


AN INTERVIEW WITH  
**MIKHAIL N. PAK**



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The Review of Korean Studies, in cooperation with Chŏngshin munhwa yŏn'gu (Korean Studies Quarterly) features interviews with eminent Korean studies scholars worldwide. In this fourth interview, we introduce Prof. Mikhail. N. Pak, Director of the International Center for Korean Studies, Moscow State University, also known as the father of Korean history in Russia. The interview was conducted by Dr. Vladimir Tikhonov (Korean name Pak No-ja, Associate Professor, University of Oslo) both in Korean and English assisted by Mrs. Tatiana Simbirtseva (Korean name Shim Pyŏl-ch'a, Researcher, the International Center for Korean Studies).

The Editorial Board of the Review of Korean Studies would like to express our deepest gratitude to Prof. Mikhail. N. Pak for graciously agreeing to the interview. Further thanks go to Dr. Vladimir Tikhonov and Mrs. Tatiana Simbirtseva for their kind cooperation and contribution. Lastly, we are grateful for the devotion of Dr. Yi Jun-shik, former Managing Editor of the Review. We firmly believe that his last minute graceful touches to all the articles of the journal have greatly contributed to its presence. (Editor)

## **An Interview with MIKHAIL N. PAK**

### **Awakening of National Consciousness and the Beginning of Korean Studies**

**Question:** Where and when were you born?

**Answer:** I was born on May 13, 1918 according to the Korean lunar calendar (the Western calendar gives this date as June 22). The place I was born was called Hayŏnch'u by Koreans and known as Yanchihe among Russians. It was a village populated by Koreans that migrated to Russia, and it lay, administratively, in the Maritime Province (*Primorskaya guberniya*; today's *Primorskiy krai*), Nikol'sko-Ussuriyskiy County (*uezd*; today's *Hasanskiy raion*).

**Question:** Have you ever managed to come back — at least once — to the place of your birth?

**Answer:** For almost 70 years since I left that place I had no chance to come back. The first time when I succeeded in coming back was October 2000, and I went there together with my granddaughter then. I wanted to let her to see what the home place of our forefathers looked like. But the problem was that the Hayŏnch'u of my childhood was totally gone. The church and school were razed to the ground long before, in 1937, when the Korean people were forcibly deported from there. Only some traces of the ruins could be seen when I came back after so long.... I felt really quite melancholic at that sight. But, of course, I was so much inspired to return to the ground of my childhood once again after leaving in 1930. I could not find my old house, nor could any other houses of our Korean migrants be seen. I could still identify the mountains and rivers where I used to play as a child, but,



of course, this village today has nothing to do with our old Korean hamlet. And even that stream that I used to cross barefoot in my childhood days, has disappeared without a trace. Well, after 70 years even mountains and rivers change their appearance! Anyway, I was satisfied with showing the place to my granddaughter.

**Question:** It is known that Hayŏnch'u was among the breeding grounds of the anti-Japanese guerilla movement...

**Answer:** That's right. That was exactly the milk-ranch there where famous An Chung-gŭn cut his finger and made the oath to settle the scores with Itō Hirobumi. The oath also stipulated that he was to kill himself in the case Itō would remain alive. So to say, It? was given a kind of death sentence there.

**Question:** I wonder whether there were any anti-Japanese activists among your relatives or close acquaintances?

**Answer:** My grandfather, as well as many of my relatives, was on very close terms with Ch'oe Chae-hyŏng, known also by his Russian name, Pyotr Semenovich Choi. We were close enough to him to call him by the shortened form of his Russian personal name, Pyet'ka. His portrait was always visible in our house. But, as the atmosphere of the so-called "class struggle against kulaks (richer peasants)" started to prevail from the later 1920s onward, we had to hide the portrait. As is well known, Ch'oe Chae-hyŏng was very rich and served as an elected district headman, a so-called *noya*, under the Tsarist regime. *Noya* is the Korean translation for the equivalent Russian term, *volostnoi starosta*.

**Question:** Did you have any other relationships with the Korean independence movement?

**Answer:** According to what my mother used to tell me, my parents were well acquainted with An Chung-gŭn too. They used to mention him in my presence by his childhood name, Ŭng-ch'il, as well, as it was then customary to refer to close friends by their childhood names. Actually, the stories about the people like An that were constantly related to me by my parents did influence my personal development a lot. Until I was 9, I used almost exclusively Korean: that was possible as I attended a Korean primary school. But after that I did not receive any systematic training in Korean, and used Russian virtually as my second mother tongue. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Russian became my first language in the long run. Regrettable thing it is!

**Question:** When did you leave Hayŏnch'u, how did it happen, and where did you head for?

**Answer:** That happened in 1930, and that was a troubled period in the history of the ethnic Korean community in the Maritime Province. Traditional village communities were crushed by the so-called "collectivization" policies, and peasants' flights from the villages were enormous. A collective farm was organized in our village too, and all kinds of troubles began....

**Question:** So, your family was pushed out of the village by the "collectivization" policies? And where did you go?

**Answer:** First, we moved to another village where my father's younger brother lived, but then the life there was disorganized by a flood and we had to move further to the city of Spassk-Dal'niy. Before that, I attended a so-called "peasant youth school" there and was on verge of collapse in the end. That school provided the pupils with a "working education" (work practice) only, and I could not get a single piece of knowledge from there. But that was a school of life in a way, of course. Through that experience, I got much clearer idea about how I wished to organize my own life. Internally, that school was built as a kind of "pupils' union," and all the most difficult chores were to be done by the pupils on duty. I had to be on duty sometimes up to 6-7 times a week, and had to do everything: clean horse stables, guard our

fields, thresh the harvest, and so on. The kitchen chores were probably the worst, as all the products and water were to be transported by a sledge in winter, and water was to be first pumped from a frozen river. Actually, the water pail was taller than me at that time.... I used to get soaked in the water in the process of transportation, and then was periodically frozen.... I had no chance to get any real education at that time.

