

The Function of Prestige Goods in the Establishment of Xuantu Commandery and Its Relationship with Early Koguryŏ

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국문초록

현도군의 설치와 초기 고구려와의 관계에서 위세품의 기능

본 논문은 고구려와 현도군의 관계를 중심으로 하여 위만조선 멸망 후 한사군 설치 및 유지 과정에서 한의 위세품의 기능에 대해 논의한 글이다. 4군의 설치와 지배는 다수의 반독립적 지역 정치집단 위에 수립되었기 때문에, 군현의 유지와 확대는 지역 수장들로부터 일정한 협력 및 타협이 요구되었을 것으로 여겨진다. 위세품은 이들이 한 군현에 명목상 종속되어 있음을 표시하는 한편, 이러한 정치체의 수장들을 군현 지배 체제 안으로 끌어들이는 도구로도 기능하였을 것으로 여겨진다. 고구려의 경우 『삼국지』 동이전에서 전하는 것처럼 고구려의 수장들이 조복과 의복, 책을 받기 위해 현도군을 방문하였으며, 고구려현의 현령이 이들의 명적을 관장하였다고 기록한다. 본고에서

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는 명적이 고구려의 군현에 대한 복속을 상징하는 동시에, 현도군이 그 인구를 적어도 명목상으로 군현 주민으로 등록하는 근거가 되었을 가능성을 논의하였다. 이후 책구루를 통해서 위세품 제공 관계가 유지되었던 것은 불안정하지만 군현 소속으로 편제될 수 있었던 중요한 조건으로, 그 대가가 본래는 명적 제공이었음을 간접적으로 반영했다고 보았다.

주제어: 고구려, 현도군, 낙랑군, 책구루, 명적

1. Introduction

During the reign of Emperor Wu 武帝, the Han dynasty actively pursued territorial expansion, and its conquest of Old Chosŏn was a direct outcome of this policy. According to the conventional understanding, in 108 BCE, the Han established three commanderies 郡 in the conquered territory: Lelang 樂浪, Zhenfan 真番, and Lintun 臨屯. One year later, the dynasty established another commandery, Xuantu 玄菟 in or around the northern part of the Korean Peninsula and southern Manchuria. These four commanderies, usually known as the “Four Commanderies of Han 漢四郡,” functioned as administrative units designed to control the local populations of ancient Korea over the following decades. Historical sources indicate that Zhenfan and Lintun were soon abolished in 82 BCE, while Xuantu was relocated to the western part of Manchuria before the first century BCE due to conflicts with Koguryŏ. Lelang Commandery, however, survived until the early fourth century CE and continued to serve as a channel connecting the dynasties of mainland China with the surrounding “barbarian” groups.

Given their role and significance in ancient Korean history until the third century CE, it is only natural that historians have devoted considerable attention to these commanderies, especially to their establishment, administration, abolition, and relocation. This line of inquiry began with Japanese scholars, who first discussed the commanderies within the framework of Korean history. At the same time, the topic has become one of the most controversial issues in the study of ancient Korean history(Hyung Il Pai, 1992: 306). The location of Lelang Commandery, in particular, has been especially contentious in South Korean academic circles, since it is closely connected to broader social disputes shaped by contemporary nationalist perspectives and by modern diplomatic issues

involving China and Japan (Jeong Tay, 2018 ; Takaku Genji, 1995: chap. 1).

Although the most prominent debate concerning Lelang Commandery has centered on its location in relation to the capital of Old Chosŏn, the character of the commanderies themselves has also remained a major point of controversy. In particular, scholars have debated their methods of governance and their relationships with the “indigenous peoples,” namely the ancient Korean populations living under or around commandery authority. While the number of studies on this topic may be limited compared with research on other aspects of ancient Korean states, scholarship on the Han Chinese commanderies has generally, and quite consistently, addressed the relationship between the Chinese commanderies and non-Han groups both inside and beyond their boundaries.

However, historical records concerning the Chinese commanderies, including the Four Commanderies of Han, often present only the completed form of administration that the dynasty sought to establish. Even without explicit written evidence, it may be suggested that the establishment of these local administrations required a long and gradual process. For one thing, if the areas designated for commandery rule consisted of small and independent polities, as was the case with Lelang and Xuantu commanderies, the creation of an organized system of governance could not have been achieved simply by conquering the existing ruling group at its so-called capital. Even after the recorded establishment of the Four Commanderies of Han in 108 BCE, a certain period of time would have been required for the commanderies to consolidate their administrative systems, especially since their ultimate purpose was to establish centralized governance.

In this sense, in order to understand the relics of Chinese culture as well, it is necessary to discuss prestige goods from the perspective of the practical methods used to construct Chinese commandery rule by drawing non-Han peoples into its administrative boundaries, whether nominally or substantively. More specifically, these goods should be interpreted as instruments used to establish, expand, and stabilize commandery rule. Many archaeological relics from the Han commanderies in this region include prestige items such as seals, bronze mirrors, and remains of official attire, including the well-known gold belt buckle from Lelang Commandery. Although there is always the possibility that some of these items were products of commercial exchange, their character in ancient society strongly suggests that many of them were distributed for political purposes. At the very least, it is difficult to imagine that such items entered

the peninsula entirely apart from processes of political exchange.

Yet the political function of these prestige goods remains difficult to define. The fundamental issue that previous studies have had to confront is the ambiguity surrounding their practical mechanism, or the difficulty of determining their precise function and historical background. Although such goods are broadly assumed to have been used to conciliate non-Han groups or even to secure their collaboration, the lack of written documentation makes it difficult to identify the exact or official relationship created through their reception. This remains true even in the case of items such as seals inscribed with titles or official positions. If one emphasizes the formal character of the titles inscribed on these seals, accepting them could be interpreted as an act of accommodation to commandery rule. Yet, like the titles and positions bestowed in later tributary relations, these titles can hardly be regarded as offices that necessarily entailed actual obligations or administrative authority. For this reason, most studies have tended to locate the meaning or significance of such goods in the objects themselves, or in the very act of exchange.

Nevertheless, even if these prestige goods did not directly determine the official relationship between the parties involved, they can still be examined as instruments that functioned in more practical ways than mere tokens of amity or vague dominant-subordinate relations. The prestige goods bestowed by the Han dynasty, including official seals, clothes, caps, and other forms of official attire, provide a useful case for reconsidering the establishment and maintenance of commandery rule after the fall of Old Chosŏn. As this paper will discuss, these goods served as instruments through which indigenous polities targeted for incorporation into the commandery system were encouraged, persuaded, or induced to participate in that system. As a result, Chinese goods flowed into these societies and influenced their culture and social structure. From the perspective of the Chinese empire, this process may also have contributed to the cultural transformation that Han policies sought to promote, even though the result was often a mixed or hybrid culture rather than a fully “Sinicized” population.

Although this phenomenon may be found more broadly in regions where Chinese commanderies were established, Lelang and Xuantu commanderies, especially the latter, provide particularly useful case studies for examining the function of prestige goods in commandery management and in the relationship between ancient Korean peoples and the commanderies of Han. Overall, this paper argues that prestige goods functioned

not merely as diplomatic gifts, but as administrative incentives tied to registration and nominal incorporation into commandery rule.

