

THE EAST ASIAN EGG-BIRTH MYTHOLOGY AND THE HAN ETHNICITY OF CHINA

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This paper examines the genealogy of countries founded by the Dongyi people, their protagonists, and their connection with the Han ethnicity through egg-birth founding myths. The egg-birth motif appears in the founding myths of various regions, including the Shang Dynasty, Buyeo, Goguryeo, Silla, Gaya, the Western states, and Van Lang in Vietnam, revealing their widespread influence across Vietnam, Northeast Asia, and much of China. These myths connect the Dongyi people to foundational nations like the Shang, Zhou, Buyeo, and Goguryeo, yet have no ties to the Han people. Sima Qian's Han-centric historical framework, linking figures like the Yellow Emperor to the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties, fostered the misconception that these myths are tied to Han heritage. However, historical evidence suggests that all Five Emperors were Dongyi people, highlighting longstanding historical distortions in Chinese historiography.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

This paper examines the relationship between the oviparous founding historical story [난생형 건국사화 卵生形建國史話] distributed in East Asia and the Han [한 漢]

ethnicity of China.² The main focus is on critically evaluating whether the genealogy of the Han ethnicity, which forms the mainstream of today's China, indeed aligns with their claimed founding heroes of the Xia, Yin (Shang),³ and Zhou dynasties.

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² The term *founding historical story* [건국사화 建國史話], often used interchangeably with The term *founding myth* [건국신화 建國神話], refers to “a historical event conveyed as a story through

symbolism and metaphor.” It highlights the historical reality of nation-founding events. Notably, in Korean mainstream academia, the term “myth” is frequently misunderstood to mean “non-factual, imaginary, or fictional,” leading to the wholesale dismissal of any historical basis in events expressed through mythical or legendary narratives.

³ [Translator's Note] The Yin [Eon in Korean, 은 殷] Dynasty is another name for the Shang [상 商] Dynasty. It came to be known as Yin after its capital was relocated to the Yin region, which became the

Sima Qian [사마천 司馬遷] stated that Chinese history began with Emperor Huang [황제 黃帝, also known as Yellow Emperor]. Nowadays, China, through its historical projects, traces its origins to the Three Sovereigns. According to these narratives, the Three Sovereigns [삼황 三皇] and Five Emperors [오제 五帝] are regarded as the forebears of the Han people. This paper aims to evaluate the validity of this claim by analyzing the oviparous founding historical stories recorded in China's primary sources.

The Oviparous founding historical stories appear in the primary sources of Korea, including those of Buyeo [부여 夫餘], Goguryeo [고구려 高句麗], Silla [신라 新羅], and Gaya [가야 伽倻]. According to *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* [사기 史記], these stories are also closely connected to the Yin (Shang) Dynasty [상 商], the Zhou Dynasty [주 周], the State of Xu [서국 徐國], and the Northern Wei [북위 北魏]. Additionally, the egg-birth motif appears in the foundation myths of Vietnam. The presence of this motif in the founding historical stories of Korea, China, and Vietnam provides valuable insights into the formation of these ethnic groups.

According to Ariel Golan (2004,19):

It was not only faith in the magic power of the images which made them so significant. In them people recorded and conveyed to their contemporaries and to future generations what seemed to them vitally important information. As a result, these symbols acquired the

significance of generic memory and reflected relationships between members of the tribe.

Like Golan's argument, the structures and symbols embedded in myths shared across different cultures represent tribal memory and relationships among their members. While slight variations may arise due to spatial movement and the passage of time, the core information often remains largely unchanged. These symbols encapsulate unique knowledge, wisdom, and historical significance. Hence, analyzing similarities or commonalities in these inherited myths among tribes and distinguishing their universal and particular elements provides an effective means for explaining the connections between tribes.

Among the studies on the oviparous founding historical stories, Yoo Youngseon (2001) conducted a comparative analysis of the Jumong Myth [주몽신화 朱蒙神話] of Goguryeo and the Bukuri Yongson Myth [포고리용순신화 布庫哩雍順神話] of Manchuria, discussing the possibility that the latter belongs to the Dongyi [동이 東夷] culture. As is well known, both myths are part of the egg-birth myth tradition. Lee Jihee (2005) classified the egg-birth myths of Asia into Cosmic Egg [우주란 宇宙卵], Divine Egg [신란 神卵], and Human Egg [인란 人卵] and discussed their meanings and characteristics. Kim Hongkyeom (2015) employed a scientific methodology to conduct interdisciplinary research and showed that oviparous

political and cultural center of the dynasty in its later years.

founding historical stories demonstrate that humanity's perception and experience operates in close relationship[with daily practices.

Other scholars investigated the origins and transmission of the egg-birth historical stories. According to Moon Ilhwan (2007), egg-birth myths originated from bird worship and developed around the 20th century BCE. With the introduction of rice cultivation culture via waterways from the Shandong Peninsula or southern China, concepts such as the Heaven-Worship ideology [경천사상 敬天思想], Heavenly Deity Consciousness [천신 의식 天神意識], and Heavenly Emperor Viewpoint [천제 관점 天帝觀點] began to emerge. Kim Jaebung (1971) analyzed the distribution areas of oviparous founding historical stories and further elaborated on Shoen Mishina's [미시나 쇼에이 三品彰英] theory that these founding historical stories originated in the south and influenced the myths of Silla and Gaya through Japan. Mishina's theory of southern transmission aligned with the colonial domination theories [식민지 지배 이론 殖民地支配理論] promoted by Japanese imperialism at the time. However, this theory was criticized by Kim Hwagyeong (2018) who argued that the oviparous founding historical story originates from the Dongyi myth and was transmitted by the Dongyi people as they migrated to both southern China and the Korean Peninsula. Similarly, Park Myeongsuk (2010), in analyzing the relationship between the

Dongyi tribes and the oviparous founding historical story, focused on the presence or absence of the sacredness associated with Dark Birds [현조 玄鳥] in these narratives. The study focuses on the relationship between egg-birth myths and the Dongyi people, emphasizing the analysis of myths and their connection to bird totems.

Previous studies on the oviparous founding historical stories have largely focused on the origins, transmission, or content analysis of the myths, with an emphasis on their identification as Dongyi myths. Furthermore, prior research suggests that the egg-birth founding stories are closely related to the nations founded by the Dongyi people.

However, the nations established by the Dongyi people and their genealogies have been "constructed" as part of the history and founding myths associated with today's Han ethnicity. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the genealogies and mythological subjects of the nations founded by the Dongyi people, focusing on the Oviparous founding historical story, and to reveal when and how these were distorted into the Han ethnicity's founding myths.

For the purpose of this paper, the study excludes myths involving cosmic eggs or legends about the origin of humanity, focusing solely on founding historical stories that feature an egg motif.⁴ This

⁴ There are approximately 50 egg-birth myths in Asia. Lee Jihee (2005) categorized Asian egg-birth myths into various types, excluding the story of Xie, the founder of the Shang Dynasty, from her

classification of 46 egg-birth myths across 10 countries, including Korea, Vietnam, Myanmar, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, and India. However, Xie's story

includes the founding historical stories of Yin (Shang)'s progenitor, Xie [설契], as well as the founding stories of Buyeo, Goguryeo, Silla, Gaya, the Western states of the Warring States period, and Vietnam. Therefore, the study primarily relies on Chinese primary sources such as *Shiji*, *Records of the Grand Historian* [사기 史記], *Lunheng*, *Critical Essays* [논형 論衡], *Bowu Zhi*, *Records of Diverse Matters* [박물지 博物志], and the Vietnamese source, *Linh Nam Chich Quai*, *Records of Strange Stories from South of the Mountains* (also known as *Linh Nam Chich Quai Liệt Truyện* [영남척괴열전 嶺南摭怪列傳]).⁵

II. THE CONTENTS OF OVIPAROUS FOUNDING MYTHS

Asian oviparous founding historical stories can broadly be categorized into Cosmic Egg [우주란 宇宙卵] and Progenitor Egg [시조란 始祖卵]. In Cosmic Egg stories, beings born from the cosmic egg—such as

should be included in the egg-birth myths because his mother, Jiandi, swallowed an egg. Additionally, although the founding historical story of Goguryeo and the myth of King Dongmyeong [동명왕 東明王] share the same structure, they should be regarded as separate myths because the founding myth of Goguryeo differs from the founding myth of Buyeo.

⁵ The *Linh Nam Chich Quai*, *Records of Strange Stories from South of the Mountains* is a collection of myths and legends from Vietnam compiled in the late 14th century. It is described as “not only the first Vietnamese text to collect myths about the origins of the Vietnamese people and the foundation of the state, but also a book in which the

energy, humans, or gods—create all things in heaven and earth, including humans. Representative examples include the Pangu Myth [반고신화 盤古神話] and the myths of Chinese ethnic minority groups such as the Yi people [이족 彝族]⁶, the Miao people [마오족/묘족 苗族], the Zhuang people [장족 壯族], the Naxi people [나시족 納西族], the Dai people [다이족 傣族], the Kachin people [까친족] of Myanmar, the Rejang people [레장족] and Sundanese people [순다족] of Indonesia, and the Kalavinka [가릉빈가 迦陵頻伽] myths of India and Mongolia, and the Muong people [므응족] of Vietnam (Lee Jihee 2005).

Progenitor Egg myths are further divided into Progenitor Myths [시조신화 始祖神話] and Founding Myths [건국신화 建國神話]. “Progenitor myths” deal with the origin of humanity or the origin of a tribe, and sometimes the progenitor of a tribe is also considered the progenitor of humanity. Examples include the myths of the Naxi people, the Mosuo people [모수어인족 摩梭語人族], the Dong people [동족 侗族], the Dai people, the Miao people, and the Li people [리족 黎族] of China; those of

Vietnamese themselves speak about their beliefs, worldview, national consciousness, unique customs, mountains, rivers, and heroes.” It is a text relevant to not just literature and history, but also intellectual history, anthropology, folklore, and mythology.

⁶ [Translator's Note] Although Romanized in the same way, this Yi people are distinct from the Yi [이夷] or Dongyi (Eastern Yi) [동이 東夷] people who resided northeast of China. The Yi people [이족 彝族] are believed to have descended from the ancient Qiang [창 羌] people and later settled in the mountainous regions of southwestern China, including Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi.

Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Japan.

The egg-birth “founding myth” refers to a founding myth in which the protagonist of the founding story is born from an egg. Among these myths, some feature human women as mediators, while others involve non-human mediators. Myths from the Yin (Shang) Dynasty, the Western countries, Buyeo, and Goguryeo fall into the former category, whereas the myths of Silla and Gaya belong to the latter, involving non-human mediators.

