

**Zeitschrift:** Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

**Band:** 76 (2022)

**Heft:** 4

  

**Artikel:** How to kill a sage : North Korean discourse on Jizi/Kija

**Autor:** Glomb, Vladimir

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1046522>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 26.03.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

Vladimir Glomb\*

# How to kill a sage: North Korean discourse on Jizi/Kija 箕子

<https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2022-0041>

Received December 7, 2022; accepted February 5, 2023; published online April 21, 2023

**Abstract:** After liberation in 1945, the new North Korean regime initiated a process to liquidate so-called “old” or “feudal” thought. One prime target of the North Korean authorities was the myth of Jizi 箕子 (kor. Kija) and the story of his migration to the Korean Peninsula. The elimination of Kija and his legacy was a complicated task; the ancient legend of the Shang dynasty sage who brought civilisation and culture to the Korean people was widely known in all strata of Korean society, deeply ingrained in thousands of literary works, and the new North Korean capital, Pyongyang, was the traditional centre of the Kija cult. In spite of censorship, physical destructions of Kija-related relics, or academic conferences, which tried to repudiate the link between Kija and the Chosŏn state on a scientific basis, the North Korean authorities were never able to fully suppress the old narrative. The ancient sage remains, until nowadays, a problematic point for North Korean historiography and cultural memory.

**Keywords:** Jizi; Kija; Korean mythology; North Korea; Old Chosŏn; 箕子

This study aims to explore the various fates of the legend of Kija<sup>1</sup> in the DPRK and the strategies of the North Korean regime in their treatment of the legacy of this specific Chinese sage. While Kija’s story formerly provided a cornerstone for the premodern cultural identity of the Korean states,<sup>2</sup> in post-liberation North Korea it became the

---

1 For the sake of clarity, in this study Jizi’s name is always used in its Korean pronunciation, except for texts of Chinese provenience. Transcriptions in various English-speaking texts are left in their original forms.

2 Fundamental features of Kija’s narrative and its symbolic value are described by Han Young-Woo 1985 and Breuker 2010: 98–102. Kija’s role in Chinese-Korean relations is thoroughly described by Wang 2015. Bohnet 2020 discusses the legend within the premodern debates on Korean ethnicity, while its modern political ramifications are analysed by Schmid 2002. Philosophical legacy of the most famous work attributed to Kija, the Great Plan (Hongfan 洪範) chapter of *Shujing*, is treated by Nylan 1992 and his place in Korean Confucianism is described in Glomb 2019. Contemporary Chinese works on Kija are represented by Chen Pujing 2003 and Miao Wei 2018.

---

\*Corresponding author: Vladimir Glomb, Freie Universität Berlin Koreastudien, Otto-von-Simson-Straße 11, 14195 Berlin, Germany, E-mail: vladous2000@yahoo.com

target of harsh critique, with numerous attempts made to eradicate any memory of the ancient worthy. Not only had he been considered an outstanding exemplary of Confucian values, which the regime strived to eliminate, but he additionally irritated Korean scholars and politicians due to his foreign origin. Essentially, the idea that the foundations of culture and civilisation were brought to Korea by a Chinese sage was unacceptable for North Korean officials. The efforts to deal with the ancient myth lasted for many decades and to a certain degree remain prevalent at the time of writing; hence the contours of this process and the resilience of the Kija narrative vis-a-vis censorship and state propaganda are the object of this study. Can a modern state, through systematic effort, annihilate historical memory?<sup>3</sup> Can complete silence be imposed over a historical individual worshiped for millennia throughout the Korean Peninsula?

No simple answer can be provided to these questions, as the debates over Kija span various stages of the DPRK regime, a diverse audience, and surprisingly extensive materials. At the same time, the course of the diverging changes in methods, means, and motivations offer important testimony about the nature of historical debate in North Korea in general and, on another level, the resilience of ancient legends.

## 1 Early studies and theories

Soon after it assumed power, the North Korean regime launched an ambitious campaign to overhaul historiographical debate according to both national and Marxist-Leninist needs. The first academic study discussing the Kija narrative appeared already in 1949 in the first North Korean history journal *Ryōksa chemunje* 歷史諸問題 (Problems of History), penned by Hong Kimun 洪起文 (1903–1992), a prominent historical linguist. Hong had been one of the most prominent figures of the new North Korean historiographic research since its very beginning, and there were several reasons why he was the scholar charged with the important task to provide a critical theory on the legend of Kija. For one, he was a seasoned researcher with an extensive record of publications, and his political credentials were impeccable. And not only his qualifications based on his own activities during the colonial period spoke in his favour, but furthermore his father, writer Hong Myōnghŭi 洪命憲 (1888–1968), was a close ally of Kim Il-sŏng and served in the highest political

---

<sup>3</sup> For the debate on the historicity of Kija and his arrival to Korea, see Shim 2002. This paper does not intend in any way to engage in this question, focussing exclusively on questions of Kija's legacy in North Korea and not on the historical validity of his story.

functions. The choice of Hong Kimun must also be understood in immediate generational terms: most of the senior scholars of Korean history, like Paek Namun 白南雲 (1894–1979), were occupied with their political careers in the regime, while the new generation of younger North Korean historians was not yet ready for such a task. Although Hong Kimun knew the colonial debate about Kija well, especially the views of his family friend Sin Ch'aeho 申采浩 (1880–1936),<sup>4</sup> he had not engaged in polemics towards previous theories and strived to create a new, concise explanation of the narrative.<sup>5</sup>

Hong Kimun's study "Review of Pre-Han and Wei Chinese Documents concerning Chosŏn Ancient History"<sup>6</sup> treats several questions concerning Chinese descriptions of ancient Korean history and their credibility, but the main emphasis of the text focused on the Kija narrative. Apart from the figure of Kija himself, the article also extensively discusses his role regarding the Eight Articles or Eight Prohibitions (*pŏmgŭm p'al cho* 犯禁八條) and whether the later rulers of Old Chosŏn were Kija's direct progeny. The legend of Kija (*Kija chŏnsŏl* 箕子傳設) is discussed in the second chapter of the study, following an introductory section discussing general historiographic problems and the Sinocentric biases of Chinese documents. To determine the precise relation between Kija and Chosŏn, Hong Kimun first reviewed the earliest mentions of Chosŏn as well as the sources on Kija. While references to a Chosŏn state in the ancient Chinese sources are notably scarce, appearing relatively late only in *Guanzi* and *Shanhai jing*, a wide range of individual mentions of Kija can be found scattered throughout the corpus of the Chinese classics. Hong Kimun's study introduces the enigmatic appearance of Kija in the thirty-sixth hexagram of *Zhouyi*, followed by the *Shujing* description of Kija lecturing to King Wu on the Great Plan in the eponymous chapter of the classic work, Confucius's mention of Kija becoming a slave and being one of "the Three Good Men of Yin" (*Lunyu* 18:1), and finally a possible personal name of Kija recorded in *Zhuangzi*. Hong Kimun pointed out that in spite of the relative abundance of materials on Kija in classical sources, there was until the Han era no ancient text connecting him to Korea, the first such source being *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (Great Commentary to the Shangshu)<sup>7</sup> attributed to Fu Sheng 伏勝 (268–178 BC) followed by *Shiji*, both of which state that Kija was given a fief in Chosŏn by King Wu. He then argued that although

4 See Ch'oe 2016. Hong Kimun also wrote several comments on Sin Ch'aeho's historical research for *Chosŏn ilbo* newspaper between 1935 and 1936.

5 Scholarship of the colonial times was similarly not taken into account in the entirety of later North Korean studies on the topic.

6 Hong 1949.

7 It is necessary to note that *Shangshu dazhuan* in traditional Korea was, due to its complicated transmission, practically unknown and Koryŏ and Chosŏn scholars knew the Kija story from other sources. For the history of *Shangshu dazhuan* see Loewe 1993: 385–86.

there was probably a person called Kija living at the end of the Shang, and allegedly the author of the Great Plan, his connection to Korea must have been a later fabrication, since “he already appears in the sources before the noun Chosŏn was mentioned.”<sup>8</sup> Hong Kimun’s conclusion was that neither *Shangshu dazhuan* nor *Shiji* could have correctly described events that had unfolded more than a millennium before their publication and that the story of Kija coming to Korea therefore must be a forgery of the Warring States era, slightly preceding the Han period. This argument then became a blueprint for the predominant strategy of later North Korean studies on the topic, which rarely denied Kija’s historicity, as attested in a broad range of classical texts, but concentrated their critique instead on Kija’s connection to Korea, which was only recorded in much later texts like *Shangshu dazhuan* and *Shiji*.