2. The Han Chinese Commanderies and Indigenous Populations after the Fall of Old Chosŏn

As noted in the introduction, the Han conquest of Old Chosŏn in 108 BCE led to the establishment of commanderies in the conquered territory. Yet the exact number, date, and administrative scope of these commanderies remain debated.

A-1) “In the summer of the third year of Yuanfeng, Sam 參, the Chancellor of Nixi 尼谿, sent men to kill Ugŏ 右渠, king of Chosŏn, and came to surrender. ... As a result [of this conquest], Chosŏn was finally pacified and made into four commanderies.”¹⁾

A-2) “Lelang Commandery 樂浪郡: Established in the third year of Emperor Wu’s Yuanfeng reign (108 BCE). Under Wang Mang it was called Lexian 樂鮮 and belonged to Yuzhou 幽州. It had 62,812 households and a population of 406,748. It had Yunzhang 雲鄣. It comprised twenty-five counties.”²⁾

A-3) “Xuantu Commandery 玄菟郡: ① Established in the fourth year of Emperor Wu’s Yuanfeng reign (107 BCE). Koguryŏ 高句驪—under Wang Mang called Xiajuli 下句驪—belonged to Yuzhou. It had 45,006 households and a population of 221,845. It comprised three counties.”³⁾

A-4) “In the third year of Yuanfeng ... In summer, Chosŏn killed its king Ugeo and surrendered. Its territory was made into the commanderies of Lelang, Lintun, Xuantu, and Zhenfan.”⁴⁾

A-5) “In the autumn of the sixth year of Yuanfeng, there were locusts. Prior to this, the two generals had campaigned against Chosŏn and established three commanderies.”⁵⁾

A-1 is the aforementioned record in the “Biography of Chosŏn” in the *Shiji* concerning the fall of Wiman Chosŏn and the establishment of the Four Commanderies of Han. The *Shiji* provides a detailed account of the conflict and war between Han and Wiman

1) *Shiji* 史記, juan 115, “Biographies,” no. 55, “Account of Chosŏn.”

2) *Hanshu* 漢書, juan 28B, “Treatise on Geography,” Lelang Commandery.

3) *Hanshu* 漢書, juan 28B, “Treatise on Geography,” Xuantu Commandery.

4) *Hanshu* 漢書, juan 6, “Annals of Emperor Wu,” no. 6.

5) *Hanshu* 漢書, juan 27B, “Treatise on the Five Phases,” no. 7B.

Chosŏn that began in 109 BCE, and it also records how those who surrendered from Wiman Chosŏn were treated during these events. At the end of the account, it briefly states that “as a result [of this conquest], Chosŏn was finally pacified and made into four commanderies.” However, the *Shiji* does not record the actual names of these commanderies. For this reason, doubts have sometimes been raised concerning the reliability of the record, especially as to whether the Four Commanderies were actually established all at once in 108 BCE. The names of the Four Commanderies first appear in the “Annals of Emperor Wu” 武帝紀 in the *Hanshu*, which, like the *Shiji*, states that commanderies were established following the surrender of Wiman Chosŏn in the third year of Yuanfeng 元封 (A-4).

However, the “Treatise on the Five Phases” 五行志 in the *Hanshu*, under the sixth year of Yuanfeng 元封 (105 BCE), records that “previously, the two generals had campaigned against Chosŏn and established three commanderies.” This differs from the accounts in the *Shiji* and the “Annals of Emperor Wu” in the *Hanshu*, both of which connect the conquest of Chosŏn with the establishment of four commanderies. The discrepancy has long generated debate. Yan Shigu 顏師古 explained in his commentary that “three commanderies” was an erroneous transcription of “four commanderies,”⁶⁾ a supposition accepted by a number of later studies (Ikeuchi Hiroshi, 1978: 4).

However, although the date given for the establishment of Lelang Commandery in the “Treatise on Geography” 地理志 of the *Hanshu* is the third year of Emperor Wu’s Yuanfeng reign, corresponding to 108 BCE and agreeing with the *Shiji* (A-2), the date given for the establishment of Xuantu Commandery is 107 BCE (A-3). On this basis, some scholars have argued that Xuantu Commandery was established on a different date from the other three commanderies. According to this interpretation, the population on which Xuantu Commandery was based was located outside Wiman Chosŏn, in a region inhabited by peoples referred to as Yemaek 濊貊, including the group that later developed into Koguryō. Yi Pyŏng-do further suggested that Xuantu Commandery was the successor to Canghai Commandery 滄海郡, which had been established following the surrender to Han of the population led by the Ye lord Namnyŏ 葦君南閼 (Lee Byong-do, 1976). In other words, Canghai Commandery, and later Xuantu Commandery, were established through a process separate from that of the other three commanderies, which explains why their dates of establishment differed.

6) *Hanshu buzhu* 漢書補注, juan 18, “Treatise on the Five Phases 五行志,” 7A, “師古曰 武紀云以其地爲樂浪臨屯玄菟真番郡 是四郡也 而此云三 蓋傳 寫志者誤”

Since Yi Pyŏng-do's interpretation, many recent studies have tended to limit the commanderies established as a direct result of the fall of Wiman Chosŏn to three. Although there are still differing views concerning Xuantu Commandery, including its location and its relationship to Canghai Commandery, most scholars now regard the commanderies that reorganized the former territory of Wiman Chosŏn in 108 BCE as limited to three, as recorded in the "Treatise on the Five Phases," while viewing Xuantu as having been established one year later, as stated in the "Treatise on Geography" of the *Hanshu*.⁷⁾

However, even if Xuantu Commandery is excluded, questions still remain as to whether the other three commanderies were all established in 108 BCE, and whether the territory of Wiman Chosŏn was reorganized en bloc into these commanderies. In the "Account of Chosŏn," the establishment of the Four Commanderies is recorded together with a series of events assigned to the summer of 108 BCE: the killing of King Ugeo, the continued resistance and death of Sŏnggi 成己, and the final pacification of Chosŏn. It is difficult to assume that all of these events, including the establishment of a commandery system over the conquered territory, were completed within such a short period.

For this reason, some previous studies have questioned whether the Four Commanderies, especially Zhenfan and Lintun, were actually established at this time. Sin Ch'ae-ho regarded them not as administrative divisions actually implemented in conquered territory, but as hypothetical units projected onto a map (Sin Ch'ae-ho, 1948: 123-124; Compilation Committee of Danjae Shin Chaeho's Complete Collection, 2007: 347-348). Other scholars have suggested that Zhenfan and Lintun may have remained planned commanderies rather than fully functioning administrative units (So Yong-su, 1998: 13-14). Although these interpretations differ in detail, they share the assumption that establishing a Chinese commandery outside the cultural and administrative sphere of the Han empire required more than the occupation of a central stronghold.

In this regard, it is also necessary to consider previous studies that have understood Wiman Chosŏn not as a polity with a unified administrative structure comparable to the commandery-county system, but as a decentralized state encompassing multiple semi-independent political groups. Many studies have argued that Wiman Chosŏn's political structure was not a unified system resembling the commandery-county system,

7) For more information about the debate over the number of commanderies established in 108 BCE, see So, Yong-su, 1996: 113.

but rather took the form of an early state with a dispersed structure of rule (Park Daejae, 2006; 2013: 237), or of a confederation (Song Ho-jung, 1999: 156–160; Park Jun-hyoung, 2012: 133–134).⁸⁾ If the structure of Lelang Commandery reflected the regional organization and social structure of the Wiman Chosŏn period, it would be difficult to assume that the incorporation of these dispersed groups was completed all at once through the occupation of the capital. In other words, even without direct illustrations from the written records, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the Han dynasty would have negotiated, or forced, to bring these small groups into their administrative boundary separately.