Let us first take a closer look at the former case. According to *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*, Xie was born after his mother swallowed an egg.⁷

Xie, the progenitor of the Yin (Shang) Dynasty, was born to Jiandi [간척 簡狄]. Jiandi was the daughter of Youxiong and became the second consort of Emperor Ku [제곡 帝嚳, Translator’s note: one of the Five Emperors of China and considered a descendent of Huangdi, Yellow Emperor]. The three of them went to bathe when they saw a Black Bird [현조 玄鳥] drop an egg. Jiandi took it and swallowed the egg, resulting in the birth of Xie.⁸

Eggs are closely related to the birth of life (Golan 2004) and have symbolic significance in heralding a new era of brightness (Kim Honggyeom 2015). Let us now turn to the story of King Xiyan [서연왕

西偃王] of the State of Xu [서국 徐國]. King Xiyan was said to have been born directly from an egg. When a concubine of King of Xu became pregnant and gave birth to an egg, it was deemed inauspicious and discarded by a river. A dog named Huchang [곡창 鶻蒼] retrieved the egg and brought it to a widow, who kept it warm. Eventually, a child emerged from the egg. Because the child lay straight, he was named Yan [연 偃]. Upon hearing of this miraculous birth, the King of Xu brought the child to the palace and raised him as his own son. Yan later succeeded to the throne of Xu.

When did King Xiyan live? Although he is said to have lived during the same period as King Mu [목왕 穆王] of the Zhou Dynasty [주 周], they were not likely to be contemporaries (Yuan Ke 2010).

According to *Hou Han Shu, Book of Later Han*,

During the reign of King Kang [강왕 康王] of Zhou, the Sushen [숙신 肅慎] returned. Later, Xu Yi [서이 徐夷] usurped the title and led Nine Yi (or, Gu Yi [구이 九夷]) in a campaign against the royal Zhou capital, reaching as far as the banks of the Yellow River. King Mu, fearing their growing power, divided the eastern territories among the feudal lords and appointed King Xiyan to govern them.⁹

⁷ Park Myeongsuk (2010) categorizes it as an egg-birth myth in a broad sense. In a broader definition, egg-birth myths encompass any myths involving eggs, while the narrower definition refers specifically to myths where the protagonist is directly born from an egg.

⁸ *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* 『사기 史記』. Annals of the Yin (Shang) Dynasty 『은본기 殷本紀』: “殷契，母曰簡狄，有娥氏之女，爲帝嚳次妃。三人行浴，見玄鳥墮其卵，簡狄取吞之，因孕生契。”

⁹ *Hou Han Shu, Book of Later Han* 『후한서 後漢書』. Chronicles of Dongyi [동이전 東夷傳]:

King Kang and King Mu were rulers of the Zhou Dynasty in the 11th to 10th centuries BCE. King Kang was the third king of the dynasty and King Mu was the fifth. King Xiyan governed the State of Xu during their reigns.

Figures with mythological narratives similar to King Xiyan include King Dongmyeong [동명왕 東明王] of Buyeo and Jumong [주몽 朱蒙], the founder of Goguryeo. *Lunheng, Critical Essays* (Chapter on Extraordinary Journeys 「길험편 吉驗篇」) recounts the birth story of King Dongmyeong as follows: The King of the Takli Kingdom [탁리국 拓里國] of the Northern Yi [북이 北夷] attempted to kill his concubine after she became pregnant. She explained, “I was impregnated by a great aura, resembling an egg, that descended from heaven,” and later gave birth to a son, who would become King Dongmyeong. The story of Jumong of Goguryeo is similar. Instead of a concubine, Yuhwa [유화 柳花], the daughter of Habaek [하백 河伯], the god of rivers, became pregnant by receiving sunlight and laid an egg (Kim Busik 1997).

Similar narrative components can be found in the founding myth of Vietnam’s King Hung of the Kingdom of Van Lang [문랑국 웅왕 文郎國 雄王].

The descendant of Shennong [신농 神農], Emperor Yan, entrusted state affairs to Chiwoo [Chiyou in Chinese, 치우 蚩尤] and took his daughter, Gu Hui [구희 嫗姬], along with her attendants, to tour Chiguigui [literally meaning Red

Ghost Kingdom, 적귀국 赤鬼國] in the south. At that time, the ruler of Chiguigui, Lord Luoyong [낙용군 駱勇君], had left for Subu [수부 宿府], and was not present. Emperor Yan left Gu Hui at the Temporary Imperial Residence and continued to travel the world. Upon returning from Subu, Lord Luoyong was delighted to find Gu Hui alone. After living together for a year, Gu Hui gave birth to a hemp plant, which was considered an ill omen, and abandoned it in the field. After seven days, the plant opened, revealing 100 eggs. Each egg produced a male child, who were brought back and raised. Remarkably, without being nursed, the boys grew up on their own. They were extraordinary in appearance, full of wisdom and bravery. The people, fearing their strength, submitted to them, calling them the “extraordinary brothers.”

Since Lord Luoyong had been in Subu, he did not know he had children, and likewise, the children did not know they had a father. When Gu Hui and her sons attempted to return to the northern lands, Emperor Yan, fearful of their power, blocked their path at the border. They then returned to the southern lands and summoned Lord Luoyong from Subu. Gu Hui and Lord Luoyong divided the sons into two groups: Lord Luoyong took fifty sons with him, while Gu Hui and the remaining fifty sons stayed in Fengzhou [봉주 蓬州]. Among the sons, the most magnificent was chosen as the king, and they named the kingdom Van Lang (Wu Qiong 2000).

Unlike the myths of Xie, Daye [대업 大業],¹⁰ King Dongmyeong, and Jumong,

“康王之時，肅慎復至。後徐夷僭號，乃率九夷以伐宗周，西至河上。穆王畏其方熾，乃分東方諸侯，命徐偃王主之。”

¹⁰ See page 184 for a detailed account of Daye’s birth myth.

the myth of King Hung of Van Lang involves a single hemp plant¹¹ that produced 100 eggs. Symbolically, 100 eggs emerging from one hemp plant, representing the membrane and placenta enclosing the babies, can be interpreted as signifying a shared lineage or common origin.

Notably, the myth of Seok Talhae [석탈해 昔脫解] shares similarities. Seok Talhae's father was the Dragon King [용왕 龍王], and his mother was the adopted daughter of Jeoknyeo-guk (Kingdom of Many Women, 적녀국 積女國) (Kim Busik 1998).¹² After seven years of marriage, they laid an egg. Viewing this as a bad omen, the ministers crafted a chest, set it afloat, and prayed that wherever it reached, a kingdom would be established. The chest eventually arrived in Silla (Ilyeon 2002).

In all these stories, the founding figures were born from eggs carried by human mothers. Although Xie and Daye were not directly born from eggs, their mothers, Jiandi and Nuxiu [여수 女脩], consumed eggs dropped by the mystical Black Bird and subsequently gave birth to them. Thus, they can be included in this category. While King Xiyan, King Dongmyeong, Jumong, and King Hung were born from eggs and emerged into the world after breaking out of their shells, Xie and Daye can be interpreted as having

metaphorically “broken their eggs” within their mother's wombs before being born.

The stories of Hyeokgeose [혁거세 赫居世] of Silla and King Suro [수로왕 首露王] of Gaya feature different mediators between heaven and earth. The birth story of Hyeokgeose is as follows: While the chiefs of the six clans were discussing the selection of a king on Alcheon hill, they saw in the south a strange light, shining down from the heavens like lighting onto a well called Najeong at the base of Mt. Yangsan. There, they found a white horse kneeling and bowing. As they approached, they discovered a single red egg. The horse, upon seeing the men, neighed loudly and ascended to the sky. When they broke open the egg, they found a boy inside (Ilyeon 2002).

King Suro's birth story is as follows: At Gujibong hill [구지봉 龜旨峰], a chant echoed through the air. “Oh spirit, oh spirit, send Suro out. If you don't, we will roast and eat him.” As they followed the sound, a purple rope descended from the sky. At the end of the rope was a golden box wrapped in a cloth adorned with red trim. When they opened the box, they discovered six round eggs, each shining like the sun (Ilyeon 2002). In the founding myths of Silla and Gaya, the mediators were a white horse and a golden box, respectively.

However, the differences in mediators sometimes reflect the varying degrees of

¹¹ The term refers to the amniotic sac and placenta surrounding a fetus.

¹² In *Samguk Sagi, The History of Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea*, it is written, “Talhae was

originally from the Kingdom of Dapana, and his father married the daughter of the king of Ye [여국 女國], taking her as his wife.”

hardship that the heroes must endure. Founding figure born from an egg through their mothers often follow the archetypal “hero’s journey.” This journey is marked by miraculous birth, abandonment, hardship, and eventual triumph, culminating in the founding of a nation. While Xie and Daye lack the motif of hunger as an ordeal, their miraculous birth alone is sufficient to grant them the legitimacy to establish a nation.

Another notable characteristic is the lingering traces of a matrilineal society. In the myths of Xie, Daye, King Xiyan, King Dongmyeong, and Jumong, the names or statuses of their mothers are known, but the identity of their fathers remains ambiguous, often vaguely attributed to “Heaven.” In the stories of Jumong and King Hung, while the fathers’ names are mentioned, little is known about their actions beyond ascending to the heavens or returning to Subu. Thus, the egg-birth founding historical stories involving a human mother reflect the societal transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal structure.

In contrast, when the mediator is non-human, such as a white horse or a golden box, the myth is more closely associated with the establishment of a patrilineal society. The direct descent motif, in which the founding figure emerges from a mediator located at the end of a descending ray of light from heaven, symbolizes the solidification of the patrilineal order (Moon Ilhwan 2007). All egg-birth founding historical stories are connected to heaven: the protagonist may receive sunlight, a mystical bird may drop the egg

from heaven, or the figure may descend directly from the heavens. These founding figures are granted legitimacy to establish a nation as they are regarded sacred descendants of heaven, Heavenly Descendants, or individuals sent by divine mandate.

III. THE DISTRIBUTION OF OVIPAROUS FOUNDING MYTHS

Where, then, are the egg-birth myths geographically distributed? To address this question, we begin by examining the Yin (Shang) Dynasty, founded by King Xie. The Yin Dynasty was located around present-day Henan Province [하남성 河南省]. Zhengzhou [정주 鄭州] was one of the early capitals of the Yin Dynasty, and the Yin Ruins were excavated in the Anyang area. Fu Sinian, in his *Theory of Eastern Yi and Western Xia*, stated that “the fact that the place name ‘Bo’ [박 亳] in the phrase ‘Sushen Yan Bo [숙신연박 肅慎燕亳]’ was mentioned alongside Sushen and Yan suggests that it was likely located near them. If so, the Bo referred to here corresponds to the Bohai [발해 渤海] coast in today’s Hebei Province [하북성 河北省]” (Fu 2011, 115). Moreover, the Shandong Province [산둥성 山東省] region was an area where the Dongyi [동이 東夷] people were historically active (Zhang Wei 2011).

