

Special Essay

Relations between Ancient Korea and Turkey: An Examination of Contacts between Koguryŏ and the Turkic Khaganate*

Noh Tae-Don

Contacts between Koguryŏ and the Turkic Khaganate

Contacts between Koguryŏ and the Turkic Khaganate Exchanges between the inhabitants of the Korean peninsula and those of the nomadic states of the Mongol steppes began in the ancient period. A specific example of this is to be found in the contacts between the Xiongnu and Old Chosŏn in the second century BCE. One of the primary goals of the invasion in 108 BCE by Han China of Old Chosŏn was the blocking of a connection between the Xiongnu and Old Chosŏn. The Xiongnu remains discovered in the Sŏg'am-ri tomb near Pyongyang and in other places bear witness to the existence of interactions between the two states. Subsequently as well, there were sporadic contacts between Koguryŏ and branches of the Xiongnu people such as the Yuwenbu 宇文部.

* This paper was first presented at a conference on the history of contacts between Turkey and Korea, which took place in Ankara on September 15, 2015. It has been translated into English by Milan Hejtmanek (milanh@snu.ac.kr), Associate Professor in the Department of Korean History, Seoul National University.

Noh Tae-Don (hangawe@snu.ac.kr) is Emeritus Professor of Korean History, Seoul National University.

However, there continues to be controversy concerning the nature and scope of such early relations, and the interaction between the inhabitants of the Korean peninsula and the Turkish peoples began in earnest with interaction between Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate (Tujue 突厥). A specific example of contact between Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate may be found in the *Samguk sagi*, “Koguryō Annals,” the seventh year of King Yangwōn, 551 CE:

In the ninth month the Turkic Khaganate invaded and encircled Sin-sōng. After losing [the battle] they moved and attacked Paeg’am-sōng. The monarch dispatched his general Kohül, with 10,000 men to counter-attack the Turkic Khaganate army. The number killed and captured totaled more than 1000.

As this passage is the sole reference in the *Samguk sagi* of contact between Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate, it possesses great value. However, the dating of the passage appears to be in error. In the second month of 552 the Turkic Khaganate launched an attack on the Avar, at a location in modern-day Inner Mongolia in the north part of Zhangbei County to the north of Zhangjiakou in contemporary Hebei province. Subsequently they crossed the Xinganling mountain chain and entered the Manchuria plain. Accordingly, in fact it was impossible before 552 for the Turkic Khaganate army to have attacked Koguryō’s Sin-sōng 新城 (modern Fushun) or Paeg’am-sōng 白岩城 (modern Liaoyang), which are located in the lower reaches of the Liao River basin. Perhaps a later event was mistakenly dated to 551 when records were compiled.

Relations between Koguryō and Turkic Khaganate were largely conducted from this period onwards. This fact is conveyed by inscriptions on two Turkic Khaganate stone monuments erected in Khosho-Tsaidam, located on the banks of the Orkhon River on the Mongol plain. These stones commemorated two brothers, Bilge Khagan, a renowned monarch, and his younger brother, Kúl Tigin, who died in 731. In their historical narration, the inscriptions on the stones both refer to the attendees at the funeral of the founder of the Turkic Khaganate, Bumin Khagan (d. 552), and Istämi Khagan: “From Bökli a land before which [= east] the sun rises”. [Kúl Tigin 4, Bk E5]. In the ancient Turkic language the “B” sound and “M” sound were used interchangeably, so Bökli may safely be deemed Mökli, meaning 𐰇𐰏𐰤 “Maekguryō.” This place name was a shortened form of Maekchok 𐰇𐰏𐰤 of Kuryō 𐰇𐰏, or “Maek people of Kuryō,” referring to Koguryō. Additionally, as the inscriptions continue, following the death of the two leaders celebrated in the Orkhon River stone monuments, the Turkic Khaganate weakened, and were forced into submission

to the Tabgač Khaganate. A mission was undertaken to attack as far as “Bökli Khagan, a place where the sun rises in front [=east]” [Kül-Tigin 8, Bk E8]. This account is in accord with the historical facts concerning how after the Turkic Khaganate was forced to submit to Sui China and Tang China, the Sui and Tang forces that were mobilized for the military missions against Koguryō comprised soldiers of the Turkic Khaganate.

