Current Issues and Problems in the Study of Old Chosön

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Studies of the history of Old Chosön so far have focused mainly on such topics as territorial boundary and the location of political centers, nature of population and cultural characteristics, social structure and economy, interpretation of the Tan’gun mythology and the legend of K’ya, movement of population after his demise, and changing historical perspectives on Old Chosön. Among these various topics, probably the most debated would be the topic related with the territoriality of Old Chosön, which this paper attempts to examine.

Currently there are three vying views about the location of the political center of Old Chosön, Liaoning Hypothesis, P’yŏngyang Hypothesis, and Transfer Hypothesis. These competing viewpoints were already proposed by Shilhak scholars of the late Chosön-period, and the merits of each theory have not ceased to be debated even until today.

The Liaoning theory sees that the political center of Old Chosön should have been located somewhere in the current province of Liaoning, China. The hypothesis includes two opinions regarding the western boundary of Old Chosön; one Luan (Luanhe), the other the river Daling (Dalinge). The former opinion is based on the interpretation of a short description of the location of Old Chosön in the book Shanhaijing—it was said that Old Chosön lies to the east of Lieyang. According to those who stick to this opinion, Lieyang should lie north of the river Luan. In this view, the territorial boundary of Old Chosön was delimited by the distribution of

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Pip'alute-shaped bronze daggers (or those with T-shaped handles). The latter is proposed from the fact that most of the known associations of Missongni-type potteries and Pip'a-shaped daggers are found in the area east of the river Daling.

Regarding the timing of the appearance of Old Chosŏn, the Liaoong theory considers Guanzhong's comment in Guanzi an important clue. Guanzhong's comment is taken as depicting a situation of his own time, so that Old Chosŏn should have existed at least before the seventh century B.C. This interpretation is believedly supported by the fact that the lower limit of the chronology of Pip'a-shaped daggers and associated bronze features is considered to be earlier than the eighth century B.C.

About the territorial limit of Old Chosŏn during its late period, two arguments are proposed for the location of Peishui (P'aesu), which is described in historical records as its western limit. While some believe that it should be the river Daling, there also appeared an opinion regarding it the river Luan.

The southern boundary of Old Chosŏn is also a topic of debate. According to those who see marked differences between archaeological remains found in the area north and south of the river Ch'ŏngch'ŏn, the southern boundary should be delimited along this river. Another position, which believes the southern boundary should lie along the river Yesŏng, is based on indirect evidence that the P'ae-ha (Peihe), which is said to be the northern boundary of Mahan and Paekche, is the river Yesŏng. According to the former, Bronze and Iron Age sites in the Taedong River basin should be remains of Mahan. The latter consider these as remains of smaller groups attached to Old Chosŏn, thus their unique characteristics are interpreted as local variants of the culture of Old Chosŏn.

The Liaoong Hypothesis so far outlined greatly helped to enhance our understanding of Bronze Age culture of Liaoong province and of Chinese historical records on Old Chosŏn. Nevertheless, there are several basic problems in accepting this hypothesis. One is that, in view of the absolute

2. Chi’or Taek-sŏn and Lee Nan-u (eds.) 1976 Kochoson yŏng’gu nongminmun’ip (Collected Papers of Old Chosŏn Studies) pp. 5-6 Pyŏngyang, Academy of Social Sciences Press
3. Lee Chi-rin op. cit., pp. 72-79
6. Chi’or Taek-sŏn and Lee Nan-u (eds.) op. cit., pp. 69-71
scarcity of historical documents of the time period under consideration, locating the political centers of Old Chosŏn itself causes a lot of problems and the results cannot escape the realm of speculation. For example, those who argue for the Liaoning theory through a literature survey often adopt records on Chosŏn in Hainaibeijing and Hainajing of Shanhaijing as the starting point for locating Kocho. In this case, in addition to the problem that most of these records are fragmentary and abstract, it is uncertain when and where each of the many volumes which together constitute Shanhaijing was written—i.e., it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand whose, or of what period's, geographical knowledge Shanhaijing reflects. Thus, it is impossible to determine Chosŏn if geographical names in such fragmented data are chased through various documents of diverse periods, some of which are of very late periods (e.g., Rehezhi of the 18th century), so that results of such attempts cannot but be arbitrary.

The second problem has something to do with physical (i.e., archeological) remains of the period under consideration. Those who argue for the Liaoning theory considers that the Great Walls of Ian and Qin/Han period ended at Shanhaiguan, which, however, is a grossly mistaken view. And there is an additional problem of interpreting Chinese artifacts and sites in the Taedong River basin.

