

# Descriptions of the History of Gojoseon Shown in Foreign Textbooks

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This paper analyzes descriptions of Gojoseon in foreign textbooks, specifically the Dangun myth, Gija Joseon, and Wiman Joseon and the Four Han Commanderies. While the Dangun myth is introduced relatively precisely, the theory of Gija Joseon that was proved false by academia in North and South Korea and Japan and the establishment of the Han Commanderies that colonial historians during Japanese colonial rule suggested are still maintained as the starting point of Korean history. It is a shocking revelation that such arguments are still maintained as dominant theories.

These problems derive from a unilateral reflection of studies not from the Korean historical world but the arguments of academics in Japan and China. After all, since Korean studies is not considered vital to the countries concerned, the perspective shown in foreign textbooks is often a Japanese or Chinese one. As a long-term solution, foreign scholars of Korean studies should be nurtured through the expansion of Korean studies projects and as a short-term solution, up-to-date research on Korean history should be translated, distributed, and reflected in foreign textbooks.

Keywords: Gojoseon, Dangun Joseon, theory of Gija Joseon, Wiman Joseon, the Four Han Commanderies

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## I. Preface

Korea's status in the world has risen from the ruins of the Korean War to one of the world's ten major economic powers. However, the image of Korea described in foreign textbooks is still far from what Korea thinks it should be both quanti-

tatively and qualitatively. Compared to descriptions of China and Japan, the problem of describing Korea is more distinct. Of course, textbook descriptions are based on the characters of the subjects and the educational guidelines and aims of each country. Compared with the northeast Asian countries of China and Japan and considering the differences of international status in the fields of history, politics and economics, it is difficult to compare simply based upon the quantity of descriptions. Rather, the problem is the content and not quantity. In general, Korea is viewed as an adherent under the influence of China and Japan's influence is often overemphasized. An example is Imna Ilbonbuseol, or the theory that Japan advanced to the southern part of the Korean Peninsula and governed Silla and Baekje in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century. Also, most descriptions focus solely on Korea's economic development and few precise introductions to Korean history can be found.

Korean history is not separated into its own chapter but in many cases is attached to descriptions of Chinese or Japanese history. Moreover, the description mainly concentrates on modern and contemporary history and the description of pre-modern history and, especially, ancient history is fragmentary. As the description is focused on several particular subjects like *Imjin waeran* (Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592) and the Korean War, it is difficult to view Korean history as a whole.

Therefore, this paper will review the contents that describe Gojoseon, a starting point of Korean history, in foreign textbooks and indicate some problems. Gojoseon was chosen because there are many errors about this period in foreign textbooks and because the first part of the introduction to Korean history will influence students according to the contents of describing this period.<sup>1</sup>

This paper used the analysis of 282 secondary school textbooks from twenty-six countries and in particular textbooks published since 2000.<sup>2</sup> The selected textbooks were for the most part ones that the author analyzed. If the author didn't analyze the textbook, then a translation of the textbooks contained in ana-

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1. The writer analyzed the types of error found in foreign textbooks between 1998 and 2006. Among the 344 historical errors from the prehistoric age to the present, thirty-four errors or about 10% are from the Gojoseon period.

2. The textbooks analyzed in 2005 were from Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, Poland, France, the Czech Republic, Brazil, and Chile; the 2006 textbooks were from Taiwan, Mongolia, the United States, Canada, Germany, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, the Sudan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman.

lytic reports from 2005-2006 was used.

## II. Contents Describing Gojoseon

Gojoseon, Korea's first state, and its ruler Dangun have been recognized as national autonomy and mobility for a long time. The Dangun myth is recorded in *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) and *Jewangun-gi* (Songs of Emperors and Kings), and there has been much research and discussion on their historical characters. In particular, when Korea became a Japanese colony, nationalist historians and Daejonggyo (a native religion in Korea that believes Dangun is its founder) accelerated a national movement about Dangun and Gojoseon, and in response to this, studies by Japanese colonial historians were vitalized. Japanese colonial historians denied Dangun and Gojoseon<sup>3</sup> and maintained that the Dangun myth was made during the struggle against Mongolia in the late Goryeo dynasty and that Gojoseon did not exist. They argued that since a Bronze Age did not occur in Korea and a civilization based on the Iron Age was transferred through Chinese immigration, Gojoseon couldn't have existed in the Stone Age. They also maintained that the beginning of Korean history was with the establishment of the Wiman dynasty, a colonial government of Chinese immigrants and the subsequent Four Han Commanderies. In particular, the study on Lolang Commandery was done exclusively by Japan as a part of its colonial rule. It viewed the beginning of Korean history as the Lolang Commandery and aimed to eradicate the national independence movement based on the Dangun myth.