In spite of his later illustrious career both as a linguist and historian, Hong Kimun never again wrote about the Kija legend, which was almost entirely omitted from his influential *Chosŏn sinhwa yŏn’gu* (Studies in Korean mythology) published in 1964.<sup>9</sup>

Kija’s narrative continued to be treated in other early North Korean studies, such as the article by Chŏng Seho’s 鄭世鎬 (1901–?) on the location of Old Chosŏn published in 1950.<sup>10</sup> Chŏng Seho devoted the introductory part of his article to the “so-called Kija Chosŏn” and after briefly dismissing the Kija relics in Pyongyang as later fabrications, turned to a critique of the Kija narrative itself. Unlike Hong Kimun, who based his study on textual research, Chŏng Seho focused on the historical reconstruction of early Zhou policy and Kija’s possible role. He stressed that King Wu could not have given Kija a fief in Korea, not only because it lay effectively outside of Zhou authority, but also because the consolidation of the Zhou feudal system and the suppression of Shang loyalists was only completed much later, under the Duke of Zhou and King Cheng. Chŏng Seho also hinted at the possibility that the Chosŏn mentioned in the sources was not the territory around Pyongyang but another location within Zhou territory, with the probable candidate being Yongping County 永平府 in Hebei province, the home of the Guzhu state 孤竹國 during the Shang and Zhou eras. Despite the near-complete lack of evidence that Chosŏn could be related to the Guzhu territory, Chŏng Seho offered several arguments in this direction: Guzhu’s association with the famous Shang loyalists Boyi and Shuqi, the possibility that Kija could have easily travelled from Anyang to Guzhu, where he would have found people of the same political views, and a quote from Pei Ju 裴矩 (547–627) from the *Jiu*

---

8 Hong 1949: 99.

9 Kija is mentioned (negatively) only briefly in connection to several quotes, as well as during a polemic against Japanese scholars, see Hong 1964: 187–93, 200.

10 Chŏng 1950.

*Tangshu* stating that the “Land of Gaoli was originally Guzhu state.<sup>11</sup> In Zhou times it was given as a fief to Jizi” (高麗之地, 本孤竹國也, 周代以之封箕子。 *Jiu Tangshu* 63, Pei Ju zhuan). These arguments were, however, only subsidiary to the main thrust of the study: the political claim that only “those infected by flunkeyist thought” (*sadae sasang pyŏngja tŭl* 事大思想病者들) could still associate Kija Chosŏn with Pyongyang territory.<sup>12</sup>

The Korean War interrupted historical debates for its duration, yet the postwar reconstruction efforts sparked a new enthusiasm that affected even the research related to Kija. Probably the most emblematic researcher of this time was Ri Chirin 李址麟 (1916–?), who in many aspects represented the new trends of North Korean scholarship and the rapidly changing political situation. In 1957, Ri Chirin was sent to Peking University to study under the great specialist on ancient China history, Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980), with the aim of providing North Korean academia with the most advanced knowledge on East Asian, specifically Korean, history. Ri Chirin’s task was simple: to prove that the Old Chosŏn had been predominantly located in Chinese territory. Although he encountered some difficulties,<sup>13</sup> he was able to defend his thesis in 1961, which was later published as *Ko Chosŏn yŏn’gu* (Studies on Old Chosŏn).<sup>14</sup> The Kija theme already played an important role during Ri Chirin’s studies under Gu Jiegang, who held his own views on the topic, as well in other publications by Ri: his articles in the journal *Ryŏksa kwahak* as well in his book, where he included a chapter titled “Critique of the Kija Chosŏn legend” (Kija Chosŏn chŏnsŏl pip’an). Ri Chirin’s studies brought a remarkable level of sophistication to the debate on Kija; thanks to his studies in China, he was able to combine the established philological tradition with the latest archeological findings to construct his theory. Additionally, Ri Chirin’s studies abroad gave further motivation to debunking the Kija narrative, as he discovered that many Chinese took it for granted that the ancient Korean state had been ruled by a Chinese elite.

Ri Chirin was convinced that the proper decipherment of the Kija legend could not be based exclusively on attacking “flunkeyist” or “Chinese expansionist” writers (which he nevertheless did as well), but on identifying the explanation of the story’s origin. He believed that there had been, around 1200 BC, an actual Old Chosŏn state

<sup>11</sup> This tendency was well known among Korean scholars, since it was repeated in *Samguk yusa*, where the commentary also identified Guzhu as “currently Haeju.” (今海州). See *Samguk yusa* 1.

<sup>12</sup> Chŏng 1950: 8–9. Chŏng Seho also pursued the topic of Old Chosŏn’s location in his later study on *Shiji* as the source for this question, see Chŏng 1956: 54–71.

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to the publication of Gu Jiegang’s diaries in 2007, we have a record of Ri Chirin’s studies and debates with his Chinese colleagues, see also Cho 2016.

<sup>14</sup> It was published by the Academy of Sciences in Pyongyang in 1963. An edition for Koreans in Japan was published in 1964 by Hagu sŏbang publishing house in Tokyo and in 1965 it was published as an internal material for the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Peking.

which had extensive contacts with Shang and Zhou civilisation. The very existence of the Kija narrative was proof that Chinese historians had to take into account the presence of such an advanced state entity. Consequently, Ri Chirin did not dismiss all Chinese sources as simple fabrications, but instead used them as testimonies to confirm the existence of Old Chosŏn. In his compilation of various sources on the Kija narrative, Ri Chirin used a highly selective approach: while a quotation from *Xin Tangshu* that Koguryŏ people worship Kija was labelled as a fabrication not to be found in previous official histories, Du Yu's 杜預 (222–285) note that “In Meng County of state Liang is Jizi's grave” (梁國蒙縣有箕子冢)<sup>15</sup> was taken as authentic. Nonetheless, Ri Chirin went through all sources containing references to Kija, the surname Ji, states called Ji, and theories about his fief to formulate two possible explanations for the origin of the legend. The first was based on an association of the constellation Ji 箕 (Winnowing Basket) with the northeastern direction and, in a narrower sense, with Old Chosŏn; this link was illustrated by the *Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會 (Pictorial Compendium of the Three Powers) statement “When barbarians Man and Yi are to move, first there appears constellation Ji” (蠻夷將動先表箕焉).<sup>16</sup> Ri Chirin combined this association with the frequent correspondence between the names of ancient states and those of constellations, concluding that “the ancient Chinese called Old Chosŏn, which was located to the North East in the direction of the Ji mansion with another name Ji/Ki.”<sup>17</sup> The second, more elaborate, theory was based on a connection with the inhabitants of Old Chosŏn, the Ye 濊 people, whose capital was located, according to *Shuijing zhu*, in Hebei province. Ri Chirin based this theory on the following reasoning.

As was described, we can read [in *idu* writing system] *ki* 箕 as “*kŏm*” [king] so Kisŏng 箕城 “*kŏmjat*” could be explained as having the same meaning as [Tan'gun's capital name] “*wang-gŏmsŏng*” [王險城]. Therefore, I reached the conclusion that the Old Chosŏn people, who were called Ye, named their capital Kisŏng and Chinese called it City of Ye (濊邑). So I came to the idea that Yin migrants, who at the beginning of Western Zhou took refuge in the Kisŏng area settled by Old Chosŏn people called the one, who later received the fief there as “*kija*”.<sup>18</sup>

15 Ri Chirin identified a commentary on *Shiji* as his source, but the oldest source is probably in *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Commentary on Water Classic), vol. 22.

16 The source of the quote is identified as *Sancai tuhui* 1/4, but its origin can be traced as far as to *Jinshu* 11. The association of the state Yan as well as of Lelang and Xuantu with the constellation Ji already appears in *Hanshu*, “Dili zhi” II. and was well known to Korean scholars, see for example *P'yŏngyang chi* 平壤志 1855, 1:1a.

17 Ri 1963: 135.

18 Ri 1963: 136. This was probably the last attempt to analyse Kija's name in relation to the ancient (probably) Korean language; the study of the most famous North Korean linguist, Kim Yŏnghwang, on Old Chosŏn personal names contains no mention of Kija. See Kim 2013.

Ri Chirin concluded that the Ki state of the Ye people and its capital Kisŏng were later moved to Shanxi, where it was attested by the archaeological find of a *ding* bronze vessel inscribed *ji/ki*.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of all his efforts, Ri Chirin to a certain degree left the Kija question open, as he was able to amass arguments against the connection between Kija and Korea, but his reconstruction of an alternative and more accurate course of events was highly hypothetical. Although Ri Chirin's works to this day remain the most systematic North Korean critique of Kija, their impact was rather limited: hypothetical conclusions were not suitable for mass propaganda and the DPRK regime never adhered to the theories of any single scholar. His work marked the end of individual studies and the shifting of the Kija debate to more organised collective efforts.

