



# The problem of interpretation of war between the Tang Empire and Bohai in period 732-735,

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## The problem of interpretation of war between the Tang Empire and Bohai in period 732 - 735

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**Abstract:** *The problem of interpretation of war between the Tang Empire and Bohai in period 732-735.* Bohai kingdom (698 - 926) was the first state in the history of the Russian Far East. This article considers the most discussed period of the history of Bohai – its war against Chinese Empire Tang. This military conflict changed the political situation not only on the Korean Peninsula, but in East Asia in general. This war also influenced political contacts in the Far East significantly. On the basis of different materials and studies of events in the neighboring states and tribes, the authors have analyzed events leading up to the war, the military operations in the war itself and the results of this conflict.

**Keywords:** *Bohai, Far East, East Asia, history, Mohe, China.*

### A short discussion of Bohai's history up until 735

To start with, we must consider the history of Bohai up until 735 in order to understand the specifics of the issue at hand.

The state of Bohai<sup>1</sup> (in Russian: Бохай, in Korean: Parhae 발해, in Chinese: Bohai 渤海, in Japanese- Bokkai) existed in what is now the Russian Maritime Region (Primorskij kraj/ Приморский край), as well as including territories that are parts of modern-day North Korea and Northeastern China. It existed from the late seventh to the early tenth centuries AD.\* (A. P. Okladnikov, 1959; A. P. Okladnikov, A. P. Derevianko, 1973). According to the Japanese annals “Ruiju-kokushi” (類聚國史), the Bohai state was founded in 698 AD. A number of events had led to the formation of this state. Leading up to the emergence of Bohai, the Korean kingdom Koguryō had been destroyed in 668 by the Tang Empire and Silla (another Korean state), and parts of the Mohe tribes, who were vassals of Koguryō, switched their loyalties to the Tang Empire or mi-

grated elsewhere.

However there were also Mohe groups that resisted pressure from Tang China and with people from Koguryo carefully prepared a rebellion. Short-sighted political decisions (oppressions of nomadic tribes) by leaders of Tang China in the east also provoked a rebellion by the Khitan tribes in 696, and the Mohe along with Koguryō groups used this episode as a pretext to establish the new state of Zhen (in Korean: Jin, 진). The ruler of this state was Da Zuurong (大祚榮, in Korean reading - Dae Jo Yeong, 대조영). The Tang Empire sought assistance from the Turks. Turkic cavalry subsequently defeated the rebel Khitan army. After this, the Tang Empire sent a retaliatory expedition to deal with Da Zuurong, but this army was destroyed.

Da Zuurong established relations with the Second Turkic Kahagnate and Silla and in 700 he received ranks from them (for example, the fifth rang “Dae Achan” from Silla). In 705 the Tang emperor fundamentally changed his attitude toward Bohai. Accordingly, China sent an ambassador to Bohai whose task was to establish

peaceful relations. In response Da Zuerong sent his second son, Da Menyi (in Korean reading - Dae Mun-ye, 대문예), as a hostage to the Tang Empire\*\*. In 713 Da Zuerong received Tang recognition as the ruler of a new state called Bohai. From this date on references to Bohai in the Chinese annals can be found. As a result of the ambassadorial group's exchanges between the Tang Empire and Bohai, Da Zuerong received the new title "Bohaigunwang" of the sovereign of Bohai. On one hand, it meant a guarantee of peaceful co-existence with China, but it also resulted in antagonistic relations with Silla. The situation changed after death of Da Zuerong. From 719 the second Bohai ruler Da Wuyi (大武藝, Korean reading - Dae Mu-ye, 대무예), began to look for allies to fight against the Tang Empire. For example, he developed relations with the Khitan and Turkic tribes, as well as with Japan, aspiring to receive their support against the Chinese Empire.

His young brother, Da Menyi criticized his position and considered his diplomatic activities to be a potential cause of Bohai's destruction in the future. Moreover, Da Menyi was commander of the Bohai army, but nonetheless criticized the commands of his superior the Bohai ruler. Hence, Da Wuyi wanted to kill his younger brother, but Da Menyi was tipped off about the plot and with a small group of people fled to China.