What about the location of the State of Xu [서국 徐國], founded by King Xiyan [서연왕 西偃王]. Fu Sannian noted that the

territory of Xu “originally belonged to the Lu State [노나라 魯國], but later they were driven by the Duke of Zhou and Duke of Lu to guard the Huai River [회수 淮水]. According to Duyue’s [두예 杜預] commentary on the Xi [희공 僖公] Year 3 entry of the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, *Zuo Commentary on Spring and Autumn Annals* [춘추좌전 春秋左傳], the ‘State of Xu was located southeast of Dong County [동현 東縣] in Xia Pi Province [하비군 下邳郡]”¹³ (Fu 2011, 219). Xia Pi Province is located southeast of present-day Suqian County [숙천현 宿遷縣] in Jiangsu Province [강소성 江蘇省] (Zang Liyue 1982).

Regarding the location of the Kingdom of Van Lang in Vietnam’s founding myth, the geographical names mentioned in the story offer valuable clues. According to the myth, Gu Hui and the remaining fifty sons settled in Fengzhou [봉주 峯州]. The territory of Van Lang is described as “bordering the South China Sea [남해 南海] to the east, Ba Shu [파촉 巴蜀] to the west, Dongting Lake [동정호 洞庭湖] to the north, and Husun Jing Kingdom [호손정국 狐獠精國] to the south” (Wu Qiong 2000:21).

According to Wu’s annotation, Fengzhou is identified as “present-day Baihe County [백학현 白鶴縣].” Wu Qiong (2000) noted in the preface of his book that he first acquired and corrected the book in the spring of 1492. Given that he annotated the book in 1492, Fengzhou of that time corresponds to present-day northern Vietnam (Zang Liyue 1982).

Park Heebyung, the translator of *Linh Nam Chich Quai, Records of Strange Stories from South of the Mountains*, noted that the South China Sea refers to the present-day Guangdong Province [광동성 廣東省], while Husun Jing Kingdom refers to central Vietnam. Dongting Lake, located in the northern part of Hunan Province [호남성 湖南省], is the largest freshwater lake in China (Zang Liyue 1982).

King Hung of Van Lang divided the country into 15 regions, which included Jiaozhi (교지 交趾), Zhuyuan (주연 朱鸞), Liuhai (육해 陸海), Fulu (복록 福祿), Yueshang (월상 越裳), Ninghai (영해 寧海), Yangquan (양천 陽泉), Guiyang (계양 桂陽), Wuning (무녕 武寧), Huaihuan (회환 懷驩), Jiuzhen (구진 九真), Rinan (일남 日南), Zhending (진정 眞定), Guilin (계림 桂林), and Xiang County (상군 象郡) (Wu Qiong 2000, 21-22). The exact founding period of Van Lang remains unclear, but the approximate locations of these 15 regions can be identified through accounts recorded during the Qin and Han dynasties.

Regarding Zhending [진정 眞定], the Chronicles of Nanyue section of *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* states that:

Wei Tuo, the King of Nanyue was from Zhending and bore the surname Zhao. During the Qin Dynasty, the empire had already unified and they conquered Yangyue [양월 楊越], establishing Guilin [계림 桂林], Nanhai [남해 南海], and Xiang County [상군 象郡], relocating people there, where they alongside the Yue people for 13 years.¹⁴

¹³ “徐國在下邳使縣東南。”

¹⁴ *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* 『사기 史記』 Chronicles of Nanyue 「남월열전 南越列傳」:

Annotations by commentators of *Shiji*¹⁵ further clarify the locations of Yangyue, Guilin, Nanhai, and Xiang County. Regarding Xiang County [상군 象郡], the *Shiji Jijie, Collected Interpretations of Shiji* cites Xu Guang as saying, “It was 13 years from when the Qin unified the world to the first year of the second emperor. Eighth years after unifying the world, the Yue lands were pacified, In the first year of the second emperor, six years passed.”¹⁶ This indicates that Xiang County was established in 213 BCE, the year the Qin dynasty pacified the Yue State. According to the *New Translation of Shiji* (2011), the administrative center of Xiang County was Linjin [임진 臨塵], which corresponds to present-day Chongzuo City [송좌 崇左] in Guangxi Province [광서 廣西].¹⁷

Regarding Nanyue [남월 南越], the *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* states,

“Its capital was Nanhai County [남해현 南海縣], in Guangzhou [광주 廣州].”¹⁸

On Zhending [진정 眞定], Sima Zhen [사마정 司馬貞] quoted Ying Shao [응소 應劭], explaining that Zhending was originally the name of a commandery, later changed to a county, located in Shangshan [상산 常山].¹⁹ The *New Translation of Shiji* (2011) notes that Zhending is situated northeast of present-day Shijiazhuang [석가장 石家莊] in Hebei Province [하북성 河北省].²⁰

Guilin [계림 桂林] was both the name of a Qin Dynasty commandery and its administrative center, located southwest of present-day Guiping [계평 桂平] in Guangxi Province [광서 廣西].²¹

Wei Tuo, the King of Nanyue, served as the Magistrate of Longchuan [용천 龍川] of Nanhai County during the Qin Dynasty.²² About Longchuan, Sima Zhen stated, “It was the name of a county

南越王尉佗者，眞定人也，姓趙氏。秦時已并天下，略定楊越，置桂林、南海、象郡，以謫徙民，與越雜處十三歲

¹⁵ [Translator’s Note] Sima Qian’s [사마천 司馬遷] *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* 『사기 史記』 was annotated by numerous scholar historians as footages to the original texts. They correct errors and add clarifications and missing information in the original texts. The most authoritative of these are so-called Commentaries by the Three Scholars [삼가주석 三家註釋]: ① *Shiji Jijie, Collected Interpretations of Shiji* 『(사기)집해 (史記)集解』 by Pei Yin [배인 裴駟] of the Song dynasty; ② *Shiji Suoyin, Search for Hidden Meanings of Shiji* 『(사기)색은 (史記)索隱』 by Sima Zhen [사마정 司馬貞] of the Tang Dynasty; and ③ *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* 『(사기)정의 (史記)正義』 by Zhang Shoujie [장수절 張守節], also of the Tang Dynasty.

¹⁶ *Shiji Jijie, Collected Interpretations of Shiji* 『(사기)집해 (史記)集解』: 徐廣曰:「秦并天下，至二世元年十三年并天下八歲，乃平越地，至二世元年六年耳。」

¹⁷ *New Translation of Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*. 『신역사기 新譯史記』: 象郡，秦郡名，郡治臨塵(今廣西崇左).

¹⁸ *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* 『사기정의 史記正義』: 都廣州南海縣

¹⁹ *Shiji Suoyin, Search for Hidden Meanings of Shiji* 『사기색은 史記索隱』: 韋昭曰:“故郡名，後更爲縣，在常山.”

²⁰ *New Translation of Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*. 『신역사기 新譯史記』: 眞定 漢縣名，縣治在今河北石家莊東北.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 桂林 秦郡名，郡治在今廣西桂平西南

²² *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* 『사기 史記』: 佗，秦時用爲南海龍川令.

belonging to Nanhai.”²³ Zhang Shoujie [장수절 張守節], quoting Yan Shigu, explained that Nanhai County corresponds to what was then present-day Shunzhou [순주 順州]. He also clarified the origin of the name Longchuan, referencing *The Bai Clan's Records of Guangzhou*, which attributed the name a legend about a dragon breaking through the ground.²⁴ According to the *New Translation of Shiji* (2011), the administrative center of Nanhai was Panyu [번웅 番禺], which is now the city of Guangzhou [광주시 廣州市].²⁵

Regarding Yangyue [양월 楊越], the *Shiji Jijie* records: “Zhang Yan said, ‘Yangzhou is Nanyue.’”²⁶ The *Shiji Suoyin* adds: “According to *Strategies of the Warring States* [전국책 戰國策], ‘Wu Qi conquered Yangyue for the Chu State.’”²⁷ The *Shiji Zhengyi* further explains that “Haoyu’s [하우 夏禹] Nine Provinces originally included Yangzhou, hence the term Yangyue.”²⁸ The *New Translation of Shiji* (2011) notes that Yangyue refers to the vast areas of present-day Guangdong Province [광동성 廣東省], Fujian Province [복건성 福建省], eastern Guangxi Province [광서성 廣西省], southern Hunan Province [호남성 湖南省], and northern Vietnam.²⁹ This spans southern China and northern Vietnam.

The founding myth of Vietnam also refers to the Baiyue [백월 百越], and since Baiyue were the people who formed Van Lang, we can infer something about their ethnic identity.

At that time, the people living in the forests and mountain foothills often suffered attacks from a water dragon while fishing in the rivers. When they reported this to the king, the king said, “The mountain dwellers are different from the water people. The water dragon favors its own kind and dislikes outsiders, which is why it attacks you.” He then ordered the people to tattoo the images of a dragon king and aquatic monsters onto their bodies with ink. After that, the water dragon no longer harmed the people. The practice became the origin of the tattooing tradition among the Baiyue people (Wu Qiong 2000, 22).

The tattooing custom of the Baiyue was intended to signify that the mountain dwellers and the water dragon are of the same kind. Park Heebyung, who translated Wu’s book, commented that the “mountain dwellers” generally refer to the southern ethnic groups living in the mountains of southern China, and in this context, it specifically refers to the Vietnamese. He also noted that the term *Baiyue* broadly referred to the Yue [월 越] people who

²³ *Shiji Suoyin, Search for Hidden Meanings of Shiji* 『사기색은 史記索隱』: 地理志縣名, 屬南海也.

²⁴ *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* 『사기정의 史記正義』: 顏師古云: 「龍川南海縣也, 卽今之循州也。」裴氏廣州記云: 「本博羅縣之東鄉, 有龍穿地而出, 卽穴流泉, 因以爲號也。」

²⁵ *New Translation of Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*. 『신역사기 新譯史記』: 南海 秦郡名, 郡治番禺 (今廣州市)

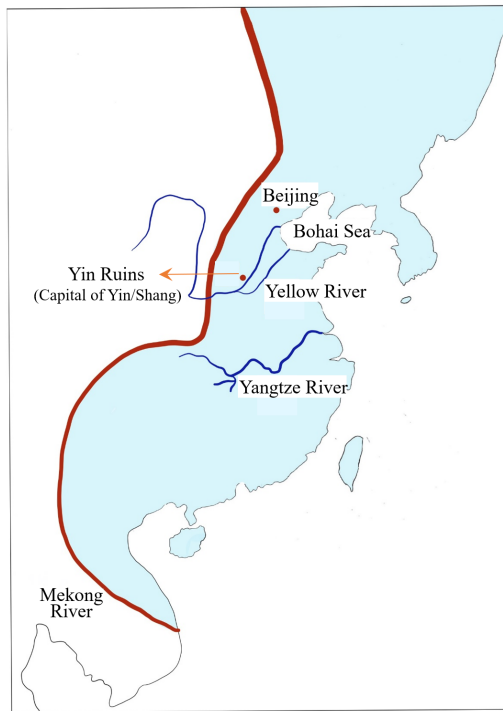
²⁶ *Shiji Jijie, Collected Interpretations of Shiji* 『사기집해 史記集解』: 張晏曰: 「楊州之南越也.