Thirdly, the Liaoning theorists tend to equate the spatial distribution of Pip'a-shaped bronze daggers with the territory of Old Choson. Such interpretation can only be proposed on the basis of a naive notion that 'culture area' coincides neatly with ethnic boundaries or territorial boundaries of a state, which is hardly true in any known ethnographic or historical case. It is apparent that distribution of Korean-style bronze daggers (or the so-called 'narrow-shaped' daggers or Sehyŏngtongkŏm themselves) cannot be an indicator of any political entity—in this case, Old Chosŏn. In addition, it must be pointed out that Old Chosŏn was in the stage of pre-territorial nation.

The P'yŏngyang Hypothesis is proposed on the basis of records on Chosŏn (i.e., Zhaoxuanchuan) in Shiji and Hanshu. Early scholars of the Chosŏn-dynasty proposed that Peishui, which is said to be the western boundary of Old Chosŏn during the Early Han, should be either the river Ch'ŏngch'ŏn or Taedong. The former position is represented by Han Paekkyŏm 1762–

7 Komunai Ichiro 1987 "Current Status and Problems of Shanhaijing Study" in China—Society and Culture, vol 2 Tokyo
8 This view is held by all who argue for the Liaoning Hypothesis
9 Han Paek-kyŏm Tongkukch'unchi 1640 edition p 15
10. Chŏng Yak-yong 1970 Pa'acduso in Yŏjudangch'ŏnsŏ vol 6 pp 436–452 Seoul,
1836). These two notions are still kept among those who favor the P’yŏngyang theory. About the territorial expanse of Old Chosŏn, one of the Peishui=Ch’ŏngch’ŏn River theorists proposed that distribution of ‘typical’ Korean-style bronze daggers would be an important clue so that its northern territory should include the northwestern portion of the Korean Peninsula and coastal regions of Hamkyŏng Province. He also suggested that its southern limit should not lie below the Han River. There also appeared an opinion which sees that archaeological remains known from the area between the two rivers Ch’ŏngch’ŏn and Amnok (Ap-rok; Yalu River) more resemble those from the Taedong River basin rather than from the Liaotung region, so that the northern limit of Old Chosŏn should be set along the river Amonok.

There is one problem in accepting the P’yŏngyang Hypothesis, however. In Weilue there is a description that Old Chosŏn lost its territory owing to conflict with Ian, stretching 2,000 li west of the Manfanhan which became the new territorial boundary between the two countries. This record implies that Old Chosŏn, prior to the Ian conflict, had been the ruler of the Liaoning region, but the P’yŏngyang theory denies the presence of Old Chosŏn in that area.

The Transfer Hypothesis appeared to overcome the shortcomings of the P’yŏngyang theory just mentioned. As is the case for other hypotheses, this theory includes a number of different versions. One prominent version of this hypothesis sees that the political center of Old Chosŏn was originally located in the Liaohé basin and was later forced to move to P’yŏngyang in the earlier part of the third century B.C. due to an invasion by Ian led by a general named Qingai. Later, P’yŏngyang became Wangkŏmsŏng, the capital of Wimanchosŏn, where the Lolang colony of Han was set up in 108 B.C. Another theorist proposed that the center of Old Chosŏn was in the Liaohé basin till the Wimanchosŏn period and the Lolang colony was also established there, but the Emperor Guangwuti of Late Han reestablished Lolang in the P’yŏngyang region. Regarding the location of the

Kyŏngmumunhwasa

11 To Yu-ho 1962 “Chunpŏn kwa Okchŏsong úi Wich’i-Kochosŏn úi Yŏngyŏk Munje wa Kwanryŏn hayŏ” (On the location of Chunpŏn and Okchŏsong—in relation to the problem of Old Chosŏn territory) Munhwaysusun 1962, No 4

12 Chŏng Ch’’an-yŏng 1960 “Kochosŏn úi Wich’i wa kŭSŏngkyŏk-e kwanhan Myŏktaj Munje” (Some problems related with location of Old Chosŏn and its characteristics) Ryŏksa kwahak 1960, No 3

13 Chŏng Ch’’an-yŏng 1961 “Kochosŏn-e kwanhan Kwahak Toronhoe” (A scientific discussion on Old Chosŏn) Munhwa yusan 1961 No 5

14 Kim Sŏk-hyŏng 1960 “Samkuk-e sŏnhaeng-han kukkadŭl-kwa chongjokdŭl-e
center of Old Chosŏn during her early days, some believe that Xianduxian of the Liaootung County during the Early Han must be today’s Gaoping so that this place should have been Wangkŏmsŏng of Old Chosŏn.\textsuperscript{15} But many hesitate to postulate the location of Wangkŏmsŏng in detail. In this case, its location is only vaguely suggested as somewhere in the Liaohe basin.