In 732 Bohai started a war against China with military operations that began at sea - the Bohai navy attacked the Shandong peninsula and destroyed the biggest seaport of the Tang Empire in the east - Dengzhou (D. Twitchett 1979; A. L. Ivliev, 2005). Bohai's army also assisted the Khitans, who were fighting with China. In this difficult situation, the Tang Empire along with Silla built an alliance consisting of several tribes. In so doing they formed an army group that could march against Bohai. In the war between the Tang Empire and Bohai in 732 - 735, Silla assisted China, describing in official letters Bohai as "rebellious barbarians" (Nan Hee Ku, 2011, p. 396) and improved relations with Chinese Empire. Tang asked Silla for military support, and Silla prepared an army (100 thousands strong) (Nan Hee Ku, 2011, p. 396) by land to enable an "attack from both flanks" with the soldiers of the Tang Empire, who were to attack Bohai in the north.

However snow and rough mountain roads made the plan impossible to carry out; the Silla army lost half its soldiers and returned to south (Kuk Jeong Jang, 2001, p. 169; Samguksagi 1959). In spite of the failure of Silla's expedition, the attempt influenced the outcome of the war between Tang and Bohai. Silla showed that it could potentially help China, and Bohai must have noted the possibility of an attack from its southern border. Bohai was forced to move some of its military to defend its southern flank from Silla. While Silla initially attacked unsuccessfully, the pressure from two fronts finally resulted in Bohai suing for peace with China in 733 (A. L. Ivliev, 2005).

The historiography of the war.

As mentioned above, Bohai was located in areas of the modern states North Korea, China and Russia. Scholars from these countries have considered the question of the war between Bohai and Tang Empire very differently.

For example, Chinese historians believe that Bohai was a provincial power in medieval China (Hong Song, 2001) and do not consider this conflict to have occurred between independent states.

North Korean specialists think that the Tang Empire provoked the war with Bohai - an independent kingdom. In their opinion, Bohai commenced military hostilities as a preventive action because China would attack Bohai in any case (Guk Jeong Jang, 2001). They have considered events of the war in detail (Guk Jeong Jang, 2001). They describe the war as being successful for Bohai, and do not write about results of the conflict (Bohai's ambassadorial mission arrived in China to ask for peace and mercy, a fact overlooked in the North Korean narrative).

South Korean scholars have been active in researching the war, but are not united in how they explain the origins of the war. Some historians consider the conflict to be connected with Bohai's relations with Silla (this medieval Korean state, located in the central and south parts of the Korean peninsula, had antagonistic relations with Bohai) (A. A. Kim, 2011a), other specialists do not comment on the reasons and results of the war\*\* (Giu Cheol Han, 1994; Ki Ho Song, 1995; A. A. Kim, 2011b).

The position of Russian historians is rather different. Scholars in the Soviet Union considered Bohai to be an independent kingdom without

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Chinese political or cultural influence. Therefore they portrayed Bohai as a state that had successfully resisted China; these scholars were therefore not all that interested in results of the war itself (A. P. Okladnikov, 1959; A. P. Okladnikov, A. P. Derevinako, 1973).

However, in the post-Soviet period, historians' views of this war have changed. Certainly, some Russian historians continue to support Soviet views of the war between Bohai and China, but other specialists have written that Bohai could not successfully fight against Tang Empire for such a long time (A. L. Ivliev, 2005).

Who started the war and why.

The war cannot be considered to be a preventive attack by Bohai against Tang Empire (as is commonly thought). China had not prepared its ground or naval forces for military activity against Bohai. This is the reason why Bohai's first attacks were successful. Clearly, the Tang Empire had a large numerical and resource advantage over Bohai. Certainly, China did not anticipate a Bohai attack in 732; therefore we must look for other reasons as to why Bohai attacked the Tang Empire.

