

—REVIEW ESSAY—

**Restoring the Glorious Past: North Korean
Juche Historiography and Goguryeo**

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This paper is setting a goal to examine the state of history research in North Korea after the 1960s, when the new nationalistic tradition of *juche* (national self-reliance) took an upper hand in the struggle against the internationalist Marxist-Leninist academic tradition. The adopted practice of making up the facts and doctoring the truth has isolated North Korean historical scholarship from its Soviet benefactors and made many of its research achievements invalid. Both the inefficiency of its bureaucratic system and the lack of funds prevented DPRK scholars from active participation in the international forums where they could voice their opinion. The dependence of DPRK on economic assistance from China after the collapse of the Communist Bloc further complicated the task for North Korean historians.

The lessons of the recent kaffuffle around the alleged Chinese appropriation of the Korean cultural legacy demonstrated North Korea's inability to defend its official point of view even on the history of Goguryeo, the model state of the past. Once situated in the mountains regions of southern Manchuria and northern Korea, this ancient belligerent kingdom is customarily presented by Pyongyang as the progenitor of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The great deal of attention that North Korean historians pay to Goguryeo creates the false impression that they are the primary authority on its history.

Nevertheless, based on primary sources published between 1960 and 2004, my hypothesis is that the image and legacy of Goguryeo have been exploited by the regime to achieve its immediate political goals. The supremacy of *juche* ideology in all spheres of life in the DPRK has resulted in the horrendous scale of

ethno-centrism and self-deception in historical scholarship. The Goguryeo which has been recreated by North Korean scholars has very little to do with historical reality. That is why China began taking over the initiative in research and protection of Goguryeo cultural relics. Although the main parties of the disagreement were South Korea and China, I believe that it was North Korea's manipulations with national history that provoked the conflict.

Among the sources used in this paper are the writings by North and South Korean historians, the reminiscences of Hwang Jang-yeop, who claims the credit for creating *juche* historiography, and the recollections of the prominent Soviet historian, Professor Mikhail N. Pak, who became the main critic of *juche* in history research.¹

Goguryeo as a Bone of Contention.

Several weeks prior to the closure of 2003, a sudden surge of interest in the history of an obscure ancient kingdom instantly caused the public opinion in East Asia to become polarised and agitated. South Korean media and activist groups began spitting vitriolic invectives toward China for its attempt to treat Goguryeo—one of the ancient Three Kingdoms which occupied the northern part of the Korean peninsula and a significant part of Manchuria between the first century B.C. and seventh century A.D.—as part of its own history. What was special about Goguryeo and its legacy?

“The Goguryeo Kingdom (37 B.C. to 668 A.D.) produced thousands of tombs which range from the simple cairn to the more elaborate stone chamber covered by an earthen mound. The latter were sometimes found decorated with colorful wall paintings which are dated between the fourth and the seventh centuries A.D. These burials are found scattered on both sides of the Yalu River in Jian, Jilin province, in the Liaodong peninsula of northeast China, and in the vicinity of Pyeongyang in North Korea. In total, about 90 Goguryeo tombs with

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wall paintings have been discovered so far, including those located in China, and some 70 tombs concentrated in the vicinity of Pyeongyang” (Perrin 2000).

That the Ji’an murals are in Chinese territory is without question, but the ethnic and cultural legacy of these ancient works made things complicated due to the fact that Koreans have always considered Goguryeo to be their first state. Goguryeo tomb murals are the oldest paintings still in existence on the Korean Peninsula and are paragons of the Oriental paintings of the early Middle Ages in general.

China’s application to UNESCO World Heritage Committee in December 2003 for including Goguryeo tomb murals discovered in the Province of Ji’an in the list of globally recognised World Heritage Sites raised suspicions that Beijing was preparing to claim that Goguryeo was a part of China. This suspicion was aggravated by the fact that researchers from the state-funded Chinese Academy of Social Sciences who, as part of a long-running northeast Asian history project called “Northeast Progress,” had been actively studying the kingdom to which the murals belong and have concluded that Goguryeo was a client state of China. In the meantime, a similar application to register Goguryeo tomb murals discovered in the DPRK was rejected at the 27th Session of the World Heritage Committee (June 30 to July 5, 2003).

The immediate public reaction in South Korea was furious. Should China be successful in proving its claim to the murals and naming Goguryeo a Chinese state, the Koreans would risk losing a significant portion of their history. Moreover, the influence of Goguryeo over the neighbouring states and cultures, in that case, would instantly question the cultural identity of both the Koreans and Japanese. Activist groups around South Korea and overseas immediately launched a public awareness campaign in order to familiarise the world with the history of Goguryeo and to prevent the appropriation of its history by the Chinese (VANK 2004).

As for Western observers, they began to blame North Korea for being relatively quiet on the matter. Allegedly, the studied silence of DPRK historians was attributed to the fact that China remains their only benefactor (Scofield 2003). Indeed, economic and political turmoil, which followed the collapse of the Communist Bloc in the late 1980s, did leave North Korea in the cold practically without reliable allies. Only Beijing remains loyal to old commitments, continuing to provide Pyeongyang with sporadic help in the form of natural resources and cash. In other words, North Korea, which is customarily depicted in the West as an evil state, was basically accused of trading in national treasures and

history in order to prop up the survival of its bankrupt political regime.