²⁷ *Shiji Suoyin, Search for Hidden Meanings of Shiji* 『사기색은 史記索隱』: 案: 戰國策云吳起爲楚收楊越.

²⁸ *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* 『사기정의 史記正義』: 夏禹九州本屬楊州, 故云楊越.

²⁹ *New Translation of Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*. 『신역사기 新譯史記』: 楊越, 指今廣東·福建·以及廣西東部·湖南南部·越南北部等廣大地區

Figure 1. The Distribution of the Egg-Birth Founding Myths



inhabited southern China and northern Vietnam.

The Commentary of Guliang on the Spring and Autumn Annals states, “The State of Wu [오 吳] is a country of the Yi [이 夷] and Di [적 狄] tribes. Its people shave their heads and tattoo their bodies.”³⁰ The State of Wu, located south of the Yangtze

River, shared the tattooing custom, suggesting a cultural connection with the Baiyue. If we recall that the Vietnam War was once referred to as the War in South Yue [월남 越南] in Korean, it can be inferred that the Baiyue were the ancestors of the modern Vietnamese population.

In the *Shiji*, an entry in the Annals of Xiang Yu mentions, “Wu Rui [오예 吳芮],³¹ the Lord of Po [파군 鄱君],³² led the Baiyue to assist the feudal lords and later followed them into the Hangu Pass [함곡관 函谷關].”³³ The *Shiji Jijie* annotates that Wu Rui “was first made Magistrate of Po, hence the title ‘Lord of Po.’ Present-day Poyang County is located there.”³⁴ If Wu Rui, as the Magistrate of Po, led the Baiyue to Hangu Pass, it suggests that the Baiyue inhabited Po at the time. Poyang County is situated east of Poyang Lake, in the northeastern part of Jiangxi Province [강서성 江西省], south of the Yangtze River.

According to the Annals of Qin Shi Huang in *Shiji*, Qin Shi Huang “took the lands of the Baiyue to the south and established Guilin [계림 桂林] and Xiang County [상군 象郡]. The Lord of Baiyue bowed his head, put a rope around his neck,

³⁰ *Chunqiu Guliang Zhuan, The Commentary of Guliang on the Spring and Autumn Annals* 『춘추곡량전 春秋穀梁傳』: 吳夷狄之國也。祝髮文身

³¹ On Wu Rui [오예 吳芮]: *Shiji Jijie, Collected Interpretations of Shiji* 『(사기)집해 (史記)集解』 explains that “Wu Rui became Magistrate of Po, which is why he was called Lord of Po [파군 鄱君]. Today’s Poyang County [파양현 鄱陽縣] corresponds to this place.”

³² On Lord of Po [파군 鄱君]: *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* 『(사기)정의 (史記)正義』 explains that “(It) is Lord of Po [파군 番君]. Po [파 番] is pronounced like Po [파 婆].”

³³ *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* 『사기 史記』 Annals of Xiang Yu 「항우본기 項羽本紀」: 鄱君吳芮率百越佐諸侯又從入關.

³⁴ *Shiji Jijie, Collected Interpretations of Shiji* 『사기 집해 史記集解』: 韋昭曰: ...初, 吳芮爲鄱令, 故號曰鄱君. 今鄱陽縣是也.

and submitted to the officials.”³⁵ Regarding the Baiyue, the *Shiji Jijie* notes that “Wei Zhao commented that there were many towns in the Yue state.” Based on the account that Qin Shi Huang’s conquest of the Baiyue territories *to the south* during his unification of the empire, it can be inferred that Baiyue was located south of the Yangtze River.

In sum, founding myths featuring the egg-birth motif are distributed across the Korean Peninsula, the Bohai Sea coast, the eastern coast of China, the South China Sea area, and as far as Vietnam. Figure 1 visually demonstrates that most of ancient China fell within the cultural sphere influenced by these egg-birth founding myths.

IV. EGG-BIRTH MYTHS AND THE HAN ETHNICITY

Sima Qian [사마천 司馬遷] identified Emperor Huang Emperor as the ancestor of the Han [한 漢] ethnicity and claimed that their descendants founded the Xia [하 夏], Shang [상 商, or Yin 은 殷], and Zhou [주 周] dynasties. Today, these dynasties are considered integral to China’s history, creating the impression that they were established by the ethnic Han people.

³⁵ *Shiji* 『사기 史記』 Annals of Qin Shi Huang [진시황본기 秦始皇本紀]: 南取百越之地, 以爲桂林, 象郡, 百越之君俛首係頸, 委命下吏

³⁶ Yuan Ke meant by the term “ancient China” to refer to regions that are part of present-day Chinese

territory. In ancient times, the term “Dongyi” meant “eastern barbarians.” It is self-evident that people would not refer to their own group as barbarians.

However, when examining the geographical distribution of egg-birth myths, which span northeast China, the Bohai Sea coast, the Shandong Peninsula, and the southern regions, raises some questions. First, were the protagonists of these egg-birth origin stories actually Han people? Second, if they were not Han, what was their relationship with the Han? Founding myths are significant ideological tools that establish the legitimacy and sanctity of a nation’s founders. As such, they are typically created and disseminated by those founders themselves.

EGG-BIRTH MYTHS AS THE DONGYI ORIGIN STORIES

Let us examine the identity of the protagonists in the egg-birth myths. Yuan Ke stated, “The surname Xu [서 徐] originally derived from Ying [영 嬴], which is a branch of the ancient Dongyi [or Eastern Yi, 동이 東夷] people. Myths involving birds and egg-birth were widely spread among these peoples of the eastern regions of ancient China” (Yuan 2010, 387).³⁶ Yuan Ke, a Chinese mythologist, asserts that myths involving birds and egg-birth were Dongyi myths. Zhang Guangzhi supports this claim, stating: “The egg-birth origin myths were prevalent among the peoples of the eastern coast of China and Northeast

Asia in ancient times”³⁷ (Zhang G. 1994, 26).

The Shaohao [소호 少昊, one of the legendary Five Emperors] Jin Tian Clan (금천씨 金天氏), who named official titles after birds,³⁸ are credited with producing several notable surnames, including Ying [영 嬴], Ji [기 紀], Yan [연 僊], and Yun [윤 允]. The *Zuo's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals* and other ancient texts originally used the term “clan” [씨 氏] to categorize families (Fu 2011). In Chinese academic circles, the Shaohao Jin Tian Clan is acknowledged as part of the Dongyi people.

According to Yuan Ke and Zhang Guangzhi, the clans with egg-birth origin myths were all part of the Dongyi people. If that is the case, then not only the Yin (Shang) Dynasty, but even the Qin [진 秦] Dynasty originated from the Dongyi. Sima Qian wrote:

“The ancestors of the Qin Dynasty were descended from Emperor Zhuanxu [전욱 顓頊], whose great-grandchild was Nuxiu [여수 女脩]. While Nuxiu was weaving, a Black Bird dropped an egg. Nuxiu swallowed the egg and later gave birth to Daye [대업 大業].”³⁹

The founding myth of the Qin Dynasty parallels that of the Shang Dynasty. As will be elaborated later on Emperor Zhuanxu,

the founding figure of the Qin dynasty, Daye, was born after Nuxiu swallowed an egg dropped by a mystical bird. Since Emperor Zhuanxu was the grandson of Emperor Huang, this egg-birth founding myth strongly implies that Emperor Huang’s lineage was part of the Dongyi people. If the grandson was an ethnic Dongyi person, then it follows that the grandfather could not have been ethnic Han.

Meanwhile, according to Sima Qian, the State of Xu [서국 徐國] belonged to the Ying [영 嬴] Clan. “The Grand Historian (Sima Qian) wrote: ‘The ancestors of the Qin Dynasty bore the surname, Ying. Later, they were enfeoffed with land and adopted the names of their respective states as their surnames, such as Xu [서 徐], Tan [담 鄆], Ju [거 莒], Zhongli [중려 終黎], Yunyin [운엄 運奄], Tuqiu [도구 菟裘], Jiangliang [장량 將梁], Huang [황 黃], Jiang [강 江], Xiuyu [수어 脩魚], Baiming [백명 白冥], Feilian [비림 蜚廉], and Qin [진 秦]. However, the Qins traced their ancestry to Zaofu [조부 造父] who was granted the city of Zhao and thus became the Zhao [조 趙] clan.’”⁴⁰

This indicates that the State of Xu was one of the 13 countries associated with the Ying Clan, from which the ancestors of the Qin Dynasty originated. In other words, the Shang Dynasty, the Qin Dynasty, and the State of Xu—all of which share egg-birth

³⁷ “卵生型の始祖誕生神話は 古代の中國東海岸や東北アジアの人人の間で廣まっていた。”

³⁸ See *Zuo Zhuan, Zuo's Commentary* [좌전 左傳] Vol. 17. Duke Zhao [소공 昭公], Chronicles [전 傳].

³⁹ *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* 『사기 史記』, Annals of Qin 「진본기 秦本紀」: 秦之先, 帝顓頊之苗裔孫曰女脩. 女脩織, 玄鳥隕卵, 女脩吞之, 生子大業

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 太史公曰: 秦之先爲嬴姓. 其後分封, 以國爲姓, 有徐氏, 鄆氏, 莒氏, 終黎氏, 運奄氏, 菟裘氏, 將梁氏, 黃氏, 江氏, 脩魚氏, 白冥氏, 蜚廉氏, 秦氏. 然秦以其先造父封趙城 爲趙氏.

founding myths—were part of the Dongyi people.

What, then, is the connection between the egg-birth founding myth of the Kingdom of Van Lang in Vietnam and the myths of the Dongyi peoples? According to Moisheson, the founding historical stories of the Dongyi and Vietnamese peoples share a genetic connection. He states:

When two phenomena are all of a sudden found to exhibit a coincidence of several properties, it is hard to shake off the impression that there is a common cause behind these coincidences, something mysterious and important, though not immediately apparent. A historian, when analyzing past events, is unable to test his findings experimentally. In this case mentioning and listing various coincidences, especially those of multiple occurrences, is about the only way of verification. This method is employed to prove the correctness of deciphering of ancient written documents and the primordial affinity between languages and archeological cultures (recited from Ariel Golan 2004, 22).