First, Bohai wanted to help the Khitans. As is known, in the period 715 - 730 the Khitans recognized Tang Empire as suzerain. However in 730 the new Khitan chief began to support positions by Turkic Khaganate. At that time Turks had antagonistic relations with the Tang Empire. Therefore China sent an army and defeated Khitan and Xsi (allies of the Khitan) troops in 731 - 732. After this battle Bohai forces suddenly attacked the Tang Empire. The Khitan army supported Bohai in this war. So, it seems clear that China did not provoke the Bohai attack – rather the attack was in support of Bohai's allies – i.e. the Khitan tribes. Khitan lands were located between Bohai and the Tang Empire. Clearly, Bohai's rulers considered the Khitan tribes to be a buffer against China. As mentioned above, the second Bohai ruler had problems with his younger brother who fled to the Tang Empire and Da Wuyi considered this situation to be dangerous for his powerbase. The Tang Empire could destroy Bohai's buffer and therefore the Bohai ruler began a war with China.

As is known, Bohai began this war and the first attack was aimed at Dengzhou. The Chinese annals "Xin Tang shu" (新唐書, The New history of Tang) and "Jiu Tang shu" (舊唐書, The Old

history of Tang), which are the main sources of information we have about the war of 732 - 735, only briefly mention attacks by the Bohai navy on this Chinese seaport. In the Chinese annals only Bohai's attack on Dengzhou and the killing of the governor of this big seaport is discussed, damage to the city by the Bohai navy is completely absent from the narrative. However, on the basis of these materials we can analyze the reasons for and the results of Bohai's attack on the seaport of Dengzhou.

The materials provide information only about land operations during the war.

However, according "Xin Tang shu", in the war against Khitans at 696 - 697 (this war gave allowed for formation of the Bohai state) the Tang Empire used naval power very effectively. For example, China moved 50 thousands soldiers by sea to the rear of the Khitan army (A. A. Kim, 2011b). It was an important factor in China's victory in this war. So, it is clear that the Tang Empire had a large number of military vessels.

But the Tang Empire did not use this fleet for similar military operations against Bohai in 732 - 733. It is not clear why Tang did not make use of its substantial naval forces. However, clearly, if the Tang Empire had used its navy against Bohai in the war 732 - 735 Chinese annalists would have written about it. Because no such references are present in the records, it seems clear that Chinese naval power was not involved in the war.

As is known, the Tang Empire did not undertake any naval operations in the period 700 - 732. I believe that the Chinese fleet could not be destroyed by the navies of neighboring states, like Japan or Silla. This is because of two reasons; first, these states did not have comparably large navies, and second, if Japanese or Silla navies destroyed Chinese military fleet, medieval Korean and Japanese annalists would surely have written in their annals about a big victory at sea. So, it is therefore plausible that the Bohai fleet destroyed Chinese navy in Dengzhou.

In opinion of the author, the military fleet of the Tang Empire was located in Dengzhou for different reasons. Initially, China had hostile relations with Silla. Between Silla and the Tang Empire were located the lands of a large number of different nomadic tribes (like the Xsi, Khitans and others), as well as the territory of Bohai. Therefore China and Silla could not engage in a land war

between each other (moreover, initially Silla used Bohai as a buffer against potential Tang aggression), but they very easily could have utilized the sea as a field for war. Clearly, the Tang Empire noted this possibility.

Second, China had problems with the Khitans. These nomadic tribes did not have a fleet, and therefore the Tang Empire could move its army by sea to the rear of Khitan territory, like in the war in the 696 - 697.

Third, China concentrated military ships near the Shandong peninsula to deal with pirates, who sometimes attacked Chinese trade or diplomatic missions.

Clearly, Da Wuyi knew about importance of the seaport Dengzhou (it was biggest port in Shandong Peninsula) for China as a base for the imperial fleet and considered the possibility of an attack by Tang Empire from the sea. The Chinese fleet could be very effective against a Bohai army and could become a problem for the concentration of Bohai military troops, because they would be forced to potentially defend their own sea ports from attacks by the Tang Empire.