This gradual character of commandery formation is also suggested by the subsequent history of Zhenfan and Lintun. Although a fragment of the *Maoling shu* 茂陵書 states that each commandery originally governed fifteen counties, both were abolished in 82 BCE and their territories were placed under Lelang Commandery. Yet not all of their counties were incorporated into Lelang, as shown by the fact that Lelang had only twenty-five counties after the annexation and that Sha County 雪縣, said to have been the administrative seat of Zhenfan, was not included among them.⁹⁾ These facts suggest that the establishment, abolition, and reorganization of the commanderies reflected the difficulty of securing stable rule over regions composed of multiple local polities.

For this reason, the establishment of commanderies over the former territory of Old Chosŏn should be understood as a staged and uneven process. Lelang Commandery may have been established first around the former center of Wiman Chosŏn, while surrounding groups were gradually incorporated as subordinate counties or reorganized into separate commanderies. In such a context, the Han dynasty needed various methods to draw local leaders and their populations into the imperial administrative order. Among these methods, the bestowal of goods upon local political leaders provides an especially important example. These goods were granted, directly or indirectly, on the condition that local subordination be formalized, even if that subordination was often nominal. This point provides the basis for examining prestige goods as practical instruments in

8) Oh Youngchan also suggested that Wiman Chosŏn formed a loose confederation of powers with local bases, citing the cases of the Ye lord Namnyō and Yōk Kyegyōng as examples. See Oh Youngchan, 2006: 66.

9) *Hanshu*, juan 6, “Annals of Emperor Wu 武帝紀,” no. 6, commentary by Chen Zan 臣瓚: “臣瓚曰 茂陵書 臨屯郡治東曉縣 去長安六千一百三十八里 領十五 縣 真番郡治雪縣 去長安七千六百四十里 十五縣 [Chen Zan says: According to the *Maoling shu* 茂陵書, Lintun Commandery was administered from Dongyi County 東曉縣, 6,138 li from Chang’an, and governed fifteen counties; Zhenfan Commandery was administered from Sha County 雪縣, 7,640 li from Chang’an, and governed fifteen counties].”

the establishment and maintenance of commandery rule.

3. The Han Dynasty's Prestige Goods in Establishing Commanderies

As noted above, the extant records concerning the establishment of the Four Commanderies of Han are fragmentary. They indicate that commanderies were established after the conquest of Old Chosŏn, but they provide little information about the specific relationships between commandery administrations, local populations, and surrounding polities that the Han empire sought either to conciliate or to incorporate into the commandery system. These relationships must therefore be reconstructed through later and equally fragmentary sources.

One of the most important sources for examining these relationships is the *Sanguozhi* 三國志. Among its sixty-five *juan*, the “Dongyi zhuan” 東夷傳 contains accounts of states and groups located to the east of the Chinese commanderies, including Koguryŏ and Puyŏ 夫餘. A substantial portion of these records was based on information obtained through the commanderies. Although there is a chronological gap between the compilation of the *Sanguozhi* and the events it describes, the text nevertheless provides relatively detailed evidence for how the commanderies interacted with non-Han groups. One useful example is Lelang Commandery's relationship with Okchŏ:

B-1) Okchŏ was included within Lelang. Since the Han dynasty considered the area too large and distant, it divided off the eastern region beyond the Tantan Mountain Range 單于大領 and established the Eastern Section Commandant 東部都尉. The administrative office of this district was placed at Pulnae Castle 不耐城, from which it separately governed the seven counties east of the mountain range. At this point, each village of Okchŏ became a county. ... In the sixth year of Jianwu 建武, 30 CE, when the Han dynasty reduced the number of frontier commanderies, the Eastern Section Commandant of Okchŏ was abolished. Thereafter, the dynasty made the *kōsu* 渠帥 of each county into county marquises 縣侯. All counties of Okchŏ, such as Pulnae 不耐, Hwaryŏ 華麗, and Okchŏ 沃沮, became marquises.¹⁰⁾

10) *Sanguozhi* 三國志, *juan* 30, Weishu 魏書 30, “Dongyichuan” 東夷傳 [Accounts of Eastern Yi] “Tongokchŏ 東沃沮.”

According to this passage, Okchō was once incorporated into Lelang Commandery, where seven counties were established. The text then explains that the Han dynasty created the Eastern Section Commandant 東部都尉 to administer the region separately, since it was considered “too large and distant.” By the first century CE, however, the Han dynasty could no longer maintain this arrangement. In 30 CE, the seven counties of Okchō were removed from direct commandery administration and transformed into marquisates. As a result, the *kōsu* 渠帥 of each county became a county marquis 縣侯, effectively entrusting local authority to indigenous leaders.

The term *kōsu* 渠帥, like *kunjang* 君長 or *chusu* 主帥, was commonly used in Chinese sources to refer to local leaders of non-Han groups, often chiefs of small-scale polities (Bielenstein Hans, 1980). A marquisate in the Han dynasty, by contrast, was originally a fief granted to a marquis and was typically equivalent in scale to a county. The transformation of Okchō’s counties into marquisates therefore suggests that Han rule in this region was not simply abolished, but reorganized through the recognition of local leaders within a Han-derived political framework.

Taking into account that these marquises were originally local leaders, it is likely that the Han dynasty sought to control the population of the conquered territory by conciliating such figures and incorporating them into the Chinese administrative order. The establishment of the Okchō marquisates in 30 CE indicates that, even in the first century CE, indigenous political communities with a certain degree of autonomy still existed in this region. If so, it is reasonable to assume that local political leaders in this area had maintained some degree of independence already in the first century BCE, when Lelang Commandery incorporated the region into its territorial sphere.

The artifacts from Tomb No. 1 at Chōngbaek-tong 貞柏洞 provide an important archaeological case often used by historians to explain this phenomenon. In this tomb, a silver seal bearing the inscription “Puchoyegun” 夫租藏君, or “Lord of Ye in Pucho,” was excavated, indicating that the tomb owner was a local leader of Ye origin or identity.¹¹⁾ “Pucho” refers to the present-day Hamhŭng region, where the Okchō people and their marquisates were located. Although there is no definitive evidence demonstrating the exact relationship between the Okchō marquises of 30 CE and “Puchoyegun,” it is difficult to assume that the two were entirely unrelated.

The tomb is generally dated to the mid-first century BCE, based on comparisons

11) The seal was first introduced in Paek Ryōn-haeng (1962). For more information about its excavation process and the relic, see Ri Sun-jin, (1974)

with nearby tombs such as Tombs No. 364 and No. 37 at Chǒngbaek-tong(Lee Seung-ho, 2014). At the same time, judging from its style and script, the seal was clearly produced within the Han cultural and administrative tradition, and was most likely bestowed by Han authorities(Kim Ki-heung, 1985). This suggests that the tomb owner was a local leader whose title was recognized, at least nominally, by Han. The seal therefore points to the possibility that, already during the process of establishing commandery rule in the first century BCE, the Han dynasty sought to secure the support of non-Han groups by granting titles to their leaders and incorporating them into its political order.