There are other records corroborating the fact that the Turkic Khaganate people referred to Koguryō as Mökli. In a record left by the Byzantine historian Theophylactus Simocattes, there is an account of how the remnants of the Avar nation reached Tabgač (Chinese: Beiqi 北齊), where they provoked a rebellion and were defeated. Thereupon, the account continues, they again fled to the east reaching Moukri, a land that “adjoins Tabgač. The Moukri people have strong resolve in facing danger and daily train their bodies; they have a very high degree of warrior spirit.” While some take the view that the “Moukri” referenced here are the Moho people, it would seem more likely that it is the same place name as Mökli, hence referring to Koguryō. Byzantium and the Turkic Khaganate people established relations from the latter part of the 560s and exchanged emissaries. The two states promoted trade in silk and exchanged information in order to ascertain the whereabouts of the remaining Avar people, who had fled to the west. Information derived from the discussion between emissaries of the two states found its way in a record left by Menandros of Byzantium. It may be speculated that the account of Theophylactus Simocattes concerning Avar’s movement to Moukri was based on this record. This being the case, from this we can know that in the latter half of the sixth century the Turkic Khaganate people called Koguryō Moukri.

In central Asia in the eighth and ninth centuries, among the Turkish peoples Koguryō and Parhae were called “Muglig.” This can be confirmed in the document “Pelliot tibétain 1283” from Dunhuang, held at present by the National Library of France. In this document “Looking to the east of the state [of He 奚], is the state called Muglig by the Drug people and Keuli by the Chinese people.” The Drug are the Turkic Khaganate and Uighur people of Turkic descent and since “Keuli” is “Koryō” and hence Koguryō, the Muglig in this document clearly means “Koguryō.” Additionally, in the *Fanyu zaming* 梵語雜名 written by the monk Liyan 禮言 from Kucha 龜茲 in Eastern Turkestan, who lived at the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth century, one can find that Koryō 高麗 was pronounced as Mukuli 畝久理.

Examining the list of states that were said to have sent envoys to attend the funerals of Bumin Khagan and Istämi Khagan of the Turkic Khaganate inscribed on the Turkic Khaganate monuments, we find states stretching from

Koguryō (Bōkli) in the east to Byzantium (Purum) in the west. However, since in 552 the Turkic Khaganate was in its early phase of formation, it is somewhat difficult to accept that all those nations really sent official mourners.

Prior to the rise of the Turkic Khaganate, Koguryō had long enjoyed harmonious relations with the Avar (Rouran 柔然), who were the hegemonic power on the Mongol steppes. Accordingly a momentous change in the political situation such as the advent of the Turkic Khaganate and its rise to central power on the Mongol steppes through defeat of the Avar would have quickly become known to Koguryō. Since nomadic societies widely adopt the tribal chieftain system, if the central power collapses the disturbance quickly spreads to groups within the system as well as adjoining states. Koguryō at this time adjoined a nomadic group in Inner Mongolia, and hence would have been sensitive to such political change. To this extent the passage on the Turkic Khaganate monument concerning a Koguryō emissary attending the funeral of Bumin Khagan may be said to reflect future reality: even though in 552 such attendance may have been unlikely, in the not-to-distant-future there would be contact between the two parties.

After defeating the Avar in the Mongolian region in 552, the Turkic Khaganate actively pursued the dispersed remnants of the Avar, thereby gaining dominance over the Mongol steppes. Going further, they crossed the Xinganling mountain range and expanded their power into the Manchurian region. They put pressure on the Khitan people in the western part of Manchuria and the Southern Shiwei 室韋 people in the Nuanjiang 嫩江 basin in northern Manchuria. As a natural result of this martial activity they collided with Koguryō, whose power extended into this region. They continued their eastward advance and directly attacked sites including Sin-sōng and Paeg'am-sōng, which were located within Koguryō's territory of the Liaodong plain. The conflict between the two gave rise to the passage from the *Samguk sagi* cited above. In addition to this, the "Treatise on the Tujue" (*Tujue zhuan* 突厥傳) in the *Sui Shu* 隋書 contains a reference in the 582 proclamation by the Sui emperor noting the fact that the Turkic Khaganate army, led by Li-qi Sād (Li Jicha 利稽察) had been attacked by the joint forces of Koguryō and the Moho (K. Malgal 靺鞨). This also is an instance of military conflict between Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate.