Despite all the probable merits of the Transfer Hypothesis, however, so far there has been no comparative study made between the two Old Chosŏns before and after the suggested movement of the political center in terms of sociopolitical composition or other various aspects. This lack of follow-up study is the most critical problem in accepting this hypothesis, along with the problems associated with locating the early center.

From the above-mentioned brief review on Old Chosŏn studies, it is clear that a number of conflicting issues have not yet been resolved at all, which can be blamed on the absolute deficiency in written data. Such lack of historical information may not be a problem unique in studying the Old Chosŏn problem. Rather, in fact ancient history through out the world must be reconstructed via various means and ‘historical imagination’, which might be the focal point of attraction of the fact that such meager historical records must be examined thoroughly and every piece of available data must be read fool-proof Interpretation and reconstruction of the past can be meaningful only after such examination is completed.

I propose that understanding the location of Old Chosŏn should begin with establishing the physical location of Ch’ŏngch’ŏn (Zhaoxianxian) of Lolang County of Han Empire. This is because Ch’ŏngch’ŏn is known to have been in the ancient territory of Old Chosŏn and there are many more extant tangible records on Ch’ŏngch’ŏn than on Old Chosŏn.

Sometime during the late fifth or early sixth century A.D., a Chinese scholar, Li Daoyuan (469–529) of Northern Wei dynasty questioned the description of the flow of P’aesu (Pesu) and asked an ambassador from Koguryŏ about its location. The Koguryŏ ambassador replied that ‘the capital of Koguryŏ is in the north of P’aesu which flows to the west through the region of ancient Zhaoxianxian of Lolang, that is, the Lolang County established by Emperor Wut’i of Han, and then flows northwestwardly.’\textsuperscript{16} There is no need to question the fact that P’aesu at that time indicates the river Taedong. When this conversation took place, the

\textsuperscript{15} Lee Chi-rim \textit{op cit.,} p 88

\textsuperscript{16} Li Daoyuan Peshunxiao in Shuqingzhu vol 14 1774 edition
capital of Koguryŏ was placed at the current ruin of Anhakkung, east of today’s P’yŏngyang. West of this place, along the Taedong River, is located T’osŏngdong, and the above-mentioned reply agrees with archaeological discoveries regarding the location of the Zhaoxianxian of Lolang.

In the above-cited reply, it might be true that the italicized part would be Li Daoyuan’s; we may then say that his Lolang County would have been transferred, probably from the Liaotung region during the Late Han period to P’yŏngyang by Emperor Guangwutti. If this is the case, we may guess that Wangkŏmsŏng was originally located somewhere in Liaodong. However, there is no record about the transfer of Lolang in either HANSHU or Houhanshu, and it seems that there is little, if any, possibility that such was the case. This point may be supported by the fact that the Great Walls of the Han and Han-Dynasty all end in the Liaohe region. Liaotung County during the Qin and Han-Dynasty was located in Liaohe Basin.

Zhaoxianxian of Lolang at P’yŏngyang used to be Wangkŏmsŏng, the capital of Wimanchosŏn Wiman attacked and occupied the capital of Old Chosŏn during the reign of King Chun (and took it as his own capital), so that the capital of Old Chosŏn must have had been in the P’yŏngyang area. This is a strongly plausible hypothesis, since archeological discoveries demonstrate that there is no gap in the ‘cultural sequence’ of this region from the third century B.C.

Most important, metallic remains recovered in this region can be said to be the typical Korean-style dagger, whose lower chronological limit does not exceed ca. 300 B.C. and whose distributions are confined to the area south of Ch’ŏngch’ŏn or Amnok River. There, of course, were found Pip’a-shaped daggers of earlier time periods, whose number, however, is limited. That is (if we take the widespread appearance of the Korean-style dagger as an indication of the formation of Old Chosŏn), appearance of a state in this region did not occur until the third century B.C. Nevertheless, both WELNO and SHI describe that Old Chosŏn lost a substantial amount of territory to the Han during the early third century B.C. As seen in Suoqin’s comment recorded in ZHANGUOZHE, Chosŏn was a well-recognized entity among the Chinese of the fourth century B.C. In other words, it is fairly clear that Chosŏn existed as a definite political entity in the Liaotung area prior to the third century B.C. If this is the case, it is probably that the

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18 Sima Qian 1959 Zhaoxianxuan in Shuyi p 2979 Beijing, Zhonghua shuju
center of Old Chosŏn had been in the P'yŏngyang area all the time but its territory expanded northwestward to the Liaohé region with its growth and later shrank due to the Ian invasion during the early third century B.C. However, this is a theory difficult to accept, since (as suggested above) the appearance of a state in P'yŏngyang region did not happen prior to the early part of the third century B.C.

