The Worldview of the Goguryeo People
As Presented in Fifth-century Stone Monument Inscriptions

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1. Introduction

The word *chenoha* [天下: referred to as “the world” hereafter] indicates the entirety of the world under heaven or the realm subject to the authority of the Son of Heaven [天子]. “The worldview [天下観],” therefore, encompasses concepts that are concerned with the composition of the world-at-large, the position of one’s polity in it, and the characteristics of one’s clan that distinguish it from others in the surrounding regions. In some ways, *cheonha* is synonymous with *segye* [世界]. However, inasmuch as the latter is derived from the Sanskrit word *lokadhatu*, this worldview [世界観: from here on “metaphysical-worldview”] is a metaphysical concept that signifies the epistemological ebb and flow of time, while the worldview is first and foremost a concept coined to understand the political realities of the world, inside as well as outside one’s polity. *Metaphysical-worldview*, moreover, contends with the problem of

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the individual’s response to the objective world-at-large and how the said individual is to live in that world, thereby rendering significant the individual experience and determination. As such, a variety of such metaphysical-worldviews tends simultaneously to be at play in any given society. *Worldview*, on the other hand, analyzes the phenomena of the objective world in a more comprehensive, sweeping manner. It follows, then, that while one’s worldview can be a factor in the formation of an individual’s metaphysical-worldview, the latter cannot be included in the former.

The term “world” was first instituted in the Spring and Autumn period, and, through the Warring States period as well as the Qin and Han dynasties, developed into a fixed concept. This term, in turn, gradually spread throughout Northeast Asian polities which belonged to the sinocentric cultural hemisphere. Certainly, the worldview of the Chinese people was highly “Chinese” as it developed in the specific context of the history of China; as such, it cannot in its entirety be transplanted into other cultures even within the Chinese cultural hemisphere. Insofar as there exist basic geographical differences amongst all the polities whose peoples imagined their own “worlds,” it follows that there are differences in the specifics of each worldview. However, the influence of the Chinese worldview—its fixed principles on a general level—on the Chinese cultural hemisphere was immense in the formation of each polity’s own logic concerning its position in the context of the greater world and its relationship to the surrounding polities.

The people who occupied the Korean peninsula also conceptualized their polities as well as the world-at-large vis-à-vis the term “world,” and the resultant notion shifted diversely along with the changing epochs. The stone monument inscriptions left by the fifth-century Goguryeo people, such as those found on the Gwanggaeto stele, Modoru tomb, and the Jungwon monument, represent the earliest examples of more specific uses of the term “world” and the formation of the worldview based on concepts originating
from the said word.

The fifth century was a period when Goguryeo rapidly acquired new territory, bringing it under a more extensively centralized state, and actively participated on the inter-state stage of Northeast Asia, engaging in flourishing relations with the surrounding polities. In addition, there was, at this time, a growth of thriving inter-state relations amongst the three kingdoms situated on the Korean peninsula (Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla), whether they were engaged in war or in peace. More specifically, the fifth century was a period during which the Three Kingdoms reached a certain precipice on their road to unification although whether or not this was actually realized by the people living in the kingdoms is another matter.

An examination of the worldview of the people of Goguryeo around this time, the main purpose of this paper, can serve as an important factor in our understanding the history of the period. The paper uses as its main source the stone monument inscriptions from the fifth century. It seeks first to analyze how the people of Goguryeo understood their characteristics, and then to evaluate how these people established the bases of their relationships to the surrounding polities. Furthermore, the paper seeks to illuminate the Goguryeo people’s concept of their kingdom’s position in the context of the Northeast Asian region. The paper concludes with a hypothesis on the Goguryeo people’s views on the people of the three kingdoms and their relationship to one another.

As there is a great dearth of stone monument inscriptions from the fifth century even in its entirety, with a large part of it not having been interpreted, this paper uses the Chinese worldview in order to reconstruct that of the Goguryeo people; it follows, then, that the paper contains tentative arguments. The author asks the readers to make their own judgments of what will be presented.
2. Awareness of the Kingdom’s Heavenly Origination

In order to examine the worldview of the Goguryeo people, it is necessary first to look at the instances of the term “world [天下]” being used by the Goguryeo people. Specific examples can be collected in the Modoru tomb inscriptions (from here on referred to as myoji). Modoru was a mid-level aristocrat who at one point served as a provincial officer in the northern Buyeo region and died in the reign of King Jangsu. His tomb remains in Gungnaeseong of what is today the Ji An [輯安] region. The tomb consists of two stone chambers, and on the walls of the antechamber are inscriptions of approximately 800 words in 81 lines, 200 words of which have been deciphered to date. The inscriptions open as follows:

The grandson of Habaek and the son of Sun and Moon, the Divine King was born in northern Buyeo. All the world [天下] and four directions [四方] knew of the sageliness of this kingdom and this village....\(^1\)

The expressions “world” and “four directions” are synonymous, both denoting the entirety of the world-at-large including Goguryeo. “Four directions” here is the same as the “four seas” as found in the writing on the Gwanggaeto stele, circa 415 CE, the fifth line of which reads as follows: \(^2\)

The sagacity and benevolence of the Great King Yeongnak are as

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1. This is based on the photograph of Myoji on p. 64 of *Tonggu* [通溝] by Author Ikeuchi Hiroshi [池內玄].
2. The “four directions [四方]” from the following phrase “The troops of king battled in four directions, and killed all the enemy [王師四方合戦, 斬殺蕩盡],” the fifth line on the third façade, denotes the region with a specific battle site as the central point, and as such is different in usage than the “four directions” and the “four seas [四海]” occurring here.
great as the Heavenly Emperor [皇天] loves the people, and the king’s military prestige reached the four seas [四海]....

As both “four seas” and “four directions” are used not to depict one kingdom, but to indicate many, they encompass the meaning of the expression, “central kingdom [中心國].” This expression simultaneously contains the literal, locative meaning of “middle” and a sense of superiority in regards to the surrounding kingdoms as well as a political preeminence. As such, myoji displays the sageliness of the kingdom whose progenitor was Divine King Chumo [鄒牟聖王], also known as King Dongmyeong, the grandson of Habaek and the son of Sun and Moon. And it referred to the “four seas” as the “world,” the world-at-large with Goguryeo at the center. From the abovementioned paragraph found on myoji, we can be infer that the people of Goguryeo formed an understanding of the nature of their kingdom and the characteristics of their people focusing mainly on the narrative of the Goguryeo progenitor’s lineage.

On the other hand, this line of understanding and conceptualization can be seen also in the Gwanggaeto stele, the opening of which is as follows:

In the old days, our progenitor, King Chumo, erected our kingdom. He was born in northern Buyeo. The son of the Heavenly Ruler [天帝], his mother was the daughter of Habaek. Born from an egg, King Chumo was sagely and benevolent from his birth....

In addition, the fifth line of the first façade of the Gwanggaeto stele inscriptions refer also to the king as the son of the Heavenly Ruler whose mother was Habaek’s daughter. The “Heavenly Ruler” here means a deity that controls the world and is synonymous with “Heavenly Emperor [皇天]”; King Chumo, then, is the Son of Heaven. The phrase “son of Sun and Moon” contained in myoji points to the same meaning, as Sun and Moon were considered foremost of astrological beings. The Goguryeo section of the Wei
History, said to be composed by Li Ao, a northern Wei emissary visiting Pyeongyang in or around 435 CE, transmits the foundation myth that Jumong was born from an egg produced by Habaeknyeo, who was impregnated by sunlight. This is in line with the “Legend of King Dongmyeong, otherwise known as Jumong” as contained in Samguksagi (History of Three Kingdoms). In other words, both narratives portray Jumong as the son of the sun.

Though all of the foundation myths vary slightly in their specificities, all are based on the Dongmyeong legend common to the tribes of Buyeo origin; as such, they contain the basic story that Jumong was born of the meeting between sunlight and Habaeknyeo. This shows the naïve perspectives on nature as espoused by the ancient peoples that all things originate from the concomitance of sunlight and water. The beginning of all things in this manner can be witnessed in the willow buds being formed at the edge of streams thawing from the sunlight after a long winter. In any case, the deification process of sunlight and water resulted in the amalgamation of the sun and the water spirits. As such, Jumong was considered to be a deity formed from the celestial and the earthly realms, as well as someone with the power to control wind and rain as well as bounty and scarcity of crops. In other words, he was an entity with shamanic characteristics. Not surprising, then, it is generally understood that beside Dongmyeong, from the Bronze Age onward, most patriarchs of the ancient period and the rulers of the nascent nations possessed shamanic elements in their perceived power, including the ability to bring peace to society as well as to bring about plentiful harvests. That pre-third-century Buyeo state practiced the execution or dethroning of kings on whom were laid the responsibilities and accountability for poor harvest or famine—or that Silla title for ruler, Chachaung, and Talhae as well as Beolhyunisageum all

were portrayed as beings with supernatural powers⁴ — is an excellent example.