## 2 Collective efforts

Academic studies of Kija were usually subsumed under broader questions involving the existence of Old Chosŏn and the reliability of Chinese sources on ancient Korea history, but this situation underwent a change at the end of the 1960s. Kim Ilsŏng's consolidation of power manifested by the 4th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea in 1960, the Sino-Soviet split, and the DPRK's growing distance from the USSR significantly shifted the patterns of North Korean historical studies toward a more nationalist perspective. This nationalist emphasis, understandably, also affected the lingering problem of the ancient Chinese sage. A material manifestation of these new views was the destruction of Kija's grave at Moran Hill in Pyongyang initiated directly by Kim Ilsŏng. Another step toward the irreversible eradication of Kija's legacy was an attempt to formulate an official stance on Kija that would offer the final word in the debate on his existence and legacy. On June 21st 1960, under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences, a joint conference of departments of history, archaeology, ethnology, and classics was held under the title "On the Absurdity of the So-Called Kija-Arrival-to-Korea Theory". The gathering was a display of the highest authorities of North Korean humanities: chaired by Paek Namun 白南雲 (1894–1979), participants included historians Kim Sŏkhyŏng 金錫亨 (1915–1996), Pak Sihyŏng 朴時亨 (1910–2001), Hong Hŭiyu, the founding father of North Korean archaeology, To Yuho 都宥浩 (1905–1982), the versatile historian of Korean education Yi Man'gyu 李萬珪 (1882–1978), the lecturer of Korean history at the Central Workers' Party School, Rim Kŏnsang, and others. The overwhelming majority of conference participants supported the opinion that the theory of Kija's arrival to Korea was absurd and assigned historians Kang Sŏkchun and Hong Hŭiyu to summarise the main

---

<sup>19</sup> For Kija related vessels see Shim 2002: 280–83.

arguments of the discussion. The result was published in the journal *Ryōksa kwahak* and could be taken as an official attempt to “establish *chuch’e* in ideological work” and “and expose the absurdity” of the Kija story.<sup>20</sup>

The key arguments of the article were based on a detailed scrutiny of the three main Chinese sources that recorded versions of the Kija story: *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, and *Sanguozhi*. The conference participants argued that the oldest record of Kija being given a fief in Chosŏn from the *Shangshu dazhuan* was mechanically repeated by Sima Qian and Ban Gu, who mixed it with genuine information on Old Chosŏn. North Korean scholars focused on the fact that while Kija’s life was described, in relative length, in the “House of Song Weizi” (Song Weizi shijia 宋微子世家) part of *Shiji* there was no mention of Kija in the detailed description of the Han conquest of the Chosŏn state in “Treatise on Chaoxian” (Chaoxian liezhuan 朝鮮列傳). This absence served as a proof that Sima Qian simply inserted the older phrase of *Shangshu dazhuan* into Kija’s biography in the Weizi-chapter but was personally suspicious about the connection between the Shang sage and Korea and hence did not mention Kija in his treatise on Korea.

Kija was depicted even more prominently in the writings of Ban Gu, who frequently mentioned him and extolled his role as “a good worthy” (*renxian* 仁賢) who brought culture and technical skills to Korea. In this case the North Korean scholars similarly asserted that Ban Gu had inserted Kija’s story into a detailed description of Korea in the *Hanshu* “Records of Geography” (*dili zhi* 地理志) without any historical justification. The general strategy of the conference was to accept Chinese records about Chosŏn as authentic, while denying any role of Kija. The same method was also employed in the treatment of the most recent Chinese sources, *Sanguozhi* and the fragments of Yu Huan’s 魚豢 (fl. third century) *Weilüe* 魏略 (A Concise [History] of Wei) contained in this chronicle. Points of contention were the *Sanguozhi* statement that Kija’s heirs ruled Chosŏn for forty generations and the *Weilüe* record that they assumed the surname Han 韓. The idea that Chosŏn rulers were Kija’s descendants was dismissed outright, with their Korean origins attested through the folk etymology explaining the surname Han as a derivate from “our country, Mongol and Jurchen ancient appellation for their rulers *han* [*han, kan*] 汗, [*han, kan*] 干, [*kam*] 邯, [*kōm*] 儉.” In combination with a further line of etymologies based on the names of the divine Korean rulers Hwanung 桓雄 and Hwanin 桓因 this origin, allegedly, proved that the title of King Chun, Hanwang 韓王, recorded in *Sanguozhi* was in fact a Korean expression for “king of kings” *wangwang* 王王, which “clearly showed that Kija never came to Old Chosŏn.”<sup>21</sup>

---

20 Kang/Hong 1961: 1.

21 Kang/Hong 1961: 16.

North Korean scholars further agreed on a rationale for Fu Sheng's phrase "Kija was given a fief in Chosŏn" (封箕子於朝鮮) in constructing a chain of events that started with the fall of Shang. The conference reached consensus on the theory that Kija was indeed released from his slave status at the order of King Wu and given rule over a remnant of Shang loyalists in Guzhu state. As *Huang Ming tongji* 皇明通紀 indicates, this was in so-called Chosŏn City 朝鮮城 located in Yongping County. Kija's audience with King Wu, associated with the Great Plan, was explained as a necessary political step in sanctioning Kija's new role, which was orchestrated by the Duke of Shao 召公, the brother of King Wu entrusted with ruling the area of the state Yan and the same man who released Kija from his low status. The conclusion of the conference was that the Kija narrative is an authentic story which, however, occurred in the Zhou territories and not in Korea.<sup>22</sup>

Although this complex theory was the result of a joint dialogue between North Korea's highest academic authorities, it was never widely used. It does not even appear in one of the most celebrated moments of North Korea's discourse on Kija: the critique of Soviet views on Korean history.

In 1955, the USSR Academy of Science started to publish the first volumes of a ten-volume project<sup>23</sup> of *Vsemirnaya istoriya* (World History), a prestigious, interdisciplinary, and richly illustrated publication undertaking to cover the history of humankind. However, its passages on the history of the Korean peninsula irritated the North Korean regime to such an extent that it decided to publish a counter-publication raising their objections. The booklet *Chŏn Segyesa (Ssoryŏn kwahagwŏn p'yŏn) Chosŏn kwangye sŏsur ūi ōmjunghan ch'agodŭr e taehayŏ* was published in 1963 by the Korean Workers Party Publishing House,<sup>24</sup> while the Foreign Languages Publishing House published an English version titled *On the Grave Errors in the Descriptions on Korea of the "World History" edited by the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences*.<sup>25</sup> Although the booklet also covered modern events on the Korean Peninsula up to 1945, the brunt of the text focused on ancient history, with Kija playing a prominent role. The North Korean-Soviet split widened in the 1960s not only on the political level, but equally in the field of historical studies. DPRK scientists had long been irritated<sup>26</sup> by reluctance of their Soviet colleagues to trace the Old Chosŏn state history further back into first and even second millennium BC. After Khrushchev's critique of Stalin, the Soviet scholars were no longer socialist colleagues but instead revisionist adversaries, and the purpose of the brochure was to assert a new line of

22 Kang/Hong 1961: 18–19.

23 It was later, between 1977 and 1983, expanded to thirteen volumes covering events after 1945.

24 Kim Sŏkhyŏng et al. 1963b.

25 Kim Suk Hyung et al. 1963a.

26 See for example an attack on the famous scholar Mikhail Nikolaevich Pak (1918–2009) in Kang/Hong 1961: 3.

purely Korean interpretation of ancient history. This polemical thrust is mirrored in the remarkably vitriolic language of the text and, no less, the deliberate misinterpretation by the Korean scholars of the *World History* text. In the case of Kija, they castigated the Soviet authors “that [their] *World History* has borrowed this most absurd (sic) ‘story of Chi Tzu’s migration to Korea’”, while the original Russian text only spoke about “ancient Chinese historiography” claiming that the Kija came to Korea.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the North Korean text assumed the official stance on Kija in the form that “it can be confirmed that Chi Tzu was a man who lived and died in China proper.”<sup>28</sup> The authors of the booklet decided to base their proof of this fact on Du Yu’s note:

Tu Yu, a bibliographer of the Chin dynasty of China in the 3rd century A.D., said that Chi Tzu lived and died in today’s Meng-hsien, Honan Province, which was then part of the dominion of Chi, and that his tomb was there. If Chi Tzu was a person who really existed and his biography reflected real facts, he can be believed to have traveled from Meng-hsien to the capitals of Yin and Chou and back. It is obvious that Chi Tzu could not, and had no reason to, come to Korea.