But to attack Dengzhou, the Bohai ruler clearly had new information about the system of defenses of this seaport, as well as the number and positions of Chinese ships. In the first year of the war Bohai destroyed Dengzhou very quickly; the Chinese army did not have time to bring in forces to support this seaport. Bohai's success confirmed that its navy had new information about the position of the Chinese imperial fleet and the situation in the seaport. Therefore one can surmise that Bohai utilized ambassadorial missions, hostages in the imperial court of the Tang Empire and trade groups to obtain such information.

However, Bohai ambassadorial groups and hostages were not important sources for information about Dengzhou. Clearly, diplomatic missions were present in Dengzhou after their arrival from Bohai, but they stayed in the seaport for only a short time and before proceeding to the Chinese Capital. Moreover, officers of the Tang Empire paid attention to members of the ambassadorial group, groups were limited in the reconnaissance and espionage activities they could undertake. Hostages located at the Chinese Imperial court and could not collect new information about the Chinese fleet. Moreover,

they served as officers of the Tang imperial guard and cannot come to the sea coast.

Therefore it seems that Bohai used trade missions to obtain new information about the fleet of the Tang Empire. Clearly, Bohai sent a large number of trade ships to China and officers in Dengzhou could not watch all members of these trade missions. They arrived in China with ambassadorial groups, but when Bohai diplomats came to the capital of the Tang Empire, merchants stayed in Dengzhou or near of this seaport. The trade missions could come back to Bohai at any time and gave important information to commanders of the Bohai navy.

As is known, Da Wuyi used the Bohai fleet and pirates ships in the attack of Dengzhou (Samguksagi 1959: 219; Ki Ho Song, 1995, p. 69; Dyuk Gong Yu 2000, p. 53-54; \*\*Parhaesa 1996, p. 33). Therefore, it seems likely that the Bohai ruler had estimates about the size of the Chinese navy, understood that his forces were not sufficient for a successful attack and asked pirates for help. Clearly, pirates supported the Bohai navy because they considered the Tang fleet a major impediment to their activities. Furthermore, pirates alone could not have beaten the Chinese fleet, but with the combined power of pirates and the Bohai navy they were successful in destroying the Tang Empire's naval base.

It appears that the Bohai attack on Dengzhou destroyed the main Chinese navy. The reasons for such a view will be discussed below.

In opinion of the authors, the second Bohai ruler considered different strategies for war and understood that he could not fight against both the combined against China and forces of Tang's army and fleet. Da Wuyi had time for this from 727 and could analyze situation. Clearly, Bohai did not have large number of the military ships and could not fight against a Tang fleet for prolonged periods. Moreover, the Bohai people did not have a good understanding of Chinese geography or where its many seaports were located.

Conversely, on land, the Bohai army was in a very comfortable position. As is known, the major part of the army of the Tang Empire was infantry. Clearly, the raw number of Chinese soldiers was vast. However, most part of the Bohai army consisted of the Mohe warriors. Mohe troops were archer cavalry. Cavalry had good conditions for

fighting in Manchuria. In spite of the fact that China had experience of fighting against nomadic tribes (like, Khitan, Turks and other) for a long time, the Tang Empire could not adapt to Bohai tactics. Moreover, the armies of the Bohai's allies – namely, Khitan tribes – were also archer cavalry. Therefore the Bohai and Khitan armies effectively fought against the Chinese army and were stopped only near Madoushan Mountain (near line of the Great Chinese Walls). Chinese forces were forced to resorting to blocking the roads with large rocks (A. L. Ivliev, 2005). Clearly, generals of the army of the Tang Empire used this strategy in order to limit the activities of the Bohai forces.

Moreover, we noted that in the “Xin tang shu” we can see that 5000 Shiwei and Mohe riders arrived to Madoushan for support of the Chinese army. Clearly, a force of 5000 warriors was a not large number to the Chinese army. However, Chinese historians mentioned these troops in the description of the military activities in the war of 732 - 733. Probably, the Tang Empire had problems dealing with rider groups of the Bohai's army and needed cavalry.