In any case, the occurrence of the foundation myth in the opening paragraphs of the inscriptions on such representative artifacts of the fifth century as the royal mausoleums and the tombs of the aristocrats served to emphasize the divine origination of the kingdom and illuminate the majesty of the royal family. Sunlight was especially emblazoned, being simultaneously called “Heavenly Emperor [皇帝],” “Heavenly Ruler [天帝],” as well as “Sun and Moon,” as the deific nature of the Goguryeo ruler was emphasized.⁵

Jumong’s celestial origination led to an opinion that the kings of Goguryeo were the Sons of Heaven⁶ and the purveyors of the agricultural-deity characteristics as possessed by Jumong. As such, the Goguryeo kings were, on the political level, the supreme rulers of the world-at-large, and simultaneously the ultimate priests [司祭] with the power to control the heavens and the earth. In fact, in the late Goguryeo era, the religious supremacy of the kings continued long after their political power had begun drastically to decline.⁷

The history sent to Goguryeo by Hyodeok [孝德], the king of Japan, in 654 CE referred to the king of Goguryeo as the “Son of Goryeo Deity”,⁸ this demonstrates simultaneously a well-established understanding in Japan of the position of Goguryeo on the international stage in Northeast Asia and the concept that there were divine-sagely priest-like characteristics embodied by the Goguryeo

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5. Takeda Yukio [武田幸男], “Moduru ippō no kōkuri ōken [牟頭倭一方と高句麗王權],” Chosen Gakuho [朝鮮學報], 99-100, 1981.
7. Gudangseo, Vol. 199; Goryeojeon transmits the record of the king himself participating in the sacrificial ritual to Susin in the tenth month, thus portraying the king as the foremost priest.
kings. The Goguryeo kingdom was, as a kingdom ruled by priestly kings, considered a divine one; following from this, the people of Goguryeo understood as the “world” all the space already subject to and that which should be subject to the authority of their kings. According to the expressions occurring in myoji, the “world” encompassed the places within the “four seas” that knew and acknowledged that Goguryeo was a divine kingdom.

In this way, the Goguryeo people considered their kingdom as the center of the known world. It is clear, however, that there were great Chinese influences on the formation of the Goguryeo worldview; concepts such as “Heavenly Ruler [天帝],” “Heavenly Emperor [皇天],” “tributary [朝貢],” “chronological era [年號],” and “civilized and barbaric [華夷]” that occur in the Gwanggaeto stele and the Jungwon tomb inscriptions, which will be discussed shortly, as well as the expression “world,” all originated from China. On the other hand, the Goguryeo view of the world was largely based on the Dongmyeong legend as revealed in the Gwanggaeto stele and myoji. There are, as such, not a few differences between the worldview of the Chinese and that of the Goguryeo people. The concepts concerning Heaven serve as examples.

In looking at the Chinese worldview from the Spring and Autumn period when the expression “world” began to be used, “world” referred to the region ruled by the Son of Heaven endowed with the Mandate of Heaven. “Heaven” in this case did not carry a group-specific meaning whether it was considered to be the objective ruler [上帝/天帝] of all things as seen according to Mozi, or, as according to Confucianism or Taoism, someone who, based on laws of the universe, looked upon the world. It was thought, instead, to be transcendant of spatiotemporal specificities so as to apply widely to all. However, the Mandate of Heaven was understood to be a most important factor in legitimating the formation of a state and power of its ruler, as it was the emblem of the will of the Heavenly Ruler and the materialization of the laws of the universe. The Mandate of Heaven in fact was what the ruler must
follow as a sacred duty and, as such, was highly systematized, serving as a basis for diverse political ideologies to follow. An example is the idea that one can trace the existence of Mandate of Heaven vis-à-vis the response of the ruled, in other words, the heart of the people. Kingly rule was legitimated by the existence of Mandate of Heaven; Son of Heaven was he who, having received the Mandate, ruled based on it, and, following from this, the ruler, as one with the Mandate, was also Son of Heaven.

In comparison, Heavenly Ruler as seen in the Gwanggaeto stele followed the form of ancestor deities. And while the expression “sun and moon” was used to portray Heavenly Ruler in *myoji*, it is nonetheless depiction of an ancestor deity. The Jumong legend in *Samguksagi* displays this aspect more prominently:

The minister Aranbul said, “The other day, Heaven came to me and said, ‘I am about to send my descendants to establish a kingdom in this land. You therefore escape from this place. On the shore of Eastern Sea, there is land called Gaseopwon. The soil is fertile, and is fit for growing five grains, therefore you can establish a capital there.’” Aranbul then requested to the king that the capital be moved there, and it was called eastern Buyeo. From the old capital, people, though they did not know where they were being taken, came to eastern Buyeo, following a man who called himself the Son of Heaven, Haemosu, who came to the new capital.9

In addition, *Gusamguksagi*, which was used as a source for *Dongmyeongwangpyeon*, explicates the passage after ① as the following:

Heavenly Emperor sent his heir apparent to enjoy the original capital of Buyeo king. The heir apparent was called Haemosu who, following Heaven, went below, riding on a Five-Dragon Chariot. Following him were a hundred and some people all of whom rode White Birds.

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The narratives continue to describe the birth of Jumong from an egg, after his mother Habaeknyeo conceived by sunlight in a palace room following her affair with Haemosu; Sunlight here is the emblem of Haemosu. The narratives show, through Haemosu, the son of the Heavenly Ruler, a more advanced concept of the Goguryeo royal family as originating from a divine source.

As can be seen in the discussion above, “heaven” was understood by the people of Goguryeo neither on a natural phenomenological plane nor according to the laws of the universe, but as Heavenly Ruler, the anthropomorphic deity. This Heavenly Ruler was acknowledged to be the progenitor of the royal family lineage. As such, the idea of the Mandate of Heaven and the deeply connected Confucian political ideology involved in the Chinese worldview could not penetrate into that of Goguryeo. It can be inferred, furthermore, from the fact that the use of the expression Son of Heaven does not occur after the narratives concerning the progenitor, that such usage was not commonplace in actuality. Son of Heaven was an expression fit only for the progenitor; Progeny of Heaven was more likely used in referring to any ruler other than the progenitor. This likelihood can be seen in the history sent to Japan in the eighth century by the third ruler, King Mun of Balhae, a kingdom originating from the people of Goguryeo, as the king referred to himself as Progeny of Heaven.10 In addition to the kings, the royal lineage was also conceptualized as divine in origin, establishing an impenetrable hierarchical structure based on superiority and difference.

As mentioned in the above, the legend of Jumong was mainly based on the Dongmyeong narrative. It naturally follows, then, that there must have been a number of groups of Buyeo origin which borrowed from the Dongmyeong legend and established Dongmyeong as their own progenitor. The royal lineage of Baekje,  

not to mention that of Buyeo, has been known to have worshipped Dongmyeong as its progenitor from the earliest times.\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, it is highly likely that Dongmyeong was worshipped as the progenitor of some of the five tribes of Goguryeo. The following may serve to illustrate this point; around the third century, the Dongmaeng \([\text{東盟}]\) rites, a type of harvest sacrifice taking place in October in Goguryeo, can be seen as Dongmyeong worship.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, it is known that amongst the Dongmaeng rites there were rituals directed toward the east of the kingdom with Susin \([\text{隧神}]\) situated on water;\textsuperscript{13} this can be seen as worship of Dongmyeong’s mother, Habaeknyeo. It can be inferred from this that not only the Gyerubu royal lineage, but other clans also carried out rituals based on worship of Dongmyeong and Habaeknyeo.

In the inscriptions of the Gwanggaeto stele as well as myoji, both from the fifth century, the legend of Dongmyeong showed a connection to the already well-established narrative of Jumong, the progenitor of the royal lineage of Gyerubu, and was used as an emblem of the power and prestige of the fifth-century royal line. This transformation and amalgamation were most likely already taking place long before the appearance of such narrative in the fifth century. In any case, the establishment of the Dongmyeong legend as its own by the Goguryeo royal lineage disabled other groups from adopting it as theirs. This shows that the entity of King Dongmyeong had already transcended the spatiotemporal specificity and been established as the national deity of Goguryeo encompassing the many diverse groups co-existing in the kingdom at that time. This transformation can be understood as evidencing a cogent centralization of power and statehood, absorbing into the kingdom of Goguryeo the five tribes that were the originators of

\textsuperscript{11} Myoungho Ro, “Baekjeu Dongmyeongsinhwawa Dongmyeongmyo,” Yeoksa
dak yeon-gu, Vol. 10.

\textsuperscript{12} Ryangseo, Vol. 54, Dongmyeong is written Dongmaeng \([\text{東盟}]\) in Goguryeojeon.

\textsuperscript{13} Sanguozhi, Vol. 30, Dong-jeon Goguryeo.
the kingdom,\textsuperscript{14} thereby eliminating the diffuse power structure inherent in tribe-oriented polities.