But later, the story of his migration to Korea was invented by feudal historians and big-country worshipping historians of feudal Korea. They fabricated facts at will by utilizing the legendary elements in the biography of Chi Tzu, the former for legalizing the aggression of a foreign country and the latter for justifying the feudal order of rule at home. In China, “Shang-shu-ta-chuan” and “Sung-wei-tzu-shi-chia” of “Shi-chi,” annals written in the 3rd–1st century B.C., were the first to invent the story. These annals cooked up a story that King Wu of the Chou dynasty, finding it difficult to make him his vassal, appointed him as the ruler of “Chosun.” It follows from this that there existed a state named “Chosun” in the 12th century B.C. Its fallacy is obvious. Therefore, though Chi Tzu is mentioned in old Chinese literature written earlier than the 2nd century B.C., it is mentioned without being connected with Korea.<sup>29</sup>

The closing part of the chapter on Kija was reserved for something we could call an open mockery of Soviet scholars. Since *World History* does not mention Tan’gun, who in the 1960s still was considered to be a mere legend and not a historical person, Korean scholars commented on this absence in the following way:

Besides the myth of Dan-goon, there are many other myths and legends about the founding of the Korean state. Nevertheless, the “*World History*” copies only the legend of Chi Tzu. Is it not because its authors think that Korean has no other legend than that of Chi Tzu? Needless to say, none of us today believe that “Dan-goon’s Kingdom of Korea” was the first state of ours. To borrow from myths or legends is in itself a practice unworthy of Marxist historians.<sup>30</sup>

---

27 Zhukov 1956: 577.

28 Kim Suk Hyung et al. 1963a: 6.

29 Kim Suk Hyung et al. 1963a: 6–7.

30 Kim Suk Hyung et al. 1963a: 9.

Besides the shared similarities of both the Kija conference and the propaganda booklet, there was another strong argument concerning the debate on the Chinese sage, which was absent from both official theories: the recent excavation of Kija's grave at Moran Hill in Pyongyang. All the scholars participating in the 1961 and 1963 debates knew that Kija's grave had yielded only Koryŏ pottery, but they were notably reluctant to use these finds as a proof of Kija's non-existence. For the academic audience, the empty grave presented no evidence whatsoever, since all the scholars knew well that the grave was constructed during the reign of King Sukchong 肅宗 (1054–1105) of Koryŏ. On the other hand, the archaeological record has been frequently used in later years in popular North Korean explanations on Kija and propaganda texts.

### 3 Textbooks and general histories

The basic strategy employed by the North Korean regime to combat Kija's legend was simply to maintain silence and treat it as a taboo topic. While this strategy could not work with the majority of the population, long well acquainted with Kija's story, it was a tempting strategy to employ for those yet untouched by it: children. Children were not supposed to be taught about the topic and in the textbooks for middle school (*chunghakkyo*) history education, any mentions of Kija or his achievements were completely omitted.<sup>31</sup> This approach was codified in a manual for teachers of Korean history published in 1956, which concluded an outline for the classes on Ancient Chosŏn with the following advice: "Finally, concerning the opinion that Ancient Chosŏn was located in the Taedong River basin and the legend that so-called Kija came from China and established the kingdom of Ancient Chosŏn etc., there is no need to mention them since the very beginning at all."<sup>32</sup> Kija was purged from popular literature and no collection of legends or fairy tales mentions him.<sup>33</sup> Critical refutations of the legend and related theories were reserved for more advanced readers, with popular or academic histories and university textbooks offering a multitude of examples of this practice.

---

31 Interestingly, their authors were professional historians who actively engaged in debates on Kija on other levels of their careers, most prominently Kim Sŏkhyŏng, see Kim 1953 and Kim 1956.

32 O 1956: 30. However, one has to take into an account the fact that this debate concerned rather advanced history education; basic school (*inmin hakkyo*) education did not mention Kija simply because the parts devoted to Old Chosŏn were very short and simple. See for example Kim Tŭkchung 1957.

33 This trend can be traced from the oldest works like Ri 1960 to the most recent ones Cho and Chang 2016. The English version of this book was published in 2019 as *Pyongyang Seen from Anecdotes and Legendary Tales*. See Ri 2019.

One of the oldest instances of a historiographical treatment for Kija under the new regime can be found in Kim Sŏkhyŏng's *Chosŏn ryŏksa* (History of Korea) published in 1948. The topic was treated in an entire subchapter where Kim reiterated the Korean version of the legend in full and offered the following explanation.

The Taedong River basin was the centre of the Korean nation (*chongjok*) [...] There is a legend that roughly two thousand seven hundred years ago, a sage from the Chinese Yin state called Kija came to this area and started to rule the country called Chosŏn, which had been ruled for more than a thousand years by Tan'gun. Because of the sage called Kija, Tan'gun went to the Asadal Mountains and became a mountain spirit (*sansin*). Kija taught the people of the Chosŏn land the rules of propriety along with agriculture and weaving methods, and he established the Eight Articles of laws. But we cannot know whether a person called Kija existed or not in China and moreover there is no reason why such a person would come to this area. His tomb and shrine in Pyongyang area were created in Koryŏ times. Kija's legend speaks only about the early appropriation of the culture of the Chinese intruders by our ancestors. Around the second century CE, a Korean man called Chun became a Lord (*hu* 侯) of Chosŏn and proclaimed himself as Kija's descendant. The story of Kija escaping after fall of Yin to the East was intended by the Chosŏn lords to boast of their family lineages to the neighbouring Chinese people, claiming they are descendants of Kija.<sup>34</sup>

The historicity of Kija and his arrival in Chosŏn was also dismissed by the extensive volume *Chosŏnsa* (History of Korea), published for the needs of the People's Economy College (Inmin kyŏngje taehak) in 1955. Its authors pointed out that, based on contradictions in Chinese sources and various logistical or social problems, the story must be of later provenience. The authors also noted that it was motivated by the exceptionalism of Han dynasty scholars, and since Koryŏ times, the legend became adopted by the Korean flunkeyist (*sadaejui*) ruling class, especially by "the yangban local tyrants of the Northeast regions, who wanted to falsely ornament their lineages."<sup>35</sup> Kija's story in the university textbook was treated in parallel with the Tan'gun' myth; the same arrangement can also be found in the first attempt to publish a comprehensive general history of Korea, *Chosŏnsa kaeyo* (Outline of Korea History), a collective work of the Kim Il Sung University historical department. *Chosŏnsa kaeyo* denied both Kija's existence and the possibility of his journey to Korea, arguing that "Kija's legend in *Shiji* is nothing more than a story reflecting the fact that since the 8th–7th century BCE there were many Chinese people who sought refuge in the territory of Ancient Chosŏn."<sup>36</sup> All these sources offer a short description of Kija's story with an explanation of the narrative; it thus seems that at the higher level of education it became common at least to mention the legend (often

34 Kim 1948: 26–27.

35 [History] cabinet material 1955: 53.

36 Kim Ilsŏng *chonghap taehak Chosŏnsa kangjwa* 1957: 53.

together with Tan'gun's myth). All the same, this pattern was far from universal, and many publications assumed the policy of not mentioning Kija at all.

A remarkable feature of early DPRK teaching and historical texts on Kija is their diversity, since the newly established regime had not yet developed the control mechanisms that would impose thorough unification on the curriculum. In contrast to the cited materials denying the existence of Kija, we can find a university textbook of Chinese history that references Kija as an important person of early Zhou times.<sup>37</sup>

In 1956, the history department of the Academy of Sciences published *Chosŏn t'ongsa* 1 (Comprehensive History of Korea), which omits the story completely<sup>38</sup> while nonetheless including other ancient myths like those of Tan'gun and Chumong. The next, substantially longer, comprehensive history of Korea was published in 1962 and to a certain degree followed the same pattern. At the same time, the book reflects the dramatic changes undergone within North Korean academic life in connection with the 4th Congress of the Workers' Party, or more specifically the several steps the regime had taken regarding Kija and his legacy. The authors of the book acknowledged the probable historicity of Kija based on Chinese records, but rejected any association of Kija with the Korean Peninsula. Also new was the very format of the entry on Kija, where the story of the Chinese sage was treated only in a simple footnote.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the 1962 comprehensive history was the last case of its kind even to include a mention of Kija: all later comprehensive histories, those from 1977,<sup>40</sup> 1987,<sup>41</sup> and even the 2009 three volume *Chosŏn t'ongsa*, avoid the topic completely. This deliberate omission stands in stark contrast to the most authoritative and largest publications of North Korean historiography: the dozens of volumes of the *Chosŏn chŏnsa* (Complete history of Korea) and the even bigger *Chosŏn tandaesa* (History of Korea by Periods). Both series devote considerable space to critique of the Kija narrative; their chapters "Critique of the Theory that Kija came to Ancient Chosŏn" (Kijaga Ko Chosŏn e wattanŭm sŏr e taehan pip'an)<sup>42</sup> and "Absurdity of Kija Chosŏn Theory" (Kija Chosŏn sŏr ūi hŏhwangsŏng)<sup>43</sup> offer detailed explanations about Kija and his story following the official stance on the topic.