This theory by colonial historians which emphasized the identity, backwardness and dependency was positively denied after liberation. The existence of the Bronze Age and Gojoseon was confirmed and proved, and the Dangun myth was also demonstrated. However, many foreign textbooks view the beginning of Korean history as the establishment of Wiman Joseon and the Four Han Commanderies.<sup>4</sup> This is a vestige of Japanese colonial history and should be

3. Refer to Shin Jong-won (2005).

4. The content on Gojoseon first appears in the section that explains China's Han dynasty and is mentioned as one of the targets for enlarging the dynasty's territories by Emperor Wudi. Also, Gojoseon is not described in sentences but, mostly, is contained on maps of the Han dynasty territories. While some describe Gojoseon using this description, in fact, there are few descriptions of Gojoseon and Korea's ancient history in most foreign textbooks.

amended since it shows the dependent, and not independent, development of Korean history.

While the denial of Dangun Joseon and the emphasis of Wiman Joseon and the Four Han Commanderies is an influence of the Japanese academic world, the description about Gija Joseon reflects the standpoint of the Chinese academic world. Even though the theory of Gija Joseon has been disproved by academia, worship of Gija was maintained in Korea for a long time until pre-modern times irrespective of its actual historical character. It is possible that the case of admitting and describing the theory of Gija Joseon as a historical fact comes from the tradition of worshipping Gija in Korea. However, China's standpoint is reflected in the theory of Gija because it follows the theory of *Dongbukgongjeong* (China's Northeast Project).

This paper will review the contents of Gojoseon by focusing on the Dangun myth, Gija Joseon, and Wiman Joseon and the Four Han Commanderies.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. Dangun Joseon (Dangun Myth)

Even Koreans believe the birth myth of their kingdom. According to the tradition, their ancestor began with Prince Hwanwung, the son of heaven. Prince Hwanwung descended to earth and established a city of god. He had the capacity to control wind, rain, and clouds. He taught people a wide knowledge of agriculture, medicine, fishery, and carpentry. Also, he enacted laws and taught people what was right and wrong. He married a bear that changed into a beautiful woman, founded Gojoseon, or Ancient Joseon, and begot a son Danjun or Tangun who became the first king of Korea. (Mateyo et al. 2005:143)

The history of Korea begins with the Dangun myth. The story of Dangun who is considered the founding father of Korea was mentioned in the previous chapter. Dangun founded Gojoseon or Ancient Joseon in 2333 B.C. According to scholars, the kingdom of Korea was divided into many countries during the Bronze Age (1000-300 B.C.) The strongest country was Gojoseon which Dangun had established. It became a kingdom in

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5. The textbooks used in this paper are ones that contain a lot of descriptions about Gojoseon. Additionally, Gojoseon appears on maps showing the territories of the Qin and Han dynasties.

this small country. (Mateyo et al. 2005:172)

The information on the beginning of Korea is neither plentiful nor precise. A myth that a hero called Dangun founded the kingdom of Gojoseon in 2333 B.C. explains the origin of the country. (Teopista et al. 2000:116)

Korean history originated over 1,000 years ago, and it is shown through the legend called Dangun. The legend says that a son of heaven married a woman whose tribe worshiped bears and that he founded a nation by collecting many tribes. Historians view this period as the starting point of Korean history and call it Gojoseon. (Plapphulng 2001:78-9)

There are various founding legends in Korea. Koreans believe the founder Dangun is a heavenly god who descended from heaven in 2333 B.C. and ruled primitive clans and tribes. This is called Dangun Joseon. It was a legendary period in Korean history and 5,000 years of long history have continued like this. (Shi 2006:50)

Few foreign textbooks describe the Dangun myth and Gojoseon. Most of the countries except the above stated ones don't contain any content on Dangun and Gojoseon. Textbooks from the Philippines and Thailand contain favorable and abundant descriptions of Korea, possibly because both countries are traditionally friendly nations who participated in the Korean War as part of the United Nations Forces and they are Christian and Buddhist states.<sup>6</sup> The reason Taiwan described the Dangun myth in its textbooks may be the fact that Taiwan was a friendly state before Korea entered into diplomatic relations with China and academic exchanges between Taiwan and Korea occurred. Errors of transcription like Danjun and Tangun<sup>7</sup> can be found at times, but the Dangun myth recorded

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6. It seems to affect the favorable descriptions that, in the case of the Philippines, Korea is second to the Philippines in the number of Christians and in the case of Thailand, Buddhism is a major religion in Korea since pre-modern times. Also, these states evaluate Korea highly as a model of economic development. This may account for their interest in Korea and the accurate descriptions about Korean history.