Furthermore, the now-centralized government of Goguryeo instituted the ritual of Jumong and Habaeknyeo worship on a national scale including various peripheries.\textsuperscript{15} This led to the worship, by the people of Goguryeo, of Jumong as the Deunggo\textsuperscript{[登高]} deity and Habaeknyeo as the deity of Buyeo. As these two deities originated from the sun deity and mother deity common to all groups in Northeast Asia,\textsuperscript{16} we can infer that the abovementioned worship of Jumong and Habaeknyeo took root in various peripheral groups without much resistance following the centralization of the Goguryeo kingdom. Moreover, the legend of Jumong assimilated within it the various pre-existing chthonic elements of the different groups; though an example from a much later period, this assimilation can be seen in the transmission of the Tang attack on Liaotong fortress in the early seventh century:

In Liaotaong fortress there was a shrine to Jumong, and placed at the altar were armor and spears. It is humbly said that these were sent down from Heaven during the times of the former Yan, when on all sides there was danger, a beautifully made-up woman married a deity. A shaman said that Jumong was pleased, and the fortress was completed.\textsuperscript{17}

The underlined part attracts our attention which state that armor and spears were placed at the altar of Jumong and treated as divine matter. From the Bronze Age onward, swords were used as important props of shamans, and swords yielding uncommon strength were believed to be divine materials.\textsuperscript{18} No wonder, then,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Tae-don Noh, “Samguk sidaeui bue gwanhan yeon-gu,” \textit{Han-guksaron}, Vol. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Zhou Shu}, \textit{Goryeojeon}.
\item \textsuperscript{16} See note 6.
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{Tang Shu}, Vol. 220, \textit{Goryeojeon}.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Mishina Ahkihide [三品彰英], \textit{Kenkoku shinwa no sho mondai} [建国神話の諸問題], pp. 304-305.
\end{itemize}
martial equipments such as spears and armor were preserved as divine matter. However, it was also said that these divine matters were transmitted from the Former Yan [前燕]; it cannot be deciphered whether by Former Yan, it was meant to denote the Yan of the Warring States period or the Former Yan of the fourth-century Murong Sienpei [慕容鮮卑]. The latter seems more plausible considering the seventh-century preservation of abovementioned materials, especially that of armor. Anyhow, the military artifacts have in reality nothing to do with Jumong. The region known as Liaotong fortress also has no connection to Jumong. As such, the link between the artifacts and Jumong can be understood as originating from the late fourth or the early fifth century when Goguryeo occupied Liaotong fortress. It is probable that as Goguryeo absorbed Liaotong fortress and as the following migration of the Goguryeo people ensued, the pre-existing belief system of Liaotong that worshipped the armor and spear perceived to have divine power was assimilated into the worship of Jumong. This process displays the absorption of the Liaotong people into the Goguryeo cultural sphere.

While it cannot be deciphered the degree to which Jumong worship was widespread amongst the various peripheral groups, the example of the Liaotong fortress delineated above was most likely not an extraordinary one. At the end of the Goguryeo kingdom, for example, Jumong worship existed in parts of the Mada mountain range connecting to the Baekdu mountain area. In addition, there were altars to Habaeknyeo in Gaekyeong in the Goryeo dynasty, and Jumong continued to be worshipped well into the mid-Goryeo period; this fact, coupled with the fact that Yi Gyubo’s expression that even a foolish man could recite the Dongmyeong narrative without much difficulty, can be used to

19. Hanwon, Goryeojo; Myoungho Ro, Supra.
support the theory that Dongmyeong worship was still very much a part of people’s existence even in the Goryeo dynasty following the Unified Silla period. As such, it can be imagined that such a belief system was quite widespread in the Goguryeo period, which precedes the Silla unification of the peninsula. This breadth displays that the belief in Goguryeo as the center of world was not one confined only to the royal family or the aristocratic lineages. It would be difficult, however, to say anything definite about the fifth century, as Goguryeo assimilated the Liaotong area and the middle region of the Korean peninsula into its centralized power structure only in late fourth century.

In any case, the idea of a nation as being originated from Heaven was supported by internal as well as external conditions; internally, by the strengthening of the royal prestige and power, and, externally, by the position in actuality of the Goguryeo kingdom relative to its surrounding states. It would be reasonable, then, to continue on with an examination of the specifics concerning the Goguryeo relationship with its surrounding regions and the concepts held by the people of Goguryeo regarding such relationship.

3. Concepts regarding the Surrounding Kingdoms

—“Tributary [朝貢],” “Protecting Heaven [守天],”
“Civilized and Barbaric [華夷]” —

The relationship between Goguryeo and the kingdoms surrounding it were described as being tributary on the Gwanggaeto stele. In other words, the inscriptions on the stele depict Baekje and Silla as being the tributaries of Goguryeo from ancient times, and portray eastern Buyeo as being originated from a trusted people by

King Chumo, who ended up betraying the king. Such portrayal, certainly an exaggeration of facts, displays the conceptualization held by Goguryeo regarding the surrounding kingdoms; this, coupled with regarding Goguryeo as originating from Heaven, established two sides of a coin.

The following is an examination of the actual relationship between Goguryeo and the surrounding kingdoms described as tributaries. First, in the example of Baekje: from the mid-fourth century onward, Goguryeo and Baekje vied violently for the control of the Daebang plains [帶方故地]. At the beginning of this fierce competition, Goguryeo was at a disadvantage as can be seen in the death of King Gogukwon in the battle of Pyeongyang fortress. By the end of the fourth century, however, Goguryeo had already battled back and established itself as the dominant power of the rivalry. In 397 CE, the sixth year of yeongnak (the chronological designation during King Gwanggaeto, as opposed to King Yeongnak), the people of Baekje submitted to Goguryeo by sending as hostages ten members of the royal lineage and ministers following the loss of the capital to King Gwanggaeto. The submission, however, was simply a strategic means to self-preservation for the time being, and soon after, Baekje instituted measures to reinstate itself as a powerful enemy of Goguryeo. In this way, Baekje never became the tributary of Goguryeo.

Let us look at the example of eastern Buyeo. In 407, that is, the twentieth year of yeongnak, the kingdom was absorbed into Goguryeo, but it is difficult to determine whether or not this assimilation was as a complete tributary of Goguryeo. According to the report by Li Ao [李俶], a northern Wei [北魏] emissary visiting Pyeongyang fortress, Goguryeo territorialization reached as far as Chaek fortress [柵城], which was around Tumen river, which would have been at the center eastern Buyeo\textsuperscript{23}; later, it was the Donggyeong yongwon township [東京龍原府] area during the Balhae period.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23} Wei Shu, Vol. 100, Goguryeojeon.
As such, considering that Goguryeo had established a military authority in the northeast area by 435, the tributary relationship between Goguryeo and eastern Buyeo, even if it had actually been established around 407, lasted for only a short period of time.

Now let us move on to the example of northern Buyeo: as can be seen in the fact that Modoru was designated as the “Provincial Officer of Northern Buyeo [令北夫餘守事]” during the reign of King Gwanggaeto, by the late fourth century, northern Buyeo was well under the territorial jurisdiction of Goguryeo. However, the entirety of northern Buyeo was incompletely under the authority of Goguryeo. The royal family of northern Buyeo maintained their lineage and power, though it is not certain how successful they were. It is possible that Goguryeo used the maintenance of the power of such an illustrious royal lineage as a political strategy to assimilate effectively the northern Buyeo region. On the other hand, the royal family of northern Buyeo made every attempt at maintaining independence under such circumstances. The deployment in 457 of an emissary to northern Wei can be seen as an example of such effort. It can be inferred, however, not to have been too successful as the deployment of emissaries ceased after the first attempt. And following a move in 494 of the northern Buyeo royal family to the Goguryeo territory in seeking refuge from the Malgal whose attack completely severed the northern corner of Goguryeo, the royal lineage ended. Between these periods, namely between the late fourth and the early fifth century, various tributary relationships were established between Goguryeo and northern Buyeo entailing a considerably hierarchically oriented structure.

The case of Silla is different. According to Samguksagi, Silla sent Silseong, son of King Naemul, as a hostage to Goguryeo in 392, a

strategy on the part of Silla in response to the security threat caused by the danger Goguryeo imposed on Baekje. In 401, the tenth year of yeongnak, by eliminating the 50,000-odd troops deployed to the Nakdong river basin by the Wei and thus saving Silla from imminent invasion, Goguryeo increased its perceived prestige and expanded its influence. In the same year, the king of Silla personally went to Goguryeo to prostrate himself. In 402, Silseong took the throne following the death of King Naemul. That Silseong was enthroned instead of King Naemul’s other son, Nulji, is indicative of Goguryeo’s influence on and direct interference in Silla’s internal politics. Afterward, King Silseong, with the help of Goguryeo military, tried to eliminate his competition, Silseong, but due to the Goguryeo support of the son of King Naemul, instead, King Silseong was destroyed, leading to the enthroning of Nulji. The power of Seok clan, the maternal line of King Silseong, was also accordingly demolished, disappearing altogether from Silla politics from this point forward. As can be seen from Goguryeo involvement in Silla royal succession struggles, Goguryeo power had deeply penetrated Silla by this point in time. Such depth of penetration can be seen in the excavated artifacts as well: the Ho bowl, a gourd-shaped utensil with inscriptions in the same letter shapes as seen in the Gwanggaeto stele epitaph, and the silver bowl Yeonsumyeong, considered to be Goguryeo chronological designation, were excavated from Gyeongju, the Silla capital. After his enthronement, King Nulji employed various strategies to upset and eliminate the vast influence of Goguryeo, partly by striking an alliance with Baekje and handling the return of his brother, Bokho, who had been hostaged to Goguryeo. Despite all these efforts, however, the tributary status of Silla continued relatively uninterrupted for quite some time due to the

28. Gwanggaeto stele third façade, second line.
stable Goguryeo power as can be seen in the existence of its military within Silla territory as displayed by Jungwon tomb inscriptions. In other words, as the king of Silla came at the behest of Goguryeo to the Ubeol fortress [于伐城] area in which the tomb was erected, Goguryeo bestowed robes on the king of Silla and his ministers. This reinforced the Silla status as a tributary of Goguryeo existing within the world order as imagined by Goguryeo. This type of hierarchical relationships established vis-à-vis accoutrement such as robes was a strategy effectively employed by the Chinese dynasties in their relationships to their tributaries.

The above discussion shows that northern Buyeo and Silla were subject to the tributary status for a longer period than other surrounding kingdoms. Though the degree of such relationship cannot be determined from extant sources, some fundamentals of the tributary relationship can be deciphered.

First, as tributaries, northern Buyeo and Silla sent some of their resources such as jade-like stone [猗] and gold to Goguryeo, and intermittently, as the example of Silla illustrates, the kings personally visited Goguryeo and carried out necessary ceremonial rituals. It seems that Goguryeo at this time bestowed on their tributaries some of the resources submitted by them. The example of the robe cited in the Jungwon inscriptions illustrates such an act.

On the military side, Goguryeo sent aid to their tributaries whenever they were in need. Both in 401, when the Japanese [倭] attacked Silla, and in late fourth century when Murong Sienpei [慕容鮮祚] attacked northern Buyeo, Goguryeo sent aid. In the case of the latter, myoji inscriptions transmit that Yeommo [冉牟], an ancestor of Modoru, fought against Moyongseonbi in the northern

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31. *Wei Shu*, Vol. 100, *Goryeojeon*: In the thirteenth year of Mujawang’s reign (503), a Goguryeo emissary informed Sejong of northern Wei that due to his kingdom retreating from Seopra and Buyeo because of Baekje and Mulgil the special tributary items such as gold and jade from those regions could not be presented. Seomna [浿箒] here is considered to be Silla. Herein it can be verified that northern Buyeo and Silla presented Goguryeo with the said tributary items.
When such aid was not possible, Goguryeo allowed for the immigration of the respective royal family as illustrated by the example of the northern Buyeoroyal family migrating in 493. In either case, Goguryeo strove to maintain its sphere of influence on its surrounding kingdoms. Jungwon tomb inscriptions well demonstrate this point:

In the fifth month, Great King Gosa and Silla ruler generation after generation wish, like elder brother and younger brother, higher and lower, mutually, harmoniously protect heaven, with the king coming from the east.

In other words, the above was a statement to the effect that the Great King Gosa [高師大王] and the Silla ruler (referred to as “Maegeum [寐錦],” an indigenous term before 503 CE), by aligning themselves in the hierarchical order resembling the relationship between elder and younger brothers, together “Protecting Heaven [守天].” “Protecting Heaven [守天]” means to carry out the Heavenly Way [天道] or the mandate of Heavenly Emperor [天帝]. Here, the king of Goguryeo would first and foremost be the core of the “Heaven” to be protected, and the king of Silla, by his connection to Goguryeo, would be part of this world order. This is fundamentally an effort to establish international dominance through striking alliances based on hierarchical relationships with Goguryeo, as the direct heirs of Heaven, situated at the top. In such manner, the people Goguryeo referred to as “world” the space under such Goguryeo international dominance and described as tributaries the surrounding kingdoms in the context of this world order.

In addition, Goguryeo described as “Civilized [華]” or “Barbaric

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32. Takeda Yukio [武田幸男], Supra.
33. Here, “Protecting Heaven Sucheon” can be thought of as the king of Goguryeo, thereby yielding the reading “King of Goguryeo came here from East.” However, considering that the king of Goguryeo is always referred to as “Great King” throughout myoji, it would be difficult to conclude that only here the king would be referred to as “Sucheon.”
“[夷]” its tributaries in the surrounding regions; in the Jungwon tomb inscriptions, for example, Silla is referred to as “Eastern Barbarian [東夷].” This expresses the conceptualization of Goguryeo as the central civilization [中華]. It can be inferred from this that Goguryeo probably referred to Baekje as the “Southern Barbarians [南夷].” In sum, Goguryeo showed the belief that they were the center of world, of the “four seas,” drawing upon the Chinese concept of “Civilized and Barbaric.”

In their original definitions, however, the relationship between “Civilized” and “Barbaric” does not stop at the hierarchical organization of various states. The former is a concept that depicts socio-cultural, politico-geographical superiority in comparison to the surrounding groups categorized as the latter. Therefore, the Chinese cultural hemisphere was in and of itself considered a “world” in the Chinese worldview post-Han dynasty. In this case, “sinification [中華]” and “world” become synonymous, at times containing, albeit in a premodern sense, the implication of the concept of nation [民族] with shared characteristics.34

Can the view expressed through the use of the terms “Eastern Barbarians” in referring to Silla in the Jungwon inscriptions be the consequence of a type of “Civilized and Barbaric” view? Jungwon inscriptions contain comparisons made between Goguryeo and Silla in the terms, “Land of Great King [大王國土]” and “Land of Maegeum [寐錦土],” respectively. Were there, then, differences in the views of the people residing in the respective kingdoms that reflected a clear awareness of the Civilized versus the Barbaric? This seems rather unlikely. If such things were to be possible, there needed to have been clear-cut differences between the people belonging to the Goguryeo sphere, as one unified group with discrete characteristics, and those living in Baekje as well as Silla. Within the Goguryeo sphere, as is well known, there existed various

34. Abe Takeo [安部健夫], “Chōgoku jin no tenka kannen [中國人の天下観念],” Gedai shi no kenkyū [元代史の研究], 1972.
groups of diverse origins following the late-fourth-century expansion. The majority were of Yemaek, Han, and Joseon lineages, roughly belonging to the same sphere. However, around the time of their assimilation into Goguryeo, each group had its own discrete historical background. For example, the people of Lolang, Taebang, and Liaotong had all been under the Chinese authorities vis-à-vis the Han commanderies part of Han and Ye were all under the political influence of Baekje. All of the abovementioned groups most likely went through gradual transformations in the assimilation process, which can be seen in the spread of the legend of Jumong.

However, it is difficult to assert that transformation of the diverse groups into one under the Goguryeo influence enough for a sense of shared characteristics has happened by the fifth century. The Gwanggaeto stele inscriptions refer to the people residing in the middle region of the Korean peninsula—which had been absorbed into Goguryeo territory—as Han and Ye. This displays an awareness, still prevalent, of the disparate groups and their own characteristics as felt by the Goguryeo people themselves, hence indicative of the incomplete assimilation process. For example, some people residing in the eastern region of Goguryeo were still being referred to as Ye in the mid-sixth century.35

In addition, by the early fifth century most people living in the eastern as well as the southern parts of Goguryeo were of Han and Ye origin; though by the time of the Jungwon inscriptions, the southern frontier of Goguryeo most likely stretched further south, the general ethnic make-up of the region remained much the same. The people of Silla also shared a similar ethnic origin.36

35. Samguk sagi, Vol. 4, Jinheungwang, ninth year, second month; Vol. 19, Yangwonwang, fourth year, first month; Vol. 26, Seongwang, twenty sixth year, first month.
36. The seal unearthed from Majo village, Singwang township, Yeong-il prefecture, North Gyeongsang province, with the inscriptions “Jinsolseonyebaekjang [晋率善檻伯長]” shows that around the third century, the residents of this area were of Ye ethnic origin (Umehara Suezi [沀垚欦炶], “Jinsolseonyebaekjangd[晋率善檻伯長銅印],” Koko bijutsu [考古美術], 8-1 · 2). In comparison, the area
We can say, therefore, that the expression “Eastern Barbarians” when Silla is referred to in the Jungwon inscriptions was not based on any real, perceived distinguishing characteristics between the people of Goguryeo and those of Silla. Then what were the bases for the use of the terms “Civilized” and “Barbaric”?

The use of such terms can be seen as being rooted in the same way the use of “Land of Great King” and “Land of Maegeum.” Namely, the regions which the authority of the Great King of Goguryeo reached, either directly or via provincial officials — as can be seen in the passages from the Gwanggaeto stele referring to the grace and benevolence of the Great King who is likened to the Heavenly Emperor — was described as “Central Civilization.”37

The people outside this region were “Barbaric,” members of the tributaries of Goguryeo who, vis-à-vis their tributary relationship, were under a very indirect influence of the Great King. The world according to the people of Goguryeo, therefore, was a space encompassing both “Civilized” and “Barbaric.”