Yet it should also be pointed out that these seals, and the titles they bore, did not necessarily represent actual offices carrying formal obligations and administrative authority within the Han bureaucratic system. Although seals functioned as instruments of office within bureaucratic institutions, titles bestowed on leaders outside the direct governance of the Chinese commandery-county system were often largely nominal. The title *gun* 君, Chinese *jūn*, in the seal inscription was a traditional title referring to a person granted stipend lands in a feudal order, such as that of the Warring States period in China. After the Qin and Han dynasties, this tradition continued, although such stipend lands came under more direct control of the central government. These titles were also often bestowed on non-Chinese groups with which the dynasties interacted, and they were generally assigned according to the political hierarchy of these groups or the size of the territories they controlled. In the case of the title *gun*, it usually appeared in titles such as *ǔpkun* 邑君, referring to a local lord who controlled a territory smaller than a county. Such titles were accompanied by seals produced and bestowed by the dynasty, with inscriptions bearing titles such as “Puchoyegun” 夫租藏君. The materials used for these seals also differed according to rank; for example, seals for *ǔpkun* were usually made of bronze(Jang Byungjin, 2025: 231–232).

Judging from these general principles governing titles and seals, the Han dynasty appears to have applied an organized system of feudal titles even to peoples outside the Chinese mainland, and the polities associated with Lelang or Xuantu Commandery were no exception. At the same time, however, the application of these principles was not always consistent. The seal of “Puchoyegun” 夫租藏君, for example, was made of silver, which was not the usual material for the seal of an *ǔpkun* 邑君. Although the seal itself was manufactured in accordance with the standard formal style of Han dynasty seals(Kim Ki-heung, 1985: 9–10). Some scholars have suggested that it may not have

been an official seal bestowed directly by the dynasty (Tamura Kōichi, 1979: 624–625).

Moreover, according to imperial law, such seals were supposed to be retrieved after the death of their holders. Yet, as noted above, the seal of “Puchoyegun” was buried in the owner’s tomb, a phenomenon occasionally observed in the tombs of political leaders outside the Chinese mainland. Although the precise character of this seal still requires further examination, it can be said that these seals, and the titles they bore, were not managed as strictly as those bestowed on officials or titleholders in the Chinese mainland, where the dynasty exercised more direct administrative control.

This irregularity does not diminish the political significance of the seal; rather, it suggests that Han title-granting on the frontier operated more flexibly than within the directly administered core of the empire. Therefore, some scholars argue that such seals functioned less as instruments representing official titles than as gifts intended to conciliate local lords and confirm the preservation of their existing political authority (Lee Seung-ho, 2014: 274–275). In any case, these objects still carried meanings that could appeal to their recipients, insofar as they implied a mutually acceptable form of Han domination—or, from the perspective of the leaders of small polities, collaboration with the Han order. At the same time, the official meaning of the titles cannot be interpreted literally as a direct representation of the actual relationship between the two sides.

Unfortunately, at the present stage, apart from the seal of the Puchoyegun, it is difficult to identify actual material evidence for the Han bestowal of prestige goods at the time of the commanderies’ establishment. The following case, however, may serve as supporting evidence, even though it survives only in textual records. In the “Biography of Han” 韓傳, records about seals and official garments bestowed by the Chinese empire illustrates this phenomenon.

C-1) According to the customs of Han 韓, people liked to wear Chinese clothes and caps 衣幘 (*ũich’aek*). Even *haho* 下戶 borrowed and wore clothes and caps whenever they visited the Lelang Commandery and had an audience. The number of people who borrowed and wore clothes and caps, as well as court seals with cords 印綬 (*insu*), exceeded one thousand.¹²⁾

Han 韓 is a collective name for the three ancient polities of Mahan 馬韓, Chinhan 辰韓, and Pyōnhan 弁韓, located in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula and often

12) *Sanguozhi*, juan 30, *Weishu* 30, “Dongyichuan” “Han 韓”

referred to collectively as the “Three Han” 三韓. According to this passage, the people of Han 韓¹³⁾ favored these Chinese garments, and by the third century their use had become sufficiently widespread to be regarded as customary. Although *ũich’aek* 衣幘 can be translated literally as “clothes and caps,” the term often refers to the official attire of government officials. These garments were usually worn on formal state occasions and also functioned as markers of the wearer’s status. *Insu* 印綬 refers to a court seal with its cord, or sometimes to the cord itself, used by a government official. Such seals differed in shape, and their cords varied in color according to the rank or status of their holders.

One may argue that accepting and using these objects represented the owners’ cooperation with, and indirectly their obedience to, Chinese government officials, since such garments and seals were originally objects designated for officials. Some scholars have suggested that the bestowal of these “clothes, caps, seals, and cords” functioned as a primal form of tributary system (Kim, Chang-seok, 2004: 8). Yet, considering the statement that “the number of people who borrowed and wore clothes and caps, as well as court seals with cords, exceeded one thousand,” it is difficult to say that these seals entailed actual political obligations or administrative authority, regardless of the titles they bore. The sheer number of such seals suggests that they could not all have been issued by commandery administrative offices as formal instruments carrying official authority and obligations.

This phenomenon raises the question of why the local leaders of Han 韓 accepted these objects so eagerly that their use became widespread. It may be argued that these objects functioned as prestige goods within their society, since they symbolized connections to a greater power, namely the Han empire, and thereby granted or strengthened the political authority of their holders. From the Han Chinese perspective, the acceptance and use of these objects signified that local leaders had been incorporated, at least nominally, into the Chinese imperial order. The Han dynasty bestowed such luxury goods upon local leaders in order to secure their cooperation and ultimately their obedience; according to the record, this policy was successful to a certain extent among the Three Han.

Although the historical records are fragmentary, the use of prestige goods as a means of managing relations with non-Han groups was not limited to the southern Korean

13) To avoid confusion with Han(漢), a name of the Chinese empire, this paper will add the character ‘韓’ when referring to ‘Han’ as the ancient states of Korea from here on.

Peninsula. A similar case can be found in the “Account of Puyŏ” in the *Sanguozhi*:

D-1) During the Han dynasty, the people of Puyŏ used a jade casket 玉匣 for their kings’ funerals. They always kept this casket in Xuantu Commandery, and whenever a king died, they retrieved it and used it for the funeral.¹⁴⁾

Record D-1 shows that Puyŏ had a custom of using a jade casket for royal funerals, and that this casket was normally kept in Xuantu Commandery. Although no written record suggests that the commandery directly controlled Puyŏ, this passage indicates that the commandery exercised indirect influence over it. Ritual objects, such as a jade casket used for a king’s funeral, commonly served to display the authority of the ruling class in ancient society (Lee Ki-baik, 1982). If such an important ritual object was “kept in the commandery,” as the record states, then Xuantu Commandery may be understood as having exerted considerable influence over Puyŏ. Unlike seals or official garments, the jade casket was not an administrative object; nevertheless, because it was indispensable for royal funerary ritual, its control by Xuantu Commandery gave the commandery symbolic leverage over Puyŏ kingship.