7. This might derive from Tagalog. For example, in Arabic there is no sound equivalent to "Incheon," therefore its transcription is closer to "Insion."

in *Samguk yusa* is described relatively precisely.

These same textbooks from the Philippines and Thailand emphasize their own religious and cultural homogeneity with Korea, explain that they belong to the same East Asian cultural circle, and emphasize the influence of Chinese culture. Such a tendency is conspicuous in Taiwanese textbooks. That is, textbooks from Taiwan briefly introduce the Dangun myth and connect the contents with the establishment of Gija Joseon, Wiman Joseon and the Four Han Commanderies, emphasizing the heavy influence of China. They limit the explanation of the Dangun myth to a myth or a legend and mention neither the historical character of the Dangun myth nor the actual existence of Gojoseon (Dangun Joseon) before Wiman Joseon.

While they show a high interest and favorable attitude toward Korea in general, the contents follow a Chinese standpoint and not a Korean one. This proves that Korean studies is weak compared to Chinese studies or Japanese studies in Southeast Asia. It seems probable that the writers who wrote about Korean history were not Korean history majors but were Chinese history or Asian history majors. Moreover, it seems serious that in most foreign textbooks the contents concerning Korea are written by non-Korean history majors and that reference data also depend on the Chinese or Japanese academic world.

The United States is no exception to this problem even though Korean studies is relatively active. For example, the theory of Gija Joseon, which North and South Korean historians completely deny, is presented in American textbooks.<sup>8</sup> The theory of Gija Joseon that will be dealt with later is generally regarded as a theory created by Chinese historians on the basis of Sino-centrism around the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.

According to a Korean legend, the first state in Korea was founded by the hero, Dangun. His father was a god and his mother was a bear. Another legend says that a royal descendant of the Shang (Yin) dynasty founded Korea. These legends reflect two points in the development of Korean culture. One is that Koreans call themselves a distinctive nation with their own traditions and the other is that Korean culture was formed under the influence of China from its earliest dynasty. (Beck et al. 2007:346)

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8. For a North Korean standpoint, refer to Kwon Seung-an (2004).

Thus, an American textbook introduces the Dangun myth and the theory of Gija migrating east as legends about the beginning of Korea. There is no problem explaining that the Dangun myth symbolizes the origin and originality unique to the Korean people, but there are a few problems with the theory of Gija's migration east. Since the middle of the Goryeo dynasty, Gija was respected and Gija Joseon was accepted as a historical fact. There was a national consciousness and pride in a civilized nation elevated through the struggle against the Mongolian invasion. Pride in a civilized nation and a civilized people continued during the Joseon dynasty and developed into petit Sino-centrism. The main points of petit Sino-centrism were Korea was next to China in civilization and a realistically meaningful movement to overcome the inferiority of national power to the Chinese dynasties with cultural pride. The explanation that Korea was only a follower of China is an explanation laying more emphasis on the phenomenon than on the true nature and is similar to the explanation found in Chinese textbooks that says Koreans were proud of sharing in the benefits of Chinese civilization.

However, except for the above textbook that introduced the theory of Gija Joseon, American textbooks generally maintain an objective viewpoint.

The ancestors of Koreans nowadays might have migrated from Manchuria and Northern China to the Korean Peninsula several thousand years ago. Over several centuries, different tribes and groups ruled other parts of the country. Around 2000 B.C., the first state called Joseon was born in Korea. (Arreola et al. 2007:647)

The first Koreans might have emigrated from Siberia and Northern Manchuria to the east during the Stone Age. They had developed their own ways of living before the waves of Chinese influence reached the Korean Peninsula for the first time in the Han dynasty. In 108 B.C., Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty invaded Korea and established military colonies. From these border colonies, Chinese calligraphy, agricultural methods, Confucian traditions, and political thoughts flowed into Korea. (Ellis et al. 2005:313)