But in 733, the Chinese Emperor sent word to the Bohai exile Da Menyi and asked him to help the army of the Tang Empire. The young brother of the Bohai ruler arrived at Madoushan Mountain (A. A. Kim 2011). As discussed above, the Chinese generals needed information about Bohai army from Da Menyi. Moreover, this Bohai exile knew both armies and could compare positions and specifics of the Bohai and Chinese military troops in this conflict. Probably it was helpful, because shortly after the arrival of Da Menyi the Bohai army retreated from Madoushan.

The successful military activities of the Bohai forces demonstrate one important thing: Da Wuyi was completely prepared for war with China. The Bohai army and navy were mobilized before the war; Bohai diplomats had close contacts with the pirates. Therefore we can surmise that Bohai would have started a war whatever the case, but successes by the army of the Tang Empire were a good reason for a Bohai attack.

The first victories of the Bohai forces in the war were unpleasant surprises for the Tang Emperor. The Chinese were quickly put in a difficult situation – in 732, the Tang Empire faced favorable conditions on its eastern frontier – Khitan and Xsi forces had been destroyed and the

Chinese army was in a position to dominate. But after the Bohai attack, the situation was changed fundamentally – the Bohai navy destroyed Dengzhou and the Chinese fleet moored there. Furthermore, soldiers of the alliance of Bohai, Xsi and Khitan were located near the Great Wall of China and Tang armies could not defeat them. Moreover Turkic forces elected a new Khagan and this made the situation more dangerous for the Tang Empire – Turks could attack the Tang Empire from west, because Chinese armies fought in the east.

At first, the Tang Emperor arrested Bohai's advance and sent their ambassadors south (A. L. Ivliev, 2005, p. 456). The Tang Empire mobilized its forces, but Chinese officers understood that these forces would be insufficient to deal with the situation. Therefore the Tang Empire requested assistance from Silla and suggested a combined plan of attack on Bohai's flanks (\*\*Parhaesa 1996, p. 3; Giu Cheol Han, 1994; Si Hyeong Park 2000).

Silla had antagonistic relations not only with Bohai at that time, but with Tang China too. Moreover, Silla had lost territories as a result of struggles with its northern neighbor. Therefore this Korean state needed to improve relations with the Tang Empire. Clearly, Silla sought to use this opportunity to take back lands from Bohai because Silla officers knew the military potential of China and understood that Bohai could not successfully fight against the Tang Empire – at least if Silla was also aiding Tang.

As stated above, China needed an alliance with Silla too, probably, more than Silla needed the proposed alliance. Clearly, Tang could not obtain information about relations on the Korean Peninsula and a possible alliance between Bohai and Silla could be very dangerous for Tang Empire. Moreover, the Chinese army had problem with armies of the Khitan, Bohai, Mohe and Xsi. War on the southern border of Bohai would be helpful for the Tang Empire, because Da Wuyi would not be able to concentrate his forces in two distant areas at once. China also needed to finish the war rapidly because there was a risk that the Turkic Khaganate could attack the rear of the Tang Empire.

Therefore China sent Kim Sarang to Silla. Kim Sarang was a member of the ruling dynastic family of Silla and hostile in the Tang Empire. His arrival was an important gesture to Silla. Silla's

leaders understood the meaning of this gesture and contacts between both sides were established. So, in a difficult situation Tang's army along with the Silla army built up an alliance consisting of several tribes (Shiwei, Heishui Mohe), thus forming a phalanx that could march against Bohai.

We should note an interesting fact though: the Tang Empire gave the Silla king a new rank – commander for sea military activities (\*\*Parhaesa 1996, p. 102; \*\*\*Samguk sagi 1959, p. 219; Dyuk Gong Yu, 2000, p. 54). Thus Silla was compelled to provide safety in the sea and fight against the Bohai navy. This seemingly confirms what was stated above about the destructiveness of Bohai's attack on Dengzhou; Tang was forced to bestow a naval rank on its ally, in order to get their naval military aid.