The DPRK has never been passive in promoting Goguryeo and its legacy. Since the 1970s, North Korean history textbooks tend to depict this kingdom as a huge and powerful empire, which managed to subdue most of its neighbours in Manchuria and allegedly threatened the territorial integrity of ancient China (Kang In-suk 1995: 241). Exaggeration in defining the former boundaries of Goguryeo went far beyond what archaeological evidence could affirm; vast territories, which North Koreans believe were once populated by their ancestors, currently belong to China and Russia. For example, stone-age tools are also displayed in museums with the inscription that they were excavated in northeast China, which was formerly inhabited by ancestors of present-day Koreans. These tools allegedly predate any archaeological finds known to mankind. Regardless of the issue of authenticity, this physical “evidence” is effectively used to bolster the people’s sense of pride and ethnic superiority (Park 2002: 70).

It must have been the North Korean passion to restore the imperial grandeur of the national past that began causing international problems. Pyeongyang’s aggressive attitude in portraying the national past from the viewpoint of militant ultra-nationalism was probably the primary rationale that provoked the Chinese to strike back. Provincial administrations in Jilin and Liaodong become increasingly worried by the looming danger of irredentism, which may gain momentum across the Yalu and Tumen Rivers when the two Koreas unify. Another reason for action was that in China proper there are no such murals left after almost all relics were lost during the period from Han to Tang dynasties (1st to 8th centuries A.D.).

The inefficiency of the North Korean bureaucratic system and the lack of funds prevented the registration of Goguryeo murals at the World Heritage Committee session in Paris (June-July 2003). The outdated practice of sending minimum delegates to international forums and conferences began to work against North Korea’s national interests. Last year, the two members of the DPRK’s Permanent Delegation to UNESCO were snowed under by the twenty-five members of the Chinese delegation representing all levels of government and academic circles. As a result, the decision on the North Korean application was deferred with the expectation that “further steps be taken so that the relevant remaining technical issues can be resolved” (UNESCO 2003). The registration of the Goguryeo mural tombs was postponed until the next Committee session in Suzhou, China (June 2004). Many people believed that Mr. Zhang Xinsheng

(the head of the previous Chinese delegation and incumbent Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee) would make sure that only the Chinese bid is successful.

However, North Korea has a powerful friend too. Since 1997, Mr. Hirayama Ikuo, a prominent Japanese painter and goodwill ambassador of UNESCO, has been cooperating with DPRK Ministry of Culture in order to get ancient Goguryeo mural paintings registered as UNESCO World Heritage sites. Under his influence, Pyongyang ratified the World Heritage Convention in July 1998. Heading the UNESCO expert mission to North Korea in April 2003, Hirayama Ikuo visited seven old mural tombs and inspected the state of their preservation. He strongly expressed his support for getting the Goguryeo mural tombs registered and continues to provide DPRK with hygrometers, thermometers, cameras, recording devices, PCs, and vehicles (*The People's Korea* April 26, 2003a).

During Hirayama Ikuo's latest visit to the DPRK, he talked with officials of the DPRK Ministry of Culture, Bureau of Art Preservation and UNESCO. They said unanimously, "We want to get our plan realized by all means." Reportedly, the Goguryeo mural tombs were all in good state of preservation and protection. Regarding the difficult situation in and around the Korean Peninsula, Hirayama Ikuo was eager to realize the registration as a contribution to peace. "The next session of the World Heritage Committee [...] will be held in June 2004 in China. China, which has friendly relations with the DPRK, will chair the meeting, so I hope that things will go well." said Hirayama Ikuo in his interview to the pro-North Korean newspaper in Japan (*The People's Korea* April 26, 2003b).

The registration of the Goguryeo mural tombs did take place at the most recent Committee session in Suzhou, China (June-July 2004). The list of nominees contained Goguryeo mural tombs located both in China (Huanren County, Liaoning Province, and Ji'an, Jilin Province) and North Korea (P'yongyang, South P'yongan Province and Nampo, South Hwanghae Province). The inscription of Goguryeo relics into the list of World Heritage List was simultaneous. However, the North Koreans may believe that they got the upper hand in the registration competition: the DPRK managed to register twelve locations while the PRC only five. Will this conciliatory decision by the World Heritage Committee end the rivalry between Korean and Chinese authorities or will it instigate them to launch another round of ambitious struggle for monopoly on the cultural legacy of Goguryeo?

Probably, the competition will continue, but this time it is going to be about the authenticity of the sites. The issues of contextual comparison and authenticity criteria were often raised during the visits of the UNESCO expert missions, one of which “has stressed the importance of placing the Goguryeo Kingdom within a broader historical and geographical context by speaking of cultural interaction with the neighbouring region of Liaoning (an important region of interaction during the Han, Wei and Jin period, and a former Goguryeo territory) and Shandong province” (Perrin 2000).