The early Koreans united with people from China who sailed eastward. Chinese people mingled with the natives that had already been there. In time clans got together and formed tribes. Around 300 B.C., the most

powerful state was Gojoseon. The people of Gojoseon used ironware and iron arms. They also used a wagon drawn by horse and irrigation facilities in the rice paddies. They might have received this idea from China. With this new technology, Gojoseon grew to a huge alliance or united nation. The capital city was Pyongyang, which is the capital of North Korea. In 108 B.C., an army from China destroyed Gojoseon and China established the Four Han Commanderies. As a result, many Chinese influences including arts and architecture spread through the entire peninsula. The Chinese rule enraged Koreans, who regained control of the Four Han Commanderies after a while. (Thornton et al. 2005:360)

American textbooks don't introduce the Dangun myth but recognized that native political forces were developed before the invasion of Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty. Also, this native political system had a Chinese influence because of Chinese immigrants. While explaining the foundation and development of Gojoseon, they don't use the concrete terms or names of Dangun Joseon, Gija Joseon, and Wiman Joseon. Generally speaking, in spite of a similar tone in describing the native forces, they establish Dangun Joseon, the Han Commanderies and Wiman Joseon respectively as the leading forces succeeding the native forces. This proves that they don't agree about the establishment of the first nation in Korea. It is still more interesting that such an aspect is connected partly with Korea, China, and Japan's viewpoints of the beginning of Korea's ancient history.

## 2. Gija Joseon

Though the Dangun myth is introduced in many foreign textbooks, it is viewed as a myth or a legend. There is hardly any description about the social development of Dangun Joseon. It seems foreign textbooks doubt the actual existence of Dangun Joseon. On the contrary, there is a positive interpretation of Gija Joseon as a historical fact.

A Korean legend says that Korea was founded by Giche.<sup>9</sup> Giche was a military officer of the emperor of the Shang (Yin) dynasty. In 1122 B.C.

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9. This is likely a misspelling of Gija.

when the emperor was ousted, Giche fled to Korea with his followers. Giche established a kingdom called Joseon at the northern part of the Korean Peninsula and chose Pyongyang as the capital. Chinese transmitted Chinese civilization and customs, which were then developed in Korea. The Giche dynasty continued until Wiman ousted Gijun in 193 B.C. (Teopista et al. 2000:116)

It is said that the Korean Peninsula was exploited by Gija at the end of the Yin dynasty and that it had relations with China from long ago (Gan et al. 2005:140).

After the fall of the Shang dynasty, most of the people who didn't want to obey Chou migrated to the northern part and a party of Gija entered the Korean Peninsula. (Zhang n.d:14)

In the beginning, Gija of the Chou dynasty exploited the land and received the benefits of Chinese culture for 3,000 years afterwards. (Shi 2006:77)

Around 1200 B.C. when there were difficulties in China, some Chinese emigrated to the Korean Peninsula. Afterwards, other Chinese settled in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. This emigration caused Chinese knowledge and customs to be transmitted to Korea. (Kracht 2005:466)

Around 1200 B.C., Chinese settlers brought their culture to neighboring Korea with them. (Boehm 2003:670)

Except for a textbook from the Philippines with its proviso that it comes from a Korean legend, it is explained as a historical fact that a Chinese man named Gija came to Korea to establish a state in the 13<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and, thereafter, Chinese culture spread throughout the Korean Peninsula. In particular, Taiwanese textbooks give the impression that Gija exploited Korea and that there had been no native force in Korea or, if any, a politically uncivilized one. It can be assumed that this was done from a Sino-centric viewpoint. Regarding Gija Joseon as a historical fact is one that the Chinese academic world has used

since 1920.<sup>10</sup>

It was understood in the past that Gija Joseon was a kingdom established around the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C., succeeding Dangun Joseon and continuing until Wiman destroyed it in 195 B.C. Only because the name Gija Joseon was a combination of the figure ‘Gija,’ a sage from the late Yin dynasty of China and ‘Joseon,’ a geographical name in Korean history, have there been many arguments concerning its social character.