In Search of an Alliance between Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate

Contacts between Koguryō and Turkic Khaganate, which had thus started in

the latter half of the sixth century, took on the nature of military confrontation following the expansion of the Turkic Khaganate's forces into Koguryō territory. Specifically, it was a dispute over control of the Khitan, Shiwei, and one part of the Mohe tribe. However, with the rise of the Sui state after 580 and the swift expansion of its power, the international political situation in East Asia changed dramatically. In 581 the Sui attacked the Eastern Turkic Khaganate, and subsequently their power also expanded into the area of Manchuria to their northeast. In the past Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate had competed to gain control of the Khitan living in the upper Liao River basin, but now as the power of the Sui state, which had unified China, burgeoned, the situation altered. Significant numbers of the Khitan tribes broke away under the sway of Sui China. Going further, Sui in 598 carried out an invasion of Koguryō, choosing a policy of expansion based on aggressive force. In opposition to this fresh aggression Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate sought a mutual military alliance, accompanied by trade between the two states.

In 607 when the Sui Emperor Yangdi was on patrol in the vicinity of Yulin District 榆林郡 in the northern part of present-day Shǎnxi Province 陕西省, apparently reacting to information he received, he suddenly changed direction and with urgency visited the encampment of the Turkic Khagan leader, Qimin Khagan, located north of Yulin district in what is now northern inner Mongolia. At this time the Turkic Khaganate led by Qimin 啓民 Khagan was in a situation of submission to the Sui and under their rule. With the sudden arrival of the Sui Emperor Yangdi, Qimin Khagan could not hide the fact that a Koguryō emissary was visiting his headquarters, and he informed Sui Yangdi of this and introduced him. At this time, without prior intention, representatives of three major military powers in East Asia, Koguryō, the Turkic Khaganate, and Sui China met in one place. Sui Yangdi criticized Koguryō, and rudely suggested that the Koguryō emissary should return home and tell the Koguryō king to journey to Sui and observe the ritual of submission. If Koguryō should fail to accede to this demand, Sui Yangdi warned, he would conquer Koguryō with the Qimin Khagan at the fore.

After the death of Taspar 佗鉢 Khagan, there was a split of the Turkic Khaganate into the Eastern Turkic Khaganate led by Ishbara 沙鉢略 Khagan and the Western Turkic Khaganate led by Tardu 達頭 Khagan, and there was sustained internal conflict that continued for several bouts of political realignment. Among these Qimin Khagan was supported by Sui to sustain his position. However, even though Qimin Khagan and the Turkic Khaganate groups he controlled were at the time subordinate to the power of Sui, they were proud inheritors of the tradition of the Turkic Khaganate empire that had ruled the Mongol steppes.

They were capable of dreaming of a new dispensation and great advancement of their state. The goal prompting the arrival of the Koguryō emissary to Qimin Khagan in this situation for a meeting may be readily surmised. That is, the search by Koguryō for a connection or possibly an alliance with the Turkic Khaganate in defensive preparation for a looming invasion by Sui.

The contact between Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate was a signal portending potential grave danger for the Sui state. As soon as he was apprized of this meeting Sui Yangdi rapidly responded and made a surprise visit to the camp of Qimin Khagan. Any alliance between Koguryō and the Turkic Khaganate came to naught due to the strong control of the Sui. Rather, in 612 when the Sui invaded Koguryō, the Turkic Khaganate leader Chuluo 處羅 Khagan and his brother formed part of the Sui military force.