**Question:** But you could make up for your missed educational opportunities afterwards, right?

**Answer:** Well, the “working education” made me seriously ill. Some arteries gave way and I was on the verge of death. I survived, however, and thought afterwards that it was just a cinch compared to the following rounds of troubles in my life.... After getting more or less recovered, I moved to the normal school that was run by the local branch of the railway department, and succeeded there academically fairly well. It was then that I got my first prize for scholarly excellence in my life, and it was simply a piece of cloth. But in such destitute circumstances as ours, that was fabulous wealth! Very unfortunately, that school had to close due to a typhoid epidemic that came to Spassk-Dal’niy. To make the situation more miserable, our father got sacked from his job, and we fell into abject poverty. As a result, we moved once again to a bigger city, and that time it was Chita. I also went to a railway-run school there, and, having spent the 7th, 8th, and 9th academic years in that institution, was able afterwards to pass the uniform scholastic aptitude test that opened the way to a university education. As my test results were quite good, I had the right to choose the university of my liking and enter it without any additional exams. But the peregrinations of our family did not end in Chita. In 1935, we all moved to Yaroslavl, in European Russia, where my elder brother served as an army officer. Actually, I had already moved out and lived separately from the family at that time, eating in the school cafeteria. Our headmaster was an unusually kind person and a Russian native of Harbin who taught literature to us. He is still living vividly in my memories. But both were soon arrested due to their “wrong” backgrounds.

**Question:** So, the university you got enrolled in 1936 on your choice was the famous MIFLI — “Moscow Institute for Philosophy, Literature, and History”?



**Answer:** Yes, and my alumni include such people as the novelist K.Simonov (1915-1979) and poet A.Tvardovskiy (1910-1971), who achieved worldwide fame afterwards. Another famous alumnus of our university was A.Shelepin (1918-1994) who afterwards became a big shot in the Communist Party apparatus, and even headed the KGB in Khrushchev times (1953-1964). He lost much of his influence in the subsequent Brezhnev period (1964-1982), however. Anyway, the level of our university education was really great. I studied Latin for 3 years, and became quite fluent in that classic language in the end. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* fascinated me at that time. The experience of studying European classical languages was very useful for me afterwards, when I started to learn Classic Chinese.

**Question:** But what was the reason that you, a student of European classical languages and culture at that time, decided to embark on Korean Studies? Who or what event influenced you?

**Answer:** In 1937, ethnic Koreans were forcibly removed from Maritime Province to Central Asia, and I started to feel a much deeper attachment to my ethnic and cultural roots. Later on, in the time of WW II, I accidentally met Kye Bong-u, a great Korean scholar, in Kazakh city of Kzyl-Orda. Kye Bong-u was totally unknown by the Korean people there; as all others, he was forcibly removed to Central Asia in 1937. I was aspiring to study Korean history, and Kye Bong-u promised to help me with Korean and Classical Chinese, especially with the modern historical terminology. Kye Bong-u had with him the unpublished manuscripts of his historical works: *Outline of Korean History* and *The History of Tonghak Rebellion*. I began my historical

education with the reading of these two texts. Unfortunately, he had to move out of the city after three months and our studies did not last long, but I managed afterwards to transfer the two manuscripts to the Academy of Science in Moscow, and that made it possible to publish them in South Korea recently.

**Question:** I have heard that then even your father was tried and executed on some spurious charges?

**Answer:** Yes, he was judged to be a “Japanese spy” on the ground that he had moved from the Far Eastern part of the country westward. That was the time when the whole of our ethnic group was repressed, and there was an atmosphere of suspicion around us all. After my father was already arrested and shot, in 1938, my elder brother, that served in Yaroslavl’, was also arrested and sent to Siberia. The predecessor on his post was sent in the same direction some time before him — you can see what kind of “spy frenzy” reigned then! My brother was to spend the next 20 years in the Norilsk silver mines, which lie in the extreme north of Siberia. First he was a prisoner, and then was upgraded to an exile. Due to the fact that he was educated as a chemist before, he could work as a precious metal analyst. After he was released and legally rehabilitated in 1956, he still continued to work there, eventually rising to the chief of the analysis lab. He retired in 1973, and died as a pensioner in 1986, when he was 79. His fate is somewhat typical for the troubled history of the ethnic Koreans in Soviet times. But, despite all the adversities, I was able to enter academia — that was an unusual feat in the circumstances we encountered.

**Question:** But how did you manage to enter academia?

**Answer:** I became a bona fide scholar after defending my “candidate of science” thesis in 1947. The exact title was “The Outline of Korean Political History in the later 19th Century.” I harshly criticized Kim Ok-kyun and other early “enlightenment” radicals in that work. My conclusion was that they were essentially pro-Japanese and totally dependent on their foreign sponsors, “compradors” of sorts in politics, so to say. On the other side, the Confucian conservatives were charging

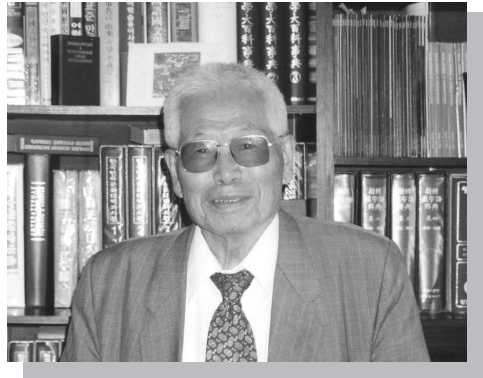


against their “progressive” opponents under essentially patriotic slogans. Of course, that was an unavoidable tragedy in the given historical circumstances. I assume that Korea’s colonization was very much a foregone conclusion, for it was objectively impossible to build modern capitalism independently on that level of economic development Korea had at that time.

**Question:** With different degrees of assertion and consistency, “mainstream” historians of both Koreas still advocate as an “accepted truth” a variety of theories that had grown out of that hypothesis of the “sprouts of capitalism” in late Chosŏn Korea. A majority of the scholars on both sides of the inter-Korean border tend to put emphasis on the development of the commodities’ production and exchange in late Chosŏn Korea and to highly estimate its potential for developing capitalism on its own, which is the main point of the so-called “internal development” (naejaejök palchŏn) theory....

**Answer:** Of course, they are all possible from the viewpoint of pure theory. The direction of the development was, to some degree, corresponding to the capitalism-oriented development of the West. But the important thing is that it was nothing more than a long-term trend, and it did not mean that the late 19th Century. merchants (proto-capitalists) were already ready to form an independent political force. In fact, Korea remained then a society of landlord-bureaucrats and peasants. It is also very difficult to find any evidence of “modernity-oriented” developments in the late 19th Century. changes in status structure. The *yangban* hegemony — in a broad sense — was still in place, unchallenged. From the viewpoint of social consciousness, the populace perceived itself not in terms of modern “nation” but, first and foremost, in terms of a pre-modern regional, clan, or “faction” (in the case of *yangbans*). It is hard to speak about such things as “national unity” in that period. In such circumstances, the *kaehwap*’a “progressives” intent on developing capitalism in Korea could not but objectively “contribute” to Korea’s colonization. In fact, even now the offspring of the colonial elite mostly belong to the ruling class in South Korea. There are many talks about the necessity of “cleaning up the colonial legacy” in South Korea currently, but is it realistic? What is the essence of much-talked-

about *ch'inilp'a*, or “pro-Japanese group”? There are many personal differences, but, on the whole, *ch'inilp'a* is a generic term for the ethnic Korean part of the colonial elite. How can you “clean up” the established privileges that their scions enjoy today? You would need a Kim Il Sung styled “class revolution”



to achieve it, but in this case the side-effects would outweigh the positive results. But, of course, I am not aware about the particulars of the *ch'inilp'a*-related discussions in South Korea today.

**Question:** How did you manage to establish the first ever course in Korean history?

**Answer:** I was assigned the world history lectures in Ryazan' Pedagogical Institute, near Moscow, in 1945. Then, I moved to Moscow State University and built the Korean history course there. The first day I taught on Korea at Moscow University was September 1st, 1949. Already 52 years ago, right? I guess I have the longest teaching experience among the Moscow University professors today. When the faculty I work with now, the Institute of Asian and African Studies, still did not exist, I worked as an associate professor at the Historical Faculty. I moved to the Institute of Asian and African Studies afterwards. From 1949 onward, I began my study of Classical Chinese in earnest, and also started to read and critically analyze North Korean books.

### The Conflict with North Korean Historiography

**Question:** It is well known that, from the late 1940s, you were entrusted with writing on Korean history for various Soviet encyclopedias and reference works. What was the reaction of North Korean “mainstream” historiography on your writings?

**Answer:** Well, there was hardly any distinguishable “mainstream” in the North Korean historiography as early as in the 1940s: the academia there was still new-born. In fact, before the emergence of the differences in opinion between the Soviet-led world communist movement and North Korean leadership, Soviet and North Korean scholars maintained a very amicable relationship and were keen to solve all the problems through discussions. But after the separate line of the North Korean leadership took definite shape, North Korean historiography succumbed to extreme dogmatism and was heavily politicized.

**Question:** It is a well known fact in Soviet Korean Studies history that your paper on Shilla’s socio-economic structure published in 1956 in “The Problems of History” (*Voprosy Istorii*), USSR’s leading historical journal, provoked a heated discussion in the North Korean historical circles on the question of the existence of a slave-owning mode of production in ancient Korean society. Would you be so kind to elaborate on that discussion? And how did the North Korean historians change their position on the question of slave-owning afterwards?

**Answer:** Yes, completely unintentionally at that time I found myself in the center of a discussion on the mode of production in the Three Kingdoms’ Period. I guess it was the last more or less free academic discussion in the history of North Korean historiography. Two theories on the socio-economic character of the Three Kingdoms’ Period clashed in the North Korean historiography at that point. While Paek Namun’s acolytes stuck to the “ancient slave-owning mode of production” theory, the younger scholars that gathered around Kim Kwang-jin, being unable to find much traces of the “slave-owning-based social system” in ancient Korea, viewed the period as the “epoch of the formation of feudal social relationships”. Basically, my position was closer to Kim Kwang-jin’s views, but the difference was in the fact that I put much stronger emphasis on the transitional character of the Three Kingdoms’ period — the gradual destruction of primitive communalism, and the gradual growth of class society. In a word, I defined the Three Kingdoms’ period as “early feudalism.” At that time, after the criticism against Stalinism on the 20th Convention of Soviet Communist Party in 1956, we started to overcome the dogmatic

approach in historiography, with lots of heated discussions on professional topics finding their ways into academic journals like *The Problems of History*. I just entered one of such discussions in Soviet historical circles, and it was wholly unintentional that I provoked a discussion in North Korea as well. In that paper of 1956, I defined the 3-6th Century period in Shilla history as “the period of feudal state formation”.

**Question:** As far as I know, after the relationship between the USSR and North Korea became much cooler in the early 1960s, a campaign of “denouncement” against you and some of your fellow Soviet scholars was launched by North Korea’s government-patronized high-ranked scholars. Can you elaborate on those events? Did they lead to difficulties in publication or visit exchanges with North Korea?

**Answer:** In fact, after that discussion on the socio-economic forms of the Three Kingdoms in August-September 1956, there were hardly any more public discussions in North Korean historiography. It became customary just to follow the “instructions” of the “Great Leader” and Party leadership.... One person among the leadership who was very negative about the discussion on the Three Kingdoms was Kim Ch’ang-man (1907-1966), the Vice-Chairman of the Labor Party’s Central Committee at that time. But in the end, he himself was purged.... In fact, they wished to struggle against the anti-Stalinist decisions of the Soviet Communist Party’s 20th Convention. North Korea confidently went the “Great Leader’s” separate way. Dogmatism became a benchmark of North Korean historiography. The most important thing for a research paper there is its conformity with all the “directions” and “instructions” from above.

**Question:** As a person who observed the trends in North Korean historiography for more than a half-century, what do you recognize as its successes and failures, and what do you consider the chief reason for its present crisis?

**Answer:** The root of the evils is the Party’s right to make and break the historical concepts. When the historical research became just a kind

of illustrative material for the Leader's "directions" and "instructions," what else can be said? Of course, there is a positive side to the Party's ideological rule over history as well: the historical publications are actively supported by the state, and some of them contain useful materials, not necessarily all ideologized. The research on the class structure of the mediaeval society by Kim Sök-hyöng, or the study of Bohai (Parhae) history and land ownership relations by Pak Si-hyöng were good books, and they were not the only ones. The translation into modern Korean and publication of more than 400 volumes of *The Veritable Records of Chosön Dynasty* was indeed a great state-sponsored undertaking. In South Korea, an independent translation of the same source appeared as well, but isn't it well known that the Northern translation made into a CD-ROM is popular even in South Korean and Japanese academia? We should also highly evaluate North Korean archaeology, especially the Paleolithic studies. Of course, foolish things happened as well: what other name can we give to the situation when an unrelated skull of unknown origin was proclaimed "Tan'gun's relics" for which a magnificent mausoleum was built, so that Pyöngyang's and North Korea's "central" and "leading" role in the "national history" and "unification process" would be emphasized?

### **Translation of *Samguk Sagi* and Systematization of 'Early Korean History'**

**Question:** In 1959, to the great enjoyment of all Oriental studies professionals, your translation of the Shilla chronicles of *Samguk Sagi* was published, thus opening the famed "Oriental Classics" series of the Oriental Literature Publishers (*Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury*). What was your motivation when you launched the great labor of translating the huge volume, how did you proceed with your work, and what were your main references in the process of translating and commenting on *Samguk Sagi*? And how do you evaluate various Northern and South Korean translations of *Samguk Sagi*?

**Answer:** Well, I started the translation just to deepen my own knowledge of the period. I was anxious to trace the historical process

through the original sources directly, and that led me to a sort of success. The translation was the work of my life, but I have also been growing as a scholar in the process of that hard work. I am very thankful to the Oriental Literature Publishers — the publishing firm attached to the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies — for both *Samguk Sagi* and the whole “Oriental Classics” series. Of course, it was an accident that my translation became the beginning of the series... Afterwards, lots of Chinese, Japanese, Central Asian, Turkish and many others classics in the translations by the best and brightest of Soviet Oriental Studies were printed in that series. The people behind that great undertaking were the Oriental Literature Publishers’ director, Oleg Konstantinovich Dreyer, and a specialist in several Central Asian languages, Dr. Yuri Evnokhovich Bregel. Dr. Bregel, with whom I was especially close personally, left Soviet Union in 1964 on some personal grounds, and, after a stint in Israel, settled down in the USA, as an Indiana State University professor. He was a great authority in the documents of Khiva Khanate.... A great enthusiast of the oriental classics’ publishing was also a young woman editor of the publishing house called Mary Lazarevna Meyer.

My appraisal of South and North Korean renditions of *Samguk Sagi* ... Well, of course, I do not possess enough knowledge to make such an appraisal. I consider the Northern translation of the late 1950s a very precise rendition, although the comments were somewhat too scarce. Of course, the translation by Yi Pyŏng-do — who became the chief (*wonjang*) of The Academy of Science of South Korea (Haksurwon) in his latter days — is a classic in itself. I relied a lot myself on the first edition of his translation... And the commented translation published recently in 5 volumes by Prof. Chŏng Ku-bok and his colleagues from The Academy of Korean Studies of South Korea (Chŏngshin munhwa yŏn’guwon) was of great help for making the third volume of the Russian translation (*chapchi, yŏlchŏn*).<sup>1</sup> It was really a great help.

**Question:** Based on your translation of *Samguk Sagi*, you published *The Outline of Early Korean History (Ocherki rannei istorii Korei)* in

1. The full reference is Chŏng Ku-bok, (*Yŏk Chu*) *Samguk Sagi*, Vol. 1-5 (Seoul: Chŏngshin-munhwayŏn’ guwon, 1996). (Editor)

1979, and that book became a textbook for the students of our generation. Would you like to elaborate on that book, unfortunately, not so well known even by South Korean historians?

**Answer:** Well, it hardly was up to become a textbook.... I just attempted to make a clear outline of the class stratification process in the primitive society, state building in the Three Kingdoms, and the breakup of the later Unified Shilla society (a kind of “feudalization”). The essentials of *The Outline* were actually included into the first volume of the official university-level textbook of Korean history published in 1974, which was entitled *Korea’s History from Earliest Times till Today (Istoriya Korei s Drevneishih Vremen do Nashego Vremeni)*. But what I

wrote on archaeology — especially on Paleolithic relics — was not included into that 1974 textbook. The archaeological part for that 1974 textbook was commissioned to Dr. Mikhail Vasil’evich Vorobyev, who simply wrote a very small sketch, even with-



out mentioning the Paleolithic sites at all. So, I did my best in that 1979 book to explain the details on these Paleolithic sites excavated by Dr. To Yu-ho in the North and Dr. Son Po-gi in Sökchangni in the South. In fact that 1979 book was the first ever in Russia to elaborate on Korean Paleolithic relics in earnest. While discussing the Three Kingdoms, I relied almost exclusively on my *Samguk Sagi* translations, considering it a unique and most reliable source. As the term “ancient society” meant basically “slave-owning society” in Soviet Marxist historiography, I tried my best to avoid using that term, speaking about “early history” instead. I defined “early history” as the formative period of early feudal society. As far as I know, in both Northern and Southern Korean historiography the scientific periodization methods based on the typology of social systems, are still not established. In the case of North Korea, after 1956 they “moved” the “slave-owning society” to the peri-

ods earlier than the Three Kingdoms — to Ancient Chosŏn and the Three Han societies. The Three Kingdoms were defined as “feudal” — not early feudal, but just “feudal”. This kind of periodization of Korean antiquity has not change up to now in Northern Korean textbooks and historical outlines.

**Question:** Apart from the *Samguk Sagi* translation, your commented translations of *Sanguozhi* accounts on Puyŏ, Koguryŏ, Okchŏ, Yemaek, and Samhan that you published as an article in 1961, were of great importance to us. How do you evaluate the level of socio-economic development of the the societies depicted in these accounts, and what do you think about the role Lolang and other Han Dynasty commanderies played in that period in Korean history?