Moisheson suggested that when common features appear in phenomena, there is likely something significant hidden beneath the surface. Ariel Golan also stated, “In them [images and symbols] people recorded and conveyed to their contemporaries and to future generations what seemed to them vitally important information.” (*ibid.*, 19). Within these images and symbols, “there is meaning that represents the memory of the tribe and the relationships among its members” (*ibid.*,

19). The symbols in these images “are preserved for many years with only slight or no alterations” (*ibid.*, 20). These symbols “represent the connection of that people to their distant ancestors or to other prehistoric peoples” (*ibid.*, 28).

Meanwhile, Yuan Ke stated, “The myths of each country reflect its unique national characteristics” (2012, 28). He further emphasized, “It is true that the myths of any country reflect the national characteristics of that country in their own way” (2010, 28). Therefore, according to Yuan Ke, myths “offer an opportunity to understand the roots of national identity and to discern both the strengths and weaknesses of that identity” (*ibid.*, 28). If, as Yuan Ke and Ariel Golan suggest, the myths of each country reflect their unique national identity, and if, as Moisheson asserts, common features in phenomena indicate the presence of something important yet hidden, what could that hidden element be?

The founding myths of the Shang Dynasty, the State of Xu, the Qin Dynasty, Buyeo, Goguryeo, the Kingdom of Van Lang, Silla, and Gaya, despite slight variations, share a fundamental archetype. The recurring motif of founding figures born from eggs sent down from heaven reflects the belief in Heavenly Descendants [천손사상 天孫思想], a concept consistently associated with these egg-birth founding myths.

Furthermore, in Vietnam’s founding myth, it is mentioned that Chiwoo [치우 蚩尤] led a rebellion during the reign of Emperor You Wang [유망 尤望] and was defeated by

Emperor Huang at Zhuolu [탁록 涿鹿].⁴¹ In contrast, Xu Xusheng, in *Ancient Chinese History and Tradition*, wrote: “After the Battle of Zhuolu, several clans of Chiwoo’s lineage migrated south and became the Sanmiao Clan [or Three Miao Clans, 삼묘족 三苗族] in the southern regions, and these were also descendants of the Jiuli [구려 九黎] tribe” (quoted in Lee Dukil and Kim Byeonggi 2006, 238). Regarding Chiwoo, the *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* states: “Kong Anguo said, ‘The ruler of the Jiuli tribe was Chiwoo.’”⁴² Lee Dukil and Kim Byeonggi noted that “the Jiuli people were a branch of the Dongyi people,” and that they “lived in what is now Shandong, Henan, and Hebei Provinces” (ibid, 238). This indicates that Chiwoo was “the common ancestor of the Dongyi people and the southern Miao and Man tribes [묘만족 苗蠻族].” Furthermore, Chiwoo’s enfeoffment in the territory ruled by Taihao [태호 太皞] is presented as evidence of his affiliation with the Dongyi people (Xu Xusheing 1980). Fu Sinian also stated that “Taihao was the tribe of the east” (Fu 2011, 192). This argument aligns with the distribution of egg-birth myths.

What does this mean? It suggests that the various nations with egg-birth founding

myths are like branches extending from the same tree—the Dongyi people. In other words, the countries with egg-birth founding myths all share the same root. Moreover, through the symbol of the egg-birth motif, they passed down their ancestral roots to their descendants. If the roots of national identity are reflected in their myths, the similarities between the founding myths of Vietnam, Buyeo, Goguryeo, and the State of Xu indicate that they all share a common origin—Dongyi⁴³. The distinctive feature of Dongyi mythology is the egg-birth myth, and the similarities between the founding myths of the Shang Dynasty, the Zhou Dynasty, Buyeo, the State of Xu, and Goguryeo indicate that these groups shared a common ancestry. The “hidden important fact” Moisejon refers to is that, in anthropological terms, these countries are consanguineous. Kin groups are defined as a collection of clans that trace their origin to a common ancestor (Yuan Ke 2010, 72).

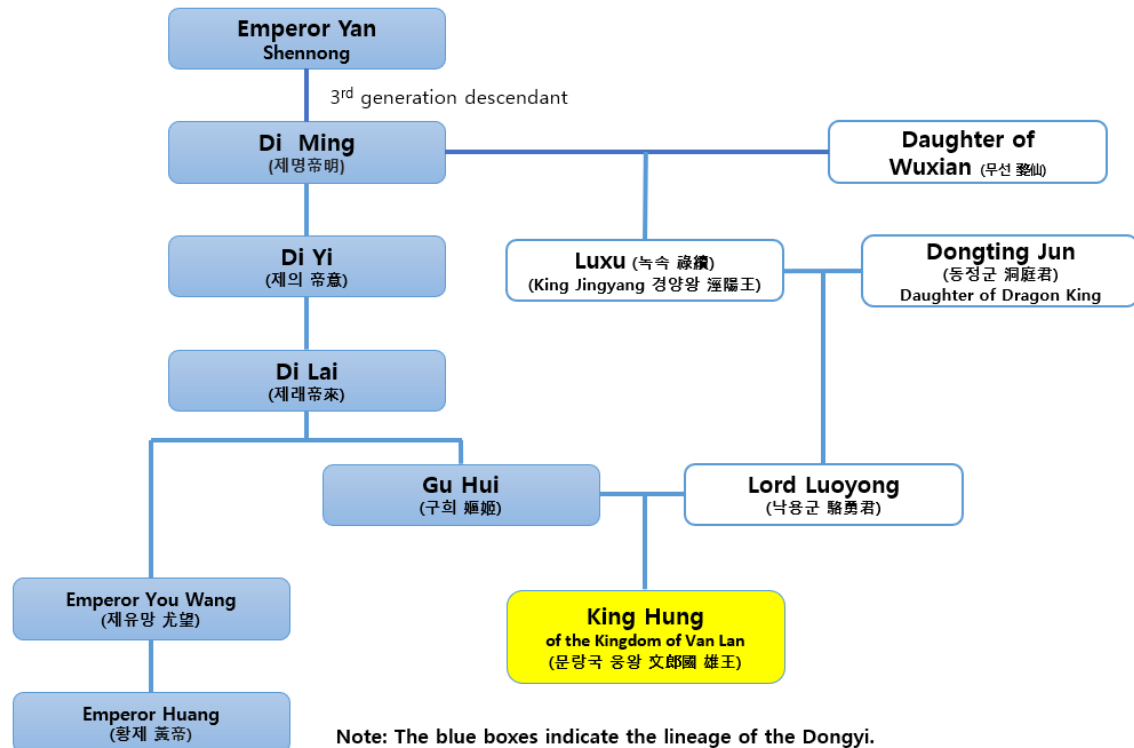
Another piece of evidence supporting Vietnam’s connection to the Dongyi people is found in its founding myth. The myth begins by detailing the lineage of

⁴¹ According to Luo Binji [낙빈기 駱賓基], the genealogical lineage of China’s ancestors, as presented by Sima Qian in *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*, is incorrect. If we accept the prevailing view in both Chinese and Korean academia that Shaohao Jin Tian Clan belonged to the Dongyi people, then Emperor Huang would also be Dongyi, because Shaohao is considered his son. This suggests that the ancient myths and history of China are actually the history of the Dongyi people.

⁴² *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* 『(사기)정의 (史記)正義』: 孔安國曰「九黎君號 蚩尤」是也.

⁴³ The term “nation” used here does not refer to the modern concept of a nation-state. Although the term “nation” has been translated into modern times as “a group sharing land, bloodline, language, history, and religion,” this does not mean such terms were absent in pre-modern times. For instance, the expression “our tribe [아족 我族]” is one example, used in the sense of a tribe rather than a nation-state.

Figure 2. Lineage of King Hung: Tracing the Ancestral Roots of the Legendary Leader



Vietnam’s ancestors, as summarized in Figure 2.

When tracing the ancestors of King Hung of Van Lang, both his paternal and maternal lineages are descendants of Emperor Yan, also known as Shennong. Yet, Luo Binji (2011), through his study of bronze inscriptions, argued that Shennong, Fuxi, Emperor Huang, and Shaohao were all belonged to the Dongyi people.

Their connection to the Dongyi people is further evidenced by the murals in the Ohoe Tombs [오회분묘 五盔墳墓] of Goguryeo, which depict both Shennong

and Fuxi, underscoring their cultural significance. The inclusion of portraits of Shennong, Fuxi, and Suiren [수인 燧人] on the walls of the Ohoe Tombs—clearly an elite burial site—raises important questions. What is the significance of their inclusion in this context? Additionally, why did King Hyeonjong of Goryeo conduct ancestral rites for Shennong and enshrine Houji [후직 后稷]⁴⁴ alongside him? (Classics Research Institute 1962).

Conducting ancestral rites reflects reverence and honor for one’s forebears. By depicting these figures in tomb murals and venerating them in rituals, the people

⁴⁴ [Translator’s Note] Houji is a legendary figure in ancient Chinese mythology and history, credited as

the god of agriculture and the ancestor of the Zhou dynasty.

of Goguryeo and Goryeo demonstrated their belief in a shared lineage with these legendary ancestors. At the very least, the figures buried in the Ohoe Tombs and the people of Goguryeo and Goryeo regarded Shennong as a revered progenitor.

Wen Yiduo (2013) asserted that Fuxi was a member of the Dongyi people. Fu Sinian (2011), through an analysis of various ancient texts, concluded that all these figures were connected to the Dongyi people. Luo Binji (2011), by examining inscriptions on ancient bronzeware, also determined that the surnames bestowed by Shennong were of the Dongyi people. Notably, all these scholars presenting these claims are Chinese. Based on the evidence examined thus far, it can be concluded that the protagonists of the egg-birth founding historical stories all belonged to the Dongyi people.

WHEN DID THE CONCEPT OF “CHINA” EMERGE?⁴⁵

Then, what is their relationship with the Han ethnicity, which forms the mainstream of China? Answering this question requires a close examination of the timing of the emergence of the concept of “China” and their genealogical lineage. When did the concept of today’s China [중국 中國] come into existence?

The term “China” [중국 中國]⁴⁶ reflects the perception of being at the center of the world. Therefore, it is essential first to examine how the Chinese people conceptualized the world. Additionally, the idea of directional orientation must have formed, as there needs to be a standard for calling directions such as east, west, south, and north. Moreover, for one’s tribe to become the center, there must also be a recognition of other tribes distinct from oneself. In other words, such perceptions could only arise after the formation of geographic concepts. Coordinates must be established from a certain location, enabling measurements of distance and direction. Bearing this in mind, let us delve into the Chinese perception of the world.

The Shangshu, The Book of Documents provides insight into the Chinese worldview (Hangaram Institute for History and Culture 2020a, 403; Lee Sanjin and Lee Jeehan 2004, 3).