Exchanges involving prestige goods of this kind may therefore be understood as a means of maintaining friendly relations—or even nominally subordinate relations—between Han commanderies and surrounding groups such as Puyŏ. Indeed, this approach may have been effective as a form of conciliation, rather than as rule based solely on military coercion. Some historians, such as Kwŏn O-jung, have pointed out that Lelang Commandery was able to maintain its rule for an extended period because of policies designed to secure the cooperation of non-Han groups. According to this view, the commandery guaranteed local leaders a certain degree of their previous authority even after its establishment, and at times allowed local people to participate in the management of commandery affairs (Kwon Oh-joong, 1992: 48).

Still, it is necessary to point out that this policy was successful only when non-Han groups regarded these goods as beneficial to themselves. Indeed, prestige goods from the Chinese empire could serve as useful instruments through which local leaders strengthened their authority over their own subjects. At the same time, it is insufficient to explain the bestowal of these prestige goods merely as a means of “appeasing” local leaders. Such a vague explanation cannot fully account for the practical benefits that

14) *Sanguozhi*, juan 30, *Weishu* 30, “Dongyichuan,” “Puyŏ.”

this policy brought in expanding Han influence, which ultimately contributed to the establishment and consolidation of commandery rule.

In the case of the Four Commanderies of Han, few records illustrate this process in detail, apart from the fact that their establishment resulted from the conquest of Old Chosŏn. Yet, as discussed above, this process did not simply involve replacing the existing administration. If this is the case, then it is possible to propose that the bestowal of these items functioned as a means of drawing small polities into the commandery system and, ultimately, of consolidating commandery institutions. In this regard, the provision of prestige goods should not be understood as a one-time event. Rather, it may have involved certain reciprocal obligations.

One noteworthy point in the above case of Puyŏ is that the jade casket 玉匣 was kept in Xuantu Commandery, and that Puyŏ borrowed it and used it for royal funerals whenever a king died. In other words, in order to use the jade casket, the people of Puyŏ would have had to visit Xuantu Commandery, at least on the occasion of a king's death. This suggests that the provision or control of prestige goods could create repeated contacts between the commandery and surrounding polities. Why, then, did Puyŏ—and, if the same pattern applied to other cases, other groups as well—have to visit commandery or county offices on a regular basis? And what did they provide to the commandery in return for the bestowal or use of such prestige goods? These questions will be examined in the following chapter.

4. Koguryŏ's Ch'aekkuru and Registration under Xuantu Commandery

The historical records do not describe in detail the administrative processes through which the Han dynasty incorporated polities located beyond its cultural boundaries, as in the cases of the Four Commanderies of Han or the Four Hexi Commanderies 河西四郡. It is also doubtful that there existed a single, formulaic, and standardized method for such incorporation. Nevertheless, with regard to the prestige goods bestowed by the Han dynasty upon local leaders, the case of Qianwei Commandery 犍爲郡 provides important clues from which the process of establishing Xuantu Commandery may be inferred. The “Biographies of the Southwestern Yi” 西南夷列傳

and the “Biography of Sima Xiangru” 司馬相如列傳 in the *Shiji* record the establishment of Qianwei Commandery and Yelang County 夜郎縣 in the Ba-Shu 巴蜀 region. Although geographically distant from Xuantu, the Qianwei case is useful because it shows that the establishment of commanderies could be mediated through the provision of desirable Han goods to local leaders.

E-1) In the sixth year of Jianyuan ... ① When Meng returned to Chang'an, he asked merchants from Shu about the matter ... ② He then met Duotong, the Marquis of Yelang. Meng bestowed generous gifts upon him, instructed him in Han's power and virtue, and made an agreement to establish officials there, appointing his son as magistrate. ③ The small settlements around Yelang all coveted Han silks and fabrics. Believing that the route to Han was so difficult that Han would ultimately be unable to possess them, they provisionally accepted Meng's agreement. After Meng returned and reported this, the region was made into Qianwei Commandery.¹⁵⁾

E-2) After Tang Meng had roughly opened communication with Yelang, he thereby opened a route to the Southwestern Yi and conscripted soldiers from Ba, Shu, and Guanghan, numbering several tens of thousands, to carry out the work. ... ① At this time, the rulers and chiefs of Qiong and Ze heard that the Southern Yi had established communication with Han and had received many gifts and rewards. Many of them wished to become subjects, and requested that offices be established on the same basis as among the Southern Yi.¹⁶⁾

Qianwei Commandery 犍爲郡, mentioned in E-1, was established in the course of Emperor Wu's expansion toward surrounding non-Han peoples, and its date of establishment was close to that of Canghai Commandery 滄海郡. What is noteworthy is the record that the small settlements around Yelang 夜郎 accepted Tang Meng's 唐蒙 agreement because they coveted Han silks and fabrics, and that Qianwei Commandery was established as a result (E-1③). The passage does not specify the exact contents of Tang Meng's agreement. Considering the surrounding context, however, it may be inferred that the agreement involved either the provision of Han goods in return for accepting the establishment of the commandery, or permission to engage in trade.

Meanwhile, E-2, from the “Biography of Sima Xiangru” 司馬相如列傳, records the incorporation of Qiong 邛 and Ze 笮 into the commandery-county system around the same time, indicating that they too were integrated into Han commanderies and counties

15) *Shiji*, juan 116, “Biographies of the Southwestern Yi.”

16) *Shiji*, juan 57 “Biography of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如”

through a process similar to that of Yelang. In particular, this passage refers to Tang Meng and Yelang and states that the people of Qiong and Ze, having heard that the Southern Yi 南夷 had received many gifts and rewards, requested the same arrangement. This indicates that, in some cases, non-Han political groups accepted the establishment of commanderies in order to obtain Han goods.

Although the eagerness of these non-Han groups for Han products may have been exaggerated in the sources, the passage still implies that Han silks and fabrics played a certain role in encouraging their acceptance of the commandery system. As shown in the “Biography of Sima Xiangru” cited in E-2 above, indigenous groups accepted the establishment of Han commanderies and counties by seeking Han material goods, presenting themselves as subjects, or requesting the installation of offices. This provides circumstantial evidence that the establishment of Han commanderies during this period was not premised simply on unilateral domination and subordination, but could also take the form of negotiation conditioned on the provision of Han goods (Lee Jongrok, 2018).

It is true that products such as silk cannot be regarded as exactly the same type of goods as seals or official garments. Nevertheless, as discussed above, seals and similar objects in the cases examined here should be understood primarily as prestige goods rather than as objects that necessarily represented formal bureaucratic relationships within Chinese governance. In this respect, silks in this period were not fundamentally different. A similar process may therefore have occurred in the establishment and maintenance of Xuantu Commandery, as implied by the relationship between the commandery and the non-Han populations in its vicinity. After its establishment in 107 BCE, Xuantu Commandery was forced to relocate its administrative center from the Korean Peninsula to the central region of Manchuria because of an invasion by a “barbarian” group called Maek 貊, which most likely refers to Koguryŏ, in 75 BCE.¹⁷⁾

F-1) During the Han dynasty period, [the dynasty presented to Koguryŏ(高句麗) people] with drums, pipes, and musicians. [Koguryŏ people] regularly visited Xuantu commandery to receive court dress(朝服), clothes and hats(衣幘)¹⁸⁾ as gifts, while the prefect of Koguryŏ County supervised the *mingji* (名籍).¹⁹⁾

17) For the details of the commandery’s change in its administrative boundary and invasion of Maek, see *Sanguozhi*, juan 30, Weishu 30, “Dongyichuan,” “Tongokchŏ.”