In other words, there existed within this type of world a separate world as imagined by the Goguryeo people according the meanings embodied in the original definition of the “Central Civilization,” that which was under the auspices of the Great King of Goguryeo, namely the sphere of Goguryeo influence. As such, the “Central Civilization” concept of the world can be thought of as the peripheral or secondary world, while the “Great King of Goguryeo” concept can be considered as the central or primary world. However, the said primary world was, as has been discussed previously, still an unstable political entity. If going forward, the various groups within the Goguryeo sphere progressed successfully to the point of complete assimilation, then an establishment of a sense of certain

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37. Gwanggaeto stele, first façade, fifth line: “At twenty nine, he ascended the throne and was called Great King Yeongnak. His grace and benevolence were such as those of the Heavenly Emperor, and his military prowess reached the four seas.”
shared characteristics that distinguish them from the outsiders would have ensued, thereby strengthening the primary world of the Goguryeo people. And while this sort of progress did take place to a certain extent, it was also a historical reality, in about the same time period, that the people of the three kingdoms, on either side of war and peace, were experiencing a sense of identification with the others of the three kingdoms via the fluidity of the relationships amongst themselves as well as the changes in the influence spheres.

So far, we have examined, as part of the worldview at hand, the conceptualization by the people of Goguryeo of their relationships to the surrounding kingdoms. It seems necessary, at this point, to investigate their understanding of the kingdom’s place in the larger context of the Northeast Asian stage. The following section will do this by looking at the terminology for “ruler.”

4. The World for the People of Goguryeo and Those of Northeast Asia

— Heavenly Emperor [皇帝], Kahan [可汗], Great King [大王] —

As has been examined above, the people of Goguryeo considered as the center of the known universe their own kingdom, the progeny of Heaven, and expressed the gravity of such position through the use terms such as “Son of Heavenly Ruler,” “Son of Heavenly Emperor,” and “Son of Sun and Moon,” all of which can be seen in the fifth-century stone monument inscriptions, namely those of Gwanggaeto stele, myoji and Jungwon. In addition, while efforts were made to heighten the gravity of the kingdom by the use of “Great King” and “Divine King,” in the end “King” was the most grandiose term ever used. Even though the Goguryeo people
borrowed concepts and institutions such as the tributary systems from the Chinese worldview, stretching so far as to use the “Civilized and Barbaric” view in order to show the kingdom’s power and prestige, the term depicting the ruler, perhaps the most emblematic of all, never went beyond “King.”

From early fourth century onward, the royal lineages in dispute with the Jin Empire migrated to the northern region of China erected their own states. Goguryeo readily was in communication with these states, intermittently engaged in mutual skirmishes, and as such was well aware of the existence of non-Han ethnic groups forming their own states on the periphery of China. In addition, despite head-on collisions with the northern Wei, Goguryeo subjugated the army of the northern Yan emperor, Feng Hong,\(^{38}\) to the Goguryeo influence in the Liaotong region, leading to the treatment of Feng Hong as a tribal ruler by calling him Feng Jun.\(^{39}\) All this aside, the kings of Goguryeo were still termed only “King.”

Of course, some evidence seems to indicate that the king of Goguryeo was called “Emperor” as well. See, for example, the following passage from “Strange Happenings: Goguryeo” section of *Samgukyusa*:

*Goryeobongi* of *National History* says “The progenitor was Divine Emperor Dongmyeong, born with Go as surname, named Jumong”\(^{40}\)

However, Kim Busik in *Samguksagi* wrote “Divine King Dongmyeong,” and Yi Gyubo also wrote in his *Dongmyeongwangpyeon* that he saw “Dongmyeongwang bongi” in *Gusamguksa*. Therefore, it is

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38. After Feng Hong succeeded his elder brother, Feng ba, as the Heavenly King. The next year, he enthroned his wife as Empress. Feng ba, who succeeded Goun, a Goguryeo person, and ascended the northern Yan throne, also enthroned his wife as Empress. In addition, he designated his grandfather and father as well as Goun as Heavenly Emperors posthumously. Feng ba and Feng Hong both were posthumously called Heavenly Emperors, and as such, we can view Feng Hong as having in actuality become Emperor.

difficult to take the above passage from *Samgukyusa* wholesale.\(^{40}\)

Let us now turn to *Goryeojeon* of Sui History [隋書], the source most often alluded to as one that supports the Goguryeo kings being termed “emperors”:

The son of the grandson of the progenitor was called Soyeol Emperor, who became Emperor. He demolished the Murong lineage, entering hwando [九都], setting fire to the royal chamber, greatly plundered it and then returned. Soyeol Emperor was later killed by Baekje.

This passage verifies that Soyeol Emperor [昭列帝] corresponds to King Gogukwon, thereby confirming the king becoming an emperor. However, Goguryeojeon of *Wei History* shows a different account:

The second brother of the progenitor’s grandson was Li, Li’s son was Gyo. At the time of Yeol Emperor, [Goguryeo] and the Murong waged war against each other. Four years after establishing the kingdom, the Murong chief, truly leading a big crowd, attacked. They entered from Namhyeop [南陥] and fought at Mokjeo [木底], greatly demolishing the Gyo troops. Then victoriously they entered Hwando [九都].... Li later was killed by Baekje.

The basic story lines are similar — both are accounts of King Gogukwon who died in a war with Murong Yan [慕容燕]. In addition, both describe the king as the fourth-generation descendant of the son of King Taejo. However, the account in *Wei History* narrating the relationship between Goguryeo and Murong Yan based on the calendar of northern Wei. Lie Emperor [烈帝] is the commemorative title of Dao Wu Emperor’s [道武帝] grandfather, completed following the designation of the term “Emperor” and establishing a new dynastic chronology.\(^{41}\) If the passage “During the reign of Lie Emperor [烈帝], Zhao [劍] and Murong attacked each other” were read without a beak between the characters 釵 and 烈帝, it ends up reading Zhaolie Emperor [釵烈帝]. Similarly,

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\(^{41}\) *Wei Shu*, Vol. 1, *Seogi yeolje*. 
the “Soyeol Emperor [昭列帝]” appearing in Goryeojeon of Sui History [隋書] seems to have been a mistake in transliterating Goguryeojeon of Wei History.\(^{42}\)

Why was the term “Emperor” not used when the Goguryeo rulers are referred? Any answer to this question calls for, among others, an examination of the Goguryeo relationship to the Chinese dynasties. It can be inferred that the Goguryeo understanding of their inferior position in relation to China, namely that the use of the term “Emperor” would cause a serious distaste for China, maintained the use of the term “King.” In other words, Goguryeo people understood their kingdom to be a subject of the sinocentric world order. In 413, around the time the Gwanggaeto stele inscriptions were written, King Jangsu of Goguryeo sent an emissary to the eastern Jin, and later submitted to a tributary relationship with the southern dynasties. Following, in the mid-fifth century and onward, Goguryeo became a tributary of the northern Wei. This type of relationship with Chinese dynasties continued well into the seventh century.

We should remember, however, that the relationships mentioned above were mostly titular. Looking at what actually took place in the fifth century, we realize that Goguryeo communicated with both the southern and the northern dynasties which were at odds with each other. Put more specifically, Goguryeo, while maintaining a peaceful tributary relationship, at least superficially, with the powerful northern Wei, managed also to be in contact with the southern dynasties along with the Rouran [柔然]. A Goguryeo emissary to the southern dynasties would intermittently be intercepted by the northern Wei, drawing sharp criticism from the said dynasty. In addition, Goguryeo maintained good relations with the Rouran of the Mongolian high plains, which was at odds with northern Wei at the time, and went so far to facilitate a relationship

\(^{42}\) Dong-ijeon Goguryeo Gwangye Jaryo, ed. Seongbong Bak, p. 34: This mistake is also noted in this volume.
between the southern dynasties and the said nemesis of northern Wei. The northern Wei was aware of these dealings conducted by Goguryeo. Moreover, Goguryeo involved itself in the battles raging around the northern Yan in the Liao xi, in the latter half of the year 430, which led to collisions with northern Weitroops in the capital of northern Yan, Chao Yang fortress [朝陽城]. Goguryeo also met with the Song of the southern dynasties under the same circumstance; in fact, the Song troops deployed to Liaotong were demolished by Goguryeo. Being in the process of forging tributary relationships with northern Wei as well as the Song, Goguryeo continued to employ strategies in direct confrontation with northern Wei, an example of which is the assimilation of the groups residing in the inner Mongolian region.\(^\text{43}\) Most surprising is the fact that this region was the birthplace of the progenitors of northern Wei.\(^\text{44}\)

In dealing with Goguryeo on these matters, the northern Wei was not able to exercise its full rights as the feudal power over Goguryeo. The same was true of the southern dynasties. This is a testament to the power of the Goguryeo kingdom in this time period, as can be further attested by the following anecdotes; a decry from a person of the southern dynasties commented that Goguryeo refused to follow orders due to their flourishing power\(^\text{45}\) at the new year celebration held at the northern Wei court in 489, Goguryeo was received on the same level as the southern dynasties, which was followed by complaints from the latter party — which was met by the northern Wei response that Goguryeo was at the zenith of its power.\(^\text{46}\) This occurred within the context of interstate strife in East Asia. More specifically, the East Asian inter-state strife

\(^{43}\) Tae-don Noh, “5-6 Century Dongasiaui Gukjeongsewa Goguryeoui Daewoe-gwangye,” Dongbanghakji, Vol. 44.

\(^{44}\) Mei Wenping [聮概扮], “Xianzhuoshishide faxianyuchubuyanjiu [鮮卓石室的 發現與初步研究],” Wemu [文物], No. 2, 1981.

\(^{45}\) Nanjishu [南齊書], Vol. 58, Goryejeon.

\(^{46}\) Zi Zhi Tong Jian, Vol. 136, Qi Jixiu Shangzhixia Yongming [齊紀 世祖 上之下 永明], second year, tenth month.
relations in the fifth and sixth centuries were an unstable stalemate amongst China’s southern and northern dynasties, the Rouran in North Asia, Goguryeo in Northeast Asia, and later in the fifth century, the Tuyuhun [吐谷渾] of the western slopes of the Tibetan high plains. Due to the strife between the abovementioned groups—especially amongst the southern dynasties and Rouran which sandwiched the northern Wei in between them, and, in turn, these states together in face of the northern Wei, the strongest element at this time—prevented any one state from becoming the dominant force on the East Asian stage. And with this background, Goguryeo in Northeast Asia maintained its monopoly in the region for over two hundred years.47

It is unlikely, therefore, that the Chinese dynasties would have interfered directly with the choice of terms to refer to the Goguryeo kings. Nor would it be reasonable to maintain that the people of Goguryeo chose to call their rulers “King” due to their innate understanding of China as the center of the universe even without any interference from China. Fifth-century Goguryeo people believed themselves to be the center of the world. Moreover, it was the beginning of King Jangsu’s reign when the Gwanggaeto stele and myoji inscriptions were made, and, from 330 CE, the beginning of King Miju’s reign up until the period directly preceding this, namely 413 CE, there was only one occasion on which Goguryeo entered a tributary relationship (with the former Yan in 355) in those hundred years.48 Even this was a strategy on the part of Goguryeo to repossess the corpse of the former king captured by the former Yan troops in 342 as well as to induce the return of the king’s mother who had been captivated. We also know that it was simply a strategy from the fact that from 355, when the corpse and the king’s mother were returned to Goguryeo, until the end of the former Yan, Goguryeo sent no tributary

47. Tae-don Noh, Supra, 1984.
emissary to the Yan. In other words, the fifth century was not a
time, the context of which was a unified China that was able to
pressure its tributaries and interfere in their internal politics.

However, all the cases of the dynasties of non-Han origin using
the term “Emperor” were those that had absorbed the region south
of Chang fortress [長城]. When they were outside Chang fortress,
they used their own traditional terms to refer to their rulers; only
when they expanded into northern China and were able to capture
at least part of it did they begin referring to their own rulers as
“Emperors.” In the situation of expansion, all of the non-Han
dynasties were newly based in China and incorporated into their
domain new subjects the majority of whom were Han Chinese. In
the process, they faced many enemies within China, and, in order
to bolster their legitimacy, adopted Chinese terminology, pushing a
sinocentric world order. Their worldview naturally became sinocentric
as well; the terms with which to refer to their rulers also followed
suit. Of course there were examples to the contrary. When the
peripheral groups [塞外民族] first invaded parts of China, the
rulers were called “King [王]” or “Heavenly King [天王].” This,
however, was only meant as a step toward adopting the term
“Emperor,” and, in fact, the cases of such change in terminology
from “King” to “Emperor” quite common.49

When staying north of the Chinese capital, the terminology
referring to the ruler tended to remain traditional even after these
peripheral groups established large empires of their own. The
Huns, the Rouran, and the Turks are examples of such a practice.
Even after going through the ceremonies of re-terming their rulers
with sinified titles, the traditional terminology such as Chanyu [單
于] and Khan [可汗] remained. For example, in the case of the
Huns, the National History [國書] sent by Han contains passages
that display the equal status of Chanyu and Heavenly Emperor,

49. Tanigawa Michio [谷川道雄], “Goko jū roku koku koku hishin niokeru tennō no
shōgo [五胡十六國・比周における天王の稱號],” Zui tō teikoku keisei shiron [隋唐
帝國形成史論].
albeit with different characteristics. In the case of the Turks, their history sent to the Sui also displays similar understanding regarding the status of the Khan. In addition, after the defeat of the first Turkish empire, the emperor of Tang was referred to as Heavenly Khan [天可汗] by the people of North Asia. The emperor afterward used the title “Heavenly Emperor Heavenly Khan [皇帝天可汗]” when commanding these North Asian peoples. The title denotes the ruler of all of China as well as the North Asian peoples.

The terms referring to the ruler are symbolic of the political order of the respective society. As such, the world for those with terms such as Chanyu and Khan remained limited to the nomadic tribal societies of Inner Asia.

In comparison, the “Emperor” terminology represented a crystallized Chinese worldview. For centuries since the advent of the term, it had been established and used as a symbol of Chinese polity. Though the term came to be used extensively with the unification of China, the historical processes preceding the unification—the province/township system [郡縣制] of the Warring States period, the solidification of the monarchy [君主權] and the ensuing several centuries of conceptualization changes, in addition to the establishment of the Chin empire [秦帝國]—were all imbibed in “emperor.” Out of the six great seals [六璽制度] of the Han, the three Heavenly Emperor seals [皇帝璽] were meant to display in internal politics the power and prestige of the emperor: the three Son of Heaven seals [天子璽] were designed to show the authority of the ruler over the rituals of the chthonic deities and his subjects living on the periphery. These aspects demonstrate the direct connection between the term “Emperor” and the actual authority over China.

51. Sui Shu, Vol. 50, Dolgwoljeon.
52. Tongjeon, Vol. 50, baleon.
53. Nijishima Sadao [西嶋定生], Chūgoku kodai kokka to East Asia sekai [中國古代國家と東アジア世界], pp. 78-82.
Due to its close connection with China, the term could not be easily adopted by non-Chinese cultures. Simultaneously, the use of the term by such non-Chinese peoples would have signified the will to subjugate and dominate the Chinese world. The Hu-origin dynasties [胡族出身王朝] of the Five Dynasties Sixteen Kingdoms [五胡十六國] period clearly illustrates this point.54

In early fourth century, Goguryeo began to absorb parts of the Chinese territory by its expansion into the four Han commanderies. However, most of these areas were originally Old Joseon territory, the inhabitants of these areas being mainly the people of Old Joseon. As such, Goguryeo did not engage in any active western expansion into northern China even by the fifth century. Moving its capital to Pyeongyang represents such motivation.

Moreover, as seen in the previous pages, the conceptualization of the ruler by the people of Goguryeo—even with the use of Chinese term “Emperor”—was always based on the Dongmyeong legend, meant to express the supremacy of their kingdom on both sides of politics and religion based on its origination from a divine progenitor. The fifth-century Goguryeo people, therefore, did not have to adopt the Chinese term when the term “King” had already been in use for quite some time to refer to their own ruler.

The Goguryeo use of “King” can be traced back to in and around the beginning of the Common Era, a conservative estimate. In Goguryeo clause [高句麗條] in the Eastern Barbarian section [東夷傳] of Sanguozhi [三國志], it was said:

In the beginning of the Wang Mang reign, he incited the Goguryeo troops and with them attacked the Hu barbarians, but the Goguryeo troops did not want to carry this out, so they were coerced into being sent into battle. All neglected to come out from the fortress and instead became vagrants. Provinces and townships placed blame on the Goguryeo Marquis .... According to an edict to punish the Marquis,

54. “Nyeonho wa Jehoui je,” Hoam Jeonjip, Vol. 4, pp. 15-14: Hoam Mun Ilpyeong has also briefly discussed the fact that the use of the term “Emperor” before the Five Dynasties was linked to the authority of the Han commanderies.
they falsely lured him in, and when the Marquis arrived, they killed him. Then they sent the Marquis’ head to Chiangan and Wang Mang was greatly pleased. It was proclaimed to all under heaven that Wang Mang renamed Goguryeo, calling it lower Goryeo, and it was at this time still a Marquisate. By the eighth year of the Guan Wu Emperor’s reign, king of Goguryeo sent a tributary emissary, and only then did he begin to be called “King.”