Kim Sarang became the mediator that facilitated coordination of military activities by Silla and the Tang Empire against Bohai in this war. According to "Samguksagi", Silla mobilized 100,000 people for war against Bohai (\*\*\*Samguksagi 1959, Nan Hee Ku 2011, p. 396) and sent armies to the north to support the Chinese army, which attacked Bohai separately from Silla.

As stated above, however, Silla's expedition proved to be unsuccessful – snowfall and bad mountain roads led to the destruction of the Silla army, more than half of the Silla soldiers were lost and the remainder was forced to retreat\*\*\*. The Tang army fought with Bohai military troops, but could not win and was also forced to retreat\*\*.

In spite of the failure of the Silla expedition, his attempt to intervention greatly influenced the course of the war. Silla demonstrated the possibility of an anti-Bohai encirclement, a fact that surely did not escape the attention of Da Wuyi. Bohai's position thus had changed. It forces now faced a war on three fronts – from the west (Tang Empire), the north (Shiwei and Heishui Mohe) and the south (Silla). Certainly, Bohai was prepared for a war on its western and northern frontiers, but the addition of a southern front was clearly too much for Da Wuyi. Moreover, Japan decided not to come to the assistance of Bohai. Bohai's allies – the Khitan and Xsi – could not support Da Wuyi against Silla, because they were located in areas of modern-day Manchuria. The Silla expedition was therefore a tactical military defeat for its army, but more importantly constituted a strategic political victory which changed the course of the war.

Nonetheless, Silla considered this expedition a failure and wanted revenge. Hence, Silla requested that the Tang Empire participate in a new joint strike. However, China had other plans, which we shall discuss below.

Da Wuyi understood the complicated position he now faced and wanted peace with China. Things were complicated by his younger brother, however. At first, Da Menyi took up residence in the Tang Empire and sought to wage a political struggle against his older brother for control of Bohai. Moreover, China was interested in using him against Da Wuyi.

Second, the course of this war confirmed Da Menyi's initial judgment: Bohai ultimately was not in a position to fight and defeat the Tang Empire in a protracted military conflict. Da Wuyi as ruler of Bohai could not be seen to recognize the opinion of his younger brother lest he lose standing in the eyes of both his subjects and in relations with allies and other neighboring states.

In our opinion, this understanding of the situation was what drove Da Wuyi to send assassins to murder his younger brother Da Menyi. However, killers were arrested and executed by the Chinese (Dyuk-Gong Yu, 2000, p. 75). On the one hand, Da Menyi was acting as an advisor to the Tang army and knew much about Bohai's forces. His murder would therefore be helpful to both Da Wuyi and Bohai's military. On the other hand, Da Wuyi also probably saw his brother as a potential pretender to the throne and therefore as a political threat. Russian scholar Alexander Ivliev believes that Da Wuyi wanted to finish war with China and has described the war as being a proxy conflict between Da Menyi and Da Wuyi (\*\*\*Gosudarstvo Bohaj, 1994; A. L. Ivliev, 2005). So, we can see a rather paradoxical situation – in spite of the fact that Da Menyi's initial judgment about the danger of conflict with China being right, Da Wuyi sent assassins to murder his young brother in the Tang Empire. After this incident, the Bohai ambassadorial mission arrived in China to ask for peace and forgiveness (Ivliev 2005).

At that time both sides wanted to peace. Not long time ago, the Khitan military had defeated Tang forces on the battlefield. The Turks had supported Khitan tribes in this military encounter. China saw this battle potentially the opening salvo of a long conflict with Khitan tribes and the Turkic Khaganate. Clearly, the Tang Empire needed peace

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on its the eastern frontier – i.e. with Bohai. Moreover, peace with Bohai gave the possibility of support from Shiwei, Silla and Heishui Mohe in war with the Turks – allies can send military troops for Chinese side.

Bohai too, as stated above, was in a complicated political and military position. In spite of victories in period of 732 - 733, Bohai could not support a long-term war with China and its ally Silla. Moreover, Bohai's people did not support the young brother of the Bohai ruler against Da Wuyi and Tang leadership must have noted this fact. Therefore, the Chinese Empire quickly made peace with Bohai.