**Answer:** Of course, the existence of the Han commanderies precipitated the breakup of primitive communities and the class differentiation among the societies of Korean peninsula and Dongbei (Manchurian) region. Of course, today’s “national historians” of China claim the territories to the north of today’s Chinese-Korean border, between the rivers Yalu and Liaohe, as “native Chinese lands,” but it is well known that their populace — the so-called “eastern barbarians” (*dongi*) — was ethnically close to the inhabitants of the Korean peninsula in antiquity.

I believe that we can closely follow the descriptions of *Sanguozhi* while trying to understand on what level of development the “eastern barbarians” stood in the 3rd Century. I know that both Northern and Southern Korean historians sometimes try to “move” to earlier times the time of the state formation on the Korean peninsula, but it would be unreasonable to ignore the *Sanguazi* materials. Compared with relatively early state-formation in the Puyŏ-Koguryŏ lands in the North, the southern Three Han tribes were much slower on their way to the statehood. The main reason was the scarcity of opportunities for trade with or raids against Han commanderies in the case of southern societies. The process of class stratification and state-formation went on among the proto-Koreans prompted by the import and redistribution of Chinese prestige goods through Lolang, and the wars against Chinese attempts to subjugate the locals. My understanding of this process



today is very close to the views on ancient history held by Prof. Han Yŏng-u (Seoul National University). The blueprint of the statehood was visible in Paekche during the reign of King Koi (234-286), but the process of state building came to its end only in the 4th Century. While state building succeeded relatively early in Koguryŏ, the foundation of statehood was laid only after 4th Century. in Shilla. When South Korean scholars base themselves on the historical facts only, without being influenced by the ideological considerations, their chronology seems to be quite correct and reliable. But already Koryŏ and Chosŏn Dynasty historiographers have approached the question of the establishment of statehood from ideological viewpoints. In more recent days, the “nationalist historians” tried to grasp the roots of Korean statehood through Tan’gun mythology. But when you allow yourself to base history on mythology, you can never get reliable dating.

**Question:** All Korean experts in Russia felt great joy when the second volume of your *Samguk Sagi* translation (“Chronicles of Koguryŏ,” “Chronicles of Paekche,” “Chronological charts”) was published in 1995. As far as I know, you spent more than 30 years of your life translating these texts. What research works did you use as your references, how do you evaluate the research on Koguryŏ and Paekche history being done in two Koreas and the West? What are the stronger and weaker points of Northern and Southern Korean research on Koguryŏ and Paekche?

**Answer:** Well, it is a bit of exaggeration to speak about 30 years. My translation job was more or less over already in 1980, but the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies did not have enough resources to sponsor the publishing, and I could not print the translation for about 15 years. I was really sorry then about my inability to find and read many good research works. But the lack of research books and papers for reference does not make the translation itself impossible.

In the field of Koguryŏ and Paekche history, Prof. Li Ogg (Yi Ok) — a French scholar of Korean origin that passed away last year — made a distinguished contribution. He established an academic school of his own in France and trained many good scholars. He was a great authority in the Three Kingdoms’ period. In his works on Koguryŏ history,

one finds an original analysis of the content of *Samguk Sagi*'s "Koguryŏ Chronicles." I guess that, except him, there are almost no specialists in this period in Europe. But I know also that the work on *Samguk Sagi*'s English translation is going on at the University of Hawaii.

What are the stronger and weaker points in Koguryŏ and Paekche research? Well, I am not a person to give any sort of "directions" or "instructions," but I can tell that the basic analytical work on extant scant narrative materials was already done — and quite well — by Prof. Yi Pyŏng-do and his school, and recent South Korean researchers show a good trend of being more faithful to the sources than to their own idiosyncratic interpretations. That is the most important thing.

**Question:** The publication of the last, 3rd volume of *Samguk Sagi*'s Russian translation (*chapchi, yŏlchŏn*) is expected around this year. How did you supervise the translation done by your disciples, what were the main difficulties in the work, and how do you evaluate the *Samguk Sagi*'s value and limitations as a historical source?

**Answer:** However competent my former students are, they still could not achieve fully coherent understanding of the original Classic Chinese text. So, my role was to closely check the correspondence between the original and Russian translation, and correct the translations done by several translators stylistically so as to ensure the stylistic unity of the whole book. I am quite confident that, to certain degree, I succeeded. The limitations of the *Samguk Sagi* as a source? Already in the 12th Century, there were manifold ideological, dogmatic approaches to history. We can more or less accept the historical facts written down in the *Samguk Sagi* as factually true, but should always be beware of the ideological lop-sidedness of the materials. Despite all this, we cannot but appraise the *Samguk Sagi* very highly as being the only reliable historical material on Korea's early history. Such early nationalist historians as Shin Ch'ae-ho did depreciate the *Samguk sagi*, but try to study early Korea without it! You will have only the mythoi and legends about Tan'gun and Kija to work with, right? *Samguk sagi*, at least, faithfully recorded the historical facts pertaining to Korea's early states for more than a millennium in chronological order. I believe that it was

a piece of good luck that I took notice of the *Samguk Sagi* as a key to Korea's early history and translated it into Russian.

**Question:** Let's now turn from your work as a translator of Korean classic historiography to your historical research as such. What is your basic understanding on history?

**Answer:** For me, as a historian, the translations of historical sources did not have any independent meaning, but were just a method to examine the historical facts deeper. The work on Korean source translation made more reliable and plausible my conclusions, as they were now based on primary source materials.