A decisive cause of the downfall of the Sui state was their defeat in four separate expeditions to conquer Koguryō. With the subsequent fall into political chaos in China, the Turkic Khaganate took advantage of the situation, again firmed up their military capability and fomented several rebellions in north China. However, subsequently Tang China emerged and China once again was united. The Turkic Khaganate leader Ilig 頡利 Khagan was defeated in battle by the Tang Emperor Taizong, and the Turkic Khaganate was subordinated to the forces of Tang. Tang Taizong became the Tian 天 Khagan, and reigned over the world of the steppes. Later, when Tang Taizong invaded Koguryō (645 C.E.), assorted leaders of the Turkic Khaganate and the Tiele 鐵勒 people formed part of the military forces. As the conflict grew protracted with the Tang army unable to advance any further due to the resistance of the Koguryō army, Koguryō forged an alliance with a Turkic tribe called the Xueyantuo 薛延陀, a nomadic group on the Mongol steppes, and had them attack the Tang forces from the rear. As the Xueyantuo threatened the Tang capital itself, the Tang army retreated from Koguryō in haste. The next year, Tang attacked the Xueyantuo and destroyed them. Koguryō had no power to save them. Subsequently the war between Tang China and Koguryō continued, but because the Turkic Khaganate and Turkic nomadic groups on the Mongol steppes were overwhelmed by the Tang power and subordinated to it, there would be no further connection between them and Koguryō.

After the possibility disappeared of gaining further assistance against Tang through alliances with nomadic groups on the Mongol steppes, Koguryō continually strove to find possible partners for alliance by dispatching emissaries even further to the west. One part of this effort is revealed by the image of two Koguryō emissaries in a mural found in the remains of a palace on a hillside in Afrasiab, located in the vicinity of Samarkand in modern-day

Uzbekistan. This mural was painted in the latter part of the seventh century at a time when the ruler was King Varxman, who ruled over a state known as Kang 康 in Chinese sources. It takes as its theme the reception of emissaries from the neighboring state of Chaghanian, but other foreign emissaries, including from Koguryō, were evidently added to this scene.

Exchanges of People after the Collapse of Koguryō

In the ninth month of 668, Koguryō was destroyed by the Tang army. Subsequently a substantial number of people from Koguryō refused to live under Tang rule and sought asylum among the Turkic Khaganate on the Mongol steppes. There were several groups formed at the time among the Koguryō people who had migrated to the Turkic Khaganate. Among them the leader of one group was Ko Mun'gan 高文簡, who became the son-in-law of Kapaghan Khagan 默啜可汗, and was known as the “Koryō Chief Minister” (Koryō mangniji 高麗 莫離支). Among the groups that migrated to the Mongol plains a substantial number later in 715 avoided the internal disorder within the Turkic Khaganate and migrated once more to Tang China.

Additionally, in 698 the Parhae state was founded in the eastern part of Manchuria, which had become a center of Koguryō migration. Upon its founding Parhae soon sent an emissary to the Turkic Khaganate and forged relations. There is no specific extant record subsequently detailing negotiations between Parhae and the Turkic Khaganate. However, it can be confirmed through documents surviving at Dunhuang (Pelliot tibétain 1283) that among the Turkic peoples in central Asia in the eighth and ninth centuries Parhae was designated as Muglig, the name previously used for Koguryō. This is a result of the general recognition that the Koguryō migrants were the central force in the founding and management of Parhae.

Relations between the Turkic groups and ancient Koreans did not continue after the mid-ninth century when the Uighurs were defeated and the Turkic peoples who had long lived on the Mongol steppes migrated to the southwest to Turkistan in central Asia.

The Significance of Interactions Between the Turkic Khaganate and Koguryō

The interactions with the Turkic Khaganate and other nomadic states in north

Asia did not concern only political and military affairs, but also substantially influenced the consciousness of Koguryō people. The experience of interacting with a wider world and diverse groups of people broadened the conceptual horizons of the Koguryō people. In terms of international relations, this interaction impeded the strength of China's unilateral power, and may be seen as contributing to a certain deeper understanding of uniqueness and one's country's place in international society.