18) Literally, “üi(衣)” means clothes, but the term in the text refers to clothes for Chinese official meetings. Ch’aek(幘) refers to a ‘hat’ for court officials.

Even after Xuantu Commandery was relocated following this conflict, and despite the resulting spatial distance between the commandery and the Koguryŏ groups, certain forms of interaction continued. According to F-1, Xuantu Commandery provided the people of Koguryŏ with prestige goods such as clothes and caps 衣幘, comparable to those given to the Han 韓 people or to the silks provided to Yelang. Although the exact purpose and use of these items remain uncertain, it is difficult to imagine that objects such as court dress, caps, and musicians were intended as anything other than prestige goods for political leaders.

At this time, Koguryŏ, which was founded in the present-day Huanren 桓仁 and Ji'an 集安 regions of China in 37 BCE, had not yet developed into a centralized polity. Therefore, visits to Xuantu Commandery were likely conducted individually by the leaders of small local polities in each region, while Xuantu Commandery administered them through Koguryŏ County as its center. At the same time, however, it also indicates that Xuantu Commandery's method of managing Koguryŏ depended on the voluntary visits of individual local leaders, and that, on the occasion of such visits, it was necessary to provide them with prestige goods such as clothes and caps.

A particularly noteworthy part of this record, in relation to the establishment and maintenance of commandery governance, is the statement that "the prefect of Koguryŏ County supervised the *mingji* 名籍." *Mingji* can be translated as a "register of names" or "list of names," and the term was frequently used to refer to registers kept by Chinese government offices. The exact purpose of this "register" in the passage is unknown, since no further description survives in the extant texts. The terms *mingji* 名籍 and *ji* 籍 appear frequently in historical texts concerning the Han dynasty, since they were general terms for various kinds of registers. The *mingji* in this passage could therefore have referred to a name register used for some bureaucratic purpose. Presumably, this register may simply have recorded the names of Koguryŏ people, or of their leaders, who visited the county and received such items.

Yet it is doubtful that the register merely recorded their names, since such an ordinary administrative procedure would be too obvious to warrant specific mention in this text. Therefore, one plausible explanation is that the register mentioned in this record was to record the population under the rule of Koguryŏ leaders, reported or submitted in exchange for the prestige goods they received. This *mingji*, or register of the households

19) *Sanguozhi*, juan 30, *Weishu* 30, "Dongyichuan," "Koguryŏ."

and populations of the non-Han peoples were often submitted by their political leaders, and the Han dynasty imposed a tax based on this register, which acted as a type of a ‘treaty’ between them (Kobayashi Satoshi, 1991: 34–38). During the Han dynasty, the submission of registers by non-Han political leaders was regarded as an act expressing their subordination to, and acceptance of, Han domination, whether nominal or substantive.

G-1) “Ren Gui 任貴, a man of Yuexi 越嶲, called himself Administrator and sent an envoy to present the *jī* 計. The commentary states: ‘*Jī* 計 refers to the name-registers of the people, like the registers of the present day.’”²⁰⁾

G-2) “The assembled officials and regional supporters, the sons and grandsons of the imperial clan, the many commanderies presenting their annual accounts, and the numerous Man peoples offering tribute in accordance with their duties all took part. The Wuhuan 烏桓 and the Yemaek 濊貊 also came to assist in the sacrifice, and the chanyu’s attendant son and the *gudu hou* 骨都侯 likewise stood in attendance.”²¹⁾

As shown in G-1, when Ren Gui claimed the title of Administrator of Yuexi Commandery and submitted to the Later Han in 38 CE, he sent a register of the commandery’s residents as a gesture of subordination. Although the submission of this register, referred to here as *jī* 計, had symbolic meaning, it would also have served as a practical tool for the receiving authority in governing the surrendered region.²²⁾ Although this case concerns a faction within the Chinese mainland, a similar phenomenon can be seen in G-2, where peoples such as the Wuhuan and Yemaek participated in imperial rites together with commanderies presenting their annual accounts and Man peoples offering tribute. This suggests that the submission of registers and the performance of tributary duties could function as acts expressing submission to the imperial order.

During the Former and Later Han periods, many non-Han polities that submitted to the imperial order, at least nominally, were often treated as “subject states” 屬國. A subject state was usually a fief held by a nominal feudal lord within the Chinese

20) 越嶲人任貴自稱太守 遣使奉計 注曰 計謂人庶名籍 若今計帳 *Hou Hanshu*, juan 1B, “Annals of Emperor Guangwu,” Jianwu 14.

21) 羣僚藩輔 宗室子孫 衆郡奉計 百蠻貢職 烏桓濊貊咸來助祭 單于侍子 骨都侯亦皆陪位. *Hou Hanshu*, juan 2, “Annals of Emperor Ming,” Yongping 2.

22) Although *jī* 計 and *mingji* 名籍 were not identical terms, both belonged to the broader administrative vocabulary of registration and population accounting.

empire, and, according to Later Han law, the lord of such a state was required to submit the number of households and residents.²³⁾ Even when subject states composed of non-Han peoples were generally allowed to preserve their existing political and social structures, their treatment varied depending on each state's particular circumstances and its proximity to the empire. Some subject states, for example, were required to provide taxes or corvée labor (Kim Byungjoon, 2013, 142–144).

Yet there is no clear indication of the official status assigned to the Koguryŏ people within the Han imperial order. Still, the register submitted to and supervised by Koguryŏ County of Xuantu Commandery in F-1 was likely a register of the households and population of the Koguryŏ people, through which the commandery enrolled them as residents. During the Former Han period, some non-Han peoples on the Chinese frontier who were subordinate to commanderies and counties at least in formal terms reported their household registers through county-level units rather than as subject states. This corresponds to the case of the Koguryŏ people, who appear to have reported their household registers through Koguryŏ County (Kim Byungjoon, 2013, 142–144).

H-1) “The *Dian shuguo* 典屬國 was originally a Qin office and was in charge of surrendered *Manyi* 蠻夷. In the third year of Yuanshou 元狩 under Emperor Wu, when the King of Kunxie 昆邪 surrendered, subject states were again increased, and offices such as Commandant 都尉, Assistant 丞, Scout 候, and Thousand-man 千人 were established. Among its subordinate offices was the Director of Nine Translators 九譯令. In the first year of Heping 河平 under Emperor Cheng, it was abolished and merged into the *Da honglu* 大鴻臚.”²⁴⁾

H-2) “The *Da honglu* 大鴻臚 consisted of one minister, with a salary-rank of Fully Two Thousand Bushels. ... When an imperial prince was appointed king, the *Da honglu* assisted in the ceremony of conferring a seal and cord. When feudal lords, heirs of feudal lords, or enfeoffed persons from among the barbarians 夷狄 of the four quarters were appointed, the *honglu* summoned them below the terrace and conducted the investiture. When a king died, the *Da honglu* sent an envoy to offer condolences and also conducted the appointment of the king's successor.”²⁵⁾

According to the *Hanshu*, the office in charge of affairs concerning surrendered *Manyi* 蠻夷, or non-Han peoples, was originally the *Dian shuguo* 典屬國. As shown in H-1,

23) “每屬國置都尉一人 比二千石 丞一人 本注曰 凡郡國皆掌治民 ... 歲遣吏上計 *Hou Hanshu*, Treatise 28, “Bureaucracy,” no. 5, “Commanderies and Kingdoms.”