In my historical theorizing I always made the Marxist thesis about the objectively inevitable changes of socio-economic formations my departure point. I believe that the theory and methodology based on the Marxist socio-economic formation analysis has not lost its meaning today. The problem is how accurately Marxist theory and methodology are being applied by the historians doing concrete research on various countries. Marxist influence on Korean historiography first became palpable in the 1930s, when the "socio-economic history school" led by Prof. Paek Nam-un emerged among Korean historians. But application of general Marxist theoretic postulates does not necessarily prevent historians from making mistakes, for example, in classifying concrete events and facts in accordance with Marxist categories. Accurate application of Marxist theory is only possible when concrete historical materials are researched upon in great detail, and when scholars show great academic scrupulousness. A good example of how Marxists theory can be vulgarized is simplistic *juche* views on Korean history, which forcibly "re-make" the realities of history to fit the Procrustean bed of the "instructions" given by "Great Leaders" or "Generals." Whenever history is "interpreted" to fit some given set of ideological formulae, the "interpretation" will be highly subjective, and South Korean historians too are not fully guaranteed from the emergence of such cases.

To deepen our understanding of historical events, it is very important to remember the experiences of the historians of the past. As all other sciences, history develops through reflecting on and overcoming its own past mistakes and discovering new facts. That is why historiog-

raphy — the history of history writing — is so important. To understand the modern state of historical research, one must remember its past state. That is why I made the first attempt in 1987 to acquaint myself with the history of the development of historical knowledge in Korea. Of course, that work was not really satisfactory: it was built on the limited number of sources and did not reflect today's state of Korean historiography. Today in South Korea, many deep studies on Korean historiography have appeared, and it shows that history as a science has matured there.

No changes today can change the history as it is. In the light of recent historical changes we may view the historical event under more diverse angles, including these events that we had to keep silent about before, or those events that were distorted by official propaganda. But current political changes did not influence the basics of my views on history at all: I remained faithful to the objective, scientific method of history writing.

**Question:** Can you talk about the beginning of your studies on Korea in the late 1940-early 1950s?

**Answer:** In that period I had very bad reading abilities in Korean, and had to study Korea's modern history with European — Russian, English, French — materials. Only after having made some progress in Korean did I begin to read North and South Korean books.

**Question:** Can you describe the relationship between MGU (Moscow State University), the university you are affiliated with, and other educational institutions related to Korean Studies?

**Answer:** In USSR, Korean history was studied as a part and parcel of world history. As the MGU was always the most important center of Soviet academic thought, Korean Studies works written in MGU were also used all over the country.

## South Korean Historiography and Korean Studies in the World

For all Korean Studies majors in the former Soviet Union, your *Outline of the History of Korean Historiography* (Moscow, 1987) was an important book to study. In that book, you analyzed the nationalist background of South Korean historiography, and gave a detailed, coherent criticism of its main underlying concept — “national subjectivity” (*juche*). Do you think that recently South Korean historians have been able to overcome the nationalist dogmatism of the past? If you think that it has not been successfully overcome, what do you consider the main reason for adhering to it? Are there any differences between your views of South Korean historiography then (in 1987) and now?

That 1987 book was also heavily ideological.... The subtitle was “The Criticism of the Nationalistic Concepts of South Korea’s Bourgeois Historians,” and that shows how faithful I had to be to the official Soviet ideology of those days. But I had no intention to smear my South Korean colleagues or distort their views: I just needed a textbook for my students with an outline of Korean historiography’s development. Of course, I greatly lacked materials. If I would be given an opportunity to re-write that book today, I would make it two to three times bigger, and would include the accounts of such brilliant scholars as, for example, Prof. Cho Tong-göl, the author of *The History of Korea’s Modern Historiography* (*Hyöndaee Han’guk Sahaksa*).<sup>2</sup> In that 1987 book, I tried to explain the progress of South Korean historiography against the background of the dominant bourgeois nationalist ideology. As any other ideology cannot dominate in the modern national bourgeois state, it is not something to be “overcome”. If they perceive their historical development from the viewpoint of “nation,” we can consider it a “national” history, why not? I have no intention to “instruct” other people to “overcome” this or that. But, even nationalist historiography can be either very superficial and heavily ideological or much deeper and more scholarly, depending on how you make it. The superficial “research” — when various diverse “layers” of history are either

2. The full reference is Cho Tong-göl, *Hyöndaee Han’guk Sahaksa* (Seoul: Nanam Ch’ulp’an, 1998). (Editor)

ignored or “explained away” from an ideological viewpoint — do not have any academic value. But, however valueless, they continue to appear.... But, in case of deeper scholarly works, the nationalism does not prevent improving the understanding of history. In the South Korean society where they live, any other paradigm is practically impossible. We should accept this reality and refrain from attempts to change this paradigm artificially. It always will remain the main task of a bourgeois national state to strengthen its nationalist ideology. There is no alternative paradigm now. If any other ideological system made an appearance in earnest, there would be, of course, some room for change.... In fact, there are non-nationalist historians in South Korea as well.

**Question:** You went to Japan and USA in 1978 and 1982 respectively as a guest professor, and used to represent Soviet Union/Russia in a variety of international professional associations, including AKSE (Association for Korean Studies in Europe) and ISKS (International Society for Korean Studies; Kukche Koryŏ hakhoe), frequently participating in various conferences in Europe, Asia and North America. What do you consider the salient features and strong points of Western Korean Studies, and what can Korean historiography, in your opinion, learn from the West?

**Answer:** Well, to give an adequate description of Western Korean Studies you need to write a book.... My personal impression was that both the world of the 1980s, which I witnessed a lot while traveling abroad, and the perceptions of Korea in that world have changed dramatically. I met many Korean scholars in the USA, including such savants as the late Edward Wagner (Harvard University) and Prof. Gary Ledyard (Columbia University) and their students, and I feel that in recent decades that Korean Studies abroad has been truly “revolutionized.” There are independent academic schools in Korean Studies not only in Great Britain, France, Germany, and the USA, but also even in the Netherlands or Italy. Numerically and qualitatively, the academic schools in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and France and their research stand at the center of European Korean Studies. The energetic development of foreign Korean Studies has left almost no subjects in the field

untouched. In this situation, since Korean Studies abroad has become a world-recognized branch of regional studies, Korean scholars certainly should take some notice of their foreign colleagues. Even inside one country, the USA, the Korean Studies schools of Michigan, Harvard, Berkeley, or Columbia Universities exhibit salient differences between each other. We, in the International Center for Korean Studies in the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, concentrate lots of effort for strengthening the academic exchanges with our American and European colleagues, especially the exchange of publications. Thanks to the Internet, it became much easier recently.

**Question:** In the wake of the dramatic changes in the late 1980s — 1990s, the dogmatic ideological censorship disappeared in Russia, and it became incomparably easier to acquire and read Western and South Korean literature. How did the social changes influence your academic activities, or the activities of your disciples? What kind of contribution into the historical studies in Korea can the “Moscow school” of Soviet/Russian Korean Studies, established by your efforts, make? Which of your books or the books of your disciples would you like to see translated into Korean first?

**Answer:** Well, I am not sure. We did not originally intend to teach lessons or to contribute anywhere. We should modestly learn from others, first of all. There are countless things we can learn from the scholars of the two Koreas, Europe and the USA. I can say that my task is to get what we can get from Korean Studies outside, while rearing the next generation of scholars who would be able to repay the debt a little.

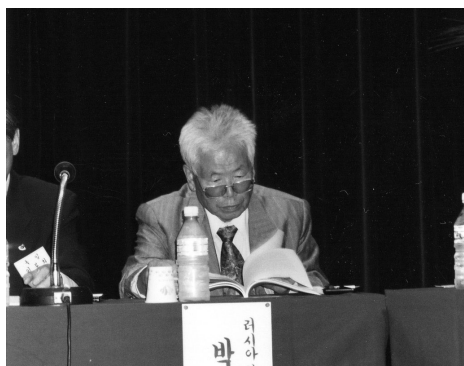
As to the books — mine and my disciples’ — I simply do not know. The more I look at my printed works, the stronger I feel how much they lack, and how many things should be corrected and added to these texts. Now, one volume of my *Selected Works* is being prepared for publication in Russia. Properly corrected and revised, this book can be offered to the readers of the world, both Eastern and Western.

## **Commitment to Korean Studies and the Korean community in Russia.**

**Question:** In the wake of great social change, you were also given much more opportunity not only for purely academic, but also for social, communal activities. You were one of the initiators of establishing the Moscow Ethnic Koreans (*koryŏin*) Association in 1987, and were elected as the Chairman of the All-Soviet Ethnic Korean Association in 1991. What do you think about today's circumstances of the ethnic Koreans in former Soviet territories, and what methods of providing assistance to them from the South Korean side do you consider the most effective?

**Answer:** The biggest thing we lost after the forcible relocation to Central Asia in 1937 was our ethnic identity. Only economic and social aspects being considered, we can say that ethnic Koreans contributed a lot, on par with other Soviet ethnic groups, first to the building of Soviet "socialism", and then to its destruction (*laugh*). In the late 1980s, we already felt that the future of the Soviet federation did not promise much, but could not even imagine that its breakup would ever come so quickly. The Soviet collapse dealt an enormous blow to the ethnic Koreans. Before, we, at least, were the citizens of one and the same country, but now, former Soviet Koreans are scattered around all 15 former Soviet republics. In fact, our ethnic unity is reinforced by the common language all we, ethnic Koreans, speak — Russian. Yes, Russian became our ethnic tongue. We had strong premonitions before the Soviet collapse that ethnic groups without any territorial autonomy, like Koreans, would experience lots of trouble. At that time, a group of our elders asked me to head the ethnic revival movement among the Soviet Koreans. I promised them to do everything I could, for this purpose. Of course, I had no intentions to work with totally unrealistic projects, like the idea of reviving Korean national autonomy in the Maritime Province. Our people are so scattered now that it is simply impossible to move all of them together to one place again. I believed that the aims of our movement should not be politicized — it should focus on reviving our identity based on language, traditions, and customs. Making politically charged projects, like the restoration of territo-





rial autonomy, will only bring more bad luck to us. At any rate, we had enough bad luck in the process of the Soviet collapse. Almost all ethnic Koreans (about 13 thousand) from civil war-ravaged Tajikistan became refugees. Many of them have not settled down yet. Last year, on invitation of their sponsor, Rev. Yi Hyōng-

gŭn of the March 1st Cultural Center in Moscow, I visited the refugee settlements in Volgograd region. The deprivation is severe, but, luckily, they are not on the verge of death from hunger. I do believe that our course on cultural work was the right one. Although the Soviet federation exists no longer, our ethnic Korean cultural centers exist in every of the former Soviet republics — in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, even Estonia, in addition to many Russian Federation regions. Even where there are only three ethnic Korean persons residing, for example, in Estonia.... We are all interconnected and help each other in business and other things. I am not interested personally in anything except cultural matters, but many of our more enterprising Koreans were quick to understand that somebody needs to financially support cultural initiatives. In fact, there are some examples of ethnic Koreans striking it rich recently. In the lists of Russia's best-connected businessmen that regularly appear in the papers, you can find the name of G. P. Han from Tumen'neft' Company, for example. You see, the ethnic Koreans live as far to the north as in the Tumen' region in Northern Siberia! The history is dealing blows to us, but we are surviving.

How to help us.... South Korea is doing much more for us than North Korea, anyway. In fact, North Korea, Soviet's long-time ally, could have done much for us, but they were too busy with building "our styled-socialism" to pay much attention to anything else. Like a snail, they hid their head into the shell and ignored the outer world. Unlike them, South Korea — both the state and civil society — contributed greatly into rebuilding our ethnic identity. Especially big was the contribution by South Korean embassies in Russia and Kazakhstan. There are cultural

and information centers affiliated with these embassies, and they also sponsor our own cultural facilities. We received great help from the embassy when the building on Leningradsky Prospect, 45, was bought and reconstructed into a cultural center. It was used as a kindergarten before, and the lecture rooms were quite useable. In fact, many rooms in that building are used as commercial offices now, but cultural events also take place there. The deal with that building was helped by USD 250,000 worth sponsorship from the Overseas Koreans Foundation (Chaewoe tongp'o chaedan) headed by Kwon Byōng-hyōn. We are also grateful for the help given to Korean Studies. Our International Center for Korean Studies in the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, regularly receives Korea Foundation grants. Of course, the sum of the grant depends on South Korea's economic conditions. We do not make unreasonable demands. But, once our ethnic Korean schools are helped, the next generation, which learns language and culture there, would feel gratitude to Korea in the future. Of course, we, ethnic Koreans in Russia, are not intent on moving to South Korea: we are Russian citizens and our children will live here, in Russia. However, it would be nice to maintain some remnants of our ethnic heritage — too much is already lost. The losses are great, for example, in the culture of interpersonal relationships. Sometimes it is painful for me to look at how the elders are being treated by the youngsters in the ethnic Korean community today.