In other words, during the Wang Mang period Goguryeo was a Marquisate and only by the Guan Wu Emperor period did it become a kingdom. On the other hand, a record in Samguksagi conflicts with this — it is stated, “我將延否” in its account of the Goguryeo Marquis who was said to have been executed in 12 CE, the fourth year of Wang Mang reign period. However, even this discrepancy considered, it seems a mistake to understand Goguryeo of this period as a Marquisate. The passage above was written based on the Wang Mang section of Han History. Wang Mang wished to change the system and title designation according the Zhouli, which stated the supremacy of the term “King” and therefore did not permit the use of the term by peripheral rulers. In fact, a conflict took place simply to protect the monopoly of the term, and as a result the king of Goguryeo had to be referred to as “Marquis” in the newly formed kingdom’s report and royal edicts. The Goguryeo section of the Later Han History shows:

Wang Mang was greatly pleased. He redesignated the king of Goguryeo as Marquis of lower Goryeo .... The eighth year of Gwang Wu Emperor’s reign, Goguryeo sent a tributary mission, and the Emperor reinstated Goguryeo ruler as “King.”

This is a more accurate description than the records based on the context delineated above because it shows that the ruler of Goguryeo, with the characteristics of tribal confederations before the strife of the Wang Mang period, was referred to as “King.”

55. Sanguozhi, Vol. 30, Dong Yi Zhuan; Hou Han Shu, Dong Yi Zhuan.
The original terms referring to the ruler in Northeast Asia were Ka [가], Kan [干], Han [皝], and, again, Han [韓]. Sometimes a prefix was tacked on to the terms. The use of the term “King” began, according to Chinese sources, around fourth century BCE. It is recorded in *Short Account of the Wei* or *Wei Lue* [魏略] as follows:

Long ago, Kija’s descendant, the Marquis of Joseon, saw the declining of the Zhou. Ruler of the Yan was self-conceited and called himself “King” and wanted to rule the east. The Marquis of Joseon also called himself “King,” and wanted to raise his troops in order to go against and attack the Yan. The Marquis, by means of attacking the Yan, wished to respect the Zhou. His minister properly remonstrated, and it was said that only then did the plan to attack cease.56

In the beginning of the second century CE, though Wiman escaped in the easterly direction and took over the kingly authority of Old Joseon, it is clear that the use of “King” for the ruler of Old Joseon was prevalent even before that time, which makes it possible for us to hypothesize that the mentioning of the Joseon Marquis, the progeny of Gija, and the various parts manipulated to be in accordance with the Zhou, are all unreliable as they are revisions by the people of later generations; however, it is more than likely that Old Joseon, being in constant struggle and contact with the Yan around fourth century CE, would have already adopted the use of “King” due to the Yan influences. At that time, not even in China was the term “King” supplanted by “Emperor,” and as such the term “King” was that which denoted the most supreme of all rulers. Ever since the Classical Chinese term “King” replaced the indigenous term, prefix-Ka [某某加], “King” was used to depict such supremacy, and such use continued after the fall Old Joseon into Wiman Joseon, which subjugated Imdun [臨屯] and Jinbeon [眞番] as well as a group led by the Ye ruler Namchang [臧君 南閭]. It is likely, then, that under the influence of the then most

developed state Old Joseon continuing on to Wiman Joseon, the said peripheral groups began also to consider the term “King” as being foremost. The terminology of early Goguryeo can be understood in this light.

In addition, the tradition of using the term “King” was kept intact, especially in Goguryeo relations with China, even after the Han, as the use of the term decreased the chance of conflict with the Chinese empire. In later periods, words such as “divine” and “great” were attached to “King” as a result of the centralization of power and solidification of sovereignty. The use of the term “King” and its occurrence in fifth-century monument inscriptions should not, therefore, be considered in the light of Goguryeo’s inferior status in relation to the Chinese empires, but in the historical context, already discussed above, of the use of the term “King” continuing from the fourth-century BCE Old Joseon onward. This can be substantiated by taking into consideration the relationship between the indigenous terms such as Chanyu or Khan, and the term “King” in Goguryeo.

The titles of rulers in Yemaek- and Han-origin societies including Goguryeo have traditionally been Ka, Han, and Kan [가, 개, 燹, 哈], all of which share the same characteristics as the term Khan [汗]. In the fifth century, “heir apparent” was referred to also as Gochuga [古冊加], as can be seen in the Jungwon inscriptions. Amongst the deities worshipped by the people of late Goguryeo, there was a Kahan/Khan deity [可汗神], though its characteristics are not known. In addition, as has been mentioned previously, Goguryeo had, by the fifth century, already subjugated some peripheral groups including the Khitans. The people of Goguryeo, moreover, were familiar with the term Chanyu, as around the middle of the third century CE, the Wu emperor Sun Quan [吳帝 孫權] had enfeoffed King Dongcheon as Chanyu. As such, it is quite

conceivable that Kahan/Khan [可汗] or Chanyu [單于] would have been used to refer the king of Goguryeo: these terms were never used. Since the supplanting of the term Ka [迦] by “King” to refer the supreme ruler, Ka [迦] was set aside to refer only to princes, aristocrats or officials, all of whom were under the authority of the king.

Let us now examine what the use of the term “King” can explain in terms of the worldview of Goguryeo people. In myoji, Goguryeo was said to be the center of the “four directions under heaven [天下四方].” What were, then, the outer limits of the said world, so called “under heaven”? As the progenitor of Goguryeo was said to the “son of the sun and the moon,” “under heaven” then literally meant all things under heaven. However, there were, within the Goguryeo sphere of influence, groups that referred to their rulers as Heavenly Emperor or Kahan/Khan. Moreover, as a “King” was not an entity that could subjugate the Heavenly Emperor or the Kahan/Khan, this was conceptually impossible. As such, the term “King” was used instead of the others due to a sense of identity based on a real set of traditions wholly distinguishable from those of China and the North Asian nomads. This aspect has already been mentioned in this paper. In other words, Goguryeo use of the term “King” displays a clear awareness of the existence of societies, outside the Goguryeo sphere of “under heaven,” that used terms such as Heavenly Emperor and Kahan/Khan to refer to their rulers. This can also be said to show a distinct characteristic of the Goguryeo worldview, namely, a multifaceted understanding of the world. An example is the Goguryeo belief in its centrality in the world, “under heaven.” The world in this case refers the regions which the authority of Goguryeo already reached or were believed that they should be under its reach. It also denotes a geographic area under heaven, literally all of the area “under heaven,” that encompassed not only Goguryeo, but also others Goguryeo being the center of its own sphere amongst the many that existed in this world. The latter concept includes the former,
and, therefore, is much more rooted in the tangible. In other words, vis-à-vis the latter view, the former concept can find epistemological and actual limits; the people of Goguryeo were able not only to understand the world-at-large better, but also the nature of the specific world pertaining to the context of Goguryeo in face of the larger, metaphysical world. Such an understanding bore more liberality and flexibility than a mere metaphysical understanding of the world.

The inter-state strategies employed by Goguryeo at this time also were deeply connected to such a worldview. Goguryeo pursued a coexistence measure with the northern and southern dynasties of China as well as the nomadic states in the Mongol region while maintaining dominance in Northeast Asia. As such, Goguryeo naturally sustained tributary relationships with the various abutting Northeast Asian states the king of Goguryeo as the progeny of Heaven helped organize the inter-state order of the region as the main constituent of “Protecting Heaven [守天]”. Furthermore, a coexistence measure was sought after in regards to the Rouran of North Asia. An example can be seen in the Goguryeo relationship with the Didouyuzu [地豆于族] of northwestern Manchuria; in 479, the sixty seventh year of King Jangsu’s reign, the principles of flexibility and friendly relations were employed as strategies in dealing with such people,\textsuperscript{59} based on the common goal of facing the then supreme power, the northern Wei.\textsuperscript{60}

In regards to China’s northern and southern dynasties, a peaceful relationship was maintained at least on a superficial level and each party acknowledged the sphere of the other’s power.\textsuperscript{61} There were certainly intermittent conflicts having to with the hierarchical relationship, as exemplified by the incidents involving the refusal of the Goguryeo kings to prostrate to the northern Wei emissaries

\textsuperscript{59} Wei Shu, Vol. 100, Georanjeon.
\textsuperscript{60} For inter-state relations strategies, see Tae-don Noh’s article, Supra, 1984.
\textsuperscript{61} Tae-don Noh’s article, Supra, 1984.
on numerous occasions. However, according to its multifaceted worldview, Goguryeo generally acknowledged, at times more for superficial purposes and always on the basis of necessity, the relative superiority of other states this was especially true when concerning the Chinese dynasties, long the cultural center of that universe. Accordingly, Goguryeo, though only titular, at this time struck a tributary relationship with the Chinese dynasties, which continued for some two hundred years well into the 6th centuries as long as China did not directly interfere with Goguryeo, even with intermittent conflicts stemming from such a precarious balance.