---

37 Kim Ilsŏng *chonghap taehak Chungguk mit tongbang chaeguksa kagjwa* 1959: 49.

38 With the exception of a single mention in connection with the Mongol attempt to reform the Koryŏ slave system when Koryŏ court argued that it is a tradition derived from Kija, see *Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso* 1956: 265.

39 *Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso* 1962: 44–45.

40 See *Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso* 1977.

41 See Son and Pak 1987.

42 *Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso* 1979, 2: 25–27. The second edition of *Chosŏn chŏnsa* offers a rewritten but largely similar version of the chapter, see *Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso* 1991, 2: 37–40.

43 Chŏn and Ch'oe 2010: 51–54.

The logic of the manner and place for discussions of Kija can be seen as a delicate mechanism that evolved over decades and depended on careful consideration of how and when the supposed audience should be made acquainted with the “flunkeyist” legend. A consensus existed that on the basic (children’s primary education) and popular (general history) levels, any discussion of Kija should be avoided and the topic was only to be brought up for a politically conscious audience as well as specialists.<sup>44</sup> This stance explains why, for example, a very basic short textbook of Korean history for party cadres would discuss Kija,<sup>45</sup> while a far more extensive textbook targeted at the foreign students of Kim Il Sung University does not mention him at all.<sup>46</sup>

To deal with the problematic Chinese sage, the North Korean regime could muster extreme measures: censorship and the complete eradication of historical memory. Both methods were attempted to a certain degree, but their employment was a rather complicated matter. The figure of Kija or allusions to him were inherently present in the thousands of literary works or poems produced in the entire course of Korean history and a deletion of all references to him was simply not possible. Yet in many cases the regime opted for the removal of Kija from modern editions of classical works. As Dennis Wuerthner documented in his study on probably the most famous Korean classical novel, *Kūmo sinhwa* 金鰲新話 (New Tales of the Golden Turtle), several North Korean editions of the novel omitted or rewrote the numerous mentions of Kija and his legacy in this work.<sup>47</sup> Deleting passages mentioning Kija can be seen as a part of a larger purification campaign working to cleanse Korean literature from allusions to Chinese culture, which must be understood as associated with the rise of *chuch’e* ideology, yet the case of *Kūmo sinhwa* shows that it was Kija who was deliberately targeted: editors would rather exclude whole parts of the work than admit the slightest allusion to the legendary sage.

This approach was, however, reserved for popular literature. The regime never attempted to censor reprints and translations of fundamental historiographical works that contained numerous passages on Kija. Both the oldest (1958/1959)<sup>48</sup> and the newest (2016) editions of *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (Histories of the Three Kingdoms) contain all references of Kija, while the current version even inserted a long note explaining who he was.<sup>49</sup> The same can be said about *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the

---

44 This dilemma was solved on the practical level because, in the case of sizeable publications like *Chosŏn tandaesa*, these were not available for a broad readership.

45 *Workers’ Party of Korea* 1958: 12–13.

46 Kim et al. 2003. The book has been part of the foreign students’ curriculum since 1997. Its predecessor was *Chosŏn ryŏksa* published in 1979, which also did not mention Kija at all, and was probably used for both domestic and foreign students. See *Chosŏn ryŏksa* 1979.

47 Wuerthner 2020: 72–74.

48 See *Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn Kojŏn yŏn’gusil* (1958/1959).

49 Kim et al. 2016: 164–65.

Three Kingdoms): while the popular retellings or editions for broad audiences do not mention Kija at all,<sup>50</sup> the critical edition from 1960 was published without any intervention.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, *Koryōsa*, both its 1957–1958 reprint and the translation published in 1962–1966, were published intact.<sup>52</sup> The censoring of Kija was a nuanced process based on tacit differentiations between the supposed audiences.

Given the dominance of the regime over both academic and public discourse, it seems obvious that North Korea could have erased memory of Kija completely and, indeed, we find instances of such an approach. The best example is not Kija's grave, which was simply razed to the ground, but a relic still standing in perfect condition: Kija's shrine Sungin chŏn 崇仁殿 (Hall of Venerating Goodness). The shrine is well preserved and is among the praised historical monuments of Pyongyang with only one provision: the information plaques make no mention of Kija and the published literature refers to the Sungin chŏn simply as a "shrine" (*sadang*), completely omitting whose shrine it was.<sup>53</sup>

However, complete silence about Kija was never achieved for yet another reason. The ancient sage began to appear in a rather unlikely literary space: the speeches and writings of Kim Ilŏng. In the course of the subsequent decades, Kija emerged as a prime example of *sadaejuŭi* and was frequently mentioned, albeit in negative sense. The continuing flurry of attacks against the ancient sage was motivated by his high symbolic value, using Kija as a metaphor for all the wrongs of the traditional relation to Chinese culture. Kim Ilŏng described Kija's role in the following way:

We should discard those which are harmful. The story of Kija, for example, should be scrapped. In the old days, some unprincipled scholars who were infected with flunkeyism told the outrageous lie that a foreigner, Kija by name, came to Korea with several hundred technicians, founded a kingdom there, and developed science and technology. These flunkeyists said that

---

50 The popular edition of Korean legends and myths *Kodae chŏn'gi sŏrhwa chip* from 1964, for example, included a translation and the original text of the Tan'gun legend from *Samguk yusa*, while deleting thirteen characters mentioning Kija, see Ch'oe 1964: 23. It should be acknowledged that the authors at least inserted a note acknowledging a "thirteen-character abbreviation of the original text" (本文一三字略).

51 See *Samguk yusa* 1960. A specific case is presented by another Korean source on Kija, *Chewang un'gi* 帝王韻紀 (Rhymed records of Emperors and Kings), which was published in 1958 as a reprint of the original xylographic edition without any change or commentary. See *Chewang un'gi* 1958.

52 See *Koryōsa 1957–1958 and Koryōsa 1962–1966*.

53 The same is valid for all sources on the building since 1960 to the present, see for example Munhwa pojŏn yŏn'guso 1983: 25. It is necessary to stress that publications prior to the 1960 purge of Kija mentioned him in relation to his shrines or other relics (like the well-fields or Kija's Well) without any hesitation. See for example the 1957 Pyongyang chronicle (P'yŏngyang t'osa p'yŏnjip wiwŏnhoe 1957: 298) or an overview of historical relics from 1956 (Muljil munhwa yumul pojŏn wiwŏnhoe 1956: 9, 14, 16). General features of the DPRK sources on historical relics (including those related to Kija) are described in Glomb et al. 2020: 456–492.

Koreans are the descendants of Kija. They even built his mausoleum on Moran Hill. The story of Kija and his mausoleum is totally unfounded. After liberation, we excavated the grave and found nothing there but a few broken pieces of brick and China. Things like this which have no factual basis whatsoever and which are harmful to our revolution should be thoroughly eliminated.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, warning the masses of the evil influence of Kija-related stories had the opposite effect, bringing Kija back to public attention. Even as the regime took steps toward the complete eradication of relics and memories linked to Kija, with the constant repetition of rationale behind these steps ever present in Kim Ilŏng's works this memory was kept alive. This contradiction is well visible in the following statement:

In Pyongyang there was once a "Kija mausoleum" which, in the final analysis, was a product of flunkeyism. We eliminated it and erected a pavilion on the spot, so now no one comes to see "Kija". Similar false legends produced under the influence of flunkeyism should all be removed.<sup>55</sup>

Kim Ilŏng spoke of Kija frequently during the early decades of the regime, but the legend of the Chinese sage remained highly visible even in later periods, when it was discussed in relation to historical revivalism of the DPRK authorities. In 1989, Kim Ilŏng, after a visit to the mausoleum of King Tongmyŏng, commented on the historical veracity of King Tongmyŏng, stating that while "Tangun has come down to us as a mythical person, the founder-king of Koguryo, Ko Jumong, was an actual person."<sup>56</sup> Excavation and reconstruction of King Tongmyŏng's tomb were declared to be decisive proof of his existence which was directly juxtaposed with Kija, exemplifying the fake historical individual.