**Question:** The International Center for Korean Studies in the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, which you established in 1991, acts now as the true center of Russian Korean Studies. Would you like to elaborate on its activities in educational and scholarly spheres, as well as on how it popularizes Korean Studies?

**Answer:** The purpose of its establishment was to deepen the study of Korean history. Its real activities began in 1992-1993. We already published more than 10 research monographs in our Center's "Korean Studies Series." We also printed *Selected Works* of Korean Studies savants, both foreign and domestic. For example, we printed *Selected Works* by L. R. Kontsevich, the grandfather of Korean linguistics and mythology studies in Russia. But, of course, the centerpiece of our

work was the *Samguk Sagi*. We reprinted last year the first volume of my Russian translation (first published in 1959), and printed the second volume of the Russian translation in 1995. The third volume, translated by my disciples and edited by me, will come out very soon. Our seminars and Korean ancient history teaching are all based on the *Samguk Sagi* and Korea-related accounts of the *Sanguozi*. But another task of ours is also to provide Russian students and readers with the translations of the best works in world Korean Studies. For example, I believe that works by Prof. Cho Tong-göl are worth translating. Now we are immersed in translating the *Tashi ch'annün uri yöksa* (Our Newly-found History) by Prof. Han Yöng-u from SNU's Korean History Department.<sup>3</sup> But even to translate the title properly is not so easy. There are no exact equivalents for this sort of expression in Russian. We need a discussion on this, and is this the only thing to be discussed?

**Question:** Your professorial career already spans half a century, and you served as the chief of the Department of Far Eastern and South East Asian History at the Institute of Asian and African Studies for more than two decades in the past. What is the “secret” of your unparalleled strength and energy that enables you to work as if you are young even when you are already in your 80s? Also how would you evaluate your life as a Korean Studies scholar?

**Answer:** I do not have “secrets,” and I am certainly not an iron-bodied “superman.” I was, in fact, very fragile in my childhood, and lost lots of physical strength during the time of WW II, due to dystrophy. So, after the war I was already suffering from chronic diseases and did not dream of living too long. But I was willing to work, and needed health in order to preserve the ability to work. So, I had to add physical exercises to my intellectual life. I started to go jogging everyday, and have been doing gymnastics outside daily for more than 52 years. I do it all under any weather conditions. As a result, I never suffer from any epidemic diseases. I have not even caught a cold this year yet! While jog-

3. The full reference is Han Yöng-u, (*Tashi ch'annün*) *Uriyöksa* (Seoul: Kyöngsewon, 1997). (Editor)

ging, I am immersed in my own contemplations, and also reflect over my schedule for the day. I am still able to work thanks to this kind of lifestyle. And if I am unable to work, why should I live any more? Currently, my granddaughter — the daughter of my first son who remains as an associate professor with the Arabic Language Department of the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University, is a MA student in SNU's Korean History Department. I expect she will become a scholar.... Such was my life, and I do believe that it was fruitful. I always paid lots of attention to my children and disciples, and they generally fulfilled my expectations. I do believe that my wishes came true. My life began in great difficulties, and I tasted both bad and good luck. But everything is going to end now, thank God.

## Chronology

- 1918 Born in Hayŏnch'u, Nikol'sko-Ussuriyskiy County, Maritime Province
- 1936 Enters Moscow Institute for Philosophy, Literature, and History (MIFLI)
- 1937 Forcible removal of Maritime Province Koreans to Central Asia
- 1941 Graduated from MIFLI after becoming a world history lecturer in the Ukrainian State University enters post-graduate school
- 1945 Full-time lectureship in world and Russian history in the Ryazan' Pedagogical Institute
- 1947 Obtained junior doctoral (Candidate of Science: *kandidat nauk*) degree
- 1949 Teaches Korean History at Moscow State University
- 1960 Obtains senior doctoral degree (Doctor of Science: *doktor nauk*)
- 1963 Full professorship
- 1971 Chief of the Department of Far Eastern and South East Asian History at the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University (serves until 1992)
- 1982 Guest professor (Fullbright scholar) at Hawaii University

- 1991 Elected to be the Chairman of the All-Soviet Ethnic Korean Association
- 1992 Awarded the *Tongbaekchang* medal by the South Korean Government
- 1997 Awarded the highest academic prize (Lomonosov Prize) by Moscow State University

## Publications

“Shilla Chronicles.” In *Samguk Sagi* (Volume 1), Moscow, Oriental Literature Publishers (*Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury*), 1959 (Russian translation, comments, and editing).

*Korea's History from Earliest Times till Today (Istoriya Korei s Drevneishih Vremen do Nashego Vremeni)*, Moscow, Science (*Nauka*) Publishers, 1974 (Editing and authorship of the ancient history-related chapters).

*The Outline of Early Korean History (Ocherki rannei istorii Korei)*, Moscow, Moscow State University Press, 1979.

*Outline of the History of Korean Historiography (Ocherki po istoriografii Korei)*, Moscow, Central Oriental Literature Publishers (*Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoi literatury*), 1987.

“Chronicles of Kogury?” “Chronicles of Paekche,” and “Chronological Charts.” In *Samguk Sagi* (Volume 2), Moscow, Oriental Literature Publishers (*Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury*), 1995 (Russian translation, comments, and editing).

“Miscellaneous Accounts” (*chapchi*) and “Biographies” (*yŏlchŏn*). In *Samguk Sagi*, (Volume 3), Moscow, Oriental Literature Publishers (*Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury*), forthcoming (editing).