancient states usually kept expanding until they were checked by the power of another state. For Baekje and Silla, this happened early in their histories, and neither was able to cross the imperial threshold. Koguryo pursued an independent and vigorous foreign policy, with the advantage of time sovereignty, and formed an international hierarchy that the surrounding states were obliged to acknowledge. Its monarchs were referred to as *taewang*, a king superior to other kings in the area. The Sinitic hegemony of later periods did not exist at the time of Koguryo's imperial ascendency, and Koguryo was able to maintain equal status with other "empires" in the region, namely the nomadic empires and dynasties of a divided China. Koguryo was able to claim superiority in its relations with the various nomads and the Japanese, powers the Koreans were unable to claim superiority against for centuries afterwards.

This article presented a systematic examination of the reasons why Koguryo became an empire, how that empire was maintained, and the factors that perpetuated imperial rule. The focus was not on Koguryo's

war victories or valiant defense, but on attributes of Koguryo as an empire operated by a logic that drives other empires. All of the variables that contributed to the establishment of the Koguryo imperium proved to be explainable by historical research and political theory. Whether this article has succeeded or not remains the exclusive opinion of the reader. There is another aspect to Koguryo that this article mentions before concluding. First, Koguryo became a military state simply because it needed to, as it was the only way it could survive. Second, Koguryo was not a simple militaristic state driven by aggressive impulses. Again, all ancient states are aggressive to a degree and Koguryo did what was required, as a state engaged in *realpolitik*, procuring resources and territories by force even at the cost of lives and being on a near-constant war-footing. In short, the benefits of going to war and expanding seemed to outweigh the costs, which eventually made Koguryo the empire it became.

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