In the past, much of the history of our country was distorted by the feudal rulers and great-power worshippers. Once the feudal rulers, tainted with the worship of great powers, built a Kija tomb on Moran Hill and paid tribute to it, propagating the fallacy woven by reactionary historians that a Chinese named Kija came to Korea, founded a state and became its king. I was doubtful that a foreigner had come to our country to build the first state and that his tomb was on Moran Hill, so I had the tomb unearthed to ascertain what was in it. The excavation found only broken bricks, revealing that the Kija tomb was a false tomb, nothing more than piled-up earth. Several other historical materials confirmed the falsehood of the theory of Kija.<sup>57</sup>

Needless to say, Kim Ilŏng's statements on Kija were not only contained in his works but permeated all historical publications: the *Complete History of Korea* in its chapter

---

<sup>54</sup> Kim 1986, 25: 26–27.

<sup>55</sup> Kim 1986, 20: 298.

<sup>56</sup> Kim 1986, 41: 330–331.

<sup>57</sup> Kim 1986, 41: 331–32.

on Kija offers two quotes from him concerning the ancient sage,<sup>58</sup> as do many other works. Critical remarks concerning Kija are also ascribed to the second DPRK leader, Kim Chǒngil, who labelled the legend a product of “great-power chauvinism<sup>59</sup> and flunkeyist ideas”.<sup>60</sup>

The historical turn of the North Korean regime also signified an important change for the strategies in the discourse on Kija. The official discovery of Tan’gun’s tomb and his remains once again recalled the necessity for ideological commentary on both mythical rulers. The publication<sup>61</sup> heralding Tan’gun’s discovery compares the Korean ruler, “a historical figure who existed in reality”, with Kija, who is described as an example of an ahistorical legend having only left a “false grave” (*katcha myo*).<sup>62</sup> The authors of the book concluded “that the ‘legend of Jizi’, in other words the version of ‘Jizi’s arrival from the East’<sup>63</sup> referenced in the *Book on Trade*,<sup>64</sup> written towards the close of the third century B.C., was false.”<sup>65</sup> Much like yin and yang, Kija was turned into Tan’gun’s antipode, mentioned only to underline the clear historical authenticity of the genuinely Korean ruler.

Another influential publication contributing to the construction of this new picture of ancient Korean history, *Ko Chosǒn ryōksa kaegwan* (Introduction to Old Chosǒn History), announces immediately in the introduction its intent to correct the traditional records that spoke about Kija Chosǒn,<sup>66</sup> again showing the unbearable presence of the ancient sage.

## 4 Strategies of appropriation: Eight Prohibitions

Kija’s legend formed a multilayered narrative and even though a prominent place was reserved for Kija’s arrival in Korea, there were other parts of his story that attracted the attention of North Korean scholars. One of them was the topic of the

---

58 *Sahoe kwahagwǒn Ryōksa yǒn’guso* 1979: 2: 25, 27.

59 *Taegukchu’i*, see *P’yōngyang oegugǒ taehak Ch’ollima yǒngǒ kangjwa p’yǒn* 1970: 205.

60 Chǒn and Ch’oe 2010: 51.

61 *Ryōksa p’yǒnjipsil* 1994. The book was published with some changes as *Tangun, Founder-King of Korea* also in 1994.

62 Chang 1994: 43.

63 The English version of the book at this point inserts a massive endnote explaining the plot of the legend to foreign audience, see *Tangun* 1994: 137. The Korean text automatically supposed that readers would be familiar with the story.

64 The translation of the *Shangshu dazhuan* title.

65 *Tangun* 1994: 34.

66 Pak 1999: 6.

Eight Prohibitions (*pǒmgŭm p'al cho* 犯禁八條), first recorded in *Hanshu* and later repeated in *Hou Hanshu* or *Sanguozhi*.

殷道衰,箕子去之朝鮮,教其民以禮義,田蠶織作。樂浪朝鮮民犯禁八條:相殺以當時償殺;相傷以穀償;相盜者男沒入為其家奴,女子為婢,欲自贖者,人五十萬。雖免為民,俗猶羞之,嫁取無所讎,是以此民終不相盜,無門戶之閉,婦人貞信不淫辟。其田民飲食以籩豆,都邑頗放效吏及內郡賈人,往往以杯器食。郡初取吏於遼東,吏見民無閉臧,及賈人往者,夜則為盜,俗稍益薄。今於犯禁浸多,至六十餘條。可貴哉,仁賢之化也。

When the Way of Yin declined, Kija went to Chosŏn and taught them rituals and the sense of righteousness, farming, sericulture, textile production, and handicrafts. The Lelang and Chosŏn people have eight articles of prohibitions: who kills another person must immediately repay it by death, who injures another person compensates it by grain, and those who steal from another person are thrown into slavery by this person's household and his woman becomes a slave. If they want to buy themselves out of crime, each person must pay fifty thousand cash. But even when they escape punishment and become common folk it is considered as disgraceful in their customs and they cannot find a partner for marriage. Therefore people in effect do not steal, there are no latched doors, and wives are chaste, faithful, and engage in no licentiousness nor depravities. People in the fields eat and drink from the proper vessels and dishes [...] Nowadays the number of prohibitions has gradually increased to more than sixty. That could be truly praised! Such was the transformation brought by the good wise man.<sup>67</sup>

One of the oldest descriptions of Old Chosŏn culture and customs and portraying them in a very favourable light, the *Hanshu* quote accordingly played since ancient times a crucial role in the construction of Korean cultural identity. The immense importance of the Eight Prohibitions story motivated North Korean scholars to construct a new narrative that would integrate the Eight Prohibitions without any reference to Kija.

The first step in this direction was taken by Hong Kimun in 1949, when he decided to view the Eight Prohibitions as a historical fact unrelated to Kija. He concluded that the “so-called Eight Prohibitions are the primitive legal system of the ancient Lelang and Chosŏn native population. These have also no relation to Kija's teachings.”<sup>68</sup> Any links between the Eight Prohibitions and Kija in historical sources were attributed to Chinese historiographers, a stance later adopted by all North Korean scholars. In 1950, Chŏng Seho stated that Kija, as the author of the complicated Great Plan, could not have been the author of such simple instructions as the Eight Prohibitions.<sup>69</sup> Ri Chirin argued that “Ban Gu wrote that these penal laws were established by Kija, but this is an expression of his unconditional approval of the Kija legend and idea that the whole of Old Chosŏn culture was [a part of] the so-called

67 *Hanshu*, “Dili zhi”, 2.

68 Hong 1949: 105.

69 Chŏng 1950: 7.

Central Efflorescence (*Chunghwa* 中華)” and “therefore, while we say that we deny Kija’s legend, there is no reason to also deny the Eight Prohibitions.”<sup>70</sup> The general conference on Kija in 1961 also concluded that the sixteen characters mentioning Kija at the beginning of the *Hanshu* quote and the eight at the end were merely added to distort the meaning of the text, which referred to authentic Korean customs.<sup>71</sup>

As official approval for teaching the Eight Prohibitions as an authentic part of Old Chosŏn devoid of any relation to Kija, we could note the 1951 publication *Chosŏn kodaesa* 朝鮮古代史 published by Chosŏn ryŏksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe 朝鮮歷史編纂委員會 (Korean History Compilation Committee): again, it described the Eight Prohibitions as a part of Old Chosŏn social structure without any mention of Kija.<sup>72</sup>

Appropriation of the Eight Prohibitions became a common strategy in all works on ancient Korean history; In his 1956 school textbook, Kim Sŏkhyŏng explained that “the population of Old Chosŏn had the law of the so-called Eight Articles of Prohibition, which the ruling class used to oppress the people” and the teachers manual from the same year designated the Eight Prohibitions as one of review questions (*poksŭp munje*) for lectures on Old Chosŏn.<sup>73</sup> In the first decades of the regime, the Eight Prohibitions were officially recognised as an authentic institution of ancient Korea and became an integral part of all material concerning Old Chosŏn. The Eight Prohibitions have been treated on all levels ranging from children’s primers to encyclopaedias and historical dictionaries, themselves deserving of quotation by the great leaders.<sup>74</sup>

Unlike the case of Kija, the Eight Prohibitions were also propagated to foreigners as a sign of the advanced nature of ancient Korean society: *The Outline of Korean History* tells the English-speaking audience<sup>75</sup> that in Kochoson the “eight-point law on crime prevention” was in force; “the law was aimed at repressing slaves and commoners and protecting the interests of slave-owners.”<sup>76</sup> However, the class contradictions that dominated interpretations of the Eight Prohibitions during the early decades of the regime gradually made way in more recent publications for a more positive tone, praising the high developmental level of ancient Korean culture and society: “As an advanced slave state, it had even a written law, Eight-Point Bans, and a well-regulated ruling system.”<sup>77</sup> With the rise of pseudo-historical writing on

---

70 Ri 1963: 353.

71 Kang/Hong 1961: 9–10.

72 *Chosŏn ryŏksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe* 1951: 17.