The actual existence of Gija can be confirmed through many history books connecting Gija with Joseon: in literature from before the Qin dynasty, Gija was described only as a loyal subject of Yin;<sup>11</sup> in literature from after the Han dynasty, around the fall of the Yin dynasty, Gija sought refuge in Joseon and the Chou dynasty appointed Gija as a feudal lord of Joseon.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the theory of Gija migrating from Yin to the east appeared after the Han dynasty and it is probable that the theory of enlightening Joseon’s civilization by Gija’s coming east and the theory of Gija Joseon enlarged and reproduced by such an argument might have been fabricated intentionally by modern historians according to Sino-centrism. Accordingly, there is a common tendency to deny the theory of Gija migrating from Yin to the east and the theory of Gija Joseon by North Korean, South Korean, and Japanese academia (Kim 1999: 89).

Thus, the reason that the unproved theory of Gija coming east and the theory of Gija Joseon were maintained as historical facts until recently was because of the historical recognition of Gija during the Joseon period. The Joseon dynasty, founded with Neo-Confucianism as its ruling ideology, recognized the righteous government and the maintenance of a diplomatic truckling relationship with China as ideal politics and diplomacy. For this reason, the Joseon dynasty took it as an honor that the Chinese sage Gija came to Gojoseon, a country with the same name as its own dynasty, and enlightened its people. Therefore, the theory of Gija migrating from Yin to the east was positively accepted. Sacrificial rites for the tomb of Gija that had been made during the Goryeo dynasty were per-

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10. There is no particular description in Chinese history textbooks because they view Gija Joseon as a distortion based on a legend.

11. In the literature before Qin including *Jukseoginyeon*, *Sangseo* and *Noneo* (Analects of Confucius), there appears only a fragmentary description that Gija was excellent in virtue and learning but no record about Gija going east.

12. Examples are *Sangseodaejeon*, *Sagi* (Historical Records), *Wiryak*, *Samguk-ji* (The History of the Three Kingdoms). Among them, *Wiryak* and *Samguk-ji* present a foundation for the basic recognition of Gija Joseon.

formed on a nation-wide level. The fact that Gija had been appointed as the king of Joseon also became a justification for the truckling relationship with the Ming dynasty.

Confucian scholars of the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties believed the theory of Gija migrating from Yin to the east, worshipped Gija as a sage who taught Korean people etiquette, and were proud of cultural nations enlightened by Gija. Since the Goryeo dynasty, there had been frequent oppression and conflicts with Liao, Chin, Yuan, and Qing and in the process of overcoming them, there was a deepened pride that Goryeo and Joseon were civilized nations like China. In short, to understand why Korea believed in Gija and Gija Joseon during pre-modern times, one should approach it not from a political standpoint but from a cultural one.

The reasons why Korean academia denies the theory of Gija migrating from Yin to the east are as follows: there was no content about appointing Gija as the king of Joseon in literature from the pre-Qin period; it would have been difficult to move from the interior of China to the northwestern part of the Korean Peninsula; there are few archaeological bases of Bronze Age culture around Huang-he in China being transmitted to Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula; and the tomb of Gija was located in Hanam or Shandong province. In particular, according to archaeological data, there appears a distinct heterogeneity between the Bronze Age culture of Korea influenced by Karasuk culture, the Siberian Bronze Age culture, and the Chinese Bronze Age culture around Huang-he. Therefore, the theory of Gija Joseon is nothing more than a fabrication.

In short, it is likely that after the Han dynasty destroyed Gojoseon and established the commanderies, it created the theory of Gija migrating from Yin to the east by embellishing a legend of Gija to secure a political cause and calm native unrest. Various efforts should be made so that expert opinion is reflected in the descriptions used in foreign textbooks. Then the theory of Gija Joseon would be deleted and the contents concerning Korea's ancient history would be improved.

### 3. Wiman Joseon

According to historical data, it is presumed that Gojoseon accomplished its political structure as a nation in the 5<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>13</sup> The funeral goods that

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13. According to *Wiryak* quoted in *Dongijeon of Wiji of Samgukji*, there were kings in Joseon since before the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., a heredity system for the throne, and a system of government posts

were excavated from balcony tombs in the Liaodong peninsula are assumed to be those of the leaders of the region at Jeonggawaja or Idohaja on the Honha; thus proving the formation of Gojoseon as a state. Gojoseon grew into a state which absorbed Chinese culture and displaced immigrants emigrated to Joseon in the midst of disorder in China in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. In the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., historical records state that kings Bu and Jun of Gojoseon took the throne successively. Even though Gojoseon's power was weakened because of the broadening power of the Yen dynasty, Gojoseon continued its own development. However, in 194 B.C., King Jun escaped to Jin in the south after a coup d'état by Wiman, who had fled the Yen dynasty. This was the beginning of Wiman Joseon.