24) *Hanshu*, juan 19A, “Table of Officials and Ministers.”

25) *Hou Hanshu*, Treatise 25, “Bureaucracy,” no. 2.

this office had existed since the Qin dynasty and was responsible for surrendered non-Han groups. After the number of subject states increased during Emperor Wu's reign, additional offices such as Commandant 都尉 were established. Later, during Emperor Cheng's reign, the Dian shuguo was abolished and merged into the *Da honglu* 大鴻臚.

The *Da honglu* managed various ceremonial affairs concerning the subject states under its jurisdiction, including ceremonies for “conferring a seal and cord” and the dispatch of envoys “to offer condolences” and conduct the appointment of royal successors. Since subject states, whether composed of Han or non-Han peoples, fell within the administrative responsibilities of the *Da honglu*, it may be inferred that the Koguryŏ people received prestige goods in connection with procedures that formally acknowledged their relationship with the Han imperial order. If the *mingji* 名籍 mentioned above was indeed a household or population register, then the bestowal of musical instruments, court dress, clothes, and caps may be understood as gifts exchanged for Koguryŏ's “participation” in commandery governance.

The possible result of this arrangement can be examined through two related problems: the unusually high population figures of Xuantu Commandery in the *Hanshu*, and the later establishment of ‘Ch’aekkuru’ recorded in the *Sanguozhi*.

I-1) Xuantu Commandery: established in the fourth year of Yuanfeng under Emperor Wu. ① Koguryŏ, called Haguryŏ under Wang Mang, belonged to Yuzhou. It had 45,006 households and a population of 221,845. It had three counties.²⁶⁾

I-2) Later, because the Koguryŏ people became arrogant, they stopped visiting the commandery. Thus, the Han dynasty built a small fortress at the eastern border of the commandery and piled court dress, clothes, and caps there, allowing the Koguryŏ people to take them at regular times. Today, the barbarians call this fortress Ch’aekkuru 幘溝瀆. *Kuru* 溝瀆 is the Koguryŏ term for a fortress.²⁷⁾

I-1 records the counties, number of households, and population of Xuantu Commandery as given in the “Treatise on Geography” 地理志 of the *Hanshu*. According to this record, the commandery had 45,006 households and a population of 221,845,

26) *Hanshu* 漢書, juan 28B, “Treatise on Geography,” Xuantu Commandery.

27) *Sanguozhi*, juan 30, Weishu 30, “Dongyichuan,” “Koguryŏ.” The original text is as in the following: “漢時賜鼓吹技人 常從玄菟郡受朝服衣幘 高句麗令主其名籍 後稍驕恣 不復詣郡 于東界築小城 置朝服衣幘 其中 歲時來取之 今胡猶名此城爲幘溝瀆 溝瀆者 句麗名城也。”

while comprising only three counties. The ratio between the number of counties and the population is markedly different from that of other commanderies. Lelang Commandery, for example, had twenty-five counties and a population of 406,748, while Liaodong Commandery had 55,972 households, a population of 272,539, and eighteen counties. Their average population was about 14,000 per county, whereas Xuantu Commandery appears to have had an average population of approximately 73,000 per county. Throughout the *Hanshu*, cases in which the average population of a county exceeds 70,000 are found only in the Central Plain, where large populations were densely concentrated. Elsewhere, counties generally had populations of roughly 15,000 to 20,000 (Lee Jongrok, 2018).

For this reason, taking into account the fact that Xuantu Commandery had undergone territorial reorganization, some scholars have argued that the population figures reflect the period of the Xuantu Commandery before 75 BCE, whereas the list of subordinate counties reflects the situation afterward (Suematsu Yasukazu, [1961] 1996). However, according to Zhou Zhenhe's study, both the composition of subordinate counties and the household and population figures in the "Treatise on Geography" of the *Hanshu* derive from a unified body of data from the late Former Han. The population figures for commanderies and kingdoms in the "Treatise on Geography" are generally thought to reflect estimates from 2 BCE, while the lists of subordinate counties are thought to reflect data from between 9 and 8 BCE (Zhou Zhenhe, 1982: 4).

Therefore, one plausible explanation is that the population recorded in this passage did not represent only the households directly administered by Xuantu Commandery, but also included the population of the Koguryō people in the Huanren and Ji'an regions, even though no county-level institutions existed there to govern the area directly. This then raises the question of how such population figures could have been surveyed and recorded if the commandery had already been relocated far from the area where the Koguryō people resided before 2 or 8 BCE. Therefore, the register submitted to the commandery may be understood as having been based, at least in part, on households and population figures reported by Koguryō leaders themselves. In this sense, the mingji supervised by Koguryō County may have been the administrative counterpart to the prestige goods distributed by Xuantu Commandery.

Presumably, this mutually beneficial strategy was a key factor that enabled the maintenance, and perhaps even the initial establishment, of commandery rule in the cases of Xuantu and Lelang commanderies. Through this arrangement, local populations

could be voluntarily included as “residents” of the commanderies, possibly paving the way for more direct forms of control, such as taxation or corvée labor. Unlike the relationship between Lelang Commandery and the people associated with the Pucho Ye lord, however, the relationship between the Koguryŏ people and Xuantu Commandery did not last in the same form. At some point, the Koguryŏ people stopped coming to the commandery to receive court dress and other goods, like I-2 stated. According to this passage, the Koguryŏ people stopped coming to the commandery to receive court dress and other goods at some point, a development that may indicate the beginning of discord between Koguryŏ and the commandery.

The record does not specify the exact date of this event, nor does it explain the cause of the discord, apart from stating simply that the Koguryŏ people “became arrogant” 驕恣. Many previous scholars have explained the cessation of visits to the commandery as a result of the emergence of the Koguryŏ royal court. According to this view, diplomatic contacts with Xuantu Commandery, which had previously been conducted independently by leaders of small polities among the Koguryŏ people, gradually came under the control of the Koguryŏ royal authority. Noh T’ae-don, who suggested this theory first, argued that this event signifies the formation of a more systematized Koguryŏ government. According to him, the Koguryŏ people in this region began to form a coalition and established a royal court capable of ruling over these small polities. This Koguryŏ royal court then began to control the diplomatic relations between the small polities and the commandery (Noh Tae-don, 1975: 12-13).

According to this interpretation, Ch’aekkuru was established during the reign of King T’aejo (太祖王, r. 53-146), and it was through this institution that court dress, clothes, and caps were provided by Xuantu Commandery. Many studies in South Korean scholarship have accepted this view and have accordingly argued that Ch’aekkuru was established in the reign of King T’aejo (Kim Ki-heung, 1987: 38; Kim Chang-seok, 2004: 103-105; Yeo Ho-kyu, 2005: 25-34). However, even if one accepts that Koguryŏ developed a more consolidated political structure after the mid-first century CE, it has also been pointed out that the central authority’s control over negotiations between local small-scale groups within Koguryŏ and Xuantu Commandery cannot necessarily be dated to the reign of King T’aejo (Park Kyung-chul, 1998: 300-306; Yun Yong-gu, 2006: 19; Lee Seong-je, 2011: 300).