Only Heaven and Earth are the parents of all things, and only humans are the leaders of all living beings. Truly wise individuals can become Sons of Heaven [元后 = 天子], and the Son of Heaven can serve as the parent of the people. ... Heaven, in its benevolence, aids the people below, appointing a ruler to govern them, thereby supporting Heaven in unifying and bringing peace to the world.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ This section has been revised and expanded by the author specifically for this English translation, differing from the original Korean version.

⁴⁶ [Translator’s Note] The original Chinese word for “China” consists of two letters: 中 [zhong]

meaning “center,” and 國 [guo] meaning “country.” Together, the term signifies “a country at the center [of the world].”

⁴⁷ *Shujing, The Book of Documents* 『상서 尚書』 Records of Zhou 「주서 周書」 Tai Shi “태서 泰誓”:

This passage indicates that only those who understand the will of Heaven and Earth, akin to parents, can become the Son of Heaven and thus serve as the people's guardian. In essence, Heaven creates the Son of Heaven, who, in turn, assists Heaven in governing the world peacefully. The subsequent text explains that initially, Heaven entrusted the rule of the people to the Xia Dynasty [하 夏], but when King Jie [걸왕 桀王] failed to follow Heaven's will, Heaven issued its mandate to Cheng Tang [성탕 成湯] of the Shang Dynasty [상 商, or Yin 은 殷], instructing him to overthrow the Xia. Similarly, when King Zhou [주왕 紂王] of the Shang Dynasty defied the Heavenly Mandate, Heaven transferred its command to King Wu [무왕 武王] of the Zhou Dynasty [주 周], directing him to conquer the Shang. Thus, King Wu's ascension as the Son of Heaven was decreed by Heaven.

The Chinese believed that the capital of the Son of Heaven was the center of the world. Sima Qian [사마천 司馬遷] remarked that “the capitals of the three great dynasties—Xia, Shang, and Zhou—were all located between the Yellow River [황하 黃河] and the Luo River [낙하 洛河].”⁴⁸ Let us hear Sima Qian's words:

In ancient times, the people of the Tang Dynasty [당 唐]⁴⁹ established their capital in Hedong [하동 河東, literally meaning “east of the Yellow River”],

惟天地 萬物父母 惟人 萬物之靈 亶聰明 作元后 元后作民父母...天佑下民 作之君作之師 惟其克相上帝 寵綏四方。

⁴⁸ *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* 『사기 史記』
Treatise on Sacrifices to Heaven and Earth 「봉선서 封禪書」: 昔三代之(君)[居]皆在河洛之間

the Shang Dynasty in Henai [하내 河內, meaning “region enclosed by the Yellow River”], and the Zhou Dynasty in Henan [하남 河南, meaning “south of the Yellow River”]. In essence, the Three He [삼하 三河] areas are at the center of the world, much like the three legs of a tripod, with kings alternately establishing their capitals there.⁵⁰

The capital of Emperor Yao [요 堯] was located east of the Yellow River in Jinyang [진양 晉陽], while King Pan Geng [반경 盤庚] established the capital at Yin Xu [은허 殷墟], which was part of Henai [하내 河內]. After the reign of King Ping [평왕 平王] of Zhou, the capital was moved to Luoyang [낙양 洛陽]. Thus, from the time of Emperor Yao onward, the regions where Xia, Shang, and Zhou established their capitals became known as He Luo [하락 河洛], where “He [하 河]” refers to the Yellow River and “Luo [락 洛]” refers to the Luo River. This area, situated on the Yi-Luo Plains [이락평원 伊洛平原], where the Yellow River and Luo River converge, is regarded as the center of the world. Ha Luo refers specifically to the western Yuxi [예서 豫西], the northwestern part of Henan Province (Chen Yulong 1994, 3).

According to *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*, the Duke of Zhou [주공 周公] described this area as following:

⁴⁹ [Translator's Note] It refers to the country ruled by Emperor Yao, distinct from the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), which adopted the name of Emperor Yao's Tang.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Biographies of Merchants 「화식열전 貨殖列傳」: 昔唐人都河東, 殷人都河內, 周人都河南. 夫三河在天下之中, 若鼎足, 王者所更居也.

This place is the center of the world; the distance for tribute from all directions are equal.⁵¹

This place refers to present-day Luoyang City [낙양시 洛陽市]. The Duke of Zhou advised King Cheng [성왕 成王] to appoint Duke Shao [소공 召公] to oversee the capital at Luoyi [낙읍 洛邑]. He placed the *Jiu Ding* [구정 九鼎], the Nine Tripod Cauldrons—one of the most significant symbols of authority and legitimacy in ancient Chinese history—in Luoyi and proclaimed it the center of the world. This concept of “the center of the world” likely took shape during the Zhou Dynasty. Notably, the term *Tianxia* [천하 天下], meaning “the world,” appears more frequently in the *Shangshu, The Book of Documents* during the Zhou Dynasty than in the Xia or Shang periods.

The concept of *Tianxia* is also linked to geographical awareness. In *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*, the “Annals of Xia” mentions that Yu the Great [우대왕 禹大王] “divided the land into Nine Provinces, opened Nine Roads, constructed Nine Lakes, and measured Nine Mountains.”⁵²

On this topic, the *Shiji* Research Team of the Hangaram Institute for History and Culture provided new commentary while

translating *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*. Regarding the Nine Provinces, the commentary states:

Yu divided the land into Nine Provinces [구주 九州] and initiated water control projects there. This is recorded in the “Tribute of Yu” [우공 禹貢] section of *Shangshu, the Book of Documents*. The provinces included Yuzhou [예주 豫州], Qingzhou [청주 靑州], Xuzhou [서주 徐州], Yangzhou [양주 揚州], Yongzhou [옹주 雍州], Jizhou [기주 冀州], Jingzhou [형주 荊州], Liangzhou [양주 梁州] and Yanzhou [연주 兗州]. While modern China equates Yu’s Nine Provinces with the entirety of its territory, the Nine Provinces established by Yu during the Xia Dynasty could not have extended beyond Xia’s territorial boundaries. At that time, Xia’s territory was confined to parts of present-day Henan, Shandong, and Shanxi Provinces. The expansion of the Nine Provinces to encompass the vast territory of China occurred only after the Han Dynasty (Hangaram Institute for History and Culture 2020b, 34).⁵³

According to the *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* and the *Shangshu, the Book of Documents*, ancient Chinese geographical awareness began with Yu the Great dividing the land into the Nine Provinces. In other words, the territorial

⁵¹ *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* 『史記 사기』 Annals of Zhou 「주본기 周本紀」: 此天下之中 四方入貢道里均

⁵² *Ibid.*, Annals of Xia [하본기 夏本紀]: 開九州 通九道 陂九澤 度九山.

⁵³ Hangaram Institute’s *Newly Annotated Sima Qian’s Records of the Grand Historian*, *Shiji* is a Korean translation Sima Qian’s *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*, and the Commentaries by

the Three Scholars [삼가주석 三家註釋]: *Shiji Jijie, Collected Interpretations of Shiji* 『(사기)집해 (史記)集解』; *Shiji Suoyin, Search for Hidden Meanings of Shiji* 『(사기)색은 (史記)索隱』; and *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji* 『(사기)정의 (史記)正義』. This edition also includes additional annotations on the people and histories of Korea, offering insights from a Korean historical perspective.

Figure 3. The Actual Territory of the Xia Dynasty and the Expanded Territory of the Nine Provinces as Defined by Later Chinese Interpretations



(Source: Hangaram Institute for History and Culture 2020b, 54)

boundaries of the Xia Dynasty were established during Yu's rule. The Nine Provinces established by Yu encompassed parts of present-day Henan Province [하남성 河南省], Shandong Province [산둥성 山東省], and Shanxi Province [산서성 山西省], as shown in Figure 3.

In *Shangshu, the Book of Documents*, the “Records of Zhou” [주서 周書] recounts King Wu of Zhou performing rituals to

honor the spirits of Heaven and Earth after conquering King Shou [수 受] of the Shang Dynasty.⁵⁴ He declared:

... I have found virtuous individuals and humbly served Heaven to quell the chaotic rule. The people of *Zhonghua* [중화 中華] and the uncivilized peoples, the Man [만 蠻] and the Mo [맥 獯], all follow without dissent. Respecting Heaven and fulfilling the Heavenly

⁵⁴ “Shou [수 受]” refers to King Zhou [주왕 紂王], the last king of the Shang dynasty. In *The Book of Documents*, within the Book of Zhou section, it is written: “今商王受無道” (“The current Shang King

Shou is without morality”). Thus, the name “Shou” is used here in accordance with the original text.

Mandate, I led an expedition to the east to bring peace to the men and women of that region. These men and women offered black and yellow silks in baskets, thereby glorifying the royal court of Zhou. Under Heaven's blessings, they returned to Zhou, our great nation, to find refuge... Peace was achieved effortlessly, and the world was governed (Lee Sanjin and Lee Jeehan 2004, 231–232).

Here, *Zhonghua* refers to the Huaxia [화하 華夏] people, with Xia [하 夏] being another term for Huaxia, symbolizing ancient China.⁵⁵ The Man and Mo peoples were classified as uncivilized tribes distinct from the Huaxia during the Zhou Dynasty.

After King Wu overthrew the Shang Dynasty, he sought guidance from Gija [Jizi in Chinese, 기자 箕子], a Shang noble, about the way of Heaven. In response, Gija presented the Hongfan [홍범 洪範], literally meaning “The Great Plan,” which outlined Nine Normative Rules. Among them, the “Five Regulations” [오기 五紀] refer to the emperor formulating and establishing laws, stating, “This is because the Son of Heaven is the parent of the people and the ruler of the world” (Lee Sanjin and Lee Jeehan 2004, 241).

It is also recounted that after the conquest of Shang, tributes were offered

from all directions in Luao [여오 旅獒, literally meaning “a mastiff of the state Lu”]:

Upon defeating the Shang, the pathways to the uncivilized regions, including the Nine Yi [구이 九夷] and Eight Man [팔만 八蠻], were opened. The western Lu [여 旅] people presented their large regional mastiff as tribute (*ibid.*, 251).

The Nine Yi and Eight Man symbolize various tribes in all directions. The conquest of Shang by Zhou enabled interaction with tribes from all sides. The *Book of Rites* [예기 禮記] further categorizes these tribes into four directional groups: the Dongyi [동이 東夷, Yi in the east], Beidi [북적 北狄, Di in the north], Xirong [서용 西戎, Rong in the west], and Nanman [남만 南蠻, Man in the south]. Collectively, they were referred to as Yimanrongdi [이만용적 夷蠻戎狄]. Historical records sometimes used the term Baiman [백만 百蠻, “Hundred Barbarians”] to describe them.⁵⁶

The “Tribute of Yu” section of *Shangshu, the Book of Documents* describes five concentric zones of rule centered on the king's authority, with each zone extending in increments of 500 *li* [리 里] (equivalent to about 208 *km*)⁵⁷:

⁵⁵ The Chinese Dictionary [한전 漢典] defines Xia [하 夏] as follows: “指中国：华~” (“Refers to China: Hua ~”). Accessed December 18, 2024 at <https://www.zdic.net/hans/夏>.

⁵⁶ *The Book of Han* 『漢書』 Biographies of Fu, Chang, Zheng, Gan, Chen, Duan, and Zhuan 「傳常鄭甘陳段傳」: 禮云東夷、北狄、西戎、南蠻, 然夷蠻戎狄亦四方之總稱耳, 故史傳又云百蠻也. (“The Book of Rites state the Eastern Yi, Northern Di, Western Rong,

and Southern Man, yet Yi, Man, Rong, and Di are simply collective terms for the four directions. Hence, the histories also refer to them as the ‘Hundred Man’”)

⁵⁷ [Translator's Note] 1 *li* (리 里) in traditional Chinese metric is generally equivalent to 500 meters. During the Zhou dynasty, 1 *li* is estimated to have been approximately 415.8 meters (Dubs 1938).

- *Dianfu* [전복 甸服]: The king's directly governed region, where the methods of collecting tribute were described in units of every 100 *li*.
- *Houfu* [후복 侯服]: Lands ruled by nobles, barons, and vassals.
- *Suifu* [수복 綏服]: Within 300 *li*, the populace was subject to cultural transformation, while the remaining 200 *li* were for military protection with soldiers stationed to defend the state.
- *Yaofu* [요복 要服]: Inhabited by foreign tribes and exiled criminals.
- *Huangfu* [황복 荒服]: The territory of the Man [만 蠻] people and a place of exile for major offenders.

The Xia Dynasty's Five Fu Zones [오복제도 五服制度] classified regions by their relationship with the central authority, distinguishing between the king, nobles, objects of cultural cultivation, foreign tribes, and criminals. However, this framework does not necessarily suggest that the Xia perceived themselves as purely civilized while treating others as barbarians. The inclusion of foreign tribes and criminals in this system indicates a perception of them as subjects for moral and ethical transformation.

The categorization of peoples into “civilized” and “uncivilized,” and their division into Nanman, Beidi, Xirong, and Dongyi, appears to have originated during the Zhou Dynasty. All other ethnic groups, apart from the Huaxia [화하 華夏] people, were collectively referred to as Yi [이 夷].

The Book of Rites, associated with Confucius [공자 孔子], reflects this worldview. Confucius considered it his duty to systematize the institutions, rituals, and etiquette of the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, and Zhou). After Confucius's death, his disciples documented his teachings and conversations, laying the foundation for the study of rituals. By the Han Dynasty, over 200 texts recorded Confucius's discussions on etiquette and rituals. Scholars of ritual studies emerged, and according to Zheng Xuan [정현 鄭玄]'s *Discourse on the Six Arts* [육예론 六藝論], there existed two versions: *Great Dai Li* [대대례 大戴禮] and *Lesser Dai Li* [소대례 小戴禮]. Zheng Xuan annotated the *Lesser Dai Li*, which later became known as the *Book of Rites* [예기 禮記]. It remains unclear whether the *Book of Rites* compiled the *Great Dai Li* and *Lesser Dai Li* together or if they were transmitted separately.⁵⁸

The *Shangshu, Book of Documents* [상서 尚書] is said to have been compiled during the Xia Dynasty by collecting existing texts. However, its composition is thought to date back to the Warring States period. Two versions exist: the *Modern Text Shangshu* [금문상서 今文尚書] and the *Ancient Text Shangshu* [고문상서 古文尚書]. The *Ancient Text Shangshu* was discovered during the Han Dynasty when King Gong of Lu [노공왕 魯恭王] demolished Confucius's former house to construct a palace. Hidden within the walls, along with other ancient texts preserved from Emperor

⁵⁸ Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture 한국민족문화대백과사전. Accessed on December 22, 2024, at <https://encykorea.aks.ac.kr>.

Qin Shi Huang's book burnings, were additional 16 chapters later incorporated by Kong Anguo [공안국 孔安國], a descendant of Confucius. The *Modern Text Shangshu* consists of 29 chapters compiled by Fu Sheng [복승 伏勝] during the Qin Dynasty.

The *Shangshu* is said to have been compiled by Confucius, who collected royal documents from the eras of Yao and Shun [요순 堯舜] through the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties. Therefore, it is evident that the compilation reflects the social context of its time.

The Book of Rites reflects the sayings of Confucius, passed down and eventually written. Similarly, the *Shangshu* is not unrelated to Confucius, who revered the Zhou Dynasty's institutions and considered their adoption ideal governance. Those who did not follow Zhou's customs, such as the Yi peoples, were categorized as "barbarians."

Chen Yulong (1994) argues that the territories of the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, Zhou) centered around Henan Province, which the Chinese traditionally referred to as *Zhongzhou* [중주 中州], meaning "the center of the world."⁵⁹ The Zhou Dynasty's territory, excluding lands referred to as those of foreign peoples, primarily included the capital Luoyang [낙양 洛陽] and the Yellow River basin.

⁵⁹ 河南, 古中原之地, 人们惯称“中州”, 东·西·南·北·中, 中者“宅天下之中”也, 是华夏文明的摇篮和发祥地 (“Henan, the ancient land of Central Plains, is customarily called ‘Central State’. The ‘Middle’ (中) here refers to ‘the center of the world’, making it the cradle and birthplace of Chinese civilization.”) (Chen Yulong 1994, 1).

According to Shi Shangang, likewise, the original meaning of the term “China” [중국 中國] refers to “the Huaxia people establishing their state in the Yellow River, basin, particularly in the Haluo region [하락 河洛] region south of the middle reaches of the vicinity of the Yellow River, which was considered the center of the world (geographically, culturally, politically and so on).”⁶⁰ He further verified that various sources confirm that Luoyang was already recognized as the center of the world during the Zhou Dynasty (Shi Shangang 1994, 14).

This origin of the term “China” is also confirmed in the inscriptions on the bronze vessel *He Zun* [하존 何尊], unearthed in 1965 in Baoji, Shaanxi Province.

When the king first moved to Chengzhou [성주 成周], he performed royal rites to receive the auspicious blessings from Heaven. In the fourth month on the day Bingxu, the king proclaimed to the ministers in the royal chambers: “In the past, your ancestor, Duke Gong, greatly assisted King Wen. As King Wen received the Heavenly Mandate, King Wu conquered the grand capital of Shang and then reported to Heaven, declaring, “I shall settle here in the Central State (i.e., China) [중국 中國], and henceforth govern the people.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ “其原意在于华夏族建国于黄河流域一带, 特别是黄河中游南岸的河洛地带, 以此作为居天下之中(地中、土中、国中等), 故称” (Quoted from Shi Shangang 1994, 15).

⁶¹ 唯王初迁宅于成周, 复禀王礼福自天, 在四月丙戌, 王誥宗小子于京室, 曰:昔在尔考公氏克速(来)文王。肆文受兹因(命), 唯武王既克大邑商, 则廷告于天, 曰:余其宅兹中國, 自之又(治)民” (Quoted from *ibid.*, 15).

This inscription reveals that in the fifth year of his reign, King Cheng declared Chengzhou (present-day Luoyang) as the capital, central to all directions, for governing the people. In sum, various historical records and archeological evidence confirm that the concept of China appears to have taken shape during the Zhou Dynasty.

EGG-BIRTH MYTHS AND THE HAN ETHNICITY

China regards Emperor Huang as their ancestor. Sima Qian asserted that the period before Emperor Huang was the era of the Three Sovereigns [삼황 三皇]. He systematically organized Han-centered history by tracing the lineage to Five Emperors [오제 五帝], whom he considered as historical figures: from Emperor Huang [or Huang Di, 황제 黃帝], to Zhuanxu [전욱 顓頊], Emperor Ku [or Di Ku, 제곡 帝嚳], Emperor Yao [or Di Yao, 제요 帝堯], and Emperor Shun [or Di Shun, 제순 帝舜]. The lineage then transitions into the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties. In compiling the *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian*, Sima Qian chose not to include a detailed discussion of the Three Sovereigns, as he treated them as belonging to the mythical era. Instead, he began his historical account with the Five Emperors. The present-day *Annals of the Three Sovereigns* [삼황본기 三皇本記] section was added later by Sima Zhen [사마정

司馬貞], a Tang Dynasty commentator on the *Records of the Grand Historian*, who supplemented the content to provide additional context.

There are differing opinions about the identifies of the Three Sovereigns. In the *Diwang Shiji, The Chronological History of Emperors* 『제왕세기 帝王世紀』 and the *Shi Ben, the Genealogies* 『세본 世本』, the Three Sovereigns are identified as Fuxi, Shennong, and Emperor Huang, while the Five Emperors are listed as Shaohao, Zhuanxu, Gaoxin [고신 高辛], Tang [당 唐], and Yu [우 虞].⁶²

However, according to Sima Zhen, however, Fuxi, Nuwa [여와 女媧], and Shennong are considered the Three Sovereigns, with Emperor Huang serving as the first of the Five Emperors. While interpretations vary among scholars, the general consensus identifies the Three Sovereigns as Fuxi, Shennong, and one of the following: Nuwa, Suinren, Emperor Huang, Gonggong [공공 共工], or Zhurong [축융 祝融]. Notably, Fu Sinian and other prominent Chinese scholars have concluded through ancient texts and bronze inscriptions that Fuxi, Shennong, and Emperor Huang were members of the Dongyi people.

As noted earlier, Sima Qian began his account of Chinese history with Emperor Huang, signifying that he considered Chinese history as originating with him. Following Emperor Huang, Sima Qian

⁶² *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji*
『사기정의 史記正義』: 皇甫謐帝王世紀, 孫氏注世本,
並以伏羲, 神農, 黃帝爲三皇, 少昊, 顓頊, 高辛, 唐, 虞爲五帝

continued to document the reigns of Zhuangxi, Di Ku, Yao, and Shun. In contrast, *Diwang Shiji, The Chronological History of Emperors* 『제왕세기 帝王世紀』 and the *Shi Ben, The Genealogies* 『세본 世本』 (“Genealogies of Emperors and Kings” 「제왕세본 帝王世本」 section) identified Shaohao, Zhuangxi, Di Ku, Yao, and Shun as the Five Emperors. A notable difference is the omission of Shaohao from Sima Qian’s list of the Five Emperors. This raises the question: why did Sima Qian choose to exclude Shaohao from his account?