One of the UNESCO expert mission’s members, Ariane Perrin of SOAS University of London, after visiting North Korea in August 2000, expressed her concern that some tombs, such as the Tomb of King Tongmyeong (the founder of Goguryeo dynasty) and the Tomb of King Wanggeon (the founder of Goryeo dynasty) had been heavily reconstructed. In the *Korean Foundation Newsletter* she wrote: “The strong political bias underlying historical interpretation in North Korean historiography has even prompted the fabrication of new historical evidence (e.g., the Tomb of Dangun, the founder of the Korean nation)” (Perrin 2000). This may certainly thwart any prospect of site registration due to the failure of the authenticity test set up by the World Heritage Convention.

In other words, the *juche* ideology, which has been designed to promote the Korean historical and cultural legacy as unique and self-reliant, has begun back-firing on its own creators. The inefficiency of North Korea’s bureaucratic system is exacerbated by the lack of funds and the reluctance to follow the suggestions made by foreign colleagues. These deficiencies effectively prevented DPRK scholars from active participation in the international forums where they could better present their case at the World Heritage Committee and challenge the Chinese attempt to hijack the initiative in protecting the cultural legacy of Goguryeo.

What is wrong with *juche*? And why did it become a stumbling block in the way of academic and other development in North Korea? To answer these questions, we should look back at the circumstances of and reasons for its creation.

The Creation of *Juche* Historiography in North Korea

The dramatic conversion of a class-centred, internationalist Marxist-Leninist tradition of history research into a leader-centred, nationalistic historiography took place in the DPRK in the late 1950s. Since then, the remodelling of historical

fact became widely accepted in North Korean historiography as it tried hard to make the national past fit a quickly changing ideological scene. The development of historical scholarship between 1956 and 1967 saw the rise of a completely new tradition based on the nationalistic doctrine of *juche*, or “self-reliance.”

To satisfy their nationalistic aspirations, the DPRK rulers insisted that the earliest episodes of Korean history were to be pushed back deeper into ancient times. Simultaneously, North Korean historians were required to emphasise the “traditional superiority” of the northern kingdoms that would demonstrate the historical inferiority of their southern neighbours. Such an attitude was necessary to prove the legitimate right of the North to unify the whole country under the banner of *juche*-style communism.

From the diminishing variety of academic opinions, the Central Committee of the Koreans Workers’ Party would choose one to become the official hypothesis. All other views would be outlawed as anti-Party and anti-revolutionary, leaving their authors little or no chance for survival. In such circumstances, any remaining common sense in historical writings was gradually emasculated, and the chain reaction of academic fraud finally plunged North Korean historical scholarship of the 1960 into the dark ages.

Although the ideological course formally remained faithful to the internationalist tenets of Marxism-Leninism, starting from the early 1960s, North Korean academic circles were systematically exposed to the influence of *juche* ideology. The previous search for ways to apply “the inexorable law of objective development” (*hapbeop chikseong*) to national history was replaced by an ostentatious demonstration of unique national characteristics. DPRK historical circles rapidly began to rewrite national history in order to make it comply with the principles of nationalism and self-reliance. In order to avoid even the slightest suspicion of foreign occupation of the Korean peninsula, all Chinese-made seals and artifacts that happened to be found in DPRK territory were said to be “fake” or simply non-existent (Kim Seok-hyeong 1963: 5-6). Understanding of the socio-economic nature of the Three Kingdoms also dramatically changed at that time: Goguryeo was claimed to be the first “feudal state” and its establishment the starting point of the Middle Ages in Korean history.

This process in the academic circles of the DPRK was going simultaneously with the unfolding Sino-Soviet ideological rift. Initially, North Korea wanted to demonstrate to China that it was actively distancing itself from the Soviet Union. Academic and cultural links with the USSR were demonstratively severed. On

20 September 1963, the day when Chinese Government delegation headed by Liu Shao-qi was visiting Pyongyang, Kim Seok-hyeong attacked the Soviet Academy of Sciences for “grave mistakes” that were presumably made in depicting the Korean History in the multi-volume *World History* (1960). Soon, with the beginning of Cultural Revolution in China in 1966, North Korean historians found themselves isolated from their Chinese colleagues. By that time, the fight against internal enemies had reached its culminating point in the DPRK.

In the frenetic struggle between Kim Jong-il, the eldest son of Kim Il-sung, and his uncle, Kim Yeong-ju, for the role of the Great Leader’s official successor, Kim Jong-il got the upper hand and soon was praised as the guru of academics (Hwang Jang-yeop 1999: 147). Among some 1,400 articles and essays, which were allegedly written by the young Kim during his four years of tertiary education, half a dozen were dedicated to the issue of national history (Interview with Yi Seong-cheol 1999). In one of these early works, *Reconsidering the Problem of the Three Kingdoms’ Unification* (1960), Kim Jong-il claimed that the southern kingdom of Silla had never really unified the nation. In the 7th century A.D., Silla managed to integrate under its rule only two thirds of the former Three Kingdoms’ territory (Kim Jong-il 1960b). Kim Jong Il’s prejudice against Silla apparently appeared in reaction to Silla’s lack of nationalism and patriotism. Indeed, while struggling for domination on the peninsula, Silla solicited the military might of the Chinese Tang Dynasty to overwhelm its neighbours, Baekje and Goguryeo.