This section has examined one facet of the Goguryeo worldview, including its understanding of its relative position in the larger context of the East Asian world, with a focus on the question of the terminology concerning the ruler. As discussed, the people of Goguryeo saw their kingdom as one world amongst many that composed the greater metaphysical world. This leads one to hypothesize that the people of Goguryeo harbored a kind consciousness in dealing with the peoples of the various adjoining states, especially in regards to the peoples of neighboring agricultural societies. When the worldview thus considered, some expressions in the Gwanggaeto stele inscriptions come into focus again.

5. Worldview and Kind Consciousness

Gwanggaeto stele inscriptions mention that Baekje and Silla from ancient times served as tributaries. In regards to eastern Buyeo, the inscriptions state its betrayal after a long period of its tributary status. These depictions stem from the necessary characteristics of epitaph inscriptions at the time of erecting the Gwanggaeto stele,

used to legitimize the reason behind the Goguryeo military expedition in the sixth and twentieth year of yeongrak. The contents of the stele inscriptions, as has been discussed in the second section, were not historically true. As such, it is not necessary to imbue such contents with too much meaning.

However, we should pay attention to the assertion that Baekje, Silla, and eastern Buyeo all originated from the those who were once under the authority of Goguryeo. In other words, this assertion displays the fifth-century Goguryeo belief that Baekje, Silla, and eastern Buyeo should be subjected to Goguryeo rule. The stele inscriptions do not, in contrast, describe as tributaries the Bei Li [畝録], part of the Khitans, or the Japanese [倭], for that matter.

In hypothesizing the formation of such Goguryeo ideas regarding Baekje, Silla, and eastern Buyeo, one needs to consider the context from which these ideas were derived. First, all these kingdoms geographically touched on Goguryeo borders in the fifth century. They shared a similar natural environment, were agricultural societies, and were connected through a similar cultural foundation from the Bronze Age onward. In examining the ethnic make-up, the people of eastern Buyeo and Goguryeo were of Yemaek origin, with the clear understanding that the royal family of the latter stemmed from the former. In addition, the ruling stratum of Baekje was an amalgamation of the Buyeo-Goguryeo lineage, and some inhabitants of Baekje

63. Hamada Gosaku [濱田耕策], “Kokuri kōkaidō ōryū hibun no kenkyū—hibun no kōzei to shishin no shī rits o chōshin to shite [高句麗高句麗土王陵碑文の研究—碑文の構造と史臣の史料を中心として—],” Chienshi kenkyūkai ronbunshū [朝鮮史研究會論文集], 11.

64. Professor Yeongsu Seo has commented that this “displays the birth of single-ethnic consciousness in the progress in ancient Korean history in “Silla Tongil Woegyoui Jeon-gae wa Seonggyeok,“ Tong-ilguk Silla sahoe published by the Dongguk University Center for Research on Silla Culture. However, I believe it might be a bit far-fetched to view the southern expansion of Goguryeo as stemming from a kind of ethnic identification or a homogeneous-ethnic consciousness already existing amongst the three kingdoms. Instead, the formation of a king consciousness in relation to Silla and Baekje seems to have been accelerated by the inter-state relations and contact amongst the two said kingdoms and Goguryeo.
became those of Goguryeo following the absorption into Goguryeo territory of the middle of the Korean peninsula during the reign of King Gwanggaeto. As such, it is natural that around the time of the Gwanggaeto stele inscriptions, the ruling stratum of Goguryeo considered Baekje and Silla, the inhabitants of which shared the same ethnic lineages of some Han- and some Ye-origination with Goguryeo, to be areas that could possibly come under the sphere of Goguryeo influence. In actuality, Goguryeo heavily exercised its influence on eastern Buyeo and Silla by making these kingdoms tributaries of Goguryeo this, coupled with the numerous invasions on Baekje territory and the Goguryeo expansion well into the Nakdong river region, helped to form and solidify the Goguryeo attitudes toward the middle and southern parts of the Korean peninsula as well as the inhabitants of those regions.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Goguryeo began to be more aware of its own sphere in comparison to those societies with the use of terms such as Heavenly Emperor or Kahan/Khan, especially when Goguryeo began to encounter a larger world through its increasingly active participation in the inter-state movements in East Asia. With such context as background, the inhabitants of Goguryeo and those of the kingdoms deemed to be under Goguryeo sphere of influence Silla, Baekje, eastern Buyeo most likely formed a sense of shared identity amongst them, which led the ruling stratum of Goguryeo to conclude that the inhabitants of Silla, Baekje, and eastern Buyeo were once subjects of Goguryeo, an attitude attested by the Gwanggaeto stele inscriptions. There is a need, then, to consider in conjunction with the Goguryeo worldview the following contained in the stele inscriptions: first, the relatively detailed descriptions of Silla, Baekje, and eastern Buyeo as originating from those who were once under the authority of Goguryeo, and second, the emphasis placed on the battles forged to subjugate the Japanese as. The Japanese were considered to exist outside the Goguryeo world, and as such, the enmity against it likely grew with every infringement of the Goguryeo world by them; such
subjugation battles waged against the Japanese, a foreign society, propelled the use of the likes of Silla and Baekje, with whom Goguryeo felt more a shared sense of identity, to enhance the power and prestige of King Gwanggaeto in the stele inscriptions. Thus considered, the attitude of Goguryeo toward Silla, Baekje, and eastern Buyeo, though cannot be said to be strictly a kind consciousness, was the precursor to the formation such consciousness to appear next amongst the people of the three kingdoms, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the Goguryeo worldview as presented in the fifth-century stone monument inscriptions. Though referred to as the worldview of the people of Goguryeo in various parts throughout the paper, it is much more accurate to consider it the worldview of the ruling stratum of Goguryeo. The contents of this view in the spatial sense can be summarized as follows.

The world according to the people of Goguryeo was divided into three disparate levels. The primary level was the region under direct auspices of the Goguryeo king, namely “Land of Great Kingdom.” At the time, Goguryeo was the foremost power on both sides of politics and religion, its legitimacy based on the divine lineage of its royal family as can be seen in the worship of ancestors as progeny of Heavenly Ruler. As such, Goguryeo was deemed superior to its neighbors. This was discussed in the first section.

The secondary level in this worldview encompasses the adjoining areas, which either were already under the auspices of the Goguryeo

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65. Tae-don Noh, “Samhane Daehan Insikui Byeoncheon,” Han-guksa yeon-gu, Vol. 38. An example of this is the “unified-rule consciousness” of the Samhan.
king or should be made subjects. Goguryeo thought of its relationship with these areas as being a hierarchical tributary one. The maintenance of such hierarchical order with Goguryeo at its center was called “Protecting Heaven [守天],” thought to be the transmission of the will of Heavenly Ruler or the Way of Heaven. The king of Goguryeo in this way was the phenomenological essence, the main constituent, of Protecting Heaven. In addition, Goguryeo referred to its tributaries as “Civilized and Barbaric.” It must be remembered, however, that these terms were only political, not based on any fundamental sociocultural differences, both perceived and real, between the people of the primary level and those of the secondary one. This aspect was examined in the second section.

The third level concerns the metaphysical world for the people of that time period and denotes the entirety of the East Asian region. This metaphysical world was divided into several different worlds; Goguryeo was considered to be the center of one of these worlds within the larger metaphysical world. In conceptualizing secondary world in the context of this greater metaphysical world, it is only natural that the people of Goguryeo formed a sense of kinship with the people of Baekje, Silla, and eastern Buyeo thought to be within the secondary level of the worldview in opposition to the peoples remaining outside it. As discussed in the third and fourth sections, this, in conjunction with the similarities in geographic, cultural, political, and ethnic aspects, propelled the formation of kind consciousness to follow.

(Translated by Aeri Shin)
ABSTRACT

The Worldview of the Goguryeo People
As Presented in Fifth-century
Stone Monument Inscriptions

Noh, Tae-don

This paper argues that Goguryeo was comprised of several regions in parallel cooperation, its leaders content to take individual areas as their own Tienshas. This view of Tiensha reflects the Goguryeo people’s unique understanding of their own identity; their Cheonha were different one from those of China and other nomadic societies. With that Cheonha in mind, the people of Goguryeo must have felt a kind of brotherly feeling for the people in neighboring states, namely those within their Cheonha. The tombstone of Gwangaeto the Great defines the peoples in Shilla, Baikjae and Eastern Buyeo as essentially subordinated to Goguryeo and justly under the reign of its king. That statement can be interpreted as an expression of brotherly feeling on the side of Goguryeo’s ruling class. It might be going too far if this kind of brotherly feeling is argued to be a certain ethnic consciousness, but to call it an incipient form of such is not to be criticized, for that period was the one during which a certain common consciousness had been slowly maturing among the three states in the Korean Peninsula.

It should not be missed that the Goguryeo people’s view of Cheonha, as is now verified by the very 5th-century inscriptions,
exerted great influence in determining Koreans’ self-identity. The pluralistic view of world order held by the people in Goryeo period (918-1391) was one of such instances; they did not insist on a single center of Cheonha, admitting the possibility of many varied centers.

Keywords:
Goguryeo, Cheonha, State of Heavenly Descendants, Sun-god, Water-goddess, harvesting ritual, sacred priest