Who is Shaohao [소호 少昊]? According to the *Shi Ben, The Genealogies* 『세본 世本』 (“Genealogies of Emperors and Kings” 「제왕세본 帝王世本」 section), “Shaohao is the son of Emperor Huang, from the Jin Tian Clan [금천씨 金天氏]. Qingyang [청양 靑陽] is Shaohao.”⁶³ *The Genealogies* cites the *Zuo Zhuan, Zuo’s Commentary*, as quoted in *Shiji Zhengyi, Correct Meanings of Shiji*, describing Shaohao in this manner. As you may know, Shaohao was a Dongyi figure and is recorded as the son of Emperor Huang. If Shaohao was of Dongyi origin, then his father, Emperor Huang, must also have been Dongyi, as it would be unlikely for a father and son to belong to different ethnic groups.

Moreover, the *Shi Ben, The Genealogies* 『세본 世本』 (“Genealogies of Emperors and Kings” 「제왕세본 帝王世本」

section) records that Shaohao was the son of Emperor Huang, Zhuangxi was Emperor Huang’s grandson,⁶⁴ Emperor Ku was his great-grandson,⁶⁵ Emperor Yao was also his great-grandson,⁶⁶ and Emperor Shun was his eighth-generation descendant. Mencius [맹자 孟子] referred to Emperor Shun as a member of the Dongyi people. The founder of the Xia [하 夏] Dynasty, Yu [우 禹], was a descendant of Zhuangxi, while Xie [설 契], the founding figure of the Yin [or Shang, 은(상) 殷(商)] Dynasty, was the son of Emperor Ku.⁶⁷ Therefore, both Yu, the founder of the Xia Dynasty, and Xie, the founder of the Shang Dynasty, were descendants of Emperor Huang and members of the Dongyi people.

This notwithstanding, when Sima Qian sought to systematize Han-centered history, he faced the challenge of reconciling the fact that much of Chinese history was, in reality, Dongyi history. To address this, he positioned Emperor Huang as the ancestor of the Han people. Sima Qian began *Shiji, Records of the Grand Historian* by describing the Battle of Zhuolu [탁록대전 涿鹿大戰] between Emperor Huang and Chiwoo, framing it as a conflict between the Dongyi people and the Han people.

Sima Qian further consolidated Emperor Huang’s prominence by replacing Shaohao in the Five Emperors with Emperor Huang, thereby establishing a genealogical lineage from Emperor Huang

⁶³ *Diwang Shiji, The Chronological History of Emperors* 『제왕세기 帝王世紀』: 皞是黃帝之子. 金天氏少皞. 靑陽卽少

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, “顓頊是黃帝之孫”

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 嚳, 黃帝之曾孫

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 堯是黃帝曾孫. 黃帝生元囂, 元囂生僑極, 僑極生帝嚳, 帝嚳生堯.

⁶⁷ *Shi Ben, The Genealogies* 『세본 世本』 “Genealogies of Emperors and Kings” 「제왕세본 帝王世本」: 契是帝嚳子

to Zhuangxi, Emperor Ku, Emperor Yao, and Emperor Shun. *The Genealogies* mentions that Shaohao succeeded Emperor Huang and ruled the world, suggesting that Shaohao was a more significant figure than Emperor Huang at the time. Given Shaohao's unmistakable Dongyi identity, Sima Qian deliberately excluded him from the Five Emperors to align the narrative with his Han-centered historical framework.

Now, we turn to the question: What is the relationship between the Han people and the Dongyi people's egg-birth myths? In conclusion, the Han people no direct connection to the founding myths of the Dongyi people. As established earlier, the genealogical lineage attributed to China—from the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors to the Xia, Shang, and Qin Dynasties—belongs to the history of the Dongyi people, with their myths, including the egg-birth founding myths, being passed down. Since Emperor Huang, regarded as the ancestor of the Han people, was a figure of Dongyi origin, his myth—where his mother, Fubao, became pregnant after witnessing a great bolt of lightning envelop the Big Dipper constellation—is also a Dongyi myth.

However, China has sought to obscure the fact that its origins are rooted in the Dongyi people, instead promoting a narrative that positions the Han people as the central force behind a long and distinguished history of human civilization. This narrative framework has been instrumental in their efforts to establish themselves as the world's preeminent

nation in the 21st century, as evidenced by historical revisionism, the deliberate distortion of history to support this ambition.

In recent years, China has been reinterpreting mythical historical figures previously identified as Dongyi, transforming them into ancestors of the Han people. As part of its national strategy for the 21st century, China is undertaking historical projects aimed at constructing a grand vision of Greater China [대중화주의 大中華主義] and positioning itself as the world's leading nation. This effort is grounded in the “Theory of a Unified Multi-Ethnic Nation” [통일적 다민족 국가론 統一的 多民族 國家論] (Woo Silha 2007, 63).

The historical revisionist projects in China encompass multiple stages: from the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project [하상주단대공정 夏商周斷代工程] to the Chinese Civilization Origin Exploration Project [중화문명탐원공정 中華文明探源工程], Northeast Project [동북공정 東北工程], Liao River Civilization Theory [요하문명론 遼河文明論], and the Chinese Civilization Promotion Project [중화문명선전공정 中華文明宣傳工程].

The Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project, conducted from 1996 to 2000, aimed to historicize the Xia and Shang Dynasties, which were previously considered part of the mythical era, and to establish a definitive timeline for these dynasties. According to recent Chinese accounts, the Xia Dynasty is now determined to have lasted from 2070 BCE to 1600 BCE, the Shang Dynasty from 1600 BCE to 1046 BCE, and the Zhou Dynasty from 1046 BCE to 771 BCE.

Following this, in 2000, China launched the Chinese Civilization Origin Exploration Project, aimed at exploring the origins of Chinese civilization. The primary objective was to incorporate the era of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors [삼황오제 三皇五帝], traditionally known as the mythical and legendary period, into China's historical framework.

The Northeast Project sought to incorporate the history of Goguryeo [고구려 高句麗] into Chinese history, based on the premise that all the ethnicities, along with their dynasties, histories, and cultures that existed within the boundaries of present-day Chinese territory, are regarded as part of Chinese history, even if those areas were not historically under Chinese rule. The Liao River Civilization Theory proposed that the Hongshan Culture [홍산문화 紅山文化] was led by the descendants of Emperor Huang's tribe, specifically Zhuanxu and Emperor Ku, asserting that they were the ancestors of northern peoples (including Dongyi) and the forebears of Jumong, the founder of Goguryeo (*ibid.*, 2006). This theory further claims that all the descendants of Emperor Huang also belong to the Han people. However, as previously established, Emperor Huang himself was a member of the Dongyi people, not the Han people..

China's historical revisionist efforts continue with the Chinese Civilization Promotion Project, which builds upon initiatives like the Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project and the Liao River Civilization Theory. This project leverages both domestic and international propa-

ganda to legitimize historical revisionism and present it as established fact.

The core of this historical revisionism lies in converting the histories of countries founded by the Dongyi people into part of the history of the Han people. As demonstrated, the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, which China claims as the foundation of its civilization, along with Yu, the founder of the Xia Dynasty, were all of Dongyi origin. The Dongyi people preserved and passed down their tribal memory and heritage through egg-birth founding historical stories, which reflect their unique cultural identity.

Sima Qian was the first to incorporate the history of the Dongyi people into the narrative of the Han people, laying the groundwork for the historical distortion seen in projects like the Northeast Project. This long-standing misrepresentation, however, faces significant challenges, as distorting such an extensive and well-documented history is no easy task. Numerous scattered sources persist, and the egg-birth founding historical stories, which preserve the memory and roots of the Dongyi people, clearly show that their progenitors have no connection with the origins of the Han people.

V. CONCLUSION

We have explored the relationship between the egg-birth founding historical stories and the Han people. These founding

historical stories are distributed across the Korean Peninsula, northeastern China, the Bohai Sea coast, the Shandong Peninsula, the southern regions of China, and Vietnam. Contrary to the claims of some Chinese scholars, the protagonists of these myths are not connected to the Han people but are instead rooted in the history of the Dongyi people.

Founding historical stories serve as cultural instruments to legitimize and sanctify the founding figures of a nation. They encapsulate critical information about the founders' tribe, roots, and collective memory, ensuring that this legacy is passed down to future generations.

As Moisejon and Yuan Ke argued, different founding myths indicate that the tribes themselves are distinct. Conversely, if the archetype of the founding myths is the same, despite minor variations, it suggests that even different countries were founded by clans sharing a common ancestry. Therefore, the Shang Dynasty, the Qin Dynasty, the State of Xu, Buyeo, Goguryeo, Silla, and Van Lang of Vietnam, all of which share the same egg-birth motif in their founding myths, can be traced back to the same ethnic origin—the Dongyi people.

However, China has appropriated the egg-birth myths of the Dongyi people as their own. This process began when the concept of China, centered around the Huaxia people [화하족 華夏族], was established, shaping the identity we recognize today. The Zhou Dynasty invented the concept of “China [중국 中國]” with 中 meaning “center,” by focusing on

Luoyang and the Yellow River Basin, the core areas under their direct control. They divided the surrounding regions into Nanman (southern peoples), Beidi (northern peoples), Xirong (western peoples), and Dongyi (eastern peoples), assigning their names derogatory connotations, such as “barbarians,” to describe these non-Chinese peoples.

Sima Qian was the one who transformed the egg-birth myths of the Dongyi people into the founding myths of the Han people. In crafting a Han-centered historical narrative, he established Emperor Huang, Zhuangxi, Emperor Ku, Emperor Yao, and Emperor Shun as the ancestors of the Han people, attributing the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties to their lineage. Sima Qian deliberately excluded Shaohao, who was widely recognized in ancient times as a member of the Dongyi people, from the Five Emperors. Instead, he placed Emperor Huang as the first of the Five Emperors.

However, other historians, such as Huangfu Mi [황보밀 皇甫謐], a contemporary of Sima Qian, who compiled *Diwang Shiji*, *The Chronological History of Emperors* 『제왕세기 帝王世紀』, assert that Shaohao was the first of the Five Emperors and was the son of the Emperor Huang. Importantly, Emperor Huang himself was a member of the Dongyi people. Sima Qian redefined the Dongyi people as part of the Han people, portraying them as their ancestors. Prominent Chinese historians of the time criticized Sima Qian for his distortion of history.

Unfortunately, history repeats itself. Despite the research findings of contemporary historians such as Fu Sinian, Moon Ilda, and Luo Binji, today's China continues its historical distortion by claiming such legendary figures as Fuxi and Shennong as ethnic Han, while portraying them as the roots of Chinese civilization. China's ambition to become the world's central power in the 21st century is reflected in its assertion that all the ethnic groups and their histories within its current borders are inherently part of China.

However, even a single egg-birth founding myth exposes the absurdity of China's historical revisionism. The Han people lack any egg-birth founding myths or coherent foundational narratives that establish the legitimacy of nation-building and the sanctity of its founders.

Key Words

Egg-birth Myth, Founding Myth, Dongyi people, Han people, Van Lang of Vietnam, Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, Sima Qian

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