The Turkic Khaganate monuments termed Koguryō “Bōkli Khagan,” while Tang was called the Tabgač Khagan. These two states were both understood as khaganates. The appellation of khagan 可汗 was also used for the Avar state. In Chinese this term was explicated as “emperor” (*huangdi* 皇帝), as noted in the *Wei Shu* 魏書 biography of Ruanruan 蠕蠕. Just as is revealed by the point that the Turkic Khaganate people understood that Tang and Koguryō both were khaganates like themselves, so too it may be seen that for them the concept of an international order centered on Chinese dynastic rule did not exist. Put another way, it tells us that the Turkic Khaganate people regarded Koguryō as a fellow khaganate, on an equal footing with Tang China, and hence an independent state. Through interaction with these states in north Asia the Koguryō people were able to abandon a tendency to view the world through the lens of China's unilateral dominance. As a result, through a confirmation of this fact, it is to be hoped that in our contemporary period as well we can rethink problems found in passages in Chinese historical records.

References

- Clauson, Gerard. “A propos du manuscrit Pelliot tibétien 1283.” *Journal Asiatique* 214 (1957).
- Iwasa Seiichirō 岩佐精一郎. “Ko Toruko hibun no Bōkli oyobi Purum ni tsuite” 古突厥碑文のBōkli及びPurumについて [On the terms ‘Bōkli’ and ‘Purum’ in an old Tujue inscription]. *Iwasa Seiichirō ikō* 岩佐精一郎遺稿. Tokyo: Sanshūsha 三秀舎, 1936.
- Kim Pyōngho. “Orūhon yet T'wirūk'ūō pimun kwa Hanbandoin ūi yet irūm” [The old Turkic inscriptions of Orkhon and the old name for people of the Korean peninsula]. *Tongbug'a yōksa nonch'ong* 42 (2013).
- Mori Masao 護雅夫. “Iwayuru Bōkli ni tsuite” いわゆる Bōkli について [On the so-called Bōkli]. *Egami Namio kyūzō kogi kinen ronshū-minsoku, bunka hen* 江上波夫教授古稀記念論集-民俗・文化篇. Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 1977.
- Moriyassu Takao 森安孝夫. “Chibettogo shiryō naka ni arawareru hoppō minzoku-

- Drug to Hor” チベット語史料中に現われる北方民族-DrugとHor [Peoples of the northern areas appearing in Tibetan documents—Drug and Hor]. *Ajia-Ahurika gengo bunka kenkyū* アジア・アフリカ言語文化研究 14 (1977).
- Naitō Midori 内藤みどり. “Tō Roma to Toruko to no kōshū ni kan suru shiryō—Menandri Protectori Fragmenta yakushū 東ロ-マと突厥との交渉に関する史料—Menandri Protectori Fragmenta 譯註 [Historical documents related to contacts between the East Roman Empire and Tujue: an annotated translation of the Menandri Protectori Fragmenta]. *Yūboku shakaishi kenkyū* 遊牧社會史研究 22 (1963).
- No T'aedon [Noh Tae-Don]. *Koguryōsa yōn'gu* [Research on Koguryō history]. Seoul: Sagyejōl, 1999.
- Onogawa Hidemi 小野川秀美. “Toruko hibun yakushū” 突厥碑文譯註 [Annotated translation of the Tujue inscription]. *Man-Mō shi ronshō* 滿蒙史論叢 4 (1943).
- Talāt Tekin, tr. Kim Yōng'il, Yi Yongsōng. *Kodae T'wirūkū pimun ū yōn'gu* [Research on ancient Turkic inscriptions]. Pusan: Pusan kyoyuk taehak ch'ulp'anbu, 1993. [Originally published as: *Orhon Yazıtları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basım Evi, 1988)].
- Wang Yao 王堯, Chen Jian 陳踐. “Dunhuang gu Zangwen ben 'Beifang ruogan guojun zhi wangtong' wenshu” 敦煌古藏文本‘北方若干國君之王統’文書 [An old Tibetan text of the ‘Royal succession of the northern khagans’ from Dunhuang]. *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯 1981.0.

