The Paekche Conquerors

SOME SPECULATIONS ON
THE CONQUERORS OF THE JAPANESE ISLANDS

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There are suggestive records in the accounts of Kojiki and Nihongi from which to construct the true life story of the conquerors, telling how they masterminded the conquest, who was the leader, when they crossed the sea, where they landed, and in what manner they fought and wrought. There are also suggestive records in the Samguk-sagi from which to obtain some idea about the identity of the conquerors.

The foundation legend of the Paekche kingdom presents the elder brother Biryu who had failed (a la Itsuse) and the younger brother Onjo who had succeeded (a la Ihare). The kingship in Paekche had indeed alternated between two royal clans, allegedly an elder brother Chogo clan and a younger brother Koi clan of the 4th King Kae-ru (128-66), until the time of Keun Chogo (346-75) and his son Keun Kusu (375-84) when the succession was at last consolidated into the Chogo line. During 166-346, the two royal clans had produced four kings each: Chogo (166-214)-Kusu (214-34)-Saban (234)-Biryu (304-44) from the Chogo line, and Koi (234-86)-Chaekkye (286-98)-Bunseo (298-304)-Kye (344-46) from the Koi line. The last of the Koi line (Kye) was succeeded by the Chogo line (Keun Chogo), and thereafter the Koi line did not return to the throne, and vanished out of the Paekche history. Some Korean historians believe that the (vanished) Koi clan belonged to the (failed) Biryu line.

The founder of Koguryeo, Chumong, had one son, Yuri, by his first wife and two sons, Biryu and Onjo, by his
second wife. After Yuri came to the throne, Biryu and Onjo left Koguryeo and came down to the Ma-han area to found a new kingdom. It is indeed tempting to speculate that the (vanished) Koi clan may have been the failed Biryu line, and they might have been persuaded in the late fourth century by Keun Chogo to leave the Korean peninsula and open a new dynasty in the new world. Homuda could have been the leader of Koi clan who had agreed to leave Han-seong with his followers and, with the full support of the Paekche court, succeeded in founding the Yamato kingdom in the Japanese islands by 390.

According to Nihongi, King Keun Chogo of Paekche dispatched scouts to a Kaya state (Tak-sun) in order to gather information about the passages to the Japanese islands in 364. Tak-sun seems to have been located in an area along the Nak-tong River which, flowing south to the modern Pusan area, constituted the shortest route from Paekche to the Japanese islands. At that time, the Paekche court was apparently planning not only the conquest of the Japanese islands by sending an expeditionary force led by Homuda but also the conquest of the Ma-han states in the southwestern part of the Korean peninsula by a force led by King Keun Chogo himself in collaboration with the expeditionary force on its way to the Japanese islands. The movement of Homuda and his followers towards the Japanese islands seems to have occurred in 369, the year the Paekche conquered the entire Ma-han states.

According to Nihongi, it was Jingū who dispatched an army to the Korean peninsula in 369 to invade Silla. It is said that the Yamato army arrived at Tak-sun led by a Paekche general named Mong-na Keun-ja. They then invaded and conquered Silla and pacified Tak-sun and six other places. From here they turned west, conquered the southern savages and then granted those conquered lands to Paekche. At this point they were joined by the Paekche King Keun Chogo and his son Keun Kusu, whereupon four more localities spontaneously surrendered. Thereupon the King and the Crown Prince of Paekche met Mong-na Keun-ja and the rest at the village Ui-ryu, and at an interview offered their congratulations and sent them off with cordial courtesy. Before the farewell, the King of Paekche and the Yamato generals ascended Mount Pi-ji and made a solemn declaration. They

land, and they in due course returned and reported on their mission.

4 Samguk-sagi records the Paekche’s conquest of Ma-han in 9 AD. According to Ledyard (1975), Samguk-sagi transferred the story backward by six cycles in order to lend antiquity to the date of Paekche’s conquest of Ma-han. Lee Byung-do (S2: 34n) also gives the same interpretation.

5 See Aston (N1: 248-9). All the statements in the text between quotation marks [except those words in square brackets] are the records of either Nihongi translated by Aston or Kojiki translated by Philippi.
also ascended Mount Ko-sa, where they sat together upon a rock, and the King of Paekche made a solemn declaration, saying:—“I make this solemn declaration of alliance to show that it will remain undecayed to distant ages [and] … we … will attend your Court with tribute.” The King also made Ku-zeo and the others escort the Yamato soldiers.5

By crosschecking the records of Samguk-sagi, Ledyard (1975) logically deduces that all those stories recorded in Nihongi represent the historical records of Paekche armies moving south. In Nihongi, the story ends with the Paekche King Keun Chogo and the “Yamato generals,” who are heading to the Japanese islands, pledging eternal friendship and bidding farewell. If we take the departing “Yamato soldiers” as a contingent of Paekche warriors led by a Paekche prince named Homuda, then the entire story becomes coherent.

THE JIN FAMILY QUEENS IN PAEKCHE AND THE MA-HITO CLAN OF THE YAMATO ROYAL FAMILY

King Keun Chogo had appointed his brother-in-law, Jin-jeong, as the Chief Minister in 347.6 The succession of Paekche kings stopped oscillating between the Chogo-line and the Koi-line, and became strictly lineal from the reign of King Keun Chogo (346-75), who belonged to the Chogo-line. Keun Chogo took his queen from the Jin clan. The practice of “Jin clan queen” continued after his reign, and his successors kept taking their queens from the Jin clan.