Some view Wiman Joseon as a colonial dynasty of China because of the origin of Wiman, but it is accepted theory to include Wiman Joseon as part of Gojoseon. It was recorded that though Wiman was from the Yen dynasty, he wore clothes like a barbarian with his hair bound when he came to Joseon as an exile (Sagi 115:55). There is a possibility that Wiman went to the Yen dynasty and then returned to Joseon. The record shows that Wiman knew at least the tribal culture of Yemaek (earliest ancestors of Koreans). Also, after he seized power, he used the name of the country, Joseon, as before. This proves that the character of Wiman Joseon was a joint government of Chinese displaced immigrants and native forces. However, there are discrepancies between the character of Wiman Joseon described in foreign textbooks and academics of Korean history.

Wiman was a Chinese general who fled to Korea when the Chu dynasty of China fell. He was persuaded to serve in the army of Gijun (Gija) and was ordered to bring the army to the western frontline. Then, Wiman betrayed the country and seized power. The Wiman dynasty continued until 108 B.C. when Emperor Wudi of the pre-Han dynasty invaded. (Teopista et al. 2000:116)

In the first year of the West Han dynasty, Wiman from the Yen dynasty became an independent king in Joseon. (Li et al. 2004:132)

Since 300 B.C., Chinese immigrants began coming to Korea with the knowledge of ironware metallurgy and agriculture. Before long, the first powerful kingdom of Korea, Joseon appeared in the north of the Korean

Peninsula. Around the early 100s B.C., Joseon was powerful enough to control many parts of the Korean Peninsula to a certain degree. (Carrington et al. 2005:280)

Chinese culture and civilization exercised powerful and perpetual influence over Korea. In reality, the first kingdom of Korea, Joseon, was founded by Chinese immigrants and reflected various elements of Chinese culture. (Carrington et al. 2005:281)

Textbooks from the Philippines and Taiwan describe Wiman as being of Chinese origin, mention nothing in particular about the character of Wiman Joseon, and leave room for mistaking Wiman Joseon for a dynasty or a state of China. But American textbooks express Wiman not as a concrete figure but as a Chinese immigrant who founded the first dynasty of Korea, Joseon. It is true that the Iron Age culture flowed to the Korean Peninsula and the social development of Gojoseon was accelerated considerably. However, the description ignored the union with natives and emphasized only the Chinese influence.

Thus, it is a serious error to describe Wiman Joseon as a conquered or colonial dynasty of China and, what is worse, there are many instances that omit Gojoseon and begin Korean history with the Four Han Commanderies, which were established after the fall of Wiman Joseon.<sup>14</sup>

As early as 108 B.C, Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty of China (202 B.C.- A.D. 220) had set up colonies in north Korea...(Mioshevich 2004:4)

In 108 B.C., the Han dynasty established colonies to trade iron. Among them, only the Lolang colony around Pyongyang survived until A.D. 313 and was destroyed by Goguryeo, a tribal state at the mid-area of the Yalu River that revolted against China for the first time in A.D. 12. (Overy 2004:70)

Many foreign textbooks describe Korean history from the establishment of the

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14. The three history textbooks from the United Kingdom describe Korean history from the establishment of the Four Han Commanderies.

Four Han Commanderies or include the northern part of the Korean Peninsula as territory of the Chin and Han dynasties. Such a description is far from reality and is based on the research by colonial historians during Japanese rule. It is likely to give a distorted understanding of Korean history.

In 108 B.C., Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty destroyed Gojoseon and established four administrative districts, or commanderies, in the occupied territory. The Four Han Commanderies were Lolang, Lin-t'un, Zhenfan, and Xuantu. Lolang Commandery, the major commandery of the Four Han Commanderies, was established at Wanggeomseong, near present-day Pyongyang. In 108 B.C., centering on Lolang Commandery, Zhenfan Commandery was established to the south, Lin-t'un Commandery to the east, and in 107 B.C., Xuantu Commandery was established to the north and in the mid-area of the Amnok River. Thus, the Four Han Commanderies were completed but they did not exist for long. Lin-t'un and Zhenfan Commanderies were abolished in 82 B.C., twenty-six years after their establishment. Because of local resistance against the commandery government, Xuantu Commandery was moved to the Liaodong area in 75 B.C. Xuantu Commandery was established to secure a transportation route between Liaodong Commandery and the Amnok River basin. But it failed because of resistance by locals and failed to protect Liaodong Commandery against Goguryeo invasion. Only Lolang Commandery survived for so long until Goguryeo absorbed it in 313 A.D.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, its function as a commandery weakened and it was nothing more than a settlement for Chinese immigrants.

