Parhae in Historiography and Archaeology: International Debate and Prospects for Resolution

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The history of the kingdom of Parhae (Ch. Bohai, J. Bokkai, 698–926) has been studied and debated in East Asia since the early twentieth century. Despite the scarcity of textual sources, over the past few decades, sophisticated analyses of a range of aspects of Parhae politics, society, and culture have been produced by scholars writing in Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Russian. Only very recently, however, have significant efforts—led by Korean scholars—been made to expand the history of Parhae into English-language scholarship. This article serves to place these more widely accessible contributions into the context of the international and multilingual negotiation over how the history of Parhae should be understood. Readers from other disciplines who encounter this scholarship are in effect hearing only a single speaker who in practice is engaged in a lively conversation with many participants. The present study is intended to address specifically the needs of such readers, and suggests that the emphasis on “multiculturalism” in contemporary Korean society may aid Korean scholars’ engagement with international audiences on the Parhae issue.

Keywords: Parhae, Bohai, archaeology, ethnicity, national identity

Introduction

The history of the kingdom of Parhae (Ch. Bohai, J. Bokkai, 698–926) has been studied and debated in East Asia since the early twentieth century.\(^1\) Despite

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the scarcity of textual sources, over the past few decades sophisticated analyses of a range of aspects of Parhae politics, society, and culture have been produced by scholars writing in Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Russian. Only very recently, however, have significant efforts—led by Korean scholars—been made to expand the history of Parhae into English-language scholarship. This article serves to place these more widely accessible contributions into the context of the international and multilingual negotiation over how the history of Parhae should be understood. At present, the sole book and the overwhelming preponderance of academic articles concerning Parhae published in English are produced by Korean authors and institutions, yet engage closely with interlocutors writing only in Chinese and Japanese. Readers from other disciplines who encounter this scholarship are in effect hearing only a single speaker who in practice is engaged in a lively conversation with many participants; it would be unsurprising for many such readers to find the meaning and significance of the information and arguments presented difficult to grasp fully. The present study is intended to address specifically the needs of such readers, and finally to suggest some as-yet unexplored avenues for further investigation. In consequence, acts of disputation intentionally located in, or targeted at, the international arena form the focus of this study. Presentations of a field to non-specialists have implications and consequences differing from, yet not necessarily smaller than, exchanges among specialists, particularly within a single field. This present work thus does not offer a comprehensive overview of scholarship on Parhae, as a number of excellent surveys of the topic are available.

A particular aim of this article is to make available, for historians new to this debate, key items of textual as well as archaeological evidence that often form the basis of discussion yet have never been fully introduced in English scholarship. A development important to the context of this study is the recent publication of *A New History of Parhae*. The original from which it was translated, *Saeropke pon Parhaesa* (2002), coexists with dozens of other Korean volumes on the same topic, many more rigorous and exhaustive, and so is viewed in Korea as mere popularization. By contrast, *A New History of Parhae*...
Parhae bears the name of a respected senior historian at a major US research university as translator, as well as the imprint of a reputable European academic publishing house. It is sold internationally through the same distribution channels as other English-language academic books, inviting a broader reception than other English presentations of Korean historical arguments. As of 2014, moreover, it remains the only full English-language volume on the topic.

For scholars of international relations and comparative history lacking Korean language proficiency due to specialization in other regions, but seeking to be informed about historical controversies, this volume appears as a basic reference for research and policymaking without comparable alternatives. Consequently, while it is not the most comprehensive, rigorously documented, or newest book by Korean scholars, A New History of Parhae receives particular attention in this study because its potential impact on international understanding is comparatively large. The book is treated herein as an intervention in a particular discursive milieu—that of newcomers and outsiders to scholarship within East Asia—and the positions advocated by its authors had in nearly all cases been first presented elsewhere, sometimes by other scholars. In this article the original articulations of those arguments within the disciplinary scholarship have been provided as space allows. For reasons of space this study addresses only a limited subset of the relevant sources and arguments, selected for their frequency of appearance and centrality in current academic debate.

A central issue in scholarship since the 1960s is the question of whether the history of Parhae belongs to “Korean” or “Chinese” national history. Arguments about the relationship of Parhae to contemporary states are political claims; specifically, they confirm or question claims by present governments to control particular territory due to an identity of essential features with a past state. Some Korean historians include assurances that their arguments for the “Koreanness” of Parhae are not arguments that former Parhae territory should now fall under Korean jurisdiction. Nonetheless academic disputes over the “identity” of Koguryŏ and Parhae are commonly linked directly to claims articulated in the international relations discourse within both Koreas questioning the legitimacy of the present Sino-Korean border. Consequently, some scholars do explicitly frame their own interventions in the historiographic debate in terms of national interest; thus South Korean scholar Kim Eun Gug declares

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4. e.g., Song Ki-ho (Song Kiho), The Clash of Histories in East Asia (Seoul: Northeast Asian History Foundation, 2010), which is not generally available for retail purchase outside the Republic of Korea.

openly, “We have a national responsibility to develop a response to China’s 
Northeast Project and its claims that Koguryo and Parhae belong to Chinese 
history.”

Neither of these two polities is currently treated at length in the state-
mandated history curriculum in the People’s Republic of China. On this basis 
the Korean pronunciations “Koguryo” and “Parhae” are used in this article. 
Romanization of all other terms follows modern pronunciation in the country 
of authorship of the first, or main, text in which a given term appears. One 
result of this approach is that the names of Parhae subjects mentioned only in 
Tang dynasty—“Chinese”—sources are Romanized according to modern 
Mandarin Chinese pronunciation. While this may prove disorienting for readers 
accustomed to Korean pronunciations for all primary sources relating to 
Parhae, it should not be interpreted as implying that these objects and persons 
are “Chinese” in some essential way. Rather, this approach serves to 
acknowledge that from the very beginning discourse about Parhae has been 
transnational and multilingual.

The international scholarly discourse regarding Parhae has centered on the 
question of which national history the state should be assigned. In a broad 
sense, the major positions are well known: in each modern nation-state a 
tendency is evident for each scholar to seek identifications between Parhae and 
his/her own state. For example, in the Soviet Union and Russia it is argued that 
a unified Parhae nation was created from the union of Mohe 靺鞨 (K. Malgal, J. 
Makkatsu) peoples ancestral to tribal groups in Russian territory. However, 
scientists narratives conflict most sharply in the debate between China and the 
Koreas. In both Koreas, it is generally argued that Parhae was a “Korean” state 
founded by descendants of Koguryo, and it is often held that Parhae together 
with Silla constituted “Northern and Southern Dynasties.” In China, Parhae is 
seen as a local polity (difang zhengquan 地方政权) founded by the “Mohe 
nationality” (Mohezu 靺鞨族). The present study seeks to provide an overview of

History of Parhae, ed. The Northeast Asian History Foundation, Seoul (Leiden; Boston: Global 
Oriental, 2012), 75–85, 84.

7. See Lishi kecheng jiaocai yanjiu kaifa zhongxin 历史课程教材研究开发中心, ed., Gaozhong lishi 
keben jiaocai jiaokeshu 高中历史课本教材教科书 (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007).

8. Sakayori Masashi 酒寄雅志, Bokkai to kodai no Nihon 渤海と古代の日本 (Tokyo: Azekura 
Shobō, 2001), 25; Ma Yihong 马一虹, Mohe, Bohai yu zhoubian guojia, buzu guanxi shi yanjiu 
靺鞨、渤海与周边国家、部族关系史研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011), 2.

9. Hamada Kōsaku 浜田耕策, “Bokkaishi wo meguru Chōsen shigakkai no dōkō—Kyōwakoku to 
Kankoku no ‘Nanbokukoku jidai’ ron ni tsuite” 渤海史をめぐる朝鮮史学会の動向——共和国と韓国 
the major arguments and evidence advanced in connection with these two positions, particularly in the international arena, i.e., outside of Korean domestic scholarship. It is suggested here that the Korean position has gained greater credibility with the recent official, academic, and popular re-conceptualization of South Korea as a “multicultural” (tamunhwa) nation.

A Brief Overview of Scholarly Trends

1. The Koreas

In the postwar era, the central arguments claiming Parhae as “a part of Korean history” were first advanced by North Korean scholar Pak Sihyŏng in the 1960s. Pak’s argument centers on identifying its government as “a state founded by people of Koguryŏ” and its territory as “composed of most of the former territory of Koguryŏ and an expansive, newly acquired portion,” and thus focusing foremost on political and territorial succession from Koguryŏ. Pak goes on to make a broader claim to continuity with the present, contending that Parhae “bloodline and culture are an important component of the bloodlines and cultural traditions of the Korean race.” As discussed below, these biological and cultural arguments are echoed more subtly in more recent scholarship from the Republic of Korea. In the same era, Pak’s textually grounded historical scholarship was complemented by the work of Chu Yŏnghŏn, who drew on the findings of joint Chinese-North Korean archaeological excavations in China in the 1960s to advocate a Koguryŏ “Korean” identity for Parhae.