In another work, *On the Correct Understanding of the Socio-Economic Character of Goguryeo among the Three Kingdoms* (1960), the freshman Kim criticized the “old” Marxist-Leninist historians for dogmatism and argued that the kingdom of Goguryeo, if compared with Baekje and Silla, boasted a higher level of socio-economic development (Kim Jong-il 1960a; 1960c). In 1964, Kim Jong-il declared that Goguryeo was established not in 37 B.C., as was recorded in the *Samguk sagi* chronicles, but in 277 B.C. (Kim Jong-il 1964a; 1964b). This move instantly allowed North Koreans to claim that Goguryeo, which occupied the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, was the oldest among the Three Kingdoms.

From this time onward, North Korean historians began to praise Goguryeo, not Silla, as the leading state among the Three Kingdoms. These claims were necessary for the DPRK leadership to deprive the government of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) of any historical legitimacy to unify the nation. It is obvious though that the teenager Kim Jong-il had little to do with these historio-

graphical experiments, but who was standing behind him is still not clear (Interview with Hwang Jang-yeop 2003). These early writings have never again been included in any of Kim's *Selected Works*. It is obvious that his intervention brought a great deal of havoc to historical scholarship and led to its major reorganisation.

By the mid-1960s, there was no topic in Korean history that had not been revised or corrected in accordance with the guiding recommendations of the Kim clan. The contribution of Korean Marxist historians to the development of left-wing nationalist historiography during the colonial period was denied, and the "old" socio-economic school was not even mentioned. Prominent scholars of philosophy, history, and economics were to declare their allegiance to *juche* ideology.

Those who did not rush to do so formed an obstacle in Kim Il-sung's pursuit of absolute domination in the ideological sphere. In such circumstances, historical facts in the hands of North Korean scholars began to play the role of bit players in the politicised reinvention of mythological discourses. The staggering simplicity of this historical narrative would help the former anti-Japanese guerrillas to control ideas and detect the first signs of political dissent. After 1967, all historiographical debates in the DPRK were closed, the publication of professional journals was suspended, and scholars were assigned to the duties of docile bureaucrats.

Historical Research in DPRK between the 1970s and 1990s

After the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist tradition of history research in the DPRK, *juche* theoreticians began assessing the events of the national past using two main dimensions—the level of military power and the level of national consciousness. For example, they attribute the ultimate victory of Goguryeo in the wars against Sui (612-614) and Tang (644-648) armies to two factors: Korean military superiority and consolidated nationalism. Similarly, the colonization of the nation by Japan in the early 20th century is attributed to military inferiority and the weak nationalism of the late Yi Dynasty. For the same reason, the North Korean propaganda machine constantly reminds the populace that Kim Il-sung's life-long struggle was dedicated to the military preparation of the country for self-defence and to ideological consolidation of the people through nationalism (Park 2002: 18).

“Militant nationalism has always been the most salient factor in the belief system of *juche*, as it invokes hostility against foreign hegemonic powers and promotes the sovereignty of Korea’s heritage and its people. In fact, the kind of sovereignty that Pyongyang claims is more than just independence. *Juche* views Korea as a chosen land, and the people are told constantly that world civilization originated on the Korean peninsula. Indeed, *juche* was originally designed to convey the doctrine that Korea, like any other sovereign nation, should be self-sufficient. But when history is viewed as having been specifically designed and devoid of any accidental development, a sense of predestination sets in it. The notion that a people are predestined to inspire and “lead the world’s oppressed peoples” makes North Korean nationalism ultra-ethnocentric” (Park 2002: 31-32).

The 1970s was the time when important archaeological discoveries of Goguryeo sites were made (Daeseongsan Fortress, Anhak Royal Palace, etc.). It must be mentioned that with the adoption of *juche* in academia, North Korean archaeologists were empowered twice to achieve outstanding results. First, it happened in mid-1960s, when Kim Jong-il declared that if archaeologists had not yet found the remains of Palaeolithic culture in Korea it did not mean that there was no Palaeolithic Age in Korean history. The second instance was in 1974, when Kim Il-sung encouraged North Korean archaeologists to use their imagination in reconstructing the relics, which, for some reason, could not be unearthed. Immediately, the special archaeological team was assembled to discover the burial place of King Dongmyeong. Thanks to the “scientific” approach based on the *juche*-oriented stance, the tomb of the legendary father of Goguryeo was spotted some 25 km east of DPRK capital. The tomb, which was built of stone blocks with burial chambers decorated with wall paintings, was discovered near the Ryongsan-ri (former Mujin-ri) village of the Ryeokpo District of Pyongyang.

Originally, Dongmyeong was buried in Gungnaeseong (Ji’anxian, modern Jilin Province of the PRC, on the northern bank of the Yalu River) but his remains were allegedly moved to the vicinity of Pyongyang in the early 5th century A.D., when Goguryeo moved its capital there. The exact place of the tomb remained unknown for one and a half millennia until Kim Il-sung instructed archaeologists to “discover” it in 1974. The swiftness with which the mausoleum was found still forces the North Korean historians to look for relevant documents and archaeological data that would dissipate any lingering doubts that this tomb belonged to somebody else (KCNA January 30, 2004).

In the 1970s, a special excavation team of the Archaeology Institute of the Academy of Social Sciences of the DPRK made many discoveries that “prove” the links between Goguryeo and Goryeo. North Korean historians and archaeologists believe that evidence from the Manwoldae site, the tomb of King Wang Geon, the founder king of the Goryeo Dynasty, the tomb of King Gongmin, and the Ryongdong Temple (all in the Kaeseong area) suggest that Goryeo was the first state to unify Korea and the first state to establish the territorial integrity of the country (Ku Chong-geon 2002: 8). In order to provide academic support to this and other archaeological discoveries, several monographs on Goguryeo history and culture appeared in the DPRK at that time. In all these treatises the traditional date of Goguryeo’s establishment (37 B.C.) was unconditionally denied. Instead, the 1st or even 2nd century B.C. was mentioned: *The Culture of Goguryeo [Goguryeo Munhwa]* (1975), Yi Chi-rin and Kang In-suk, *The Research on Goguryeo History [Goguryeosa Yeon’gu]* (1976), *The Tomb of King Dongmyeong and other Goguryeo Relics Found in its Vicinity [Dongmyeong Wangneung-gwa keu Bugeun-ui Goguryeo Yujeok]* (1976), *The General History of Korea [Joseon Tongsa]* (3rd edition, 1977), Choe Heui-rim, *The Goguryeo Fortress of Pyeongyang [Goguryeo Pyeongyangseong]* (1978), and *The Complete History of Korea [Joseon Jeonsa]* (1979-1982).

New historical sites related to Goguryeo (the remnants of mural tombs, fortress walls, foundation stones of pavilions, gates, and palaces) continued to be unearthed throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, none of these finds appeared to be older than the traditional date of Goguryeo foundation, the early 1st century A.D. A joint DPRK-PRC Archaeological Team was set up to examine the banks of the middle sector of the Amnok (Yalu) River basin. However, the data obtained about Goguryeo tombs was rather negligible.

Articles and research papers published in the *Ryeoksa gwahak* and *Joseon gogo yeongu* professional journals continued repeating themselves or simply rendered the relevant chapters of the *Complete History of Korea* (1979-1982). Despite all efforts of DPRK historians and archaeologists to present new facts supporting their views that Goguryeo was militarily the strongest, economically advanced and politically progressive, it seems obvious that after the late-1970s, a protracted period of stagnation in this area of research beset the North Korean scholarship (Chang Ho-su 2000).

As the politics and ideology in North Korea continued to drift toward total self-isolationism, the attitude to the history of Goguryeo reflected this change. When describing the international relations of Goguryeo with its neighbours, the

emphasis was invariably placed on Goguryeo's "progressive effort to expand its territory by absorbing smaller kingdoms" and on the "patriotic spirit in its struggle against foreign invaders." The declaratively "materialistic and class-centred" methodological approach in history research in the early 1980s was officially replaced by the one, which emphasized "self-reliance" (*jucheseong*), "uniqueness" (*tokchaseong*) and "superiority" (*ususeong*) of Goguryeo culture (Chin Ho-tae 1990: 131). At that time, Goguryeo was presented as the genuine leader of the region in their struggle against China and the *bona fide* successor of Old Joseon.

However, starting from the 1990s, North Korean scholars emphasised a new theme in the history of Goguryeo's international relations. Historian Song Yeong-jong, in his book *The History of Goguryeo (Goguryeosa, 1990)*, argued after the 6th century A.D. Goguryeo "unfolded a struggle for national and territorial unification" of the Korean peninsula (Song Yeong-jong 1990). This hypothesis of "unification motion southward" (*namjinnon*) was dictated by the political necessity to demonstrate North Korea's traditional leadership in the process of national unification. The southern "semi-feudal" kingdoms of Baekje and Silla were depicted as "moaning under the yoke of colonialism of a foreign nation" (Pak 1994: 243).

In order to present the history of Goguryeo as long and glorious, in the early-1990s the DPRK historiography resorted to a new invention. Somehow it was established that Goguryeo developed from a mysterious proto-state of Guryeo (fifth to third centuries B.C.), which carried "slave-ownership" characteristics and was a part of Chilbon Buyeo in southern Manchuria. Based on Kim Jong Il's earlier "instructions" North Korean historians adopted the new date of Goguryeo's establishment, the year 277 B.C. To support the hypothesis that Goguryeo was a fully-fledged feudal state, which struggled for national unification for nearly 1000 years (277 B.C. to 668 A.D.), a large volume of new books and articles was published in the DPRK. North Korean experts from the Management Bureau for Cultural Property Conservation (MBCPC) and the Korean Cultural Preservation Agency (KCPA) compiled the famous twenty-volume series of *Illustrated Book of Ruins and Relics of Korea (Joseon Yujeok Yumul Togam 1990-1996)*, of which four volumes are dedicated to the Goguryeo relics and sites.

According to Ariane Perrin, "[t]he latest archaeological excavations in Korea and China of the past decade force us to reconsider the extent of Goguryeo's cultural and political sphere of influence and interaction in the northeast Asian

region as well as in the southern part of the Korean peninsula” (Perrin 2000). For example, ancient Japanese mural tombs have both Chinese and Korean influences. But those built around the 7th or 8th century A.D. (such as Kitora and Takamatuzuka tombs in Nara Prefecture) were more influenced by Goguryeo. “The discovery of the Kitora tomb in the area which was under a strong influence of Goguryeo culture was not accidental as surrounding the tomb were Asuka Temple, which adopted Goguryeo’s typical temple arrangement style, and tombs of Korean-related emperors and immigrants,” said Chon Ho-jon, the Chairman of a pro-North Korean Archaeological Association in Japan (*The People’s Korea* March 6, 1998).

Chinese archaeologists used to argue with their North Korean counterparts in the 1960s over interpretations of Balhae’s place in history. Discussions about Goguryeo usually lead to a compromise. However, in 1993 an academic conference was held in China where a strong North Korean complaint prompted a very defensive reaction on the part of Chinese historians. After the explosive exchange between Chinese and North Korean scholars that year, such a compromise was probably no longer seen as necessary and the Chinese began insisting that Goguryeo was a “Chinese” state. By about 1995, there was no longer much of a North Korean academic presence in Jilin Province.

Many archaeological sites discovered in the DPRK in previous decades were renovated in the 1990s. The Tomb of King Dongmyeong, the authenticity of which still raises questions, was dramatically refurbished in 1993. The original stone sculptures with the 12 animals of the Oriental zodiac, which decorated the base of the tomb, were removed and put along the corridor which leads to the burial chamber. Around the big main Tomb of King Dongmyeong, the founder of Goguryeo, there are around 20 other tombs of Goguryeo high ministers. Both the discovery and renovation of this mausoleum were conducted under the direct guidance of Kim Il-sung.

Kim Il-sung was also the initiator of the discovery and reconstruction of the tomb of King Dan’gun, the mythical father of the Korean nation. Dan’gun and his wife’s remnants were announced discovered in October 1993 and the construction project of a brand-new mausoleum was approved and signed by Kim in summer 1994, just days before his own demise. The architectural style, scale, and location of Dan’gun’s mausoleum were to match that of King Dongmyeong’s in order to demonstrate the absolute power of the monarch of a powerful state and the father of the nation. Kim Il-sung’s plan was also to show that Goguryeo not only succeeded Old Joseon and orchestrated the history in the

period of Three Kingdoms but also had a great influence on the development of history of the successive states that appeared in Korea thereafter, namely Balhae, Goryeo and the Yi Dynasty Joseon. In other words, Goguryeo was presented as a country which led the main stream of history of the Korean nation in the Middle Ages.

The Current State of Research on Goguryeo in North Korea

After the June 15, 2000 Summit in Pyongyang, when relations between the North and the South became significantly warmer, ideological pressure on the academic circles has been eased, allowing North Korean historians to revise some of their views. The ban on anti-South propaganda in the DPRK has already created the grounds for academic cooperation between the two scholarships. International cooperation on the issues of ancient history also allowed historians from the North and the South to discuss many topics.

On November 24, 2000, a symposium on the ancient history of Korea was held in Tokyo to mark the centenary of the Society for Providing Scholarships to Korean Students. Present there were nearly 600 persons including the academic delegations from North and South Korea, and Japanese archaeologists and historians. Dr. Sok Kwang-jun, researcher of the Archaeological Institute of the DPRK Academy of Social Sciences, presented a research paper on the subject "The New Achievements Made in Archaeological Study of Goguryeo." Dr. Chae Thae-hyong, a Section Chief of the History Institute of the Academy, presented a paper on the subject "The New Achievements Made in the Historical and Archaeological Study of Balhae." Professors Han Pyong-sam and Yi Ki-dong of Dongguk University in Seoul spoke about successes achieved in the study of the ancient history of Korea in South Korea including the discovery of facts proving that Baekje originated from Goguryeo.

The growing number of tourism-related projects opens to visitors from South Korea and other countries many historical sites in the DPRK. The Goguryeo tombs, as they represent the legacy of a broader East Asian culture of the past, will surely be among the primary destinations to be visited by domestic and international travellers. In order to establish policies for the conservation and presentation of these sites, the August 2000 UNESCO expert mission reviewed the nomination file and the management plan of the Goguryeo tombs. Ariane Perrin's remark leaves no doubt about the willingness of the DPRK to imple-

ment this plan: “We were impressed by the amount of time and effort the North Korean specialists put into preparing and translating all the working documents in a relatively short span of time” (Perrin 2000).

The first draft of the nomination file comprised twenty Goguryeo mural tombs which have been selected not only for their historical value but also for the quality of their paintings. Six out of the twenty tombs in the nomination file are open to visitors. Three sets of equipment for monitoring changes of temperature inside the tombs, which had been donated by the Hirayama Foundation, were installed in the Gangseo Great tomb, the Anak No.3, and the Deokgeung-ri tombs (Perrin 2000). The latter two are the only Goguryeo tombs which have been firmly dated thanks to a surviving funerary epitaph. A glass structure has been built inside their funerary chambers to protect the wall paintings. North Korean authorities seemed profoundly committed to the protection of their heritage. Experts hope that such a high level of maintenance will be continued in the future despite the development of tourist facilities (Perrin 2000).

On August 20, 2000, an opening ceremony of a photo exhibition of Goguryeo murals was held at the Korean Central History Museum when Matsuura Koichiro, Director General of UNESCO, and his party were present in Pyongyang. The ceremony was also attended by Kang Nung-su, the Minister of Culture, and Choe Su-hon, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the DPRK National Committee of UNESCO. Displayed photos featured the unfading colours of Goguryeo murals, which even after the lapse of 1,500 years remained in fairly good condition. Few studies have been dedicated to the analysis of early Korean pigments used for their decoration. Instead, North Korean scholars seem to be more attracted by the drawing techniques, themes, and composition of Goguryeo murals (Ri 2001a: 23-29; Ri 2001b: 14-17; and Son and Ri 2001: 18-22). However, with growing concern over the conservation of the Goguryeo tomb wall paintings, more research must be focused on the nature of these pigments.

Historical relics and remains of Goguryeo are under state protection in the DPRK. A well-organized system of preservation has been established throughout the country. The Pyongyang Cultural Relics Management Agency (PCRMA) is a pacesetter in this campaign. In November 2001, the Botong Gate of Pyongyang, the west gate of the central fort of the walled capital of Goguryeo in the mid-sixth century, has been repainted. Similar repainting was done on Eulmilde Pavilion, which served as the northern command post in the inner fort of the walled city of Pyongyang, and other relics on Moran Hill built

in the same period. Repair work was carried out on the ridges of the tiles of Chilseong Gate (named after the constellation of Great Bear) built as the northern gate of the inner fort of the walled city of Pyeongyang. Explanatory boards in the city are now being replaced with natural stones.

Excavation work with focus on Goguryeo sites and relics continued to be conducted throughout the first years of the new millennium. In summer 2001, North Korean archaeologists succeeded in discovering the mural Tomb No.3 in Daesong-ri, Gangso district of Nampo. It is a typical tomb built with stone and covered with earth that attributes it to the period of Goguryeo. Unearthed in the tomb were gold ornaments, jewellery, bronze bracelet, glazed pottery, coffin nails, and other relics. According to North Korean archaeologists, the structure, the building material and the relics inside the tomb “prove” that it is a king-level tomb belonging to the period from early to middle of the 4th century A.D. (KCNA August 1, 2001).

In October 2002, the Archaeological Institute of the Academy of Social Sciences discovered another mural tomb in Songjuk-ri, Yeontan County. The tomb is a typical Goguryeo-style stone-earth tomb, which faces south. The remaining walls of the tomb were decorated with gorgeous murals showing a procession of people, a hunting scene, warriors, life inside houses, and other scenes depicted in detail with various colours. The architectural style and theme of the mural paintings of the tomb suggest that it was built in the first half of the fifth century. Also found in the tomb were a gold-copper ring, an ornamental silver hairpin, a coffin nail coated with silver sheet, earthenware, and other relics. North Korean archaeologists say it was the first time since 1976 for them to unearth such a tomb with mural paintings with diverse themes. The newly discovered tombs allowed them to argue that this precious cultural heritage was a “clear reminder of the power of Goguryeo, a strong state in the East that existed for a thousand years” (KCNA 7 October 2002).

Archaeologists of the DPRK Academy of Social Science unearthed in November 2002 a brick tomb in Saenal-ri, Sinchon County of South Hwanghae Province. This tomb faces southeast and the floors of its chambers are paved with two layers of bricks in a reed-mat pattern; its walls were built in such a way that thick layers of bricks were laid sideways or upright. The brick walls, on which letters are seen, are embossed with designs of various geometrical patterns, fantastic animals such as a white tiger and a red bird, and figures holding spears, etc. More than 20 pieces of artefacts including a light-grey pot, beads, a silver bracelet, a silver hairpin, and nails of a coffin were also discovered there.

Based on the style of the tomb, relics, and letters on the walls, North Korean archaeologists presumed that the tomb dated back to the period of the Rangun (Lolang) Kingdom that existed from the late 2nd century B.C. until the mid-3rd century A.D. (KCNA November 28, 2001).

In late 2003—early 2004, a group of researchers of the Faculty of History of Kim Il-sung University conducted a survey of the area which resulted in discovering 112 dolmens dating back to the period of Old Joseon, and nineteen earthen stone tombs, three brick tombs, and one mural tomb dating back to Goguryeo. Inside the dolmens were discovered stone daggers, stone arrowheads, stone axes, pieces of earthen jars, fragments of human bones, and many other relics. In the earthen stone tombs, which belong to the period of Goguryeo, were excavated iron axes, iron arrowheads, earthenware, a metal scale on a piece of armour, and other relics that had been used by the people of that period. More relics were discovered in the area of Mt. Ryongak, Mangyongdae District of Pyeongyang. They also unearthed the site of the Ryongak Temple, the existence of which had been mentioned only in ancient documents. Some tile pieces belonging to the period of Goguryeo were also found on Pobun Rock (KCNA (February 2, 2004).