Given that there should have existed a certain political entity in the Liaoning region prior to the third century B.C. and the P'yŏngyang area became the center of Old Chosŏn sometime during the third century, it is possible to hypothesize that Chosŏn existed in the Liaoning region not as a 'state' but as a mere 'ethnic group', and they lost the western part of their territory to Ian, whose invasion stimulated the formation of a state in the northwestern part of the Korean Peninsula during the third century B.C. This hypothesis implies that immigrants from Liaoning into the peninsula during the process of state formation might have played a much less important role than the original settlers of the peninsula. As evidence to support this speculation, we may point out that archaeological remains from burials associated with Korean-style daggers found in the P'yŏngyang region demonstrate strong cultural continuity with burial customs of dolmens and stone-cist burials of earlier stages. However, the problem is that all these suggestions are in direct conflict with descriptions of Weilou as mentioned earlier. It also needs to be explained why Misongm-type pottery and top-shaped pottery demonstrate mutually segregated spatial distribution.

This scenario which sees the formation of Old Chosŏn state in the P'yŏngyang area during the third century B.C. does not deny the importance of the Liaoning region as the center of Old Chosŏn prior to ca 300 B.C. Liaoning should have been the cultural center of Old Chosŏn since this is the area of concentrated distribution of Pp'a-shaped daggers. Then, for the (possibly many) ethnic group(s) of Chosŏn as a whole, we may say that there indeed happened a movement of a (political) center.

Although it is highly plausible that the earlier center of Old Chosŏn in the Liaohé basin of Liaoning moved to the P'yŏngyang area sometime after ca 300 B.C., it needs to be explained why certain formal attributes of Korean-style daggers changed and what is the reason behind such strong 'cultural continuity' in burial customs between the earlier, 'aboriginal' Bronze Age settlers and the proposed new settlers from Liaoning. In this hypothesis, it also must be explained exactly where the center of Old Chosŏn was, and it should be demonstrated in detail whether a state was formed there indeed and existed in the Liaohé region prior to ca 300 B.C.

In regard to the location of the Old Chosŏn center in the Liaohé basin,
there currently are two viewpoints, while some see that Wangkŏmsŏng should be Gaoping in Liaotung\(^\text{19}\), others believe it existed somewhere north of Peizhen in Liaoxi\(^\text{20}\). These seemingly conflicting opinions, however, are all based on a historical record that Han naval forces invaded Old Chosŏn in 108 B.C. across Bohai into Liegou. Interpreting this record, Bohai is believed to be Bohai Bay, and Liegou—i.e., estuary (hegou) of the river Lie (Lieshui)—is interpreted to be either the mouth of the Liaohe or the confluence of the Liaohe and the Dalinghe. In this interpretation, it must be pointed out that the name Bohai in the Zhaoxianchuan of Shyì does not necessarily indicate the current Bohai Bay—this term was also used as a term to indicate the northern part of the Yellow Sea in general. About the interpretation of Liegou, we need to think about the possible route of invasion. The most probable course of invasion would have been like this: Han naval forces departed Shantung Peninsula and went into the Bohai Bay; then cruising along the shore of the Liaotung Peninsula they finally reached the northwestern part of Korea. If this was the actual course of invasion, whether Bohai would be Bohai Bay or not, we may say that there is no reason to equate Liegou with the mouth of the Liaohe.

About the location of Wangkŏmsŏng, there is an opinion that it must be Xianduxian in the Liaohe basin, following the classic interpretative note on Hanshu Dilizhi by Ingzhao. In this case, the problem is that probably Xiandu would be a place name with ideographic connotations, while Wangkŏmsŏng is a Chinese transliteration of a Korean place name. Thus, we may be dealing with two mutually incomparable terms. Given all these problems, the location of an Old Chosŏn center in the Liaohe basin can only be confirmed through archaeological discoveries in the future. And the same can be said about confirming whether Old Chosŏn of that time was a state or not.