From this effort to incorporate Parhae into Korean history emerged a paradigm viewing Parhae and Silla as “Northern and Southern Dynasties;” Chu Yŏnghŏn pointed to instances in which the Silla court in fact referred to Parhae as “the northern state” (bukkuk 北國 or bukcho 北朝). Acceptance of this narrative in South Korea was not immediate: in 1981 a prominent South


Korean scholar could still refer to the Northern-Southern Dynasties paradigm as an “interesting new interpretation,” and as of 1990 there was still no consensus in South Korea regarding the thesis. By now, however, it has been widely accepted by South Korean scholars. Kim Eun Gug argues that political imperatives demand the adoption of this position by his compatriots, to counter efforts to incorporate Koguryŏ and Parhae into Chinese history, and to provide a model for the underlying unity and eventual reintegration of North and South Korea.

2. China

Since 1949 the Chinese state has depicted the country as a unified multi-ethnic state. In the case of ethnicity, this means endeavoring to build unity among the country’s various recognized nationalities in order to strengthen the nation as a unified construct. In accordance with this national narrative, in PRC scholarship the standard characterization of Parhae is as a “local polity of a minority nationality” (shaoshu minzu de difang zhengquan). As a recent survey has noted, “the great majority” of Chinese scholars conclude that “Parhae was a local government subordinate to Tang rule at the time, and the history of Parhae belongs to China.”

Only from the 1980s onward did research on Parhae come to be seen as a significant enterprise within these fields in China. Parhae studies received a new impetus in the mid-2000s from the widely discussed Northeast Project (Dongbei bianjiang lishi yu xianzhuang xilie yanjiu gongcheng). The project aroused a sense of crisis among South Korean scholars, who saw it as a concerted political effort to contest the role of

Koguryo and Parhae, which had by that time been firmly assigned to Korean national narratives, and concern was raised that the Chinese state would seek recognition for its position by applying for UNESCO recognition of Parhae sites. Park Jin Suk argues that “the Chinese position has been solidified” as a result of the Northeast Project, with scholarship in the PRC now presenting a united front against alternative historical interpretations.

Within those limits, however, the theses advocated display a degree of diversity such that it is not possible to speak of a single “Chinese position;” several of the variations therein are discussed later in this paper. The editors of a recent volume of Chinese studies on the topic commented that they had selected some articles expressing viewpoints “directly opposed to one another,” to the point of including even “articles containing obvious errors” in the interest of advancing the discursive process. It is nonetheless apparent that the political implications of the topic limit the positions advocated in scholarship published in China: publications by Chinese authors arguing that Parhae was “Korean” are not to be found.

3. Japan

In Japan, active and concerted research on Parhae began after the 1895 Sino-Japanese War, as Japanese political and military interests in former Parhae territory grew. At first Japanese scholarship placed Parhae history within the framework of “Manchurian history,” emphasizing the distinctiveness of Parhae culture in contrast to Tang China, Koguryo, and Silla, and its political independence from the Tang. This position is exemplified by the prominent Japanese archaeologist Komai Kazuchika, who directed the excavation of the Parhae Supreme Capital (Ch. Shangjing, K. Sanggyeōng, J. Jōkei) site in 1933–1934. In his draft of a “Cultural History of Manchuria” (Manshū bunkashi 満洲文化史) written before 1945, Komai described the first monarch of Parhae as “a ruler of the Sumo Mohe” (Zokumatsu Makkatsu no shihaiša 栗末靺鞨の支配).

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者), conferring on him a tribal identity devoid of any Korean or Koguryo connection, but also emphasizing his independence from the Tang.24

From the mid-1930s through the early postwar period, Parhae came to be described by many Japanese scholars as part of Korean history (Chōsenshi 朝鮮史), a position prominently represented by the work of Mikami Tsugio. This view became particularly prevalent in Japan after the country's diplomatic ties with the mainland Chinese government were severed after 1949.25 In the 1980s, scholars in Japan began scrutinizing new archaeological evidence from China, hoping to clarify the ethnic identities of the Parhae rulers and population.26 Since then, however, the majority of scholars in Japan have moved away from seeking a single ethnic identity for Parhae.27 Their focus has shifted instead to the mechanisms of local governance and its relationship with central authority.

The work of Japanese scholars has been far from free of political influences, of which scholars—including within Japan—have been fiercely critical.28 Nonetheless, their research has encompassed a diversity of positions during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and is drawn on by both Chinese and Korean scholars. Korean scholar Park Jin Suk has argued that because in the present international environment Japan “has no territorial interests in Parhae,” its scholars can offer analyses on Parhae “from a more objective position.”29

Primary Points of Contention

1. Ethnicity

a. Central Issues and Theses

In the Sino-Korean debate over Parhae’s historical identity, the question of ethnic identity has received the greatest attention. The most widely held position presents Parhae society as comprising two ethnically distinct elements:

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28. See the articles in Shokuminchi shugi to rekishigaku: sono manazashi ga nokoshita mono 植民地主義と歴史学：そのまなざしが残したもの, ed. by Terauchi Itarō 寺内威太郎 et al. (Tokyo: Tōsui shobō, 2004).
descendants of the Koguryo population, and Mohe (K. Malgal)靺鞨 tribal groups. Even among scholars accepting this broad characterization of Parhae society, however, significant disagreements are evident. The chief textual and archaeological bases for each position are introduced in later sections; here the theses themselves are briefly introduced.

In Korean scholarship and history textbooks at the secondary school level, it is generally held that “the ruling class of Parhae were persons of Koguryo origins and that the people over whom they ruled were the Malgal, a people whose ethnic origins were different from Koguryo.” Under this framework, scholars portray Parhae as a country with a government founded by, and a state dominated by, “Koguryo people” or “old people of Koguryo,” defined as an ethnic group cognate with modern Koreans. Under this rubric, the identity of the rulers is seen as overriding the ethnic plurality of the broader population in determining how Parhae is to be located in terms of national histories. Thus, writing for a Japanese audience from a North Korean perspective, Chŏn Hoch’ŏn characterizes Parhae and the peninsular Korean state of Silla as possessing fundamentally “the same ethnicity” (dŏzoku 同族).31

In China, the standard position on Parhae is that the Mohe should be viewed as its “main ethnicity” (zhuti minzu 主体民族), with descendants of Koguryo constituting a minority of secondary importance.32 More specifically, most scholars in China cite the Xin Tang shu 新唐書 (discussed below) to argue that the Parhae founders were members of the Sumo Mohe tribe, i.e., a group of Mohe tribes centered on the Songari River (Ch. Songhua River 松花江, referred to at the time as the Sumo River). In 1915, the Japanese scholar Tsuda So¯kichi noted that Tang sources described the Mohe Baishan 白山 (K. Paeksan, J. Hakusan) tribe as more closely allied with the Koguryo state, while the Sumo tribe was often in conflict with Koguryo.33 Building on Tsuda’s findings, Li Jiancai has recently argued that the Parhae founder Da Zuorong 大祚榮 (K. Tae Choyŏng, J. Dai Sakuei, r. 698–719), closely affiliated with Koguryo, was more

30. Han Ciu-cheol (Han Kyuch’ŏl), “The Ethnic Composition of Parhae’s Population,” in A New History of Parhae, 16; in Korean domestic scholarship an influential exposition of this position is that of Song Kiho; for his recent advocacy of this position see his Parhae sahoe munhwasa yo’n’gu, 36–42.
32. Feng Haiying et al., “Ershi shiji jiushi niandai yilai.”
likely to have been of the Baishan tribe. While the distinction may appear trivial, by challenging the reliability of the key Tang text on which the mainstream Chinese position relies, the thesis proposed by Tsuda and Li opens the way methodologically for scholars to offer more flexible interpretations of the available evidence. This position has been adopted by a handful of Chinese scholars, but remains relatively marginal.

Another minority position in China, represented by the scholar Sun Jinji, argues that to characterize Parhae as “Mohe” is inadequate, and that over time the diverse groups composing the country’s population merged to form a “Parhae ethnicity” (Bohaizu 渤海族). This thesis has been directly opposed by the Korean scholar Yun Jae-Woon, who argues that “separate activities by such non-Parhae elements as Malgal and Nuzhen [sic] groups” after the dissolution of the Parhae state demonstrated that the Mohe were not entirely absorbed into a “Parhae ethnicity.” This refutation is incomplete, however: the continuing presence of other ethnicities does not show that a new ethnicity did not form as well. The question of ethnic integration over time within the Parhae state deserves further study, as it bears direct implications on how scholars understand the state’s descendants, who remained prominent in northern Chinese society for three centuries after the fall of Parhae itself.

A minority of scholars in Korea argue that Parhae should be considered a society composed entirely of ethnically homogenous Koguryo descendants. An advocate of this position, Han Ciu-cheol, has suggested that there was no ethnic distinction between the “Koguryo” and “Mohe” subjects of Parhae. Rather, he argues, the only distinction was between elite and commoner classes, with “Mohe” functioning as a pejorative term for the lower strata of society.