73 O 1956: 30.

74 There are at least two comments (*chijŏk*) by Kim Chŏngil’s on the Eight Prohibitions, one in *Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn’guso* 1999, 2000 2: 38 and a second in An Yongch’ŏl et al. 2008: 46.

75 There were also other foreign-language mutations of the book.

76 *The Outline of Korean History (until August 1945)* 1977: 11.

77 *Understanding Korea 2, History* 2016: 3.

Old Chosŏn in the last three decades, the Eight Prohibitions started to be understood as legal institutions representing early Late Chosŏn,<sup>78</sup> while the society of early Chosŏn was supposedly regulated by so-called Tan'gun's Eight Articles (*Tan'gun p'al cho*).<sup>79</sup> As such, the rather nebulous record in *Hanshu* became elaborated into a fully-fledged historical event. The chronological tables of *Chosŏn chŏnsa* and *Chosŏn tandaesa* even record the precise time of their enactment: the middle of the fifteenth century BCE.<sup>80</sup>

Our survey of the official discourse on the Eight Prohibitions shows that the North Korean regime did not hesitate to salvage certain parts of the Kija legend and use them for its own purpose. Even though the Eight Articles were organically connected to Kija since their first appearance, the North Korean authorities were able to erase this origin and present this part of the Chinese chronicles as an authentic testimony regarding ancient Korea.

## 5 Conclusion

Despite decades of refutation, the DPRK authorities still persist in their efforts to discard, explain, or appropriate various parts of the legend of Kija, thus unwillingly demonstrating the enormous resilience of the sage's legacy. The complex narrative of Kija was so interwoven with the fabric of historical sources that it has been practically impossible to construct a coherent narrative of ancient Korean history without mentioning him. Hence, the eradication of the ancient legend was never completed; while it was possible to prevent children and a broader audience from learning about the ancient sage, academic debates and higher education for several decades maintained at least a basic awareness of the myth. Kija might be missing in children's books but continues to live in historical dictionaries and encyclopaedias.<sup>81</sup> An important role is also played by Kija's identification with the idea of flunkeyism and the alleged distortions of Korean history frequently invoked by Kim Ilsŏng, who cemented the lasting memory of the sage, albeit in a negative sense. On the other hand, the North Korean regime was able to

78 See for example Pak 90–95.

79 Sometimes also called Tan'gun's Eight Instructions (*Tan'gun 8 hun*). See for example Kim 2016: 87 or Kwŏn 2007/2.

80 *Sahoe kwahagwŏn ryŏksa yŏn'guso* 2004: 5 and *Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso* 2012: 6. It is interesting to note that in the oldest North Korean chronological table published in 1957, under more positivist Marxist-Leninist views, this alleged fact was missing, see *Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso* 1957.

81 See for example the entry "Kija's arrival to Korea" (*Kija tongnaesŏl*) in *Ryŏksa sajŏn* 1999, 1: 217–18 and the entry on "Kija's arrival to Korea" in *Kwangmyŏng paekkwajasajŏn 1: Chosŏnŭi ryŏksa* 2007: 40.

appropriate an important part of the Kija narrative, the Eight Prohibitions, and claim them as an authentic part of Old Chosŏn culture.

## References

- An Yongch'ŏl et al. (2008, 3rd edition): *Chosŏn ryŏksa sangsik* [Common Knowledge of Korean History]. Pyongyang: Kwahak paekkwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Bohnet, Adam (2020): *Turning toward Edification: Foreigners in Chosŏn Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Breuker, Remco (2010). *Establishing a Pluralist Society in Medieval Korea, 918–1170: History, Ideology and Identity in the Koryŏ Dynasty*. Leiden: Brill.
- Chang Ujin (1994): “Tan'gunnŭng esŏ saram ppyŏ ūi illyuhakchŏk t'ŭkching [Anthropological Characteristics of Human Bones from Tan'gun's Grave]”. In: *Tan'gun kwa Ko Chosŏn e kwanhan yŏn'gu ronmunjip* [Collected studies on Tan'gun and Old Chosŏn]. Edited by Ryŏksa p'yŏnjipsil. Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 35–43.
- Chewang un'gi* 帝王韻紀 [Rhymed Records of Emperors and Kings]. (1958). Pyongyang: Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Chen Pujing 陈蒲清 (2003): *Jizi pingzhuan* 箕子评传 [A Critical Biography of Jizi]. Changsha: Yuelu shushe.
- Cho Kwang / Chang Hyangok (2016): *P'yŏngyang ūi irhwa wa chŏnsŏl* [Pyongyang Anecdotes and Legends]. Pyongyang: Oeguk mun ch'ulp'ansa.
- Cho Pŏpchong (2016): “Ri Chirin ūi Ko Chosŏn yŏn'gu wa Pukkyŏngdae Ko Hilgang kyosu wa kwan'gye [Ri Chirin's Studies on Old Chosŏn and His Relation with Beijing University Professor Gu Jiegang]” *Silla munhwa* 48: 1–28.
- Chŏn Taeju / Ch'oe Inch'ŏl (ed.) (2010): *Chosŏn tандаesa* (Ko Chosŏnsa) [History of Korea by Periods (History of Old Chosŏn)]. Pyongyang: Kwahak paekkwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Chŏng Seho (1950): “Ko Chosŏn ūi wich'i e taehan ilgoch'al [A Study on the Location of Old Chosŏn]”. *Ryŏksa chemunje* 歷史諸問題 2: 2–21.
- Chŏng Seho (1956): “Sagi rŭl chungsimhan Ko Chosŏn ūi wich'i e kwanhayŏ [On the Location of Old Chosŏn with a Focus on *Shiji*]” *Ryŏksa kwahak* 2: 54–71.
- Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn Kojŏn yŏn'gusil (1958 / 1959): *Samguk sagi* [(Histories of the Three Kingdoms)]. Vol. I–II. Pyongyang: Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn.
- Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (1956): *Chosŏn t'ongsa* [Comprehensive History of Korea]. Vol. I. Pyongyang: Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn.
- Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (1957): *Chosŏnsa nyŏnp'yo* [Chronology of Korean History]. Pyongyang: Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn.
- Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (1962): *Chosŏn t'ongsa* [Comprehensive History of Korea]. Vol. I. Pyongyang: Kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Chosŏn ryŏksa kyogwasŏ chipp'iljo (1979): *Chosŏn ryŏksa* [History of Korea]. Pyongyang: Kim Ilsŏng chonghap taehak ch'ulp'ansa.
- Chosŏn ryŏksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe (1951): *Chosŏn kodaesa* [Ancient History of Korea]. Pyongyang: Saryo chosabu.
- Ch'oe Hyemin (2016): *Sin Ch'aehoŭi Kija, Kija Chosŏn insik* [Sin Ch'aeho's Understanding of Kija and Kija Chosŏn]. PhD dissertation, Kyŏnghŭi taehakkyo.