The Four Han Commanderies, which had varying lengths of existence, different purposes for being established and had little influence on Korean history, were explained as an organic system and were recognized as the beginning of Korean history by Japanese historians during colonial rule. The Four Han Commanderies were emphasized as a major basis of heteronomy. According to the theory of heteronomy, Korean history is not an autonomous but heteronymous one progressing through foreign invasions and their influences; therefore, it is essential that Korea should be a colony of an advanced country and the Four

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15. The reason Lolang Commandery existed for so long was the role of Chinese inhabitants. Most of them did not arrive after the establishment of the Four Han Commanderies but were descendants of displaced Chinese immigrants who had lived in the area long before the establishment of Lolang Commandery. They had been nativized to a considerable degree because they were people of Wiman Joseon and had survived because of few racial and cultural conflicts.

Han Commanderies established as colonies of the Han dynasty were a good example. Also, the ruling territory and power of the Four Han Commanderies, including Lolang Commandery, were estimated too highly and it was understood that the whole northern area of the Korean Peninsula was under the rule of the Four Han Commanderies.

With research on Korean history distorted and fabricated by Japanese imperialism, the importance of the Four Han Commanderies was reinterpreted after liberation. What was found was that the period of existence of the Four Han Commanderies except Lolang Commandery was about twenty-five years. Even Lolang Commandery, which was destroyed last, maintained a slender existence in a narrow area of the Daedong River basin in the second half of its rule. Moreover, the area had no connection with the Han dynasty after 220 A.D., when the Han dynasty fell. It is also revealed that the character of Lolang Commandery was not a ruling organization but a settlement for Chinese immigrants with strong commercial functions such as trade and communication with mainland China.

The contents concerning the Four Han Commanderies described in foreign textbooks follow the argument set forth by colonial scholars during Japanese rule. An overall revision is essential because of the distorted historical interpretation.

### **III. Conclusion**

This paper classified the descriptions of Gojoseon in foreign textbooks using the Dangun myth, Gija Joseon, and Wiman Joseon and the Four Han Commanderies. While the Dangun myth is introduced relatively precisely, the theory of Gija Joseon that was proved false by academics in North and South Korea and Japan and the establishment of the Han Commanderies that colonial historians suggested are still maintained as the starting point of Korean history.

Using records of literature and the results of archeological studies, the theory of Gija Joseon is shown not to be a historical fact but a story created by the Han dynasty to attain just cause after destroying Gojoseon. This is the accepted view of academics in North and South Korea and Japan. It is nothing but a false legend that even Chinese textbooks don't mention. The Four Han Commanderies were used as a typical example of the theory of heteronomy, which posits that Korea developed through foreign invasions, overemphasizes the influence of

outsiders on Korean history and even presents a distorted interpretation that Korean history began with the establishment of the Four Han Commanderies. Thus, the theory of Gija Joseon is maintained unilaterally by some Chinese academics to spread a Sino-centric historical view and is not approved by the international academic world. Also, the argument that views the establishment of the Four Han Commanderies as the beginning of Korean history is nothing more than distorted historical research with political aims. Therefore, these contents need to be revised. What gives students their first clear impression about Korea and Korean history is the contents about the origins of Korea; thus descriptions of Gojoseon that reflect the political standpoint of the Chinese and Japanese academic world should be revised.

Many good results have come about from ‘the correction project on Korea’ that began in 1975 and the ‘understanding Korea project’ that enlarged and strengthened the previous project in 1993 to correct errors about Korea found in foreign textbooks and encyclopedias. Nevertheless, there are still many errors and problems in the descriptions of Korea. Basically, this phenomenon results from the fact that Korean studies has not been vitalized overseas. These problems derive from a unilateral reflection of studies not from the Korean historical world but the arguments of academics in Japan and China. After all, since Korean studies is not considered vital to the countries concerned, the perspective shown in foreign textbooks is often a Japanese or Chinese one. As a long-term solution, foreign scholars of Korean studies should be nurtured through the expansion of Korean studies projects and as a short-term solution, up-to-date research on Korean history should be translated, distributed, and reflected in foreign textbooks.

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