Insofar as Sun Jinji and Han Ciu-cheol both portray Parhae as comprising a single ethnic group with significant internal variation, their theses exhibit a

34. Li Jiancai 李健才, “Tangdai Bohai wangguo de chuangjianzhe Da Zuorong shi Baishan Moheren” 唐代渤海王国的创建者大祚荣是白山靺鞨人, Minzu yanjiu 2000 no. 6 (June 2000), 77–110.
37. See Nishikawa, “Bokkai kōkōgaku no seika to minzoku mondai,” 594.
degree of similarity. They differ, however, in the diachronic trends each describes. Sun portrays Parhae society as acquiring this diversity from originally disparate groups, with the convergence of their cultural practices over time eventually earning a unitary ethnic label. In contrast, Han deemphasizes changes over the duration of the Parhae kingdom’s existence, portraying its cultural variations as the legacy of an ethnically homogeneous Koguryô society. An influential, more moderate position widely influential in Korean domestic scholarship is that of No T’aedon (Noh Tae-don), who has argued that the people of Parhae comprised a core Koguryô population into which was mixed a Mohe group assimilated to Koguryô culture.40

b. Textual Sources on the Founding of Parhae

While scholars of Parhae draw on a wide range of textual sources, most investigations of Parhae ethnicity take as their starting point the founding of Parhae as narrated in the two official histories of the Tang dynasty. Familiarity with these passages is consequently a prerequisite for making sense of subsequent debates. One key passage is the opening of the section on Parhae in the Jiu Tang shu 旧唐書:

The Bohai Mohe Da Zuorong was originally a branch of the race of Koguryô. Once Koguryô had been annihilated [by the Tang], Da Zuorong led his relatives to a new home at Yingzhou 营州 [near modern Chaoyang Municipality, 朝陽市, Liaoning]. In the [Tang] Wansui Tongtian 萬歲通天 period [696–697], the Khitan Li Jinzhong 李盡忠 rebelled, and Zuorong and the Mohe Qisi Biyu 乞四比羽 each led a group of refugees fleeing east, fortifying an inaccessible position for self-protection. Once Li Jinzhong had died, [Empress Wu] Zetian 武則天 ordered Li Kaigu 李楷固 [d.u.], Great General of the Right Guards of the Jade Strategy, to lead troops in an attack on [Li Jinzhong’s] remaining followers. He first defeated and executed Qisi Biyu, and then crossed the Tianmen Range 天門嶺 to press in on Da Zuorong. Zuorong united Koguryô and Mohe groups to repel Li Kaigu. The [Tang] army suffered a major defeat, and Li Kaigu escaped to return [to Tang territory]. All of the Khitan and Xi submitted to the Turks, and with the route [to Zuorong’s position] cut off Wu Zutian was able to attack. Da Zuorong thereupon led his group to the east, fortifying the former territory of the Guilou 桂婁 and buttressed by Mt. Dongmou 東牟山, where they built a wall for a settlement.41

Because this passage draws an explicit link between the Parhae founder and the  

state of Koguryó, it is most frequently cited by scholars seeking to place Parhae into “Korean history,” or at least as a successor state to Koguryó. The term translated here as “branch of the race,” *biezhong* 別種, has proved particularly controversial. Literally *biezhong* means a “separate kind,” and whether the phrase should be read with emphasis on “separate” or “kind” has been a matter of debate. The translation above is but one possible way of reading the term in this context—the most widely accepted, but far from uncontested. Representing the mainstream interpretation in Korean scholarship, Yun Jae-woon argues that the term *biezhong* “implies that that ‘branch’ is closely related to the main group,” adding that since the phrasing of the text draws an association between Da Zuorong and Koguryó, it would be odd to read the text as denying such a connection.42

Recent scholarship in China has challenged this reading, with entire articles devoted to analyses of the term *biezhong*. Li Jiancai argues that if the authors of the *Xin Tang shu* had intended to identify Da Zuorong as “Koguryó” they would have made the identification directly, such that *biezhong* should be understood as implying difference.43 In separate articles, Lei Yijie and Yao Yucheng raise several specific usage examples to argue that the term *biezhong* did not have necessary connotations of ethnic identity, but instead was an ambiguous term used by Chinese official sources in a range of situations where different groups with some apparent cultural similarities occupied the same territory.44 These articles are valuable reminders that scholars should not rush to interpret this passage in terms of one apparent meaning. On the other hand, they do not show the Korean scholars’ interpretation to be impossible or even particularly unlikely. Rather, the diversity of plausible interpretations highlights the need to consider other evidence to resolve the question.

The corresponding passage in the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書, also narrating the founding of Parhae, serves as the starting point for the mainstream Chinese position. The section on Parhae in this second text begins: “Parhae was originally the Mohe [tribes] who had submitted to Koguryó; the clan surname

42. Yun Jae-woon, “Chinese Perceptions of Parhae,” 172–173. Arguments for this interpretation have been developed far more fully, before and since, in Korean domestic scholarship; see for example Song Kiho (Song Ki-ho), *Parhae chǒngch'isa yǒn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchokak, 1996), 35–41; and No T'aedon, “Parhaeguk ŭ chumin kusōng e taehan yǒn’gu hyǒnhwang kwa kwaje—‘Koryó byǒchung’ kwa ‘Parhaejok’ ŭ tullossan non’ui rül chungsim üro,” *Han’guksa yǒn’gu* 122 (2003): 289–309.

43. See Li Jiancai, “Tangdai Bohai wangguo.”

[of its rulers] was Da.” 45 Following this account, the majority of scholars in China have argued that Da Zuorong was a member of the Sumo Mohe people, and in consequence the Parhae rulers should be considered ethnically Mohe rather than Koguryō.

Yun Jae-woon has challenged this reading with the argument that although Da Zuorong’s group may have originated as Mohe, they “would have already undergone a substantial process of Koguryō-ization” during the two generations in which they had provided military service to Koguryō.46 Yun’s argument would allow the Xin Tang shu to remain accepted as a valid source while still viewing Da Zuorong as Koguryō in at least a cultural sense. Adopting this position could destabilize other common Korean positions, however. By the logic of his argument, descendants of Koguryō could be said to lose “Koguryō” identity after two generations in another society. Celebrated Koguryō descendants in Tang service such as the general Gao Xianzhi 高仙芝 (K. Ko Sŏnji, d. 755) would become simply “Chinese,” a position at odds with prevailing narratives.

Scholars on both sides have sought evidence in other extant texts to corroborate their positions. Because of the extreme scarcity of extant texts by Parhae authors, however, the utility of such an approach is ultimately limited by the uncertain reliability of outside observers’ information about and appraisals of the situation within the remote northeastern kingdom. In consequence, archaeological evidence is playing an increasing role in the debate. The contents and applications of this evidence are discussed in later sections.

2. The Political Status of Parhae

In 1990, Song Kiho characterized Chinese research as focusing “solely on the relationship between Parhae and Tang, leading to the conclusion that Parhae was only a local government dependent in every respect on Tang.”47 This is no longer entirely true, as scholars in China now pay increasing attention to relations between Parhae and other polities.48 Nonetheless, it is fair to say that

46. Yun Jae-woon, “Chinese Perceptions of Parhae,” 172–173. As noted elsewhere in this paper, detailed articulations of this position in Korean domestic scholarship were provided by No T’aedon and Song Kiho.
48. Ma Yihong, Mohe, Bohai yu zhoubian guojia is a monograph-length example; see also Wei
claims of Parhae subordination to the Tang remain prominent in the discourse. A recent Chinese introduction to research on the topic categorizes Parhae diplomatic exchanges with the Tang as a “relationship between cultures” (wenhua zhijian de guanxi 文化之间的关系), while using “foreign relations” (duiwai guanxi 对外关系) to categorize other Parhae diplomacy.49

A representative study within this framework is that of Lei Yijie; examining diplomatic exchanges between Japan and Parhae, and memorials from Silla to the Tang, Lei argues that Parhae was “a local ethnic polity” ruled by the Tang under its policy of loose-reigned (jimi 羈縻) governance.50 Seeking to clarify the Chinese position, Japanese scholar Kaneko Shūichi 金子修一 argues that in terms of formal administrative structure, the Tang did not recognize either Parhae or Silla as independent countries; formally they were indeed “prefectures under loose rule” (jimizhou 羈縻州). Parhae gained this status in 713, when the Tang court granted Da Zuorong the post of Commander-in-Chief (dudu 都督) of Huhan Prefecture 忽汗州, the official Tang name for the Parhae capital. This is similar to the case of Silla, whose kings were given the post of “Commander-in-Chief of Jilin Prefecture” 雞林州都督.51

The mainstream position among Korean scholars is that in practice Parhae operated as an autonomous monarchy, and that its rulers understood its status as a politically independent dynastic successor to Koguryŏ. In support of the latter point, a number of Korean and Japanese scholars have pointed to evident Koguryŏ self-identification by the early Parhae rulers in their diplomatic communications with Japan. In a 727 letter initiating diplomatic relations with the Japanese court in Nara, the second Parhae ruler, Da Wuyi 大武藝 (K. Tae Mugye, J. Dai Bugei) identified his polity as occupying the area “where Koguryŏ formerly resided.” He claimed that his country carried on “the customs of Puyo 扶餘” (ca. 100–500 CE), another Northeast Asian state widely claimed by Korean scholars as part of their national history.52

These scholars have argued further that, far from considering their government to be a prefectural post within the Tang administration, the rulers of Parhae saw their own status as that of emperors, comparable to that of the Tang court. Song Kiho in particular has drawn attention to received and

50. Lei Yijie, “Cong ‘biezhong’ touxi Bohai de zushu ji qi guishu.”
52. Chŏn Hoch’ŏn, Chōsen kara mita kodai Nihon, 196.
epigraphic sources illustrating this phenomenon, including an epitaph indicating that the consort of the Parhae monarch held the title of “Empress” (huanghou 皇后), just as did Tang imperial consorts. He argues further that the reference to the “palace of a prince” (王府, Ch. wangfu, K. wangbu, J. ōfu) in an 834 Parhae inscription demonstrates that the positions of the state’s male relatives were likewise regarded domestically as parallel to those of Tang imperial princes. The Japanese chronicle Shoku Nihongi 續日本紀 records a protest from the Nara court in 772 against a demand from the King of Parhae for a status superior to that of the Japanese sovereign. According to the source, the Parhae monarch had referred to himself as “Grandson of Heaven” and demanded that the relationship between himself and the emperor of Japan be that of uncle and nephew rather than between equals. The Japanese scholar Sakayori Masashi agrees that the Parhae ruler’s self-identification as the “Grandson of Heaven” was meant to express his own superiority in a “Sinocentric worldview” (Kai shisō 華夷思想) centered on Parhae, and constituted a claim of sovereignty over Silla and the various Mohe tribes.

These points illustrate a fundamental weakness of the mainstream Chinese position: it assumes that Tang claims to universal dominion reflected the actual circumstances. In practice, however, the “tribute model” of foreign relations made it difficult for Chinese dynasties to recognize any state as independent, regardless of the political reality. This problem is illustrated by the peninsular Korean states of Silla, Koryŏ 高麗, and Chosŏn 朝鮮, which, from the perspective of a suzerain power in the tribute model, exhibited less political autonomy than Parhae yet are not claimed as “Chinese” by any mainstream historians. As Song Ki-ho points out, the Parhae court established reign periods of its own at variance with Tang reign periods, and did so more consistently than the three uncontested “Korean” states. Regardless of Tang administrative rhetoric, then, the Parhae government did not recognize a subordinate status for itself.

Korean scholars have argued further that in practice the Tang state did not consider Parhae subjects to be regular subjects of the Tang, but rather treated them as aliens. As evidence it is noted that the former were eligible for civil

55. Song Kiho, “The Dual Status of Parhae: Kingdom and Empire,” 109–112; see also Song Kiho, Parhae chŏngch’isa yŏng’gu, 101–105.
56. Sakayori, Bokkai to kodai Nihon, 450.
57. Song Ki-ho, “The Dual Status of Parhae: Kingdom and Empire,” 105.
service examinations under the Tang bingongke examination track, which was applied specifically to candidates who were not regular Tang subjects. This position receives indirect support from the work of Chinese scholar Ma Yihong, who shows that Tang official sources were careful to distinguish Parhae subjects such as Li Huaiguang 李懷光 from members of the prominent Gao 高 family of Bohai County 渤海縣, located within Tang territory proper. Ma argues that this precision in distinguishing “Bohai Gao” from “Parhae” displayed a concern on the part of the Tang with “distinguishing Chinese from barbarian” (qubie huayi 區別華夷). In other words, the Tang court seems to have considered Parhae subjects not to have been “Chinese”—and thus distinct from its regular subjects. In terms of political status, then, the weight of the evidence thus far points to Parhae as a separate, independent polity, rather than a district under Tang administration.

3. Social Structure

Perhaps the most widely cited and intensely debated passage regarding Parhae social structure is found in the Ruiju kokushi 類聚國史, a Japanese chronicle completed in 892. Describing the land of Parhae, it records:

In length and breadth it measures two thousand li. It has no prefectures, counties, state lodges, or post stations, but has villages everywhere. All are Mohe tribes. Among its subjects, Mohe are many while natives are few. In all cases natives are made village headmen; in large villages they are called Commanders-in-Chief, in smaller [villages] Prefects, and below that all subjects are called Chieftains.

What is now the mainstream view was clearly articulated by Pak Sihyŏng, who argued that the term “natives” in this passage referred to people of Koguryŏ

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58. Song Ki-ho, “The Dual Status of Parhae: Kingdom and Empire,” 104; see also Song Kiho, Parhae chōngb’isa yŏng’gu, 158–177, 238. Under the bingongke system, foreign subjects tested alongside regular Tang candidates, but their examinations were evaluated separately. See Gao Mingshi 高明士, “Binggongke de qiyuan yu fazhan—jianshu keju de qiyuan yu Dongya shiren gongtong chushen zhi dao” 宾贡科的起源与发展—兼述科举的起源与东亚士人共同出身之道, in Tangshi luncong 唐史论丛 vol. 6 (X’ian: Sanqin chubanshe, 1995), 87–95; Zhao Sha 赵莎, “Xinluo liuxuesheng yu Tangchao ‘binggongke’” 新罗留学生与唐朝宾贡科, Jiannan wenxue 计南文学 2011, no. 11 (November 2011), 215–216.

59. Ma Yihong 马一虹, “Tang feng Da Zuorong ‘Bohaijun Wang’ hao kao” 唐封大祚荣“渤海郡王”号考, Beifang wenwu 北方文物 2002, no. 2 (February 2002), 61–66. Given that much of Ma’s article seeks to refute Song’s arguments on other issues, the compatibility of the two authors’ positions on this point is noteworthy.

descent, as the Japanese authors of the account “were well aware that Parhae was a country of Koguryō people.” Thus, he argues, this source shows that all local officials in Parhae were of Koguryō background rather than Mohe. If even the appointees to local posts were Koguryō, he continues, “it is clear” that high officials in the central government were nearly all “Koguryō aristocrats.”

While Pak’s position has since been widely adopted by scholars in both Koreas, it has been challenged by Han Ciu-cheol, who argues that the phrase in the *Ruiju kokushi* should be read as referring to “literati” (J. *shijin* 士人), not “natives” (J. *dojin* 土人). In consequence, Han suggests, the passage should be read as follows: “Everywhere there were villages and those villages were all Malgal settlements. There are many Malgal among the commoners but there are few literati.” On this basis he argues for a breakdown of the Parhae populace into two groups, “Malgal” (Mohe) and “literati.”

In support of this view, Han notes that some editions of the *Ruiju kokushi* contain the characters *shijin* in place of *dojin* in both loci in the passage cited above. The standard modern critical edition of this text was created by comparing twelve additional versions of the *Ruiju kokushi* with the version used as the base text; of these, the orthographic variant *shijin* appears in three, a small minority of the extant versions. Han’s thesis is provocative, but thus far it does not appear to have been adopted by other scholars, particularly in Japan where the textual history of this source might be expected to be most familiar to researchers.

As with the medieval Chinese term *biezhong* above, here the medieval Japanese *dojin* is contested among scholars, with a range of interpretations offered even within the Chinese academic community. Fu Langyun argues that the term *dojin* refers neither to Koguryō nor Mohe, but rather to a separate group of “native inhabitants” long resident in the area. Fu consequently cites this passage as support for the thesis that a “Parhae ethnicity” (*Bohaizu*) and its constituent branches constituted the bulk of the Parhae population. In contrast, Yang Jun argues that *dojin* refers to the Sumo Mohe, who would naturally have referred to themselves as “natives.” Ultimately this issue is bound up intimately with the larger question of ethnic identity, for which any adequate answer requires consideration of the archaeological evidence.

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4. Archaeological Evidence and Interpretations

Given the scarcity and indirect provenance of textual sources on Parhae, archaeological evidence is heavily employed by Parhae scholars of all approaches. It should not be imagined, however, that archaeological sources are somehow more “objective” or less controversial. In many cases the international debate centers on scholars’ arguments that a particular feature represents either “Mohe,” “Koguryŏ,” or “Tang” cultural identity. The former two categories are used in advocating for a particular origin of Parhae culture, while the presence of “Tang” cultural elements can be utilized to argue that the Parhae assimilation of Tang practices demonstrates that the Parhae population, regardless of their origin, “became Chinese” over time.

Even in an exhaustive, detailed monograph, the initial framing of the topic and overall structure of its investigation often presuppose or predetermine particular interpretations of the evidence. For example, a recent thorough Chinese study of Parhae archaeological sites and artifacts begins from the mention of Parhae relics in Qing dynasty texts, thereby constructing Parhae archaeological surveys as an activity performed in “China” by “Chinese.” A more recent, more exhaustive study commences with a summary of Parhae’s “historical background” that positions it as a “Mohe” state. The study’s first chapter is titled “The Origins and Development of the Mohe Ethnicity,” divided chronologically among the “Pre-Qin Sushen,” 肅慎, the “Yilou 抿娄 and Wuji 勿吉 Peoples in the Han, Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties,” and “The Southern Migration of the Wuji and the Remains of the Sumo Mohe,” followed directly by “the Founding and Development of the Parhae State.”

The connection between Koguryŏ and Parhae is not ignored in the study’s investigation of the archaeological findings themselves, which goes so far as to note that the overlap between Parhae and Koguryŏ territory creates difficulty in distinguishing finds from the two states. By omitting any mention of Koguryŏ from the historical context of Parhae, however, this monograph ensures that the details provided in abundant tables, maps, and statistics will be interpreted as an outgrowth of “Mohe” culture, with any resemblances to Koguryŏ forms appearing as a later accretion. Care must therefore be taken to view the evidence

67. Wei Cuncheng, Bohai Kaogu, 293.
from multiple perspectives. The following section explores the types of archaeological evidence most widely discussed, as well as the diverse frameworks through which that evidence has been interpreted.

a. City planning

The site of a long-abandoned city at Dongjingcheng (東京城) in Ning’an County (寧安縣), Heilongjiang 安縣, Heilongjiang) was determined by archaeologists in the early twentieth century to be the Parhae Supreme Capital (Shangjing 上京) due to its scale and layout of wards and palaces, which echoed those of other medieval East Asian capitals. The first full excavation of the site was conducted in 1933–34 by a Japanese archaeological team under Harada Yoshito 原田淑人 and Komai Kazuchika. By the 1980s, sites determined to be the other four Parhae capitals had also been excavated in China and North Korea.68

According to the Xin Tang shu, Parhae’s Supreme Capital was established by its third monarch, Da Qinmao (大欽茂, K. Tae Sinmu, J. Dai Kinbō), who moved the center of government three hundred li to its new location from an “original capital” (jiuguo 舊國, K. Kuguk, J. Kyūkoku) that had been established soon after the state’s founding.69 Because a tomb discovered in the environs of Dunhua Municipality (敦化市) in Jilin Province has been determined to be that of the second monarch, the nearby city site of Aodongcheng (敖東城) was long considered by many archaeologists to be the original Parhae capital.70 Meanwhile, remains of a hill fortress on nearby Chengzishan (城子山) was widely thought to be the “fortress built at the Dongmou Mountains” by Da Zuorong, described in the Jiu Tang shu. Since the 1980s, however, some scholars now see the phrase “original capital” as referring not to a single walled city but to the early capital region in general, corresponding to the environs of modern Dunhua.71 In particular, the coins and ceramics unearthed in recent excavations at the Aodongcheng site have led scholars to argue that the fortress at that site dated from the late Jin 金 dynasty (1125–1234), far post-dating Parhae.72

68. Zhu Guochen and Zhu Wei, Bohai yiji, 38–74.
71. Wei Cuncheng, Bohai kaogu, 53–54.
In his analysis Wei Cuncheng emphasizes the practical utility of the Parhae practice of pairing flat, riverside settlement sites with the hilltop redoubts, noting that this combination provided for both economic prosperity and military security respectively. Lee Byeong Gun has argued for a greater cultural significance to this dual structure, arguing that hilltop or mountain fortresses distinguished Parhae settlements from the level sites characteristic of Tang Chinese urban planning. To Lee, these mountain sites represented “features of the indigenous cultures of such neighboring entities as Koguryŏ” and thus support the thesis of cultural continuity and political succession from Koguryŏ to Parhae;73 Lee’s arguments in the international area represent a number of studies in current Korean domestic scholarship arguing that the urban plan of the Parhae capitals demonstrates both an imperial self-understanding and succession from Koguryŏ.74

b. Architecture

The Korean scholar Lee Byeong Gun has characterized Chinese scholarship as insisting “that Parhae’s culture was the culture of the Songmal Malgal [Sumo Mohe] who imitated Chinese culture,” and thus that its architecture was identical to that of Tang China. To avoid inaccuracies in the restorations of Parhae capitals currently underway in China, Lee argues, the distinctive features of its architectural culture should be duly recognized.75 As Lee himself notes, the opposite problem can also arise: the patterns on Parhae eave-end tiles (瓦當 or 瓦璫, Ch. and K. wadang, J. gatô) have been used for the reconstruction of a Tang dynasty site in Shanxi, a practice with troubling implications for the project’s fidelity to the Tang original. Currently, however, much Chinese scholarship does not portray Parhae and Tang styles as identical, but rather stresses a range of influences on Parhae. Moreover, an emphasis on features unique to Parhae is common throughout scholarship on the country’s architecture, regardless of the nationality of the author. The sections below examine the range of scholarly views on key features of surviving Parhae architectural sites.

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c. Roof tiles
The patterned ceramic roof ornaments found at Parhae sites suggest multiple influences on the country’s architecture, and this diversity has sometimes been interpreted selectively to conform with national-historical agendas. In the case of round eave-end tiles with lotus flower designs, archaeologists generally agree that Parhae forms follow Koguryo precedents. Lee Byeong Gun argues that these designs are “strongly influenced by Koguryo traditions,” asserting repeatedly that they are “different from that of China.”76 This evaluation is not new: the original Japanese excavators of the Supreme Capital wrote already in the 1930s that these lotus patterns showed more resemblance to Koguryo than Tang models.77 Similarly, the Chinese scholar Wei Cuncheng argues that eave-end tiles with lotus flower patterns were common in China from the Northern Dynasties onward, but agrees that the Parhae designs do show Koguryo influence.78

There is less agreement regarding other ceramic ornamentation, however. For example, Lee mentions the existence of Parhae “owl’s tail tiles,” i.e., tail-shaped ornaments 鴟尾 (Ch. chiwei, K. ch’imi, J. shibi) placed at either end of roof ridges, without commenting on their likely provenance. In the 1930s, Komai and Harada wrote of the ornaments found at the Supreme Capital that “it goes without saying” that they could be traced to Tang precedents.79 Citing depictions of architecture in extant Tang paintings, Zhu Guochen and Zhu Wei echo the argument that these Parhae ornaments resemble Tang forms, yet these latter authors remain silent on the influences on Parhae eave-end tiles.80 Regarding this category of architectural evidence, then, omission is sometimes employed on multiple sides to counter the indeterminacy of the evidence.

d. Residential architecture
Scholars writing from varied viewpoints have pointed to structural features of Parhae residence sites as indicative of the lifestyle and possible ethnic identity of the Parhae population. Some building sites in the Parhae capitals and elsewhere contain the remains of heated platforms (hypocausts) used for winter heating,

78. Wei Cuncheng, Bohai kaogu, 293.
79. Tōa Kōko Gakkai, Tonkinjō, 56.
80. Zhu Guochen and Zhu Wei, Bohai yiji, 196.
referred to as ondol in Korean and kang 炕 in Chinese. The presence of these facilities in Parhae residences has been pointed to by a number of Korean scholars, who argue that such “ondol” are a feature that “first appeared in Koguryö” and thus demonstrate Parhae succession to Koguryö. In an extensive study of heating platforms at archaeological sites, Song Kiho has argued at length that heating platforms were transmitted from Koguryö to Parhae, where they spread out from the political center to Mohe localities and thus serve as evidence of political and cultural succession from Koguryö.

To support their identification of the Parhae population and founders as predominately “Mohe,” Chinese scholars point to another feature of Parhae settlement sites: the remains of pit dwellings (dixue juzhuzhi 地穴居住址). These, scholars argue, resemble the ninth-century settlements of “Mohe” tribes farther north that avoided incorporation into the Parhae state. Wei Cuncheng notes that the hill fortress at the Parhae “original capital” site contained fifty such pit dwellings, suggesting that the state’s founders inhabited “Mohe-style” residences and thus were themselves culturally Mohe.

e. Extant above-ground structures

The octagon stone lantern discovered at the Parhae Supreme Capital site is something of a Rorschach test for historians and archaeologists. The original Japanese excavators offered the somewhat impressionistic view that the shape of its stem and body, and “the bulky quality of its proportions” (dosshiri shita mochiaji), convey “a simple, unique Parhae spirit different from Tang culture.” Lee Byeong Gun contends that the shape of the lantern echoes examples on the Korean peninsula more closely than those in China and Japan, arguing that “the convex swelling of other regions only goes as high as the middle of the post, but that of Parhae and the Korean Peninsula goes two-thirds of the way up the post.” Chinese scholars in turn refer to the lantern as “the northernmost known example of Tang dynasty stone pillar sculpture.”

82. Song Kiho, Han’guk kodae ü ondol: Puk Okchö, Koguryö, Parhae (Seoul: Seoul tachakkyo ch’ulpanbu, 2006), 41–52.
84. Wei Cuncheng, Bohai kaogu, 293.
85. Töa Kóko Gakkai, Tonkinjö, 33.
87. Zhu Guozhen and Zhu Wei, Bohai yiji, 208.
The only surviving aboveground example of Parhae architecture is a brick pagoda located in Changbai County 長白县, Jilin, just across the Yalu (K. Amnok) River from North Korea. Conventionally this is called the Lingguang Pagoda 靈光塔, a name given by a local official in the late Qing dynasty. A nuanced discussion of the structure’s function in esoteric Buddhism in Parhae, as well as its possible affinities with later religious architecture under the Liao 遼 state (K. Yo, J. Ryō, 908–1127), has been offered by Im Sŏkkyyu.88 In international debate, however, the dominant theses in this case as well seek to establish a national identity for the structure on the basis of stylistic affinities. Thus, Chinese scholars have generally argued that the pagoda exemplifies Tang Chinese forms.89 Not all draw the same conclusions from this hypothesis, however. Wei Cuncheng’s detailed study does find the pagoda’s structure similar to Tang pagodas at Xingjiaosi 興教寺 in Xi’an, and Tianningsi 天寧寺 in Ningbo. However, Wei recognizes this similarity as an instance of “outside influence,” on Parhae, even arguing that Tang influence suggests that the pagoda dates from late in Parhae history.90 Against this emphasis on Tang models, Lee Byeong Gun argues that precedents can be found on the Korean peninsula, and criticizes Korean historians of architecture for not devoting more attention to the topic.91

As a rule, however, consensus is difficult to achieve concerning arguments on stylistic grounds. The question of whether these structures display Koguryŏ or Tang influence may gain some resolution by the use of other dating methods such as radiocarbon dating and dendrochronology; an earlier date would suggest Koguryŏ precedents, while a later date might indicate Tang influence.

f. Burials
The structure of Parhae tombs as a possible guide to ethnicity is an area of particularly active contention. Known Parhae burial sites exhibit a range of styles and building materials, including earth, stone, and brick in a variety of configurations, and thus offering support to diverse interpretations. In addition, Parhae burials are distinguished by the interment of multiple family members within a single tomb, and regular reburial of the deceased in a new location.

89. e.g., Zhu Guozhen and Zhu Wei, Bohai yijī, 123–126.
90. Wei Cuncheng, Bohai Kaogu, 149–150.
The first Parhae tombs to attract the attention of archaeologists were the
tombs of aristocrats near the Supreme Capital site, which featured horizontal
shafts leading to stone tomb chambers. Writing in the early 1980s, Nishikawa
Hiroshi argued that aristocrats’ tombs of early Parhae resembled the late
Koguryō model of stone-chamber tombs, and so were thought to reflect strong
Koguryō influence. He contrasted these with royal and aristocratic tombs from
the middle and late Parhae periods; these show a deliberate adoption of Tang
practices, particularly in the use of brick for tomb chambers.\footnote{Nishikawa,
“Bokkai kōkogaku no seika to minzoku mondai,” 585.} The stone-
chamber tombs of early Parhae aristocrats have been frequently cited by Korean
scholars as evidence of Parhae succession from Koguryō,\footnote{Song Kiho,
*Parhae chōngch’isa yōn’gu*, 76 and 109–110; Yi Namsŏk (Lee Nam-seok), “Yujŏk
ŭro pon kyesŭng kwan’gye,” in *Koguryō wa Parhae ĭ kyesŭng kwan’gye*, ed. Chŏng Chinhŏn et
al. (Seoul: Koguryŏ yŏn’gu chaedan, 2005), 258–264.} an argument they
have reiterated in the international discourse.\footnote{E.g., Yun Jae-woon, “Parhae’s Burial Culture,” in *A New History of Parhae*, 130.}

Over the subsequent two decades, the growing number of excavations
outside the capital sites has led to changes in the characterization of “typical”
Parhae burials. Wei Cuncheng has recently offered a different periodization of
Parhae tomb types, with earthen pit (*shuxue tukeng* 坑穴土坑) burials predo-
minating in the early years. The representative burial type changed under
Koguryō “influence,” he argues, transitioning through a period when vertical
stone-shaft (*shuxue shikuang* 坑穴石圹) tombs were favored, to an eventual
adoption of stone-chambered (*shishi* 石室) tombs.\footnote{Wei Cuncheng,
*Mohezu qiyuan fazhan de kaogu guancha* 靺鞨族起源发展的考古学观
察, *Shixue jikan* 史学集刊 2007, no. 4 (July 2007), 61–68.} In this account, Wei presents
the stone-chambered tombs as a clear example of Koguryō cultural “influence”
on Parhae, distinguishing it from native cultural elements.\footnote{Wei Cuncheng,
*Bohai kaogu*, 293–294.}

The Korean scholar Yun Jae-woon agrees that earth tombs were more
common in early Parhae, but argues that many features frequently found in
Parhae tombs were of Koguryō provenance. These include the construction of
aboveground buildings at tomb sites, as evidenced by remaining roof tiles, and
the use of stone in constructing tombs themselves.\footnote{Yun Jae-woon, “Parhae’s Burial Culture,” 130–131.} He contends as well that
vertical pit tombs do not show Mohe influence, but rather were “used universally
by non-elite social groups.”\footnote{Yun Jae-woon, “Chinese Perceptions of Parhae,” 177.} Nonetheless, he does not offer a clear periodization

\footnotetext[92]{Nishikawa, “Bokkai kōkogaku no seika to minzoku mondai,” 585.}
\footnotetext[93]{Song Kiho, *Parhae chōngch’isa yōn’gu*, 76 and 109–110; Yi Namsŏk (Lee Nam-seok), “Yujŏk
ŭro pon kyesŭng kwan’gye,” in *Koguryō wa Parhae ĭ kyesŭng kwan’gye*, ed. Chŏng Chinhŏn et
al. (Seoul: Koguryŏ yŏn’gu chaedan, 2005), 258–264.}
\footnotetext[94]{E.g., Yun Jae-woon, “Parhae’s Burial Culture,” in *A New History of Parhae*, 130.}
\footnotetext[95]{Wei Cuncheng, *Mohezu qiyuan fazhan de kaogu guancha* 靺鞨族起源发展的考古学观
察, *Shixue jikan* 史学集刊 2007, no. 4 (July 2007), 61–68.}
\footnotetext[96]{Wei Cuncheng, *Bohai kaogu*, 293–294.}
\footnotetext[97]{Yun Jae-woon, “Parhae’s Burial Culture,” 130–131.}
\footnotetext[98]{Yun Jae-woon, “Chinese Perceptions of Parhae,” 177.}
of Parhae tombs that might replace Wei’s chronology. The significance of the aboveground structures at Parhae tomb sites he mentions remains uncertain. Chinese archaeologists have posited multiple origins for these structures, sometimes within the same account. Here they are traced both to sacrifices at Mohe tombs noted by Tang authors and to the model of “ancestral halls” (xiangtang 享堂) in China, being thus depicted simultaneously as a legacy of Mohe tradition and as evidence of Tang influence. At this point it can be ascertained only that these structures have multiple possible precedents, but the near-complete destruction of the Parhae structures precludes precise comparisons.

The Parhae practices of joint burial and reburial have also been seen as offering insight into the country’s culture and ethnic composition. The original Japanese excavators of the Supreme Capital identified the joint burial of family members as a “Mohe” practice, which exemplified how “the customs of the Parhae state had their own distinctive flavor.” More recent Chinese scholarship has followed their lead in viewing joint burial and reburial as Sumo Mohe practices. While the significance of joint burial to understandings of Parhae culture has been discussed within Korean scholarship, Korean intervention in the international debate mentioning the practice lacks claims of a particular provenance.

Some of the most elaborate and well-preserved Parhae tombs are constructed with brick chambers, and Chinese scholars have argued that single-chambered brick tombs were introduced to Parhae from China, particularly the Tang. Consequently, they argue, the greatest outside influence on Parhae culture was the Tang, not Koguryó. They contend further that the clothing and customs of Parhae elites as depicted in wall paintings are clearly those of the Chinese central plains (zhongyuan 中原), and differ stylistically from those depicted at Koguryó sites. The Korean response has been that quantitatively speaking, brick tombs are relatively rare in Parhae burials. Moreover, it is argued, the selection of brick as a construction material does not necessarily demonstrate

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100. Tōa Kōko Gakkai, Tonkinjō, 88–89.
104. Wei Cuncheng, Bohai kaogu, 294.
Han or Tang influence, but rather results from “natural environments where there are few stones and much soil.” In the case of Parhae this second argument is unconvincing, as the frequent use of stone around the capital sites indicates its ready availability. The late appearance and infrequency of Tang-style brick tombs in Parhae—as indicated by Wei Cuncheng’s chronology—does suggest, however, only a very limited affinity for Tang mortuary culture.

As a whole, any appeal to architectural features in positing a given ethnicity for the Parhae founders and population must be viewed with caution. As Dieter Kuhn has pointed out, the architectural types used reflect the skill set of the craftsmen who were available to plan and carry out the construction, and are not a reliable indicator of the ethnic identity of those who either commissioned or used the structures. He observes that the rulers of the Liao empire are normally identified as ethnically Khitan, yet Liao architecture—including tomb structures—drew entirely on Tang Chinese and Parhae models, with no specifically “Khitan” precedents. Determining ethnicity from the structure of residential architecture is particularly problematic in relatively extreme conditions such as the northeastern Eurasian location of Parhae. Its remoteness may have limited the range of techniques and materials available. At the same time, the cold climate would favor particular structures, such as pit dwellings to provide protection from the wind and heating apparatus to add warmth, as a practical measure regardless of the ethnicity of the occupants.

g. Ceramics
Analysis of ceramic vessels has a particularly important position in Chinese scholars’ arguments that the early period of Parhae history was not dominated by Koguryo culture. In the early 1980s Nishikawa Hiroshi noted how archaeologists in China had by that time begun to divide Parhae ceramics into three stylistic types: Mohe, Koguryo, and Tang. Early Parhae vessels were mainly placed into the first category and cited as evidence that Parhae was founded by the Mohe. Items of this type are generally brownish in color and of relatively unsophisticated workmanship, with “long-bellied jars with multiple lips” constituting their characteristic form. Chinese archaeologists argue that the geographic distribution of these Parhae ceramics matches that of “wide-

mouthed, deep-bellied jars of coarse black-brown material” dating to the preceding centuries in the same areas, which Chinese archaeologists refer to as “Tongren Culture” 同仁文化; received texts speak of the inhabitants during this period as “Mohe” and “Wuji” 勿吉 (K. Mulgil, J. Mukkitsu). Later Parhae pottery in turn shows clear technical improvement and the introduction of green and three-color glazes.

Offering a detailed typology and periodization of ceramics from widely distributed Parhae sites, Wei Cuncheng argues that “deep-bellied cylindrical jars and bowls” remain prevalent beginning from before the eighth century and continuing through the tenth or eleventh centuries, particularly in small-scale burials and locations outside the capitals. He argues that these are characteristic of the Sumo Mohe tribe, and so demonstrate that the general population of Parhae—particularly in the period of its founding—was culturally, and ethnically, Mohe.

Noting that Chinese scholarship has sought to bolster its characterization of Parhae as a Mohe state by reference to the typology of ceramic vessels, Yun Jae-woon has offered some refutations. He challenges the assertion that “the representative pottery of Parhae” was the “Malgal pumpkin-shaped jar,” arguing that similar jars have been found at several Koguryō sites. It is unclear to which vessels exactly he refers; those normally termed “gourd-shaped vases” 葫芦瓶 (Ch. *hulu ping*, K. *horobyoŋ*, J. *korobin*) are later and of a different type than those to which Wei refers as “Mohe jars.” As a more conceptual critique, Yun argues that pottery does not indicate ethnic difference, but rather “should be seen as reflecting social and cultural differences between elites and non-elites and between the center and the provinces.” This argument echoes the thesis advanced by Han Ciu-cheol that Parhae was in fact ethnically homogeneous, and that “the Malgal were not a distinct ethnic group but rather Koguryō subjects who lived in border regions to which Malgal was applied as a pejorative name.” This position remains outside the scholarly mainstream, particularly in the international discourse, and so cannot be addressed in detail here. Nonetheless, Yun’s argument remains a valuable reminder that, as with architecture, ceramics are not necessarily an indicator of ethnic identity. Both are, after all, constrained by available raw materials and conditioned by the flow of cultural tastes and technical skills between groups.

112. Wei Cuncheng, “Mohezú qiýuán fazhán de kaogu guancha.”
Although the archaeological and historical studies of Parhae focused initially on the central government and capital cities, concentrated in the modern Chinese province of Jilin, scholars have conventionally defined the kingdom’s territory as extending far beyond these sites. In recent decades, scholars have paid increasing attention to the role of other areas in Parhae territory, particularly to the north in Russia and China’s Heilongjiang.

Parhae sites in the Russian Maritime Territory (Primorsky Krai) share fewer features with Koguryo sites than do the Parhae capitals, and so are typically characterized as representing the culture of “Mohe” and other tribal peoples. Under the Soviet Union, researchers focused on the “uniqueness and independence” of Mohe and Parhae culture, seeking to incorporate them into the framework of Soviet history. This orientation was linked to strategic interests, which produced an archaeological and historiographic focus on Siberia and the Far East.115

Park Jin Suk emphasizes conflicts between Chinese and Russian scholarly positions, writing that “whereas the Russian criticize the Chinese for being ‘China-centric’ and ‘Asia-centric,’ the Chinese criticize the Russians for being ‘Central Asia-centric’ and ‘hegemonic.’”116 In recent years, however, disagreement between scholars in the two countries has been less evident, with Russian archaeological scholarship frequently cited in Chinese research. This confluence of positions is due in part to the fact that while new explorations of the capital sites continue, numerically the preponderance of new Parhae archaeological surveys in China have been undertaken further north in Heilongjiang, geographically closer to Russia. The reports from these surveys have consequently described sites and artifacts similar to those found in Russian excavations. The current trend of Mohe archaeology in China began with the 1974 excavation of the Tongren site (同仁遗迹) at Suibin County (绥滨县), Heilongjiang.117 The discoveries there were attributed to the “Tongren Culture” mentioned above, which is defined in the Chinese archaeological literature as having lasted from the fifth to eleventh centuries and covering a large area of Heilongjiang and northern Jilin provinces, centered on the Heilongjiang and Songari rivers. This latter was precisely the “Sumo” (K. Songmal, J. Zokumatsu) River around

115. Ma Yihong, Mohe, Bohai yu zhoubian guojia, buzu guanxi shi yanjiu, 2.
117. Sakayori, Bokkai to kodai no Nihon, 26–27.
which was gathered the Mohe group in which the *Xin Tang shu* locates the Parhae founder. Similar sites extend into Russia, where scholars see them as part of a “Mohe Culture,” which they regard as lasting from the third century until its replacement by the Pokrovka Culture in the ninth century. These discoveries have attracted the interest of scholars in Japan as well, who have sought links between Mohe culture in this period and the contemporaneous Okhotsk Culture, which flourished in Hokkaidō and Sakhalin circa 550–1200.118

The significance of this scholarly trend for overall understandings of Parhae history has been largely ignored by mainstream Korean scholarship in the international arena. This neglect is unfortunate particularly given the vital role that funding from the Republic of Korea has played in supporting archaeological excavations in Russia since the 1990s,119 and the careful analysis of ceramics and tomb styles at these sites offered within Korean domestic scholarship.120 In an overview of recent Russian scholarship on Parhae, Park Jin Suk critiques the citation of these archaeological findings as evidence that Parhae was essentially “Mohe,” arguing that the distance of Russian sites from the Parhae center diminishes their significance to the polity’s identity.121 By their emphasis on the wide expanse of its territory, however, Parhae scholars in Korea as elsewhere will find it difficult to justify focusing on a small number of capital sites, and will need further to incorporate evidence from across Parhae territory into their accounts.

In current Japanese scholarship, the effort to assign a simple “ethnic status” to Parhae has come to be seen as unproductive. Instead there has emerged a growing interest in what Japanese scholars refer to as the diverse “ethnic groups” (*esunikku gurūpu*) dispersed across Parhae territory, and in particular the question of how the Parhae state endeavored to incorporate and govern them.122 In 1986, Nishikawa Hiroshi criticized historians’ characterizations of Parhae as “merely a cultural colony of Tang and Koguryō,” arguing that their approach was a legacy of early twentieth-century Japanese scholars’ colonial attitude toward Manchuria. As a remedy he called for greater recognition to features distinguishing Parhae from both Tang and Koguryō culture, and

120. See Hong Hylum (Hong Hyung-woo), “T’ogi rúl t’onghæe pon Tong Amurū chiyök chungse munhwa ūi chön’gæe,” *Koguryō Parhae yŏng’u* 42 (2012), 114–130.
particularly to the role of Mohe traditions in Parhae. Since then, Sakayori Masashi has argued that the variation in traditions and livelihoods among the various Mohe tribes, as reflected in archaeological findings in China and Russia, created challenges to Parhae state efforts to maintain a unified rule. This increasing emphasis on the importance in Parhae history of localities outside the capitals is further developed in the more recent work of Minoshima Hideki, who views the former Koguryo lands as only one component of Parhae territory. In Minoshima’s account, Parhae comprised as well the domains of the semi-agricultural Sumo Mohe and Baishan Mohe, as well as the territory of hunting and fishing peoples. These latter, he argues, made up a greater portion of Parhae territory than all its agricultural sections combined.

Integrating Chinese and Russian archaeological findings, the work of Suzuki Yasutami has been enormously influential in recent Japanese scholarship, and consequently merits greater consideration in the international debate. Suzuki argued that the shuryō “Chieftains” referred to in the Ruiju kokushi passage cited earlier in this article were probably autonomous local leaders throughout Parhae territory. When the Parhae administrative system was established, he argues, these existing local chieftains were recognized by the central government as commanders, prefects, and county magistrates. Suzuki and others who have built on his work thus offer a competing model against the image promulgated by Pak Sihyŏng of a fully centralized administration dominated by Koguryŏ officials. While scholarship in Korean has engaged Suzuki and his successors in offering alternative accounts of Parhae local governance and the role of the “Chieftains” therein, Korean engagement in the international discourse has not transmitted these arguments more widely. In his groundbreaking 1990 English state of the field article, Song Kiho notes that Suzuki had studied the Parhae system of rulership, but does not elaborate on his

124. Sakayori, Bokkai to kodai no Nibon, 27.
findings or their implications for the major narratives in Parhae historiography.\textsuperscript{128} The focus of Korean scholarly engagement in the international arena continues to stress a single “Korean” identity for Parhae, descendants of Koguryō and blood relatives of Silla.\textsuperscript{129}

It is evident, then, that outside both China and the Koreas, the scholarly trend regarding Parhae is toward increasing attention to the diversity of its population. If their concentration on linear succession—not to say equivalence—between Parhae and a Koguryō defined as purely “Korean” continues, the role of Korean scholars in the international discourse on Parhae will become increasingly marginal. The remainder of this paper examines how such an eventuality may be avoided.

**Ethnic National Self-Definition**

As Sakayori Masashi has observed, scholars’ competing characterizations of Parhae culture and society are often projections of the respective countries’ contemporary conceptions of ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{130} For this reason, the terms by which current governments define their polities—what each claims as the essential defining features of its country—are eminently relevant, and must be considered when evaluating historiographic attempts to assign Parhae to any particular “national history.”

1. “Chinese” Identity as a Multi-Ethnic Nation

From an official standpoint, Chinese national identity has since 1949 been explicitly defined as being—and having always been—multi-ethnic.\textsuperscript{131} Chinese “national history” is consequently framed as the separate histories of multiple ethnicities coming together to form a single multi-ethnic nation. Archaeology in China is carried out with the explicit purpose of “using the past for the present”

\textsuperscript{128} Song Ki-ho, “Current Trends in the Research of Palhae History,” 164.

\textsuperscript{129} For recent examples of this focus, see Song Kiho’s citation of recent archaeological evidence for the Koguryō identity of the Parhae ruling family in Parhae saboe munhwasa yŏn’gu, 353–366; also, Yun Chaeun’s argument for the racial affinity between Parhae and Silla, in Chŏng Pyŏngj’un, “Parhae wa Silla úi kwan’gye,” in Chungguk úi Parhae taeoe kwan’gyesa yŏn’gu (Seoul: Tongbuga yŏksa chaedan, 2011), 168.

\textsuperscript{130} Sakayori, Bokkai to kodai no Nibon, 25.

\textsuperscript{131} Thomas S. Mullaney, Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 1–2.
(gu wei jin yong 古为今用). In regards to ethnicity, this approach entails showing that the current “unified multiethnic nation” is the result of a long, complex history of development within the various ethnic groups. Accordingly, a recent Chinese study of Parhae archaeology positions the topic in these terms:

China is a multi-ethnic country; its history is long and its culture glorious. Although the progression of development is different for each ethnicity, each nonetheless has its own venerable civilization. Parhae, the famed “flourishing nation east of the sea,” is among them.

By defining “Chinese” society as ethnically and culturally diverse from the outset, this framework can accommodate a wide variety of archaeological evidence regarding Parhae culture without risk of destabilizing its characterization as “Chinese.” This approach allows Chinese scholarship to integrate the findings of newly excavated Parhae sites on an ongoing basis.

2. Parhae Identity and the Question of “Korean” Homogeneity

In contrast to the official definition of Chinese identity as encompassing ethnic diversity, modern Korean national identity has long been officially framed in terms of ethnic homogeneity, a definition linked to an official narrative of national history in which “Korean” ethnicity has always been unitary. One sociologist has recently summarized the popular acceptance of this narrative in South Korean society as a whole: “Koreans take great pride in sharing ‘one pure blood’ as descendants of one common ancestor and in a ‘unique, continuous culture’ from the birth of the nation.” In this narrative, division in Korean society is portrayed as always being political, never cultural or biological. Moreover, this definition of “Korean” identity in terms of biological descent—i.e., race—has been prevalent in society at large as well as academia.

Mainstream Korean historians have been willing in some cases to recognize

133. Although Parhae lay on the Eurasian continent, from Tang territory it was most easily reached by ship from the seaport of Dengzhou 登州. For this reason, the Xin Tang shu referred to Parhae as the “flourishing nation east of the sea” (haidong shengguo 海東盛國); see Song Kiho, Parhae chōngch’isa yŏngu, 153–158.
134. Zhu Guochen and Zhu Wei, Bohai yijì, 2.
multiple groups as predecessors to later “Koreans;” e.g., early Korean origins are commonly traced to a combination of the already related Huimo (K. Yaemaek, J. Waibaku) and Three Han (Ch. Sanhan, K. Samhan, J. Sankan) peoples. Thus far, however, Korean scholars have avoided any position that both recognizes a significant, ethnically distinctive “Mohe” population within Parhae society and portrays that population as “Korean.” Under the current paradigm, scholarship from the Korean perspective is necessarily placed in a defensive position with regard to any evidence of ethnic diversity within the Parhae state. This commits Korean scholars to the narrow and difficult position of insisting that the population of Parhae was entirely homogeneous, or that the population outside its capitals was irrelevant to its national identity.

Within the domestic sphere of Korean-language scholarship in South Korea, more nuanced positions are apparent; as Rho Moon Chang has noted, since the 1980s, “the previous focus on placing Parhae within Korean history was abandoned in favor of a more Parhae-specific approach.” A representative example is the prominent scholar Song Kiho, who has criticized the insistence by some other historians that the Parhae founder Da Zuorong was necessarily either “Koguryŏ” or “Mohe.” Song argues instead that Da was the chieftain of a Mohe group that joined Koguryŏ society, and should consequently be considered a “Koguryŏ person of Sumo Mohe ancestry” (Songmal Malgalkye Koguryŏin). Song goes on to acknowledge that the archaeological record shows cultural diversity within Parhae, arguing that the political self-definition of its central government is sufficient to establish the state as a successor to Koguryŏ without reference to the biological ancestry of its ruling house. Song Kiho’s argument that political consciousness is more significant than cultural practices in establishing Parhae as a predecessor to present Korean states is one possible way around the present debate over whether the cultural practices evident in Parhae were “Korean,” “Mohe,” or “Chinese.” The utility of this position is limited, however, by its lack of direction regarding how questions of cultural identity are to be addressed.

In the international discourse Korean contributions remain dominated by claims that Parhae displayed uniformity in biological heredity, cultural markers, and ethnic self-identification. This perspective manifests in scholars’ insistence that the Parhae founders were ethnically Koguryŏ, and more strongly still in the

139. Song Kiho, Parhae chŏngch’isa yŏn’gu, 239–240.
minority position that no ethnic distinction existed between Mohe (Malgal) and Koguryō. That these scholars delineate Korean—and Parhae—identity strictly in terms of biological descent is assumed by some Chinese scholarship which seeks to refute Korean claims. In a representative study, Wu Yuhuan critiques the Korean position by arguing that Parhae and Koguryō belonged to different ethnic lineages, and “according to blood ancestry were nationalities of different types” (zai xiéyuánshăng shì bùtóngzhī de mínzú 在血缘上是不同质的民族).140

Recently, however, the state-approved history curriculum in South Korean schools has ceased to define “Korea” as ethnically homogeneous.141 This change has come with growing attention in the country to “multiculturalism” (tamunhwaw) which, Andrew Eungi Kim argues, has since 2006 become “one of the most popular topics of research” in the country.142 During these recent years, the term “multicultural” has appeared frequently in official documents and academic papers about the country.143 The introduction of multicultural discourse has important implications for how the Korean nation is defined, and represents “a significant departure from the proverbial image of Korean identity and nationalism centered on the ideology of ethnic homogeneity.”144 It should be noted that the conception of diversity celebrated in this movement does not entail persistent cultural variation within Korean society. Emphasis lies instead on incorporating the ethnic Other in the form of spouses—typically brides—from overseas and children of these “multicultural families” into society through assimilationist state policies.145 Nonetheless, this trend is significant for its valorization of a “Korean” society of diverse origins.

Such an expansion of national identity broadens the range of interpretations under which Parhae can still be seen as a chapter in “Korean” history. Most notably, this shift may allow Korean scholarship to incorporate and engage productively with the specifics of Russian, Japanese, and Chinese scholarship on the Mohe. No longer would Korean scholarship in the international arena find it necessary to ignore or downplay the significance of archaeological evidence

from newly excavated Parhae sites where similarities to Koguryô material culture are less evident. It removes as well the need to engage in debates on the biological heredity of groups described in received texts produced by authors with limited information, whose shortcomings were indicated some decades ago by Song Kiho. In the views they present in the international arena, scholars in Korea have yet to draw connections between Parhae heterogeneity and the “multiculturalism” valorized in the ROK today; emphasis on a linear succession from Koguryô to Parhae remains dominant. Should historians adopt the framework of a “multicultural Korea,” however, the diversity of perspectives already found in Korean domestic scholarship on Parhae may be presented more fully to international audiences.

From a more theoretical standpoint, this new perspective may help scholarship on Parhae to move beyond a deceptively simplified national history which, as Prasenjit Duara has argued, “secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a selfsame, national subject evolving through time.”146 No T’aedon has already argued for the futility of efforts to assign a single ethnic origin to the people of Parhae and link them to any modern nationality,147 and John Duncan has also pointed specifically to the “problematic nature of nationalist narratives as applied to the history of Parhae.”148 The recent changes in the discourse of Korean identity noted above may finally help address this issue.

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147. No T’aedon, “Parhaeguk üi chumin kusŏng e taehan yŏn’gu hyŏnhwang.”