Regarding the Sino-Korean boundary during the Old Chosŏn period, what is necessary is a thorough examination of Bronze Age cultures in the Dalinghe and upper Liaohe basins. Although Pip’a-shaped bronze daggers occur commonly in this broad region, the accompanying bronze artifacts indicate a wide range of regional variation both in kind and style. The same can be said about pottery, too. It has long been recognized that Chinesestyle tripod ware vis-à-vis Misongm-type pottery occur in more or less spatially-limited patterns. Recently, there appeared an attempt to subdivide

\(^{19}\) Lee Churm *op cit.*, p 88

\(^{20}\) Im Kŏn-sang 1963 “Kochosŏn ìi Wŏks‘i-e tachan Old Ch‘al” (A study on the location of Old Chosŏn) in *Kochosŏn Munje To‘rom Nonmunpy* (Discussions of Old Chosŏn Problem) Pyŏngyang, Academy of Sciences Press
the Upper Xiamidian Culture into three groups, Dajing Type, Nanshanjun Type and Sherdanungzi Type. Such an attempt is encouraging, since we need to define the vaguely-identified bronze Age of this region into more specific and narrowly-definable archaeological entities. An ethnic interpretation of the Bronze Age can be possible only after such work is made and the results are compared with ancient historical records. Such an attempt also requires more understanding of the nature and ethnic identities of the Bronze Age culture(s) of Inner Mongolia and the Ordos region, along with a comparative study of all these 'peripheral' cultures with those of the Huanghe basin in central China. That is, we must be equipped with much broader areal perspectives for a better understanding of the Korean Bronze Age in a regional context. Such attempts must be accompanied by a theoretical examination regarding how the spatial boundary of research must be defined for studying the ancient history of Korea.

A palaeoecological consideration of the Liaoning area also cannot be neglected. It seems that the Liaoning Bronze Age blossomed under more favorable climatic conditions than today's—the temperature and sea level would be somewhat higher than today, and the amount of precipitation would be different. Such climatic conditions would have left their imprint on everyday lifeways (e.g., subsistence patterns) of the occupants, and the distribution of population groups and routes of transportation also would have been affected.

Location of Old Chosŏn and her character can be revealed when all these different lines of inquiries are sought and their results synthesized. Only then can a clearer picture of the origin of Korean history, which is the ultimate goal of Old Chosŏn studies, be reconstructed.

(translated by Yi Seon-bok)

21 Jin Feng. 1987 “The Upper Xiamidian Culture and its ethnic attribution” Kaoguxuebao 1987, No. 2
GLOSSARY

Anhakkung 安鹤宫
Bohan 渤海
Ch’ŏngch’ŏn river 凌川江
Chŏng, Yak-yong 丁若镛
Chun 淇
Dayang 大井
Dahng 大凌河
Gaeping 盖平
Guangwutı 光武帝
Guanzhong 管仲
Guanzi 管子
Hamabeiyng 漢內北經
Hamayang 漢內經
Han Pack-kyŏn 韓百謙
Hanshu 漢書
Hanshu Dilsız 後漢書
Houhanshu 后漢書
Hagou 河口
Ian 淮
Ingzhao 应劭
Kya 猪子
L’i 里
Liaotung 澀東
Liaoning 遼寧
Li Daoyuan 遼道元
Lieguo 列口
Lie river 列水
Lieyang 列陽
Lolang 樂浪
Luan 澧河
Mahan 马韓
Manshanan 裕番汗
Nanshanun 南山根
Old Chosŏn 古朝鮮
P’ae-ha 濩河
Paekche 百濟
Pehu 濩水
Pezhen 北鎮
Qingai 秦關
Rehezhi 熱河志
Sachŏngtongkŏn 細形銅劍
Shantung 山東
Shanhaiyang 山海經
Shierdaengzi 十二臺營子
Shihir Suoqin 史記 蘇秦
Taedong river 大同江
Tan’gun 檜君
T’osŏngd’ong 壽城洞
Wangkŏmsŏng 王俭城
Wei 魏
Welue 綿略
Wimanchosŏn 汝南朝鮮
Wutai 武帝
Xiaguadian 夏家店
Xianduxian 鞍毯縣
Yalu river 鴨綠江
Yesŏng river 體成江
Zhanhuoze 政國策
Zhaoxianxian 朝鮮縣
Zhaoxianchuan 朝鮮傳