According to North Korean researchers, the recent discovery of numerous dolmens in the area of Mt. Ryongak in the wake of the finding of dolmens in Pyeongyang, including Kangdong, Sangwon and Daedong Counties “proves” once again that Pyeongyang was the centre of the ancient civilization of the Korean nation. In order to disseminate this point of view, Pyeongyang began giving awards to foreign scholars of history for research who conform to its official doctrine. On January 7, 2004, an awarding ceremony was held at the Mansudae Assembly Hall. The DPRK Doctor’s degree in History was conferred on Yun Hyeon-cheol, a lecturer at the History Faculty of Yanbian University in north-eastern China. Yun studied and systematised the history of Balhae, paying particular attention to its land and naval routes of transportation. “On the basis of the principle of fidelity to historical truth, he scientifically ascertained that Balhae was a successor to Goguryeo and that the history of Balhae is an important component of the history of the Korean nation,” stated the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA January 8, 2004).

On January 29, 2004, a National Symposium of Historians was held at the Kim Il-sung University to mark the 30th anniversary of President Kim Il-sung’s instructions to excavate the Tomb of King Dongmyeong. Speeches were delivered by Prof. Jong Chi-geon, the Dean of the KISU’s Faculty of History, Dr.

Son Su-ho, the Director of the Institute of History of the Academy of Social Sciences, and Dr. Song Sun-tak, Deputy Curator of the Korean Central History Museum. They noted that the questions surrounding the Tomb of King Dongmyeong were solved “scientifically from the *juche*-oriented stance and it was splendidly rebuilt as a historic monument of national treasure, illustrating the history and cultural tradition of powerful Goguryeo on the principle of historicism thanks to the noble patriotism of Kim Il-sung and his tireless and energetic leadership” (KCNA January 30, 2004).

On July 2, 2004, the DPRK had the Goguryeo murals around Pyeongyang and Namp’o inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. This move will benefit the DPRK in many ways. A country that receives little international attention except for engineered famine and abuse of human rights will now have a chance to return Goguryeo to the history of Korean people. However, the DPRK was not only interested in preserving its cultural heritage; by having Goguryeo mural tombs internationally recognised, North Korea also plans to establish its hegemony in the process of national unification and even to secure itself from possible preventive strikes. Even in a case of military dispute, a place once registered as a World Heritage Site is not permitted to be attacked under international law. Such a place, in other words, is regarded as a “sanctuary” recognized by people all over the world (*The People’s Korea* May 19, 1999).

Conclusion

The North Korean version of national history has been designed to convey the notion that Koreans always enjoyed a position of physical and cultural superiority and that it is likely that human civilization originated from Korea. The orderly continuum from primitive communal society through slave-ownership in Old Joseon, feudalism in Goguryeo and Koryo, the development of capitalism during the last years of the Yi Dynasty Joseon through to the victory of “Korean-style socialism” in the DPRK altogether helps the regime claim its legitimacy. Presenting the national past from the *juche* position, North Korean historians demonstrate history as an inexorable process inspired by the popular wish for national self-reliance and the struggle against foreign aggressors. The result of their research is a mere narrative of people’s consolidation around the consecutively changing leaders and their struggle against foreign aggressors. No foreign influence is admitted, while the influence of Korean culture on neighbouring

nations is especially emphasised.

It is not an accident that the Goguryeo question took special a dimension in North Korean history writing. The Goguryeo borders in later periods of its history were roughly similar to the present-day borders of the DPRK. The notion that Goguryeo was the most powerful and advanced of all Korean kingdoms and was feared even by foreign powers of the time supports DPRK's ambition for leadership in national unification. From the 1960s, in the North Korean official version of history, Goguryeo is eulogized as an embodiment of the true national spirit and depicted as a champion of Koreanness against treacherous and flunkeyish pro-foreign Silla, which is associated with the South. North Korean historians are imposing present-day political and cultural sensibilities back on to peoples and places of the past. The analogies are simple: Goguryeo is the DPRK, Silla is the ROK, and Tang is the USA.

This politicised attitude toward history research, while dictated by the nationalistic *juche* ideology, is creating problems in international relations and strains academic cooperation with its neighbours. Its image has been badly damaged by the four decades of self-isolation and self-deception. The recent conflict around Goguryeo mural tombs clearly showed that, despite all the efforts undertaken by North Korean historians to study and glorify the national past, the real ability of DPRK historical scholarship to defend its positions is extremely limited. Unless the main course in the DPRK is changed and its academic circles are emancipated from the dictate of ideology, the North Korean version of national history will always remain the laughing-stock of the international academic community and the Korean people may really start losing their history to the hands of their neighbours.

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In addition to the Goguryeo tomb murals, the DPRK also wanted to register as World Heritage sites such places as the city of Pyeongyang, Mt. Myohyang, Mt. Geumgang, the city of Gaesong, and the village of Panmunjeom on the DMZ.

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