According to Samguk-sagi, King Koi (234-86) appointed Jin Chung as his Commander General in 240, and entrusted him with military affairs. In 247, Jin Mul was appointed as Commander General. In 262, King Koi appointed Jin Ka to the position of Finance Minister.7 The Jin clan could indeed have been providing queens not only to the Chogo-line but also to the Koi line long before the reign of King Keun Chogo.

The preface of Shinsen Shoujiroku states that the Ma-bito (Jin-person) is the sovereign one among the imperial clans. One may well wonder whether there could be any relationship between the Jin clan of Paekche queens and the Jin-person (Ma-bito) clan of the Yamato imperial family. After the reign of Keun Chogo, the Koi-line vanished from
peninsular history. It is hence tempting to speculate that Homuda might have been the last leader of the Koi-line, to reappear in the Japanese islands as the founder of a new kingdom. King Keun Chogo and the Chief Minister Jin Jeong were in-laws, as were Amaterasu and Takagi in the Kojiki-Nihongi story. In the foundation myth, Ninigi was the grandchild of Amaterasu, and Takagi was the maternal grandfather of Ninigi. According to Kojiki and Nihongi, Takagi was much more active than Amaterasu in making Ninigi the ruler of the earthly kingdom on the Japanese islands. Perhaps the Jin clan had been maintaining the in-law relationship not only with the Chogo line but also with the Koi-line that lost in the succession contests, and hence came to harbor a strong maternal compassion for Homuda's endeavor.

Paekche was born after the contest for succession had been lost at the Chu-mong's court. And yet, after successfully founding a new kingdom, the Paekche rulers held no grudge against Chu-mong, but rather maintained annual rites at his shrine. According to Samguk-sagi, the mother of Paekche's founder played the role comparable to that of Homuda's mother depicted in Nihongi (Jingū). Homuda could have inherited the (Biryu-Onjo) pioneer spirit of opening up a new world, and the preservation of the clan name Jin-person (Ma-hito) by the sovereign Yamato royal family might suggest Homuda's sense of indebtedness to his maternal roots.

METAPHOR OF KOJIKI AND NIHONGI: “THIS LAND WILL BE SUITABLE FOR THE EXTENSION OF OUR HEAVENLY REALM”

The metaphor of Nihongi reads: [On a day, at the Paekche Court in Han-seong, Minister Jin-zeong told Prince Homuda and his elder brother, Itsuse] -- “Now I have heard from the Ancient of the Sea, that in the East there is a fair land encircled on all sides by blue mountains. The remote region does not yet enjoy the blessings of Imperial rule. Every town has always been allowed to have its lord, and every village its chief, who, each one for himself, makes division of territory and practices mutual aggression and conflict. I think this land will undoubtedly be suitable for the extension of our Heavenly...使降之皇孫乃離天磐座...天降於日向襲之高千穂峯矣 (NI: 139-141)

神武天皇即位前紀 神日本磐余彦天皇...曰...昔我天神 高皇産靈尊...尊 擧此豐葦原...我天神火瓊瓊杵 (NI: 189)

Jin Jeong could have played the role of Takagi. If Ninigi were to leave the Heavenly Kingdom, Takagi had to make Ninigi the ruler of the Earthly Kingdom. Likewise, if the last heir to Koi-line had to leave the Korean peninsula, Jin Jeong had to make Homuda the founder of a new kingdom on the Japanese islands.

三國史記 百濟本紀 第一 一云始祖沸流王...北扶餘王解扶婁庶孫...朱蒙...南奔至辛本立都號高句麗 娶召西奴為妃...及朱蒙在扶餘所生禮氏子孺留來立之為太子... 於是沸流謂弟溫祚曰...我母氏傾家財助成邦業...不如奉母氏南遊卜地別立國都 與弟率黨類...至彌鄒忽以居之 (S2: 15)
The Metaphor of Kojiki and Nihongi

Realm, so that its glory should fill the universe. It is, doubtless, the center of the world. ... Why should we not proceed thither, and make it the capital?” “The Imperial Princes answered, and said: --‘The truth of this is manifest. This thought is constantly present to our minds also. We may well proceed thither as soon as possible.’ This was the year Kinoye Tora [354] of the Great Year.” 10

The Metaphor of Kojiki reads: --“Then, by command of Takagi and Amaterasu, the eight-hundred myriad deities assembled in a divine assembly in the river-bed of [Han River], who were told that ‘This Central Land of the Reed Plains is the land entrusted to our child as the land to be ruled by him.’ Two deities were dispatched to make inquiries into the path to the land, and they in due course returned and reported on their mission. Thereafter, Takagi and Amaterasu caused Ninigi to descend from the heaven.” 11

Embracing on an Expedition to the Japanese Islands

The metaphor of Kojiki reads:--When Homuda was journeying across the sea, “he met in the straits a person riding on a tortoise’s back. [Homuda] asked: ‘Who are you?’ He answered: ‘I am an earthly deity.’ Again [Homuda] asked: ‘Do you know the sea-lanes?’ He answered: ‘I know them well.’ Again [Homuda] asked: ‘Will you serve as my attendant?’” 12

Nihongi reads:--“In that year, in winter, on the fifth day of the 10th month, [Homuda] in person led the Imperial Princes and a naval force on an expedition against the [Japanese islands]. When he [was to embark] there was there a fisherman who came riding in a boat. [Homuda] asked him: ‘Canst thou act as my guide?’ He was accordingly made pilot.” 13

As shown above, one can find all sorts of suggestive records in the accounts of Kojiki, Nihongi and Samguk-sagi from which to reconstruct the story of the conquerors, telling how they masterminded the conquest, who was the leader, when they crossed the sea, where they landed, and in what manner they fought and wrought.