- Ch'oe Hyemin (ed.) / Han Ryongok (trans.) (1964): *Kodae chŏn'gi sŏrhwa chip* [Collected ancient and early times tales]. Pyongyang: Chosŏn munhak yesul ch'ongdongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa.
- [History] cabinet material (1955): *Chosŏnsa (kodae chungse kyojae)* [Korean History (teaching material for ancient and medieval times)]. Pyongyang: Inmin kyŏngje taehak.
- Glomb, Vladimir (2019): *The Way Coming East: Genealogy and Authority in Korean Confucianism*. Habilitation, Freie Universität Berlin.
- Glomb, Vladimir / Eun-Jeung Lee / Martin Gehlmann (2020): *Confucian Academies in East Asia*. Leiden: Brill.
- Han, Young-Woo (1985): "Jizi Worship in the Koryŏ and Early Yi Dynasties: A Cultural Symbol in the Relationship between Korea and China". In: *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*. Edited by William Theodore De Bary / JaHyun Kim Haboush. New York: Columbia University Press, 349–374.
- Hong Kimun (1949): "Chosŏn kodae ūi Han, Wi ijŏn Chungguk munhŏn ūi kŏmt'o [Review of Pre-Han and Wei Chinese Documents Concerning Chosŏn Ancient History]". *Ryŏksa chemunje* 歴史諸問題 9: 94–109.
- Hong Kimun (1964): *Chosŏn sinhwa yŏn'gu* [Studies in Korean Mythology]. Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kang Sŏkchun / Hong Hŭiyu (1961): "Sowi Kija tongnaesŏl e taehan pip'an [Critique of the So-Called "Kija's arrival to Korea"]". *Ryŏksa kwahak* 4: 1–19.
- Kim Ilsŏng (1986, 2nd edition): *Kim Il Sung Works*. Vol. I–XLIV. Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Kim Ilsŏng chonghap taehak Chosŏnsa kangjwa (1957): *Chosŏnsa kaeyo* [Outline of Korean history]. Pyongyang, Kungnip ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kim Ilsŏng chonghap taehak Chungguk mit tongbang chaeguksa kagjwa (1959): *Chungguksa* (taehak yong kyojae) [History of China (teaching material for universities)]. Vol. I. Pyongyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kim Kilsin et al. (2003, 7th edition): *Chosŏn ryŏksa* (wŏnsi-kŭndae) [History of Korea (primitive–early modern times)]. Pyongyang: Kim Ilsŏng chonghap taehak ch'ulp'ansa, Kim Ilsŏng chonghap taehak.
- Kim Sŏkhyŏng (1948, second edition): *Chosŏn ryŏksa* [Korean History]. Pyongyang: Puk Chosŏn inmin wiwŏnhoe kyoyukkuk.
- Kim Sŏkhyŏng (1953): *Chosŏn ryŏksa* (ch'ogŭp chung hakkyo che 1 hang'nyŏnyong) [Korean History (for the first year of elementary middle schools)]. Pyongyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kim Sŏkhyŏng (1956): *Chosŏn ryŏksa* (ch'ogŭp chung hakkyo) [Korean History (elementary middle schools)] Pyongyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kim Suk Hyung / Kim Heui Il / Son Yung Jong (1963): *On the grave errors in the descriptions on Korea of the "World History" edited by the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House).
- Kim Sŏkhyŏng / Kim Hŭiil / Son Yŏngjong (2016): *Samguk sagi chuhae* [Commented Histories of the Three Kingdoms]. Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kim Sŏkhyŏng / Kim Hŭiil / Son Yŏngjong (1963): *Chŏn Segyesa (Ssoryŏn kwahagwŏn p'yŏn) Chosŏn kwangye sŏsur ūi ōmjunghan ch'agodŭr e taehayŏ* [On the Grave Errors in the Descriptions of Korea in the "World History" edited by the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences]. Pyongyang: Chosŏn rodongdang ch'ulp'sa.
- Kim Tŭkchung (1957): *Chosŏn ryŏksa* (inmin hakkyoyong) [Korean History (for People's Schools)]. Pyongyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kim Un (2016). *Chosŏn kodae noye chedo* [Ancient Slave System of Korea]. Pyongyang: Kwahak paek kwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Kim Yŏnghwang (2013): *Ko Chosŏn mit Koguryŏ ūi inmyŏng kwa chimyŏng* [Personal and Local Names of Old Chosŏn and Koguryŏ]. Pyongyang: Kwahak paek kwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.

- Koryōsa 高麗史 [History of Koryo]. Vol. I–III. (1957–1958). Pyongyang: Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn.
- Koryōsa [History of Koryo]. Vol. I–XI. (1962–1966). Pyongyang: Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn.
- Kwŏn Sŭngan (2007): “Ko Chosŏn esoŭi pŏb ŭi paljŏn e taehan myŏtkaji koch'al [Some Consideration on Law Development in Old Chosŏn]”. *Ryŏksa kwahak* 2, available at dprkmedia.com (21/11/2022).
- Loewe, Michael (ed.) (1993): *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*. Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California.
- Miao Wei 苗威 (2018): *Jizi chaoxianshi* 箕子朝鮮史 [History of Jizi Chaoxian]. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe.
- Munhwa pojŏn yŏn'guso (1983): *Uri nara ryŏksa yujŏk* [Historical Relics of Our Country]. Pyongyang: Kwahak paekkwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Muljil munhwa yumul pojon wiwŏnhoe (1956): *Chungyo yujŏkmyŏngsŭng ch'ŏnyŏn kinyŏmmul illam* [An Overview of Important Historical Relics, Cultural and Natural Monuments]. Pyongyang: Muljil munhwa yumul pojon wiwŏnhoe.
- Nylan, Michael (1992): *The Shifting Center: The Original 'Great Plan' and Later Readings*. (Monumenta Serica) Sankt Augustin [Germany]: Steyler Verlag.
- O Changhwan (1956): *Chosŏn ryŏksa kyosu ch'amgosŏ* [Manual for Teachers of Korean History]. Pyongyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa.
- Pak Tŭkchun (1999): *Ko Chosŏn ryŏksa kaegwan* [Introduction to Old Chosŏn History]. Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa.
- P'yŏngyang chi* 平壤志 (Pyongyang Gazetteer). (1855). Bibliothèque universitaire des langues et civilisations (BULAC), 259715808.
- P'yŏngyang t'osa p'yŏnjip wiwŏnhoe (1957). *P'yŏngyang chi* (Pyongyang Gazetteer). P'yŏngyang: Kungnip ch'ulp'ansa.
- P'yŏngyang oegugŏ taehak Ch'ollima yŏngŏ kangjwa p'yŏn (1970): *Choyong sajŏn, Korean-English Dictionary*. Pyongyang: Oegungmun kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa.
- Ri Chirin (1963): *Ko Chosŏn yŏn'gu* [(Studies on Old Chosŏn)]. Pyongyang: Kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Ri Kapki (ed.) (1960): *Chosŏn ryŏksa sŏrhwa chip* [Collected Korean Historical Tales]. Pyongyang: Kungnip munhak yesul sŏjŏk ch'ulp'ansa.
- Ri Yu Il (ed.) (2019): *Pyongyang Seen from Anecdotes and Legendary Tales*. Pyongyang, Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Ryŏksa p'yŏnjipsil (1994): *Tan'gun kwa Ko Chosŏn e kwanhan yŏn'gu ronmunjip* [Collected Studies on Tan'gun and Old Chosŏn]. Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa.
- Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (1977): *Chosŏn tongsa* [Comprehensive History of Korea]. Vol. I. Pyongyang: Kwahak, paekkwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (1979): *Chosŏn chŏnsa* (Kodae p'yŏn). Vol. II. [Complete History of Korea (Ancient times)]. Pyongyang: Kwahak, paekkwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (1991): *Chosŏn chŏnsa* (Kodae p'yŏn). Vol. II. [Complete History of Korea (Ancient times)]. Pyongyang: Kwahak, paekkwa sajŏn chonghap ch'ulp'ansa.
- Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (1999, 2000, 2nd edition): *Ryŏksa sajŏn* [Historical Dictionary] Vol. I–II. Pyongyang: Kwahak paekkwa sajŏn chonghap ch'ulp'ansa.
- Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (2004, 2nd edition): *Chosŏn chŏnsa (nyŏnp'yo)* [Complete History of Korea (Chronology)]. Vol. I. Pyongyang: Kwahak paekkwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Sahoe kwahagwŏn Ryŏksa yŏn'guso (2012): *Chosŏn tandaesa (nyŏnp'yo)* [History of Korea by Periods (Chronology)]. Vol. I. (Pyongyang: Kwahak paekkwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa.

- Samguk yusa* [Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms] (1960). Translated by Ri Sangho. Pyongyang: Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Schmid, Andre (2002): *Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shim Jae-Hoon (2002): “A New Understanding of Kija Chosŏn as a Historical Anachronism”. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 62.2: 271–305.
- Son Yŏngjong / Pak Yŏnghae (1987): *Chosŏn tongsa* [Comprehensive History of Korea]. Vol. I. Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa.
- Tangun, Founder-King of Korea* (1994): Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- The Outline of Korean History (until August 1945)* (1977): Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Understanding Korea 2, History* (2016): Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Workers' Party of Korea (1958): *Chosŏnsa* [History of Korea]. Vol. I. Pyongyang: Chosŏn Rodongdang chungangdang hakkyo.
- Wang Sixiang (2015): *Co-constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea: Knowledge Production and the Culture of Diplomacy, 1392–1592*. PhD dissertation, Columbia University.
- Wuerthner, Dennis (2020): *Tales of the Strange by a Korean Confucian Monk: Kŭmo sinhwa by Kim Sisŭp*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Zhukov, Yevgeniy Mikhaylovich (ed.) (1956–1965): *Vsemirnaya istoriya*. Vol. I–X. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury.