

Post-Northeast Project: Examining Chinese History Textbooks' Representation of the Northern Korea as a Subordinate State

Was Northern Korea the Territory of the Han, Wei and Jin Dynasties?

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The Northeast Project, based on China's "Unified Multi-Ethnic State theory," encompasses not only territorial claims, but Korean history, culture, and even traditional symbols like hanbok and kimchi. This project reframes Korea's history as tributary to China, and has been incorporated into Chinese national textbooks, which depict northern Korea as part of the Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties. This portrayal risks diplomatic tensions with both Koreas. While domestic research has focused on the project's visible issues, the claim that the Lelang Commandery was in Pyongyang remains central to justifying Korea as China's tributary. This paper examines the depiction of northern Korea in Chinese textbooks and analyzes the underlying rationale. It further proposes strategies for Korean academia and government to counter both the Northeast Project and the Peninsula History Viewpoint invented by Japanese colonialism.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

On June 24, 2003, the Guangming Daily [光明日報], a leading official Chinese media

outlet overseen by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, detailed the contents of the Northeast Project: "Following the Zhou Dynasty, the Northeast region was under Chinese

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jurisdiction, and the wars of the Sui and Tang dynasties were unification wars. Goguryeo was a local government under the Zhongyuan [중원 中原, Central Plains] dynasty of the Han. Wang Geon, founder of Goryeo, was a descendant of the Han Chinese who lived in Lelang Commandery. Wang Geon appropriated the name ‘Goryeo,’ and Yi Seonggye appropriated the name ‘Joseon’ from Gija Joseon.”

Recently, Gojoseon, Buyeo, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Balhae was redefined as ancient Chinese local governments (Ha, Jingyu 2022, 2). This is largely based on the argument that the Zhongyuan and ancient Korean states were part of a tributary system [번속체제 蕃俗體制], an approach emphasized particularly in early research on Goguryeo (Lee, Jun-sung 2017, 49). This historical war waged through the Northeast Project will continue along the same lines, its fundamental nature unchanged, and remains a potential powder keg ready to explode at any time (Jung, Hosub 2013, 63).

A particularly sensitive aspect of the post-Northeast Project is the direct incorporation of the Northeast Project’s historical claims into Chinese national

history textbooks. The goal is to provide new history education to the 55 ethnic minority groups, including the Joseon ethnic group, based on the Unified Multi-ethnic State theory [통일적 다민족국가론 統一的 多民族國家論].² However, the Northeast Project originally targeted at the three northeastern provinces [동북3성 東北三省, Translator’s note: They are Liaoning [요녕성 遼寧], Jilin [길림성 吉林], and Heilongjiang [흑룡강성 黑龍江]] where the Joseon ethnic people reside. If China’s intention had been limited solely to absorb the history and culture of this region into the Chinese sphere, it would not have invested so much human and material resources over such an extended period. The three northeastern provinces are home to the Joseon ethnic group, a people sharing a common ethnicity with those of present-day North and South Korea. Therefore, a careful examination of the final claims of the Northeast Project reveals that the incorporation of the history and culture of the Joseon ethnic group in the three northeastern provinces served only as a catalyst for further absorbing ancient Korean history into that of China, ultimately resulting in a narrative positioning northern Korea as a Chinese tributary state [속국사화 屬國史化].³ Viewed in this light, the Northeast Project

² This is a historical rationale for unifying the Han [한 漢] people and 55 minority ethnic groups. Underlying this historical rationale is a political agenda to prevent the fragmentation of minority groups by abandoning a Han-centric historical perspective and absorbing the histories of minority groups into the history of China.

³ The history project applied to the ethnic Koreans of China’s three northeastern provinces differs

significantly in nature and impact from that applied to other minority groups. The three northeastern provinces have been a historical territory of Korea since ancient times and maintain direct historical and blood ties with both North and South Korea. Therefore, incorporating their history into Chinese history would inevitably lead to the incorporation of the history of both Koreas into Chinese history.

transcended the academic realm of history and proceeded as sophisticated political strategies. Because it is a framework constructed from historical narratives to serve political aims, it has significant ramifications over the future of the Korean Peninsula, including unification and territorial issues. This study examines the perspectives and responses of Korean academia to the Northeast Project, along with their limitations.

II. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE NORTHEAST PROJECT

The early Goguryeo-focused aspect of the Northeast Project, referred to as a “history war [역사전쟁]” or “a Second Silla–Tang War [제2의 나당전쟁],” delivered a big shock to Korean academia (Na, Yeongju 2004, 7). Initially targeting Goguryeo history, this campaign asserted that Goguryeo’s origins lay in the ancient Shang [상 商] dynasty of China.⁴ Subsequently, it further expanded the scope of Chinese ancient history by claiming Balhae as being formed by a fusion of Goguryeo and Han Chinese [한족 漢族] peoples and ultimately absorbed and extinguished by the Han Chinese (Shin, Seonhye 2008, 149).

In response to the project, South Korea established Goguryeo Research Foundation [고구려연구재단 高句麗研究財團]

in 2004. As an effort to intensify the response, in September 2006, it was further expanded and reorganized, into the Northeast Asia History Foundation [동북아역사재단 東北亞歷史財團] as a specialized research and response organization (Kim, Jihoon 2007, 131). As a result, while only one research paper was published in 2002 when the Northeast Project began, this number had surged to thirty papers by 2004, marking the peak in research activities in response to the project (Baik, Youngseo 2013, 65–66). However, South Korea’s research on the Northeast Project decreased afterwards at the time when the Northeast Project itself neared its conclusion. As this paper will reveal, this was because the Northeast Project’s claims were largely consistent with the long-held conventional view of the South Korean academia on the location of Lelang Commandery among the Four Han Commanderies and they lacked alternative historical narratives with which to overcome this established interpretation.

Extant research has largely focused on examining the nature and content of the Northeast Project, rather than developing fundamental counterarguments. Some studies view the Northeast Project through a political lens, emphasizing the potential for Chinese military intervention in case of a North Korean collapse, the death of the North Korean leader, or a US military strike on North Korea. These studies argue for the need of close strategic cooperation with China (Suh,

⁴ Information panel/brochure from the Jilin

Provincial Museum in Ji'an.

Sangmun 2014, 66). Other studies highlight the threats that the Northeast Project imposes. While defining it as a state-organized and systematized national undertaking based on the “Unified Multi-Ethnic State Theory,” they argue that the project’s scope would not stop at the history of contemporary Chinese territory, but has started to encroach upon the history of the entire Korean peninsula (Kim, Yeong-shim 2011, 136). Territorially speaking, the underlying logic of the Northeast Project is that the history that occurred within the geographical boundaries of present-day China automatically constitutes a Chinese history (Kim, Jong-park 2012, 188). By establishing the northern part of the Korean peninsula as ancient Chinese territory, the Northeast Project poses a significant potential source of conflict and a considerable foreign policy challenge in Sino-Korean relations (Jeon, Byung-kon 2006, 361). Kang Jun-young (2006, 3–4), for example, analyzed the scope of the Northeast Project not merely as China’s regional issue, but a national one linked to China’s stability, thus impacting both domestic and international relations. Ultimately, the Northeast Project is viewed as a politically driven narrative deeply rooted in a self-centered, hegemonic history perspective, primarily designed to serve major political objectives such as preemptive preparations for the territorial disputes in the Northeast region following Korean unification (Nah, Youngju 2012, 84).

Conversely, some research argues that it would be an oversimplification to

interpret the Northeast Project solely as an attempt to expand influence or pursue hegemony in Northeast Asia. They contend that it is a simplistic perspective to understand the project as a mere historical maneuver to strengthen China’s dominance over the Korean Peninsula and preemptively address territorial issues in a unified Korea. They further point out that the claims of the Northeast Project are not universally accepted within the Chinese academic community (Lee, Hee-ok 2007, 21–22; 2006, 141).

Some scholars argue that the Northeast Project has been misrepresented in South Korea. They contend that it was merely a project of the relatively small Borderland History and Geography Studies within the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Furthermore, they point out that the term “Project [공정 工程]” in Chinese is a generic term for any undertaking, and the negative connotations associated with it in South Korea stem from Korean media’s direct use of the term without translation. They also criticize the frequent—and often unsubstantiated—linking of the Project to accusations of historical distortion and encroachment, particularly in discussions of historical matters (Kim, Hyunsook 2022, 9). In the same logic, there is also an argument that the tendency to view the Northeast Project as claiming Korea as part of Chinese history, territory and culture shows some irrational aspects of Korean media reports (Kim, Jongsung et. al. 2008, 355–374). In the historical realm, different views on the nature of the Northeast Project stems from different

interpretations and viewpoints between South Korea and China regarding historical narratives, territorial jurisdictions, and tributary relationships concerning specific dynasties such as Gojoseon [고조선 古朝鮮], Gija Joseon [기자조선 箕子朝鮮], Buyeo [부여 夫餘], Goguryeo [고구려 高句麗], and Balhae [발해 渤海] (Yoon, Hwytak 2007, 327). This interpretation attributes the controversy surrounding the Northeast Project not primarily to China's political motivations, but rather to differing historical interpretations and South Korea's own way of interpreting history.

Next, the background of the Northeast Project needs to be examined within the context of its development. Scholars have identified the historical logic of the Northeast Project as closely related to the issues of Chinese perception of ancient history and Gando [간도 間島]. Existing research, for example, views the background of the Northeast Project as stemming from the fact that Chinese historians, within their historical consciousness, have long perceived the territories associated with the Gija Statehood Debate [기자봉국론 箕子封國論] and the Four Han Commanderies as Chinese territory, a historical tradition firmly entrenched in contemporary China too (Park, Kyungchul 2008, 33). Ha Jinkyoo viewed that China pursued the illogical reasoning of the Northeast Project to establish historical dominance, anticipating challenges to its border claims. Specifically, they aimed at nullifying the Gando Treaty (a pact Japan imposed on Korea in 1905 through

coercion, depriving Korea of diplomatic sovereignty and thereby serving Japanese interests), establishing historical supremacy in preparation for potential disputes over its border, and employing the Unified Multi-ethnic State Theory to eliminate any perceived link between ancient Koreans and modern-day Koreans (Ha, Jingyu 2022, 1 & 8). Shinohara Hirokata understood the Northeast Project's objectives as a historical narrative to address multiple challenges China faces. They include the need to establish a common understanding within the Chinese academic community and to counter a sense of crisis incurred by increased interactions between the Korean population in Northeast China and South/North Korea (Shinohara 2008, 99).

While previous analyses and responses from South Korean academia to the early stage of the Northeast Project served as a wake-up call, the current trajectory of the post-Northeast Project necessitates a fundamental shift in countermeasures. The Northeast Project has rapidly evolved beyond mere a historical project, now encompassing a "cultural Northeast Project" actively contesting the origins of Korean cultural elements such as kimchi, taekwondo, and hanbok (Lee, Donghoon 2008, 138). China has even registered "Chinese Calligraphy" related to its calligraphy heritage with UNESCO (Kim, Jungnam 2022, 248). Thus, an active response is urgently needed, not only to protect Korean history but also its culture.

As the Northeast Project has been concluding and Korean history has been integrated into Chinese scholarship, it has become evident that the coverage now extends to ancient Korean entities like Gojoseon, Goguryeo, Baekje, Balhae, and Buyeo. Dangun Joseon [단군조선 檀君朝鮮, Translator's note: the first dynasty of Korea] is described as a fabricated myth, with the origins of Korean history centered on Gija Joseon (Lee, Donghoon 2008, 4).

Severely lacking is such research that reveals the invalidity of the core arguments of the Northeast Project and develops the counterarguments to refute them. This deficiency appears to stem from inherent limitations associated with the current framework of Korean academia of ancient history. A key element in China's efforts to incorporate the history of Gojoseon, Buyeo, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Balhae into its own historical narrative is the "Pyeongyang Lelang Commandery theory" (한반도 평양 낙랑군설 韓半島平壤樂浪郡說, that the Lelang Commandery of Chinese Han was in Pyeongyang on the Korean peninsula). This theory directly incorporates those claims previously made in some Korean historical scholarship regarding the location of Wiman [위만 衛滿] Joseon and Lelang Commandery in northern Korea and transforming them into the central tenets of the Northeast Project's historical narrative. Consequently, the historical territories of Gija Joseon, Wiman Joseon, Goguryeo, Balhae, and Buyeo have been absorbed into China and presented as tributary states within the Chinese

historical narrative.

In the following sections, we will examine the trends in Korean academia of history as to the post-Northeast Project and how Chinese history textbooks incorporate the historical claims of the Project. We will also analyze the causes underlying these trends and discuss solutions.

III. SOUTH KOREAN ACADEMIA'S RESPONSE TO THE NORTHEAST PROJECT

The Northeast Asian History Foundation is a key South Korean organization dedicated to countering historical distortions by the Northeast Project. Established on September 28, 2006, by merging with the Goguryeo Research Foundation, it aims to address historical disputes between South Korea and China, Japan, and other Northeast Asian countries. As a government-funded institution, its mission is to systematically counter the historical misrepresentations by China and Japan concerning Northeast Asia and to research and disseminate accurate accounts of Korean history.

By a presidential decree, the Foundation is required to pursue its projects with the approval of the Minister

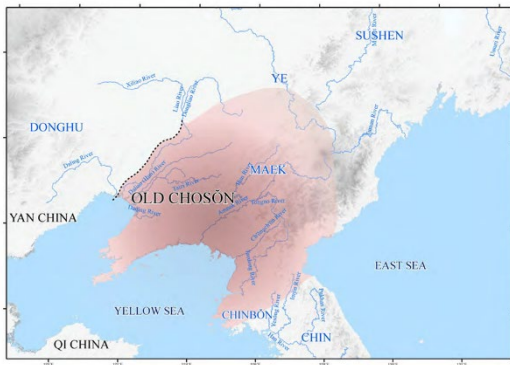
Figure 1. Cover of the U.S. Senate Report (November 2012), “China’s Impact on Korean Peninsula Unification and Questions for the Senate”



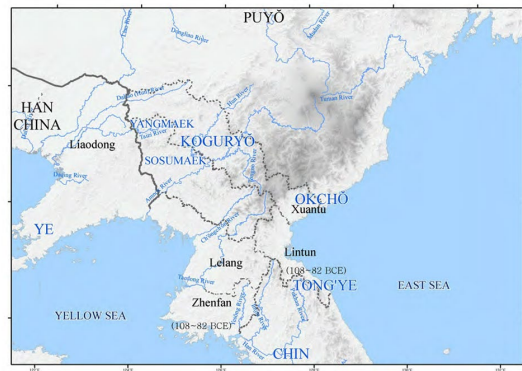
Figure 2. The Territories of the Four Han Commanderies and Gojoseon (Old Choson) in the CRS Report

BORDERS BETWEEN KOREA AND CHINA IN HISTORICAL MAPS OF KOREA

MAP 1: THE TERRITORY OF OLD CHOSŎN



MAP 3: THE TERRITORY OF THE HAN COMMANDERIES AT THE TIME OF THE COLLAPSE OF OLD CHOSŎN (108 BCE)



of Education.⁵ The Minister of Education is responsible for its management and supervision.⁶ However, it caused a significant shock and controversy within the National Assembly and the South

Korean public when so-commissioned Foundation submitted a report CRS report to the U.S. Congressional Research Service at the request of the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the report,

⁵ Act on the Establishment and Operation of the Northeast Asian History Foundation. Article 17 (Submission of Business Plans, etc.) (1) The Foundation shall submit the following documents to the Minister of Education and obtain his/her approval, in accordance with the Presidential Decree.

⁶ Act on the Establishment and Operation of the

Northeast Asian History Foundation. Article 21 (Guidance and Supervision, etc.) (1) The Minister of Education shall guide and supervise the Foundation. However, regarding matters under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Education shall consult with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Figure 3. The Wei Territory Map by the Northeast Asian History Foundation Showing Lelang Commandery in Pyongyang and Wei Territory Extended to Gyeonggi Province



the Foundation acknowledged some key claims of the Northeast Project, including the existence of Gojoseon (Wiman Joseon) and Lelang Commandery in northern Korea. This 2012 CRS report, requested by the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was intended to prepare for potential future scenarios involving North Korea. The request, made to the Korean Northeast Asian History Foundation and the Ministry of Education, sought South Korea's position on the Northeast Project in the event that North Korea collapses and China asserts historical claims to the territories of North Korea. The request asked for an academic review of the validity of the Northeast Project's arguments. Paradoxically, a South Korean historical research organization established, specifically to counter the

Northeast Project, responded to the U.S. Congress while validating the key aspects of the Northeast Project's claims, even with maps (Figures 1 and 2).

The report depicts northern Korea as Old Joseon (Gojoseon) and southern Korea as Chin [진국 辰國] (Map 1 in Figure 2), a geographical designation at odds with source materials and seemingly intended to support the placement of Wiman Joseon [Translator's note: Wiman Joseon was a constituent dynasty of Gojoseon] in Pyongyang. Historical texts place Chin east of, not south of, Wiman (or Ugeo) Joseon.⁷ Furthermore, the report presents that the Lelang Commandery of the Han dynasty was located in present-day Pyongyang—a thesis still debated among scholars—as an established fact

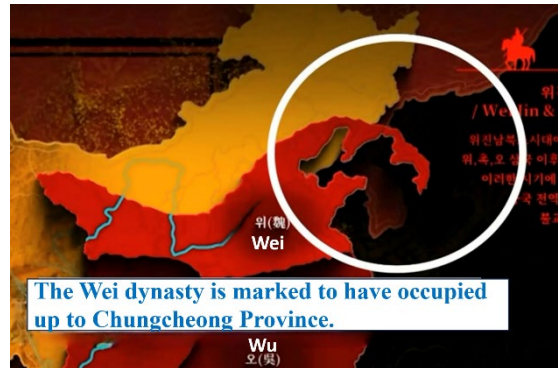
⁷ *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, Wei Shu, Volume 30, "Records of the Eastern Yi": *Wei Lue* states: Initially, before Ugeo [우거 右渠] was defeated, the prime minister of Joseon, Likixi Qing [歷谿卿], remonstrated with Ugeo, but he did not heed him. In the Chen [辰] State of the East, the people left

thecountry, and there were more than 2,000 households remaining. [三國志魏書]卷30「東夷傳」魏略曰初右渠未破時朝鮮相歷谿卿以諫右渠不用東之辰國時民隨出居者二千餘戶

Figure 4. The National Museum of Korea Video Acknowledging the Northern Part of the Korean Peninsula as Han Territory (Source: Han-Korean Culture Times [한문화타임즈], October 8, 2021)



Figure 5. The National Museum of Korea Video Acknowledging the Northern Part of the Korean Peninsula as Wei Territory (Source: Ibid., October 8, 2021)



and indicated it in a map (Map 3 in Figure 2). As will be discussed below, this clearly aligns with the logic of the Northeast Project.

Afterwards, the Foundation undertook another large-scale project concerning Northeast Asian history: the compilation of the “Northeast Asian Historical Maps” [동북아 역사지도 편찬사업]. It proceeded between 2008 and 2015 with approximately 60 historians and a total of 4.7 billion Korean won in public funding. The resulting map solidified the location of Lelang Commandery (낙랑군 樂浪郡, one of the Four Han Commanderies) in Pyongyang, North Korea, effectively portraying northern Korea as Chinese territory. Furthermore, it depicted that northern Korea continued to be within the territory of the Wei Dynasty, which extended its reach to include areas as far south as Gyeonggi-do province, central Korea (Figure 3). While the location of Lelang Commandery in northern Korea

remains a subject of debate, the representation of northern Korea as territory under Cao Wei [조위 曹魏, the period of Wei ruled by the Cao family during the Three Kingdoms era] control caused significant controversy and surprise. It was largely because it presented a historical interpretation previously unknown to scholars and Korean people. The reasons behind the creation of such maps require further investigation and are a focal point of this study.

This same historical map was also presented in a video shown to the public at the National Museum of Korea [국립중앙박물관], the country’s central historical museum. It not only acknowledged Han Dynasty control over northern Korea (Figure 4) but also depicted Wei Dynasty territory extending as far south as Chungcheong-do province [which is south of Gyeonggi Province] (Figure 5).

Figure 6. The Yan Great Wall in *Historical Atlas of China* (Tan 1996, 41–42)



Although the museum director attributed the video’s depiction to an error and apologized,⁸ the recurrence of the same claim—from the diplomatically sensitive CRS report to the 4.7 billion won Northeast Asian Historical Map and to this episode—points to a deeper issue. They reveal the underlying logic, persistent in South Korean academia, that stems from the “Pyeongyang Lelang Commandery claim” (Han Dynasty) and subsequently links to the Wei Dynasty.

IV. ANCIENT NORTHERN KOREA IN HISTORY MAPS AND TEXTBOOKS OF CHINA

ANCIENT KOREAN HISTORY IN *HISTORICAL ATLAS OF CHINA*

Following the Northeast Project, China’s “Chinese Civilization Dissemination Project” [중화문명전파공정 中華文明傳播工程] promotes Korean history and culture as part of Chinese history and culture. A close look, however, reveals that Korean ancient history was treated not as an equal and multi-ethnic narrative alongside that of the Zhongyuan, but rather as a history of tributary states to China. This historical narrative has been reinforced not only through scholarly research but also via maps which were immediately incorporated into national history textbooks, thus indicating that this is more than simple academic distortion. The

⁸ At the National Assembly's Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee's parliamentary inspection on October 7, 2010, Min, Byeongchan [민병찬], director of the National Museum of Korea, officially apologized for the display of a digital map video in

the permanent exhibition's China gallery that contained content similar to that of the Northeast Project.

Figure 7. The Qin Great Wall in *Historical Atlas of China* (Tan 1996, 4)



Figure 8. The Korean Peninsula in the Maps of the Western Han [서한 西漢] and Eastern Han [동한 東漢] Territories in *Historical Atlas of China* (Tan 1996, 14 & 41)



Historical Atlas of China [『중국역사지도집 (中国历史地图集)』], also known as the “Tan Jiqiang [담기양 譚其驤] Atlas,” officially sanctioned by the Chinese government, transforms the Northeast Project’s historical arguments into territorial claims, effectively presenting them as matters of national border history.⁹ Since its initial publication in October 1982, it has served as the standard historical maps of China.

In this atlas, the first attempt to

establish the historical territory of China as encompassing northern Korea begins with the Yan [연 燕] Great Wall. The map depicts the eastern end of the Yan Great Wall as extending into northern Korea (Figure 6).

Then, the map of the territory of the Qin [진 秦] Dynasty—which unified the Six States—connects the Qin territory to the Yan Great Wall, thereby seamlessly extending the Qin’s domain to include

⁹ The *Historical Atlas of China* [중국역사지도집 中国历史地图集] is a collection of maps compiled and published primarily by the Chinese Academy of

Social Sciences. It consists of a total of seven volumes, categorized by historical period.

Figure 9. The Korean Peninsula in the Map of the Cao Wei territory in *Historical Atlas of China* (Tan 1996, Vol. 3, 4)



Figure 10. The Korean Peninsula in the Map of the Western Jin Territory in *Historical Atlas of China* (Tan 1996, 34)



northern Korea (Figure 7). This portrayal establishes as a historical fact the thesis that the Qin Great Wall extended into northern Korea. The map further connects the Ming Dynasty's Shanhai Pass section of the Great Wall to the Yan Great Wall, thus extending its direction and length into northern Korea. This way the maps attempt to establish that even during the Qin Dynasty, China's territory encompassed not only ancient Liaoxi (요서 遼西, the west of the Liaohe River region) and Liaodong (요동 遼東, the east of the Liaohe River region), but northern Korea as well.

Next, the *Historical Atlas of China* definitively locates Wiman Joseon and Lelang Commandery (one of the Four Han Commanderies)—both subjects of ongoing debate in South Korea—in Pyongyang, North Korea, thereby incorporating this region into Chinese territory within the atlas (Figure 8).

China's logic for incorporating Goguryeo into its history as a tributary

state centers on the thesis that the Xuantu Commandery [현도군 玄菟郡] Goguryeo County [고구려현 高句麗縣] of the Former Han Dynasty had been established in the region even before the founding of Goguryeo and Goguryeo was founded within the jurisdiction of this commandery (Yeo, Hogyu 2004, 303). Therefore, the fundamental historical argument for Goguryeo's subservience to China rests on the locational issue of the Four Han Commanderies, specifically that of the Lelang Commandery [낙랑군 樂浪郡]. Much of the previous South Korean research on the Northeast Project has overlooked this fundamental issue, focusing instead on Goguryeo's origins or the perceptions of Chinese historians.

The *Historical Atlas of China* reveals that the debate within South Korean academia regarding the location of Lelang Commandery in Pyongyang is not limited to the Han Dynasty. The atlas also links Lelang Commandery's territory to that of the Wei Dynasty, raising concerns

about the implications for territorial claims. Although likely to become a source of future contention and criticism, the Northeast Asian History Foundation continued to include the northern Korea in the Wei territory in 4.7 billion won Northeast Asian Historical Map and the National Museum of Korea depicted northern Korea as a territory of not only the Han dynasty but the later Wei dynasty as well in its public video. Due to the unfortunate influence of the existing Korean history education, their claim that the Lelang Commandery was in northern Korea can be passed as a matter of academic debate in the eyes of Korean people. However, it is not only unacceptable but deeply offensive to the national sentiment to claim that even subsequent Cao Wei controlled over northern Korea (Figure 9).

The *Historical Atlas of China* depicts northern Korea as territory belonging to the Han, Wei, and subsequently the Western Jin [서진 西晉] dynasties (Figure 10), showing a continuous territorial claim across these periods.

THE ANCIENT KOREAN HISTORY IN THE NATIONAL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS OF CHINA

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, China adopted national history textbooks. From the mid-1980s onward, however, the national textbook system was abolished, and a screening system was adopted instead. Although diverse history textbooks were developed thereafter, conflicts arose between the resulting diversity of historical interpretations and Marxist interpretations. The Xi Jinping [시진핑 習近平] administration, during its second term, beginning in 2017, actively began distributing national history textbooks to schools (Yoon, Se-byong 2019, 8). The Chinese Ministry of Education, with the release of the *Common High School History Curriculum Standards* [보통고중역사과정표준 普通高中歷史課程標準], finalized the nationalization of history textbooks along with a new history curriculum (Lim, Sang-hun 2022, 225). Recent textbooks are written and taught based on the Unified Multi-Ethnic State principle of China.¹⁰

The portrayal of Korean history in Chinese history textbooks is a crucial

¹⁰ Although South Korean middle and high school textbooks vary in their descriptions of Lelang Commandery's nature, they uniformly locate it in Pyongyang, regrettably in alignment with the logic of China's Northeast Project. Junior high school history textbooks published by Visang Education [비상교육] (p. 43), Chunjae Textbook [천재교과서] (p. 41), and Keumsung Textbook [금성교과서] (p. 38) all indicate Pyeongyang Nakrang [Lelang in Chinese

낙랑] County on their history maps. High school history textbooks published by Chunjae Education [천재교육] (p. 15), Dong-A Publishing [동아출판] (p. 11), Cimas [씨마스] (p. 13), Keumsung Publishing [금성출판사] (p. 13), Mirae N (p. 15), Jihak-sa [지학사] (p. 14), Visang (p. 12), and Haenam Edu [해남에듀] (p. 17) also indicate Nakrang County in Pyeongyang.

Figure 11. The Korean Peninsula in the Maps of Yan and Qin Territories in *Chinese History for Middle School, Vol. 1* (People’s Education Press 2021, 34 & 45)

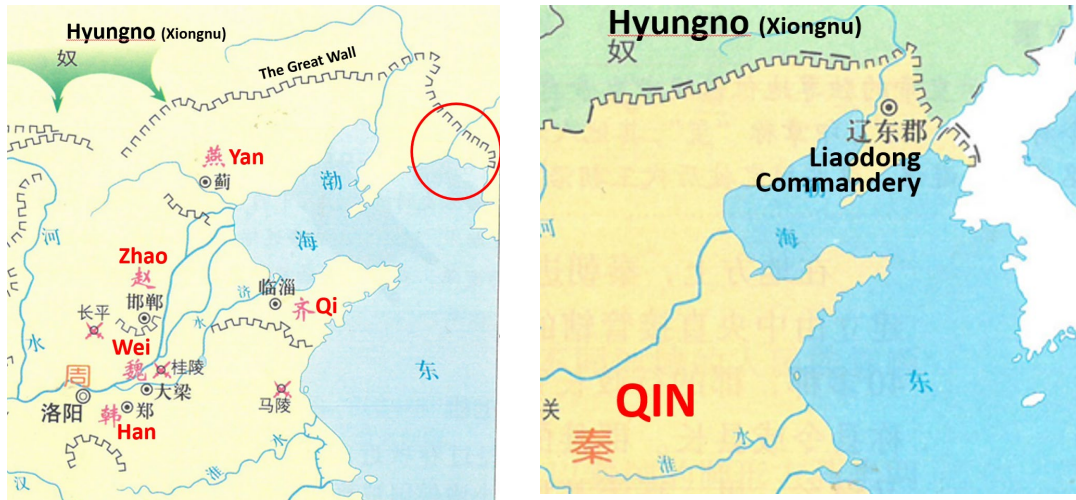


Figure 12. The Korean Peninsula in the Maps of the Warring States Period and the Qin Dynasty in *Chinese History Atlas for Middle School, Vol. 1* (Planet Map Publishing House 2019, 21 & 31)



aspect of the post-Northeast Project that warrants close examination. The question is whether the historical arguments are applied only to China’s northeastern region (the three northeastern provinces) as part of academic discourse, or whether they are used, as many fear, to define Korea as a tributary state within China’s

territory. Textbooks serve as the best litmus test with which to determine this.

This study examines the depiction of ancient northern Korean Peninsula history on the maps included in the following national textbooks mandated for use in all public primary and junior high schools

Figure 13. The Korean Peninsula in the Maps of Western Han [서한 西漢] and Eastern Han [동한 東漢] territories in *Chinese History for Middle School, Vol. 1* (People's Education Press 2021, 60 & 64)

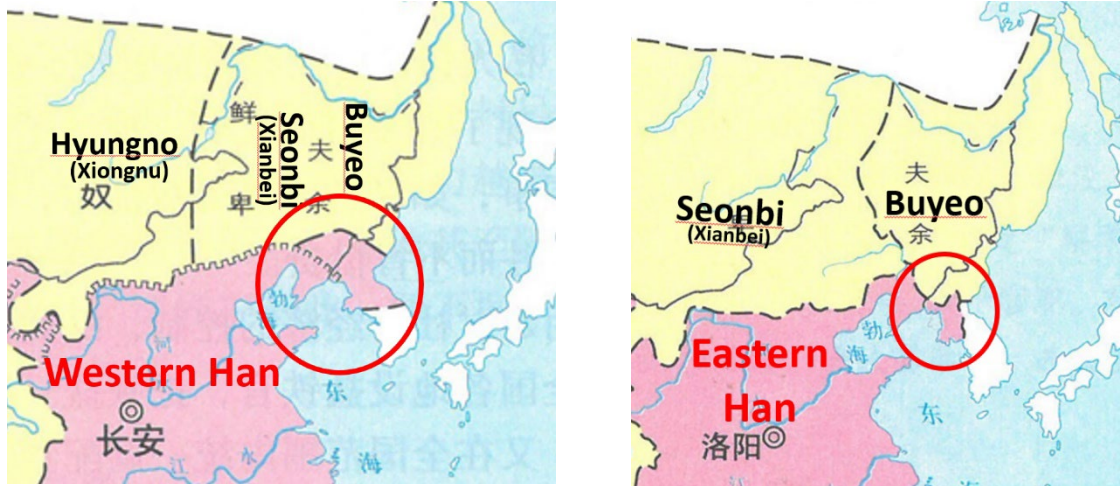


Figure 14. The Korean Peninsula in the Maps of Western Han and Eastern Han territories in *Chinese History Atlas for Middle School, Vol. 1* (Planet Map Publishing House 2019, 38 & 42)



across China: *Chinese History for Middle School, Vol. 1* (『七年級 中國歷史 上冊 7년급 중국역사 상』, People's Education Press 2021), *Chinese History Atlas for Middle School, Vol. 1* (『七年級 中國歷史 地圖冊 上冊 7년급 중국역사 지도책 상』, Planet Map Publishing House 2019), and *Common*

High School Textbook—Required History: Essentials of Chinese and World History, Vol. 1 (『普通高中教科書 歷史 必修 中外歷史綱要 上冊 보통고중교과서 역사 필수 중외역사요강』, People's Education Press 2022;), a national textbook implemented in 2017.

Figure 15. The Korean Peninsula in the Maps of the Three Kingdoms and the Distribution of Minority Groups within the Western Jin Dynasty in *Chinese History for Middle School, Vol. 1* (People's Education Press 2021, 83 & 87)

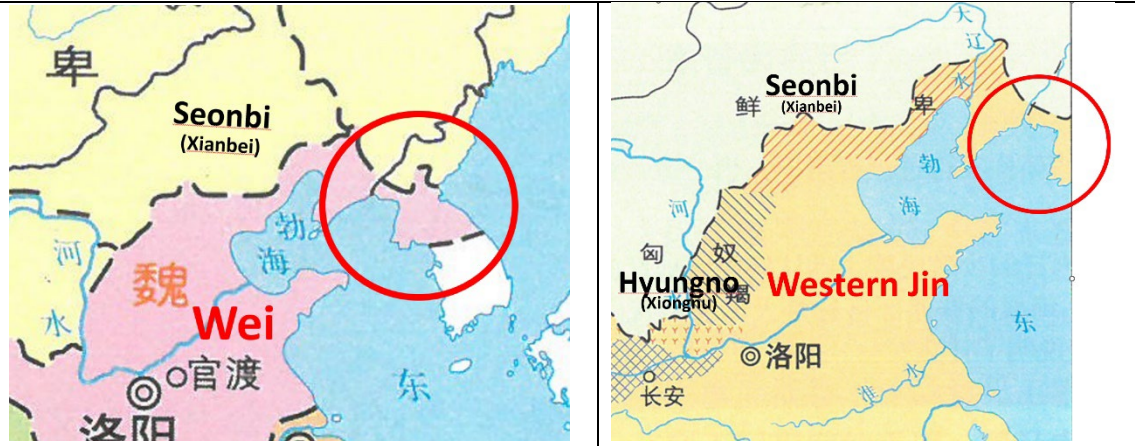
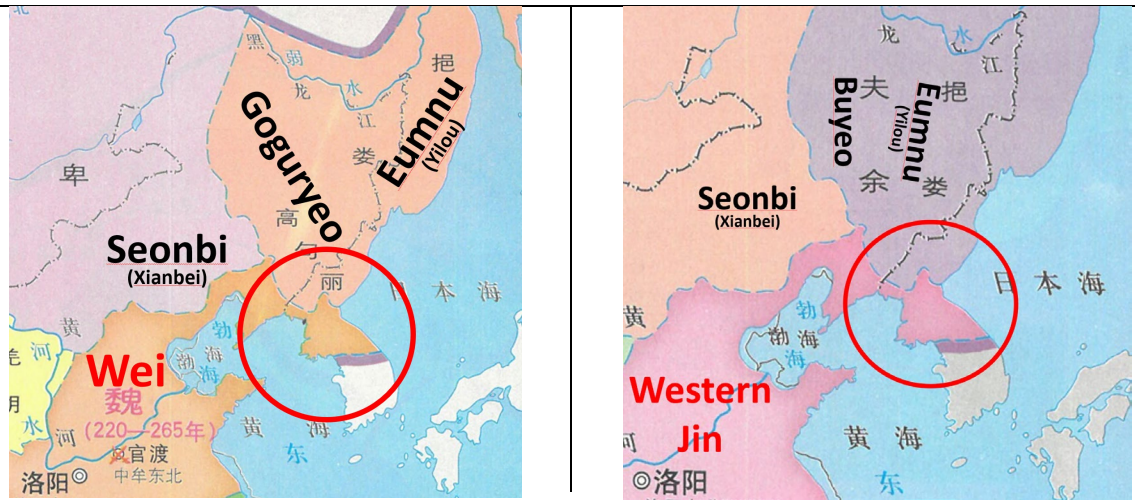


Figure 16. The Korean Peninsular in the Maps of the Three Kingdoms and Western Jin Territories in *Chinese History Atlas for Middle School, Vol. 1* (Planet Map Publishing House 2019, 53 & 55)



The *Chinese History for Middle School, Vol. 1* depicts the Yan and Qin walls extending into the northern Korean Peninsula (Figure 11). This represents an expansion of the ancient Yan and Qin territories to encompass the northern Korean Peninsula.

The *Chinese History Atlas for Middle*

School (Figure 12) also depicts the northern Korean Peninsula as territory belonging to Yan and Qin on its maps of their respective periods; notably, the Qin territory is labeled as “Qin Dynasty [진조 秦朝].”

Figures 13 and 14 are the maps of Han, Wei, and Jin territories in the Chinese

Figure 17. The Korean Peninsula in the Maps of the Yan and Qin Great Walls in *Common High School Textbook—Required History* (People's Education Press 2022, 10 & 16)

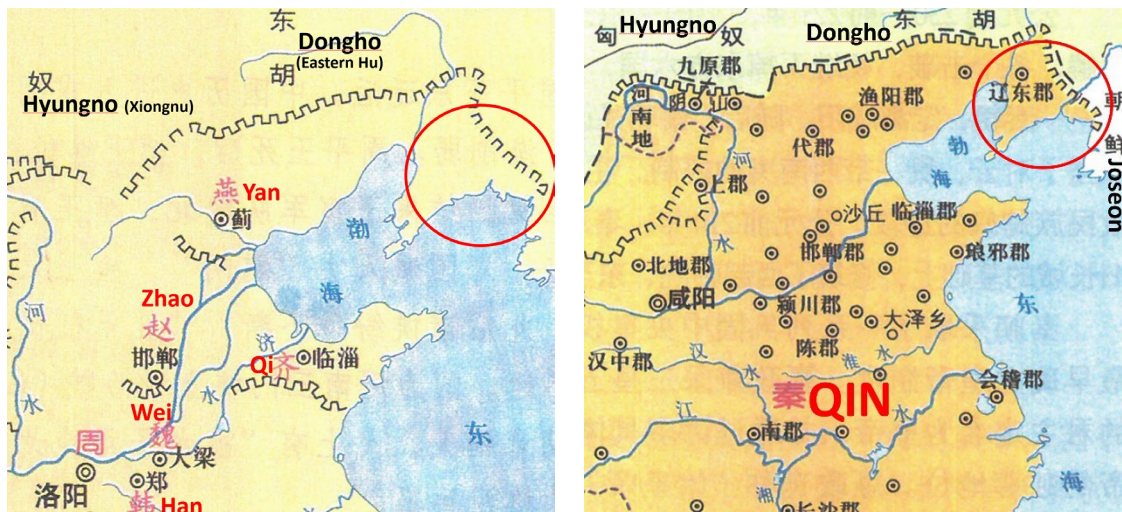
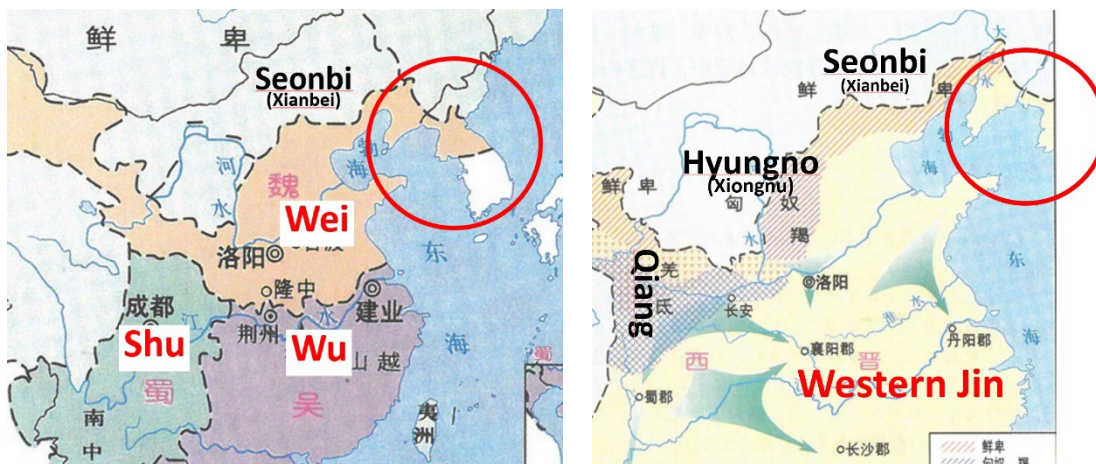


Figure 18. The Korean Peninsula in the Map of the Western Han Dynasty in *Common High School Textbook—Required History* (Ibid., 22)



Figure 19. The Korean Peninsula in the Maps of the Three Kingdoms and the Distribution of Ethnic Minorities and the Southward Migration of Northern Nomads in Western Jin in *Common High School Textbook—Required History* (Ibid., 26–27)



national history textbooks. As

previously noted, the official Chinese government maps already depict the northern Korean Peninsula as part of China.

Both the middle school China history textbook and atlas (Figures 15 and 16) depict the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, using Lelang Commandery in Pyongyang as a reference point, as Han territory. These maps reflect the claims made by Korean historical academia.

These textbook and atlas have presented the territory of Lelang Commandery under the Han dynasty as seamlessly transitioning into the territory of Wei and subsequently the eastern Jin dynasty. Since such representation is made not just in text narratives but cartographically, it establishes a clear territorial boundary.

Finally, let us examine the government-issued *Common High School Textbook—Required History* [보통고중교과서역사필수 普通高教科書 歷史 必修, commonly referred to as *Essentials of Chinese and World History* [中外歷史綱要]], currently in use and set to become the standard for future history textbooks. It describes the origins of the Chinese history based on a map depicting the Central Plains, Liaoxi, and Liaodong regions as part of the Chinese Paleolithic territory, along with photographs of the Niuheliang and Liangzhu ancient city sites. Following this, it details the Xia-Shang-Zhou dynasties and the Warring States period, while showing the Yan State's Great Wall extending into northern Korea (Figure 17). The account then describes Qin Shi

Huang's unification of the Six States, with the northeastern border marked by a Great Wall extending to northern Korea (Figure 17). The textbook further depicts that the Han Dynasty controlled the entire northern region of the Korean peninsula (Figure 18). This is followed by the designation of northern Korea as territory of the Wei and Western Jin dynasties (Figure 19).

The depiction of North Korea as territory of the Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties in the government-issued textbook, a result of the post-Northeast Project, is expected to cause continuous disputes and controversies not only within the Korean and Chinese academic circles but also between the diplomatic institutions of both countries. Particularly regarding the Korean historical perspectives in relation to the unification of South and North Korea, this will become a matter with immense potential for academic and political debate.

V. THE ORIGINS OF THE CHINESE VASSAL STATE THEORY OF NORTHERN KOREAN PENINSULA

HISTORICAL BASIS FOR DEPICTING ANCIENT NORTHERN KOREAN PENINSULA AS HAN, WEI, AND JIN TERRITORY

Once the territory of the Four Han Commanderies was established centering

Table 1. The Korean and Chinese Historical Accounts of the Lelang Commandery during the Han, Wei, and Jin Dynasties

Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location of the Lelang Commandery of the Four Han Commanderies is established as present-day Pyongyang. • Traditionally, it is described as established in 108 BCE under Emperor Wu of Han, demised in 313 CE during King Micheon’s reign of Goguryeo, lasting approximately 420 years. • Recently, the term “demise” is avoided in favor of such terms as “abolition” or “expulsion.”
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established in 108 BCE under Emperor Wu of Han. • Later Han fell in 220 CE. In 238 CE, Emperor Ming of Wei sent Liu Xin and Xianyu Si to pacify Lelang and Daifang when he dispatched Sima Yi to conquer Gongsun Yuan. Since then, they became Wei territory. • After Western Jin succeeded the Wei dynasty, the Lelang Commandery came under the Western Jin control.

around Pyongyang in Korea, it would be natural to depict northern Korea as territory of the Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties. Korean historiography has traditionally identified the “Kingdom of Nakrang (Lelang in Chinese)” [낙랑국 樂浪國] in *Samguk Sagi, The History of Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* as the Han commandery of Lelang [낙랑군 樂浪郡] and described the latter’s demise in 313 CE during the reign of King Micheon. Recently, terms such as “expulsion [추출]” or “abolition of the commandery [군현폐지]” have been used instead of “demise [멸망].” However, regardless of whether Lelang demised or was expelled—a point for later discussion—it persisted as territory under the Wei and Jin dynasties, succeeding the Han. Insofar as the Lelang commandery is located in Pyongyang, it naturally follows that northern Korea was undoubtedly within the territories of the Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties. Consequently, the Korean

academic community [which identifies the location of the Lelang Commandery in Pyeongyang] has failed to present a historical argument to counter the Northeast Project; instead, they extended the Wei territory to include even Gyeonggi-do and Chungcheong-do provinces of Korea (see Table 1).

The succession of the Lelang and Daifang Commanderies of the Four Han Commanderies to Cao Wei territory is supported by the following historical sources.

In the 12th year [of King Dongcheon, that is, 238 CE], Sima Xuanwang [사마선왕 司馬宣王], the Grand Tutor of Wei, led his troops to subdue Gongsun Yuan [공손연 公孫淵]. The king [of Goguryeo] then dispatched a chief registrar [주부 主簿] and a Daga [대가 大加], sending them with 1,000

soldiers to assist in the campaign.¹¹

In the eighth month of autumn [246 CE], Guanqiu Jian [관구검 田丘儉], the Inspector of Youzhou [유주 幽州] in the Wei state, along with Liu Mao, the governor of Lelang [낙랑 樂浪], and Wang Zun, the governor of Shofang [삭방 朔方], attacked Goguryeo. Seizing an opportunity, the Goguryeo king sent Zhen Zhong [진충 眞忠], his left general, to raid and seize the border inhabitants of Lelang. Upon hearing this, Liu Mao was enraged. Fearing a retaliatory attack, the Goguryeo king returned the captured inhabitants.¹²

They sent Xianyu Si, the governor of Lelang, and Liu Xin, the governor of Daifang [대방 帶方], across the sea, (and quelled the Gongsun clan's forces) and pacified the Lelang and Daifang Commanderies.¹³

In the sixth year of the Zhengshi era [정시 正始] [245 CE], Liu Mao, the Lelang governor, and Gong Jun, the Daifang governor, launched a military campaign against the Ye [예 濊] east of the (Dandan-dae) Ridge [단단대령] after they had submitted to Goguryeo. Bulnaehu [불내후 不耐侯] and others surrendered their settlements.¹⁴

In the eighth year of the Zhengshi era

(247 CE), Wang Qi [왕기 王頎], the Daifang governor, arrived at his official post (seat of government).¹⁵

The Zhengshi era was the first era name used by Cao Fang [조방 曹芳], the emperor of the Cao Wei state. The records of the 19th year of King Dongcheon's reign (245 CE) describes Lelang and Daifang Wei territory. This description could serve as evidence to place the location of Lelang Commandery in Liaodong [요동 遼東] rather than Pyongyang in the Korean Peninsula. This notwithstanding, Korean academia has consistently assumed the location of Lelang Commandery to be Pyongyang. Therefore, they could not help but designating Pyongyang and surrounding areas as Wei territory following the Han. Since Lelang Commandery's territory automatically succeeded from Han and We to Western Jin, there is no other way but to include northern Korean Peninsula within the Jin Dynasty's domain.

According to the Daifang Commandery section of *Jin Shu*, *The Book of Jin*,¹⁶ Lelang's southern prefect controlled seven counties of Zhenfan,

¹¹ *Samguk Saji, The History of three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* 『三國史記』 Chronology of Goguryeo, 5. King Dongcheon 「高句麗本紀 第五 東川王」: “十二年 魏大傳司馬宣王 率衆討公孫淵 王遣主簿 大加將兵千人助之”

¹² *Ibid.*, Chronology of Baekje, 2. King Saban 「百濟本紀」 第2 沙伴王 · 古尔王: “秋八月 魏幽州刺史母丘儉與樂浪太守劉茂 朔方太守王遵 伐高句麗 王乘虛 遣左將真忠 襲取樂浪邊民 茂聞之怒 王恐見侵討 還其民口”

¹³ *Sanguo Zhi, Records of the Three Kingdoms* 『三國志』 Accounts of Han 「韓傳」: “景初中 明帝密遣帶方太守劉昕 樂浪太守鮮于嗣越 海定二郡。”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Records of Wei 30. Dongyi [魏書 30 東夷傳]: “濊. 正始六年(245) 樂浪太守劉茂·帶方太守 弓遵以 領東濊屬句麗 興師伐之 不耐侯等舉邑降.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Records of Wei 30. Dongyi [魏書 30 東夷傳]: “倭人. 其八年 太守王頎到官.”

¹⁶ They are Liekou [列口], Nanxin [南新], Changcen [長岑], Dixi [堤奚], Hanzi [含資], Haiming [海冥], and Daifang [帶方].

with a total of 4,900 households.¹⁷ Furthermore, its geographical records state that in the second year of the Xianning era [함녕 咸寧]¹⁸ (276 CE), Lelang came under Pingzhou [평주 平州] Commandery. Lelang Commandery then governed six counties (조선 朝鮮, 둔유 屯有, 혼미 渾彌, 수정 遂城, 누방 鑊方, 사망 駟望), with a population of 3,700 households.

The number of counties within Lelang Commandery fluctuated throughout history: 25 during the Former Han,¹⁹ 18 during the Later Han,²⁰ and 6 during the Western Jin.²¹ If the traditional Korean historiography is correct, the names of these counties and their territories should all be found around Pyongyang. However,

Korean academia never conducted any study to this effect; instead, they simply inherited the historical perspective of the Japanese Government-General of Korea and located the Wiman Joseon and the Lelang Commandery in Pyongyang. And they never changed this stance. The implications of this stance for the Wei and Western Jin territories were entirely unforeseen, however, rendering Korean academia inherently unable—even to this day—to effectively counter the Northeast Project’s claim that the northern Korean Peninsula was a vassal state of China.

Records of Lelang and Daifang Commanderies continue to appear in subsequent historical records. While the

¹⁷ 『晉書』卷十四 志 第四 地理上 帶方郡: “帶方郡公孫度置 統縣七 戶四千九百 帶方列口南新長岑提奚含資海冥”

¹⁸ Xianning [咸寧] was the second era name of Emperor Wu [무제 武帝] of the Western Jin Dynasty [서진 西晉]. Xianning [咸寧] lasted from 275 to 280 BCE.

¹⁹ This is a record from the *Han Shu, The Book of Han* [한서 漢書]. In the section of Geography [지리지 地理志], it lists the following counties [縣]: Joseon [朝鮮縣], Namham [南邯縣], Paesu [溟水縣], Hanja [含資縣], Jeomje [黏蟬縣], Suseong [遂城縣], Jeungji [增地縣], Daebang [帶方縣], Samang [駟望縣], Haemyung [海冥縣], Yeolgu [列口縣], Jangjam [長岑縣], Dunyu [屯有縣], Somyeong [昭明縣], Nubang [鑊方縣], Jehae [提奚縣], Honmi [渾彌縣], Tanyeol [吞列縣], Dongi [東曉縣], Buri [不而縣], Jamtae [薑台縣], Hwalyeo [華麗縣], Sadumae [邪頭昧縣], Jeonmak [前莫縣], and Bujo [夫租縣]. The connection between the names of Jeomjeon county [黏蟬縣] (Western Han) and Jameon county [占蟬縣] (Eastern Han) and the character “粘” in the *Nyeoncheon Pyeongsanjun Shrine Stele* [粘蟬平山君神祠碑] found in Pyongyang led the Japanese Government-General of Korea [조선총독부] and Korean academia to identify them as Han Chinese territorial markers. Son, Bogi

[손보기] argued that the location of the Jeomje stele [점제비] in Pyeongyang would have been underwater 2,000 years ago, making it impossible to erect a stele there. He posited that the Japanese had moved it from Mount Jieshi [갈석산]. He further interpreted the stele as a record of a sacrifice to Heaven performed by the magistrate of Jeomje county [粘蟬縣長 점제현장]. (Hanbaedal interview, January 17, 1990).

²⁰ This is a record from the *Hou Han Shu, Book of Later Han* [후한서 後漢書] *Gazetteer of the Military and State* [軍國志], pertaining to Youzhou [幽州] commandery. The listed counties [縣] are: Joseon [朝鮮縣], Namham [南邯縣], Paesu [溟水縣], Hanja [含資縣], Jameon [占蟬縣], Suseong [遂城縣], Jeungji [增地縣], Daebang [帶方縣], Samang [駟望縣], Haemyung [海冥縣], Yeolgu [列口縣], Jangjam [長岑縣], Dunyu [屯有縣], Somyeong [昭明縣], Nubang [鑊方縣], Jehae [提奚縣], Honmi [渾彌縣], and Nakdo [樂都縣].

²¹ This is a record from the *Jin Shu, The Book of Jin* [진서 晉書] *gazetteer* [지리지 地理志]. The listed counties [縣] are: Joseon [朝鮮縣], Dunyu [屯有縣], Honmi [渾彌縣], Suseong [遂城縣] (the origin of the Great Wall built by the Qin [秦築長城之所起]), Nubang [鑊方縣], and Samang [駟望縣].

Korean records of the Lelang Commandery as expelled and ceased to exist in 313 CE during the reign of King Micheon appears in *Wei Shu, The Book of Wei* [위서 魏書]. The following is the record about the first year (432 CE) of the Yanhe era [연화 延和]²² of the Northern Wei [북위 北魏] Dynasty.

On the day *eummyo* of the ninth month, the imperial entourage returned. Thirty thousand households from the six commanderies of Yingqiu [영구 營丘], Chengzhou [성주 成周], Liaodong [요동 遼東], Lelang [낙랑 樂浪], Daifang [대방 帶方], and Xuantu [현도 玄菟] were relocated to Youzhou [영주 幽州]. Granaries were opened to provide relief.²³

Furthermore, detailed records concerning Lelang Commandery's Joseon County [조선현 朝鮮縣] appear within the accounts of Beiping Commandery [북평군 北平郡].

Joseon County was under the jurisdiction of Lelang during the Former and Later Han and Jin Dynasties, before later being abolished. In 432 CE, during the first year of the Yanhe era under the Northern Wei, the people of Joseon County were relocated to Feiru [비여 肥如], and the county was re-established.²⁴

The issue of Lelang Commandery's

vassal status does not end there. The *Wei Shu, The Book of Wei* records that Lelang Commandery, while called Lelang during the Jin Dynasty, was later abolished, only to have its administrative region reinstated towards the end of the Zhengguang era [정광 正光] under the Northern Wei.

Lelang Commandery was established during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Former Han Dynasty. While known as Lelang during the Former Han, Later Han, and Jin Dynasties, it was subsequently altered and eventually abolished. However, towards the end of the Zhengguang era (520–525 CE), it was reinstated. Its administrative center was in Liánchéng [연성 連城] and governed two counties. It had 219 households and 1800 individuals.²⁵

Figure 20 shows the territory of Northern Wei. Considering it and the historical records concerning Lelang Commandery, a significant discrepancy arises regarding Lelang's location compared to the commonly accepted placement in Pyongyang, North Korea. The descriptions of Lelang within these records are incompatible with a Pyongyang location. The claim by some Korean scholars that the tomb of Han Xiandu [한현도 韓显度], a native of Lelang Commandery's Joseon County, found in Beijing, dates to the Northern Wei

²² Yanhe [延和] was the third era name of Emperor Taiwu [太武帝] of the Northern Wei Dynasty [北魏], used for three years and one month, from 432 to the first month of 435 BCE.

²³ 『魏書』卷四 上 世祖紀. 九月乙卯車駕西還徙營丘·成周·遼東·樂浪·帶方·玄菟六郡民三萬 家于幽州 開倉以賑之

²⁴ 『魏書』卷106 上 志 第五 地形 志 上. 朝鮮 二漢·晉屬樂浪 後罷 延和元年徙朝鮮民於肥如 復置屬焉

²⁵ 『魏書』卷106 中 地形志 營州. 樂良郡 前漢武帝置 二漢 晉曰樂浪 後改 罷 正光末復 治連 城 領縣 二戶二百一十九口一千八 永洛 <正光末置 有鳥山> 帶方 <二漢屬 晉屬帶方 後罷 正光末復屬>

Figure 20. The Territories of Northern Wei (Upper Blue) and Southern Song (Lower Red) (Source: [https://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/북위_\(북조\)](https://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/북위_(북조)))



Dynasty—more than two centuries after Lelang’s dissolution—is merely a stopgap measure to address this inconsistency.

Ironically, it was China that feared the implications of this discovery for the vassal state theory because the discovery refutes the validity of the theory. The 1997 excavation of the seal of the magistrate of Lintun [임둔 臨屯], one of the Four Han Commanderies, in Liaoning Province, China (Bok, Gidae 2002), and the

subsequent 2014 discovery of the tomb of “Han Hyeondo of Lelang Commandery’s Joseon County” at the Sanhezhuangcun [삼합장촌 三舍莊村] site in Huangcunzhen, Daxing District, Beijing²⁶ provide strong archaeological evidence contradicting the long-held Korean academic assertion that Wiman Joseon and Lelang Commandery were centered in Pyongyang.

Sekino Tadashi [関野貞] excavated Pyongyang tombs, designated them as remnants of the Lelang Commandery of the Han Dynasty, and used them as archeological evidence for the thesis that Lelang was in Pyeongyang. However, the records in his own diary detailing his acquisition of large quantities of Four Han Commanderies artifacts, particularly Lelang artifacts, from Beijing’s Liulichang [유리창 琉璃廠 Translator’s Note: It is a historic district in Beijing known for its traditional Chinese art and antiques markets], has fueled widespread distrust of the validity of his Pyongyang Lelang Commandery excavation findings (Moon, Seongjae 2016, 351–353).²⁷ Above-mentioned recent archaeological discoveries that

²⁶ Seven tombs from the Later Han, two from the Northern Dynasties, 33 from the Tang, and 33 from the Liao [요 遼] periods were excavated at this site. Among them, a brick with a clear inscription identifying the tomb’s owner was unearthed. The inscription reads: “Tomb inscription of Han, Hyeondo [한현도 韓顯度], a resident of Joseon County [조선현 朝鮮縣], Nakrang (Lelang) Commandery, who died on April 17th, in the second year of Yuanxiang [원상 元象] (539) [元象 2年4月17日 樂浪郡朝鮮縣人韓顯度銘記].”

²⁷ According to the *Diary of Sekino Tadashi* (2009):

March 20, 1918 (Taisho 7): Clear. Beijing. ... I looked around antique shops and purchased artifacts of the Han Dynasty period for approximately 300 yen for the Japanese Government General of Korea’s Museum [조선총독부박물관 朝鮮總督府博物館].

March 22, 1918 (Taisho 7): Clear. This morning, I went to Liulichang with Mr. Zhu Cun and bought antiques. There were relatively many Han Dynasty excavated artifacts in the Liulichang antique shops, and most of the Lelang unearthed items were well-stocked, so I actively collected them.

refute the Pyongyang thesis of Wiman Joseon and Lelang Commandery closely match the location of Paesu [Peishui in

Chinese] River [패수 溟水] in Hebei Province and near Beijing where Wiman Joseon and Lelang Commandery.²⁸ Furthermore,

²⁸ **Shui Jing, The Waterways Classic* [수경 水經], “Paesu River” [패수 溟水]: The Paesu River originates in Lubang County [鑊方縣] of Lelang Commandery [樂浪], flows southeast past Linpi County [臨瀨縣], and empties into the sea to the east [東入于海].

**Shuowen Jiezi, Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters* [설문해자 說文解字]: The Paesu River originates in Lubang County [鑊方縣] of Lelang Commandery [樂浪], and flows east into the sea [東入海].

**Shisan Zhou Zhi* [십삼주지 十三州志] The *Shisan Zhou Zhi* states: Paesu [溟水] County is located northeast of Lelang, and Lubang County [鑊方縣] is located to the east of the commandery. It appears that the river originates south of Paesu County and flows through Lubang.

**Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* [사기 史記], “Biographies of Joseon” [조선열전 朝鮮列傳]: Man, the king of Joseon, was a former Yan [연 燕] person. From the beginning of the Yan's rule, he had already subdued Zhenfan [진번 眞番] and Joseon, establishing officials and building fortifications. After Qin's conquest of Yan, Joseon was placed under the jurisdiction of Liaodong [요동 遼東] as its outer border. Following the rise of Han, due to its distance and difficulty to defend, the old Liaodong fortifications were repaired, and the Paesu River became the boundary, attached to Yan.

**Records of the Thirteen States* [십삼주지 十三州志]: The *Shisan Zhou Zhi* states that Paesu County is located northeast of Lelang Commandery, and Lubang County is located east of the commandery. It seems the river originates south of the county and passes through Lubang.

**Hanshu, The Book of Han, "Annals of Emperor Wu"* [무제기 武帝紀]: Emperor Wu embarked on a journey from Mount Taishan [태산 泰山], continuing eastward along the coast to Mount Jieshi. From Liaoxi [요서 遼西], he inspected the northern border to Jiu Yuan [구원 九原] and returned to Ganquan [감천 甘泉].

**Hanshu, The Book of Han, Volume 25, Upper;*

"Treatise on Sacrifices to Heaven": In the first year of Emperor Er Shi, he made an eastern inspection tour to Mount Jieshi [갈석 碣石] along the coast, and went south to Mount Taishan.

**Jin Shu, The Book of Jin, Volume 42, "Biographies,"* Section 12, Wang Hun and His Son Wang Ji: They expanded the old territory, reclaiming thousands of *li*, restoring the Great Wall fortifications from Wencheng [溫城] to Mount Jieshi, stretching over mountains and valleys for nearly 3,000 *li*. Troops were stationed along the line, with signal towers in sight of each other. Consequently, the border achieved peace without the sounds of dogs barking, a stark contrast to the Han and Wei dynasties' defense efforts.

**Sui Shu, The Book of Sui* [수서 隋書], *Gazetteer*, Liaoxi Commandery [요동군 遼西郡]: Liaoxi Commandery, formerly established as Yingzhou [營州], had a General Manager's Office established at the beginning of the Kaihuang era [開皇]. At the beginning of the Daye era [大業], the office was abolished. It controlled one county, 751 households. Liucheng [柳城]: During the Northern Wei [後魏], Yingzhou [營州] was established in Helongcheng [和龍城], governing the commanderies of Jiande [建德], Jiyang [冀陽], Changli [昌黎], Liaodong [遼東], Lelang [樂浪], and Yingqiu [營丘], as well as the counties of Longcheng [龍城], Daxing [大興], Yongle [永樂], Daifang [帶方], Dinghuang [定荒], Shicheng [石城], Guangdu [廣都], Yangwu [陽武], Xiangping [襄平], Xinchang [新昌], Pinggang [平剛], Liucheng [柳城], Fuping [富平], etc. During the Later Qi [後齊], only Jiande [建德] and Jiyang [冀陽] commanderies remained, along with Yongle [永樂], Daifang [帶方], Longcheng [龍城], and Daxing [大興] counties; the rest were abolished. In the first year of Kaihuang, only Jiande [建德] commandery and Longcheng [龍城] county remained; the rest were abolished. Soon the commandery was abolished as well, and the county was changed to Longshan [龍山]. In the eighteenth year, it was changed to Liucheng [柳城]. At the beginning of the Daye era [大業], Liaoxi Commandery [遼西郡] was established. It contained Daifang Mountain [帶方山], Tuli Mountain [禿黎山],

North Korean academia officially designates the approximately 3,000 tombs in the Pyongyang Nakrang area as belonging to Goguryeo-originated Kingdom of Nakrang [낙랑국 樂浪國], not the Han Dynasty (Ri, Sunjin 2001). Despite this, the South Korean academic historians prioritized the archaeological ‘findings’ of Sekino Tadashi over numerous historical records, upholding the Pyongyang-centric theory of Wiman Joseon and Lelang Commandery as the ‘established’ theory. In doing so, they effectively became providers of the rationale underpinning the logic of the Northeast Project.

Faced with contradictory archaeological evidence, Chinese academia has even resorted to the argument that the people of Lelang Commandery, residing in Pyongyang, were forcibly relocated to Beijing by the Murong clan during the conquest of Goguryeo. They also cite the *Wei Shu*, *The Book of Wei*, claiming that Emperor Taiwu of Northern Wei relocated them in 432 CE.²⁹ However, 432 CE falls within the flourishing period of Goguryeo under King Jangsu, a time of amicable relations with Northern Wei. This highlights how Chinese scholarship swiftly formulated counterarguments—however irrational—to reconcile conflicting archaeological findings and preserve the narrative of

northern Korea as a tributary state of China in ancient times.

The fundamental historical stance of the Korean historical community, which has historically incorporated the existence of Wiman Joseon and Lelang Commandery centered in Pyongyang into the realm of Korean history, can be judged to have functioned as the basis for the Northeast Project’s assertion of the tributary status of the northern Korean Peninsula.

Against this backdrop, on July 26, 2022, the National Museum of China opened the “Oriental Auspicious Metals: Ancient Bronze Exhibition of Korea, China, and Japan” to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and China and the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan. In the historical chronology, Goguryeo and Balhae were removed, the founding year of Gojoseon was indicated as “?”. And the existence of the Four Han Commanderies in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula was taken as a *fait accompli*, expanding the historical territory of the Lelang Commanderies to the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. This exhibition, which was co-hosted by the National Museum of Korea, has become an international event

Jimin Mountain [雞鳴山], Song Mountain [松山], Yushu River [渝水], and Bailang River [白狼水].

²⁹ The "Annals of Emperor Taiwu [세조태무조본기 世祖太武帝本紀]" cites a record stating that: "In the ninth month of the year Yi Mao [乙卯] of the first year of Yanhe [延和] (432 CE), the imperial court [車

駕] returned west. The people of six commanderies—Yingqiu [營丘], Chengzhou [成周], Liaodong [遼東], Lelang [樂浪], Daifang [帶方], and Xuantu [玄菟]—totaling 30,000 households, were relocated to Youzhou [幽州 (present-day Beijing)], and granaries were opened to provide relief."

that confirmed the location of the Lelang Commanderies in Pyongyang on the Korean Peninsula.

THE NORTHEAST PROJECT AND THE PENINSULA HISTORY PERSPECTIVE OF THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT-GENERAL

We will now examine the origins of Northeast Project's theory of northern Korean peninsula as Chinese vassal state. Surprisingly, much of it was already included in the national history textbook of Joseon that was taught as a textbook by the Japanese Government-General of Korea in the early 1920s, over 100 years ago.

Recently, most Korean history textbooks have included maps that define the territory of Gojoseon as the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, inconsistent with the national sentiment that considers Laioxi [요서 遼西], Liaodong [요동 遼東], Amur River [흑룡강 黑龍江], and the entire Korean Peninsula as the territory of Gojoseon. The logic behind this is that the northern part of the Korean Peninsula was Wiman Joseon and the southern part was Jin State [진국 辰國]. As indicated earlier, Jin State was a country that existed to the

east of Wiman Joseon, not a country that existed below in the south. Ignoring even the original text of history, they divided the northern and southern parts of the Korean Peninsula into Gojoseon and Jin State.

In ancient times, the northern part of the peninsula was called Joseon, and it is said that Gija [기자 箕子] came from China and became king there. After that, a man named Wiman [위만 衛滿] came to this region, drove out Gija's successor Jun [준 準], and took over the country. During the time of Wiman's grandson Ugeo [우거 右渠], Emperor Wu of Han attacked and destroyed it, and established four commanderies on the land. From then on, most of the peninsula became Chinese territory for several hundred years. Han [한 漢] was the name of the Chinese country at that time, and Emperor Wu took Joseon during the time of our Emperor Kaika [개화 開化], the 9th emperor.³⁰

This is the content of the section on the ancient Korean Peninsula and Northern Joseon in the *Elementary School National History Supplementary Textbook for Children* 『심상소학국사보충교재 유아용尋常小學國史補充教材 兒童用』, which was government-issued textbook for Koreans since 1920 by the Japanese Government-General of Korea. The Japanese Government-General of Korea had

³⁰ Japanese Government-General of Korea, *Supplementary Elementary School National History Textbook for Children, Vol. 1* 『심상소학국사보충아동용 1』 “Ancient Joseon in the Northern Part of the Korean Peninsula” [1. 상고 시대의 조선 반도 북부조선]: “昔, 半島の北部を朝鮮といひ, 支那より箕子來りて其の地に王となれりといふ。其の後, 衛滿と

いふもの此の地方に入り, 箕子の後なる準を逐ひて國を奪へり。衛滿の孫右渠の時, 漢の武帝之を攻め滅し, 其の地に四郡を置けり。これより數百年の間, 半島の大部分は支那の領地となる。漢とは其の時の支那の國名にして, 武帝の朝鮮を取りしは, 我が開化天皇【第九代】の御時なり。” (Source: Our History Net [우리역사 넷])

already defined the location of Gojoseon as the northern part of the Korean Peninsula and taught children about it by setting it as the territories of Gija Joseon, Wiman Joseon, and the Four Han Commanderies. It was also taught that this area was a Chinese territory.

The southern part of the peninsula was inhabited by the Korean Han [한 韓] people, divided into three ethnic groups that ruled Mahan [마한 馬韓], Jinhan [진한 辰韓], and Byeonhan [변한 卍韓]. Although they were all made up of numerous small countries, Mahan later became Baekje, Jinhan became Silla, and Byunhan became countries such as Gara [가라 加羅]. Countries such as Gara are collectively referred to as the Imna Countries [임나제국 任那諸國]. All the countries above were very close to Japan, so they crossed the sea and interacted with each other from early on.³¹

It established that the Samhan [삼한 三韓] people, the roots of Koreans who existed in Liaoxi, Manchuria, and the entire Korean Peninsula, lived in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula, and became Baekje, Silla, and Gaya. The connection between Goguryeo and the Korean people was denied. In addition, it

established the six Gaya states as the Imna Countries and thereby described the Gaya on the Korean Peninsula as Imna.

The instructional guide for teaching this national history was the *Elementary School Japanese History Supplementary Textbook Teaching Reference Book* [『심상소학 일본역사 보충교재 교수참고서 尋常小學日本歴史補充教材 教授參考書』], which established the following guidelines for teaching ancient Korean history.

Lesson Objectives

In this section, the history of the Korean Peninsula is very different in the north and the south. The north was ruled by people from China since ancient times and was therefore a vassal state or territory of China. The south was the residence of the Korean Han people, the ancestors of the Korean people, and this region had close ties with Japan from early times.³²

The instructional guidelines above clarified that the northern part of the Korean peninsula should be taught as a vassal state and territory of China. The following clearly shows the origin of the logic of the Northeast Project, which states that the northern part of the Korean

³¹ Ibid., “Ancient Joseon in the Southern Part of the Korean Peninsula” 1. 상고시대의 조선반도 남부조선. 半島の南部には韓種族住み, 馬韓·辰韓·卍韓の三種にあかる。いづれも數多の小國をなせしが, 後に至り, 馬韓は百濟國となり, 辰韓は新羅國となり, 卍韓は加羅などの國國となれり。加羅などの國國を指して一に任那諸國といふ。以上の國國はいづれも日本と甚だ近ければ, 海を渡りて早くより互に交通せり。(Source: Our History Net [우리역사 넷])

³² Ibid. *Supplementary Teaching Materials for*

Elementary School Japanese History, Instructor's Guide, Vol. 1 [『심상소학일본역사 보충교재 교수참고서 1』], Lesson Objectives: The Korean Peninsula in Ancient Times [상고(上古) 시대의 조선반도, 교수요지 (教授要旨)] 本課に於ては朝鮮半島の沿革は北部と南部とにより大いに其の趣を異にし、北部は古來支那より入り來りたるもの之が統治をなし、從つて支那の屬國又は領土となりたるのと、南部は即ち朝鮮人の祖先たる韓種族の住地にして、此の地方は早くより日本と密接の關係ありしてとを教ふべし。(Source: Our History Net [우리역사 넷])

peninsula was a vassal state of Wiman, Han, Wei, and Jin.

Emperor Wu of Han destroyed Joseon and established four commanderies in its territory: Zhenfan, Xuantu, Lelang, and Lintun. This was the third year of the Yuanfeng era (the 50th year of Emperor Kaika's reign). After 27 years, in the 5th year of Emperor Zhao's reign, they were merged to become the two commanderies of Lelang and Xuantu. [From this time on, Xuantu Commandery went north of the Yalu River, so it became outside the peninsula.] After about 280 years, towards the end of the Later Han Dynasty, during the Jian'an era, the southern part of Lelang Commandery was divided to establish Daifang Commandery, so it became three Commanderies. After the fall of the Later Han Dynasty, the lands of the three Commanderies became the territory of the Wei dynasty. Later, the Jin [진 晉] dynasty arose and unified China, so the three Commanderies again became the territory of Jin. At the end of Jin, they were encroached upon by Goguryeo and Baekje. The Commanderies lasted for approximately 420 years from the third year of the Yuanfeng era during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty to the end of the Jin Dynasty.³³

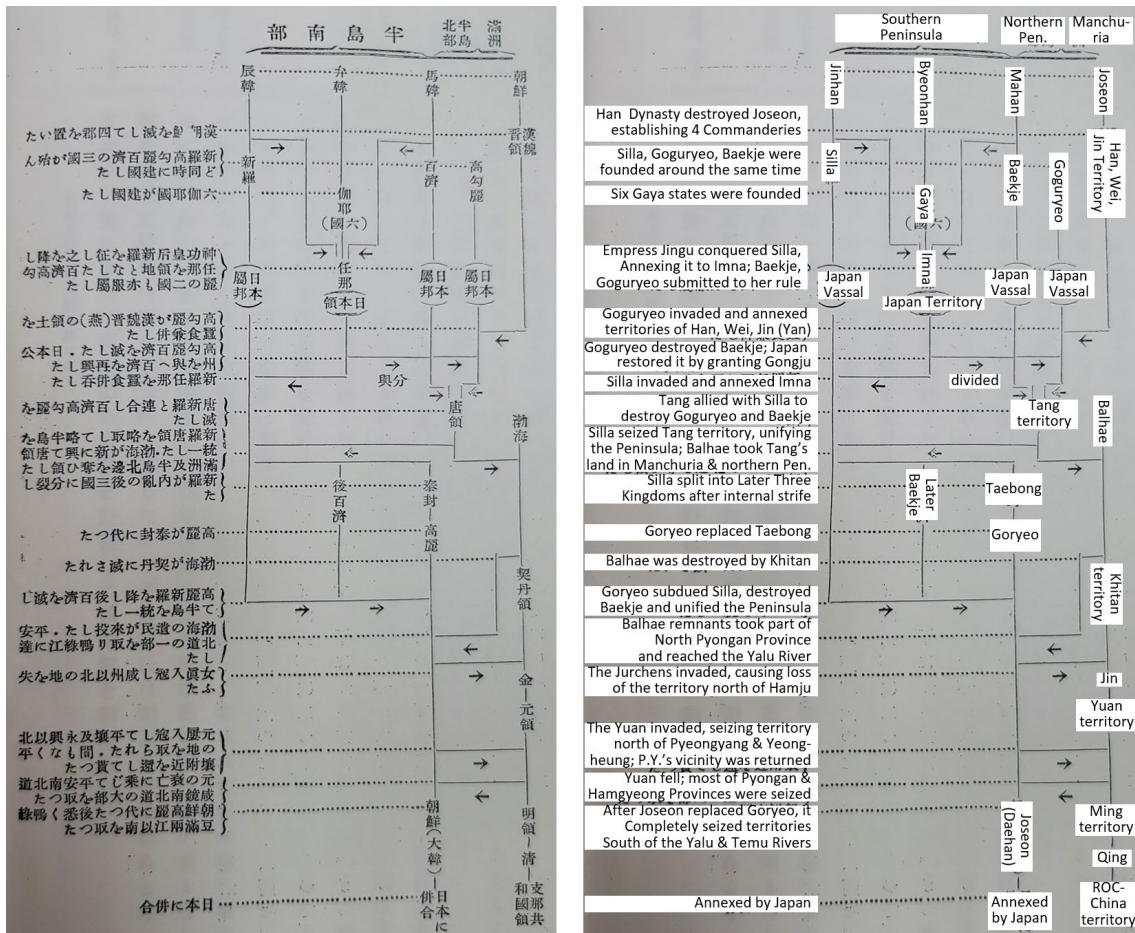
If we look at the above descriptions, we can see that they are exactly the same with the logic of the Northeast Project. For Chinese scholars, it is very difficult to set the location of Wiman and Lelang

Commandery as Pyongyang on the Korean Peninsula through original historical sources. This is because there are no historical documents that recorded it that way. It also requires a great leap of logic to identify the Paesu River mentioned in *Shui Jing Zhu, Commentary on the Waterways Classic* [수경주 水經注] of the Li Daoyuan [역도원 酈道元] as the area around Pyongyang on the Korean Peninsula. Ultimately, the logic of the Northeast Project—that the Korean Peninsula was a vassal state of China—rests on the claim that the Lelang Commandery was located in Pyeongyang, a notion originally invented by the Japanese Government-General of Korea about 100 years ago and subsequently adopted by the Korean historical community. In other words, the northern part of the Korean Peninsula is China's territory, and the southern part of the Korean Peninsula is Japan's (Imna) territory (Chosun History Society 1924, 233). It was the Chinese who, using this logical framework, formalized the theory of the northern Korean peninsula as a vassal state, mapped it as a territorial concept, and described it in their textbooks about 100 years later. If we examine the chronology recorded in the

³³ Ibid., Section 1: The Korean Peninsula in Ancient Times. 1. 상고(上古) 시대의 조선반도, Notes on the Chronology of Han Commanderies 비교(備考) 한사군(漢四郡)의 연혁. 漢の武帝朝鮮を取り、其の地に眞番·玄菟·樂浪·臨屯の四郡を置けり。恰も元封三年 【開化天皇五十年】 なり。其の後二十七年にして、昭帝の始元五年に廢合を行ひて樂浪·玄菟の二郡とし、【玄菟郡は此の時より鴨綠江の北に出でたれば半島の

以外とす。】 それより二百八十餘年を経て、後漢の末に至り、建安年中に樂浪郡の南部を割きて帶方郡を置きたれば、三郡となる。後漢亡びし後、三郡の地は魏の領土となり、次いで晋起りて支那を一統したれば、三郡また其の領土となに、晋末に至り高句麗·百濟二國の爲に蠶食せらる。漢武帝の元封三年より晋末まで四百二十餘年間なり。(Source: Our History Net [우리역사 넷])

Figure 21. System Chart of National Titles [국호 國號] for Korea and Manchuria (Joseon History Society 1924, 230)



General History of Joseon of the Joseon History Society (Figure 21), which contributed to popularizing the Japanese Government-General of Korea’s view of history, we can see that the logic of the vassal state theory was already established at that time.

According to the system chart, the history of Korea dates back to the Gojoseon period, during which it was part of the territories of Han, Wei, and Jin. Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla were vassal

states [속방 屬邦] of Japan, while Gaya was considered part of Japan’s territory as Imna. After the unification of the Three Kingdoms, it became part of the Tang territory, while Balhae and Goryeo were under the territories of the Khitan [거란 契丹], Jin [금 金], and Yuan [원 元]. Joseon was part of the Ming Dynasty and the Republic of China, and ultimately, Joseon (Daehan) was incorporated into Japan, as depicted in the chart. This chart clearly demonstrates the intention of Japanese

imperialism then. It defined Korean history as beginning as a vassal state of Han, Wei, and Jin, and continued as the territories of the vassal states of great powers throughout its history, ultimately leading to the annexation by Japan. Currently, China, through its Northeast Project, is attempting to confine the realm of ancient Korean history to northern Korean Peninsula and label it as a vassal of China in its textbooks. The chart above provides an early glimpse into the historical narratives that may emerge next.

VI. CONCLUSION: TASKS FOR OVERCOMING THE NORTHEAST PROJECT

The continued emergence of maps related to the Northeast Project since its inception poses a potential crisis for future Korean historical academia. While researchers on the Northeast Project have attempted to offer solutions, they have failed to address the fundamental issues at the root of the historical debate. Several proposed solutions to this immediate challenge include the following: Some argue that since the Northeast Project arose from China's domestic concerns about national unity and social stability, one approach is for South Korea to seek ways to alleviate China's concerns and refrain from emotional and nationalistic responses (Yoon, Hwytak 2007, 354–355). Others argues for the need to define, develop counterarguments against China's

historical narrative that frames the tributary [조공 朝貢] and investiture [책봉 冊封] relationship and Gija Joseon, Wiman Joseon, and the Four Han Commanderies as prehistory to Goguryeo, and conduct systematic research on the identity of Goguryeo (Pollack 2014).

Other proposals include inter-academic collaboration and publications to counter the Northeast Project's logic, enhanced history education in schools through textbooks, cultivation of linguists, research and publications (including history maps) on the regional history of Gojoseon, Buyeo, Goguryeo, and Balhae, and the formation of an international collaborative body of nations surrounding China (Kim, Weehoyun 2007, 318–321). The differing historical perspectives—China's territorialist [영토주의 領土主義] view and Korea's successionist [계승주의 繼承主義] view—make consensus difficult, thus necessitating the inclusion of the arguments of the Northeast Project and Chinese perspectives, Korea's historical understanding, and conflict resolution proposals in history textbooks (Ma, Yongjun 2018, 40). Some argue that the potential for escalating Sino-Korean historical disputes into excessive nationalism and patriotism necessitates heightened vigilance especially on the part of the Korean historical community (Lim, Kihwan 2006, 21). Furthermore, countering China's New Northeast Project requires strengthening support for Korean studies and expanding international cultural exchange programs leveraging soft power, such as the Korean Wave (Hallyu). Increased historical and

cultural exchanges with North Korea is also crucial, as is the need for greater corporate social responsibility initiatives in history and culture to counter China's substantial investment in Korean popular culture (Jo, Ahra et al. 2021, 398–403).

The immediate countermeasures that I argue for in this study are as following: As Bok, Gidae clarified, “History, when crossing borders, leads to conflict; therefore, clear boundaries must be established during peacetime. China, through its historical projects, has secured international recognition of its safety within its borders from any conflict arising in Northeast Asia, with the specific example being the Pyeongyang thesis of the Four Han Commanderies” (2016, 45). We need practical countermeasures to this Pyeongyang Thesis of the Han Commanderies. “The Unified Multi-Ethnic State theory is distinct from Chinese Sinocentrism. The latter lacked the modern concept of national borders. However, China's creation of historical maps through the Northeast Project plays a crucial role in asserting territorial sovereignty as depicted on modern maps. In other words, these historical maps demonstrate the existence of clearly defined territorial units from ancient times” (Na, Inho 2007, 3–4). Based on this argument, the author emphasizes the urgent need for a comprehensive re-examination of the Pyeongyang theory of the Lelang Commandery and the publication of a Korean Ancient History Atlas to counter the Northeast Project. Furthermore, based on this, revision of national history [국사개정 國史改正] is

needed to inform the Korean people about the true nature of the Northeast Project.

As discussed above, the problems with the placement of the Four Han Commanderies and Lelang Commandery in Pyongyang have been raised by numerous scholars based on recent archaeological findings and achievements. Our framework of Korean history remained largely unchanged for nearly a century since the publication of the Japanese Government-General of Korea's *History of Joseon*. This stagnation makes it not entirely unreasonable to view it as a factor in making us vulnerable to the Northeast Project. Therefore, it is deemed time to decisively correct the misidentification of Lelang Commandery's location. While learning lessons from the flaws of the previously abandoned 4.7 billion won Northeast Asian History Atlas, it is of paramount importance to compile a new atlas that effectively counters the Northeast Project and revise the country's history textbooks. These are crucial tasks that will determine the future of Korean history.

The Korean Peninsula must prepare for contingencies and unification. Failure to decisively counter neighboring countries' encroachment of history risks the loss of its most precious history and territory in the future. While massive historical distortion has begun, peace still prevails. During this time, ancient historical borders with neighboring countries must be clearly established. This is the path towards future coexistence between China and a unified Korea.

Key Words

Post-Northeast Project, Chinese History Textbooks, Northeast Project, Han Commanderies, Lelang (Nangnang) Commandery, Northeast Asia History Foundation

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