Some scholars have therefore argued that, even if the decline in individual contacts between Koguryŏ people and Xuantu Commandery resulted from control by the central

authority, Ch'aekkuru may have been established at an earlier date. Some studies suggest that it was established as a consequence of the relocation of Xuantu Commandery in 75 BCE(Yeo Ho-kyu, 1997; Kim Ki-heung, 1987: 38; Kim Chang-seok, 2004: 13-15), while others place the emergence of this distinctive form of contact sometime between the founding of Koguryō in 37 BCE, as recorded in the *Samguk sagi*, and the reign of King T'aejo(Kim Hyun-sook, 2007: 22-25; Lee Jongrok, 2018: 430-431). There are also differing views regarding the actual function of Ch'aekkuru in the relationship between the commandery and the Koguryō people. One such view argues that the bestowal of prestige goods functioned as a form of *hushi* 互市, that is, a market established by the Han dynasty for trade with non-Han peoples(Yun Yong-gu, 2011).

Still, it is difficult to assume that Ch'aekkuru was established immediately after the relocation of Xuantu Commandery in 75 BCE. The record cited above explains the decline in visits by the Koguryō people simply as the result of their “becoming arrogant,” a phrase that would seem too simplified a description if it referred to an invasion by the Koguryō people and the consequent cessation of contact with them. It is therefore more likely that, even after the relocation of the commandery, local leaders among the Koguryō people continued to visit Xuantu Commandery to receive prestige goods, which may have functioned as a means by which the Han government sought to appease them. Although it is difficult to determine the exact date of Ch'aekkuru's establishment or the precise nature of subsequent contacts between the Koguryō people and Xuantu Commandery, it can at least be suggested that, whether Ch'aekkuru was established before or after the reign of King T'aejo, there was a certain period during which prestige goods and registers of the Koguryō people were exchanged. The latter may have provided the basic information for the population figures of Xuantu Commandery recorded in the *Hanshu*, which reflect conditions before either 2 BCE or 8 CE.

One question that must be addressed is why the commandery's distribution of goods continued, even though the method of distribution changed. According to section ①, the commandery still provided clothes and caps to Koguryō, and the Koguryō people continued to receive them through the fortress called Ch'aekkuru. If the relationship between the commandery and Koguryō had become entirely hostile, it is unlikely that Koguryō would have continued to take, and presumably use, these objects. This situation is therefore difficult to understand unless Xuantu Commandery had some reason to continue this “bestowal” of *ch'aek* 幘 upon the Koguryō people, and unless Koguryō also found some benefit in maintaining the practice. Although it is unclear whether

the Koguryŏ people continued to report their population or whether the *mingji* still existed, the bestowal of these goods clearly continued. This suggests that such bestowal had functioned as a condition for Koguryŏ's nominal subordination to commandery rule, even after direct visits to the commandery had ceased. In this sense, Ch'aekkuru was not merely a sign of deteriorating relations between Koguryŏ and Xuantu Commandery, but also evidence that the earlier mechanism of prestige-goods distribution and nominal incorporation continued in altered form.

Admittedly, at present there is no concrete evidence to demonstrate that this *mingji* was indeed provided by the Koguryŏ people or that it served as the basis for the household and population figures recorded in the "Treatise on Geography" of the *Hanshu*. Therefore, the argument would remain one based on circumstantial inference. Moreover, it is still unclear whether the population figures for Xuantu Commandery in the *Hanshu* included the Koguryŏ people, who stood outside the commandery's direct administrative control around the first century CE.

In a broader sense, however, as discussed above with regard not only to Xuantu Commandery, but also to the process of establishing Lelang Commandery, the establishment of Han commanderies presupposed a certain degree of cooperation from local populations. In many cases, these populations were not unified political entities but aggregates of small-scale groups, such as the group represented by the "Puchoyegun" in the area where the counties of Lelang Commandery were established. If so, it is reasonable to ask how the number of their households and populations—essential elements for commandery rule—could have been investigated and recorded. Although this point also rests on circumstantial evidence, it would not be implausible to suggest, at least as a possibility, that the bestowal of prestige goods, one of the most effective means by which the Han empire could induce local cooperation, may have served as a medium in this process. This possibility, however, requires further demonstration.

5. Conclusion

So far, this paper examined the role of prestige goods in the establishment and maintenance of Han commandery rule in ancient Korea, focusing especially on the

relationship between Koguryŏ and Xuantu Commandery. Previous studies have often interpreted Han prestige goods—such as seals, official garments, caps, musical instruments, and ritual objects—as symbols of diplomatic amity or vague dominant-subordinate relations. This paper argues instead that these objects served a more practical administrative function: they helped draw indigenous polities into the commandery system and formalized their participation in Han imperial order.

Although historical sources present this process as a direct result of conquest, the actual formation of commandery rule was likely gradual and complex. Wiman Chosŏn and its surrounding regions consisted of multiple semi-independent local polities rather than a centralized administrative unit. Therefore, Han rule required negotiation with local leaders and the gradual incorporation of their populations. Against this background, prestige goods can be understood as instruments of political incorporation. Examples such as the “Puchoyegun” seal from Chŏngbaek-tong, the seals and garments mentioned in the *Sanguozhi*’s account of Han 韓, and the jade casket used in Puyŏ royal funerals suggest that such goods strengthened local leaders’ authority while also marking their nominal subordination to Han commanderies.

The central case is Koguryŏ’s relationship with Xuantu Commandery. The *Sanguozhi* records that Koguryŏ leaders visited Xuantu to receive court dress, clothes, and caps, while the prefect of Koguryŏ County supervised their mingji, or register. It is likely that the register was a household or population register submitted by Koguryŏ leaders, allowing Xuantu Commandery to count Koguryŏ populations as commandery residents at least nominally. The later establishment of Ch’aekkuru, where such goods continued to be stored for Koguryŏ, further shows that prestige goods remained central to this fragile relationship. Han commandery rule in ancient Korea was therefore not based solely on conquest or direct administration, but on negotiated relations mediated through prestige goods and registration.

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Abstract

The Function of Prestige Goods in the Establishment of Xuantu Commandery and Its Relationship with Early Koguryō

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This paper examines the role of Han prestige goods in the establishment and maintenance of commandery rule in ancient Korea, focusing on the relationship between Koguryō and Xuantu Commandery. Since Han commandery rule was often established over multiple semi-independent local polities, Han authority required negotiation with local leaders. While marking their nominal subordination to Han commanderies, prestige goods also functioned as tools for drawing the leaders of these polities into the commandery system. In the case of Koguryō, the *Sanguozhi* records that its leaders visited Xuantu to receive court dress, clothes, and caps, while the prefect of Koguryō County supervised their *mingji*, or register. This paper discusses the possibility that the *mingji* served both as a symbol of Koguryō's submission to the commandery and as a basis for the commandery's registration of its population as commandery residents, at least nominally. The subsequent establishment of Ch'aekkuru can be understood as indirectly reflecting the fact that the provision of prestige goods served as an important basis for incorporating Koguryō into the commandery system, despite the instability of this relationship.

Keywords: Koguryō, Xuantu Commandery, Lelang Commandery, Ch'aekkuru, mingji