There is however some debate among scholars over when the war actually ended. Usually, scholars from other countries consider 733 as the year when the conflict ended because this was when Bohai's peace mission arrived in China. But Korean specialists believe that that the war finished in 735, this would mean that the war spanned four years.

Historians from Korean peninsula believe that, in spite of the fact that Bohai's ambassadorial mission arrived in the Tang Empire in 733, China was not able to stop its allies from continuing their operations against Bohai. China did not have speedy lines of communication with Shiwei, Heishui Mohe and Silla. Clearly, China's allies wanted to benefit from this war, especially, Silla, which had lost a substantial part of its army. Korean scholars also have considered another fact – in 735, Tang Empire ceded land to Silla, (these lands were located in south of the Phaegang River and formally were under protectorate by China) (\*\*Parhaesa 1996, p. 34, 103; Jin-Hun Jung. 1999, p. 49; V. M. Tihonov 2003, p. 213-214). These lands were probably a reward for Silla's intervention in the conflict.

As we can see, the peace between Bohai and China itself was declared in 733. But Tang "presented" land in Phaegang River to Silla in 735. Therefore it can be surmised that the decision by the Tang Empire was a subject for discussion among Chinese nobles.

The Phaegang River has become the object of discussion between scholars, researching Bohai history. Some historians believe that Silla occupied these lands, but Tang Empire did not recognize Silla's claim to this territory (\*\*Parhaesa 1996, p. 123). It seems though that Bohai had an interest in

controlling this area. So, these lands became the object of conflict between Bohai and Silla. We do not know who lived in these lands at the time, but China ceding this territory to Silla clearly added to frictions present between Bohai and Silla. Certainly, Bohai could have controlled these lands, but was not able to fight against both China and its allies. Therefore it had to concede these lands to China, but the Tang Empire gave them to Silla. Bohai was to fight for control over these lands for a long time after this war. Silla sent expeditions to the Phaegang River throughout the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries (A. A. Kim, 2011a).

Among historians there are a number of different opinions about the consequences of this war. Many Korean scholars believe that the war ended with a victory for Bohai. They have paid especial attention to the Dengzhou attack, the expedition of the Bohai army to Madoushan (\*\*Parhaesa 1996; Si Hyeong Park, 1995, 2000), but have not written about the actual results of the war. Chinese specialists believed that Bohai was a Chinese provincial power (Hong Sung, 2001; Feng Yao, 2001) and these military activities were not war, only a rebellion against central imperial power. They consider that the conflict finished positively for China. Soviet scholars, under political pressures, supported the position of Korean historians (A. P. Okladnikov, 1959; A. P. Okladnikov, A. P. Derevinako, 1973).

In the opinion of the authors, this military conflict was very much a war because Bohai was not a Chinese province or autonomous "region of Tang Empire". Nonetheless, the war finished with the effective defeat of Bohai - it effectively had to cede lands to Silla, and its period of domination on the Korean peninsula ended. For a long time after, Bohai did not (and perhaps could not) mount military operations against either China or its allies. Bohai had interest in war against Silla as revenge for conflict 732 - 735, but looked for alliance with Japan for this and did not try fight against Silla alone (A. A. Kim, 2011b).

It is important to remember however that the Tang Empire did not try to destroy the Bohai state. On the other hand, the Tang Empire did not consider the destruction of Bohai as in its vital strategic interest. Clearly, the Tang Empire needed to be careful on its eastern frontiers. China wanted to support Silla and to weaken Bohai. But Chinese officials remembered well that the destruction of



Koguryō by Silla and Tang forces led to Silla's occupation of almost the entire Korean peninsula and the expulsion of Tang forces from the peninsula.

Thus, Tang had fought a war against the two other states on the Korean peninsula – Paekche and Koguryō, but it was Silla, not China, that ultimately reaped the benefits.

Clearly, Tang's leadership carefully considered the aims of their war against Bohai and came to the conclusion that the destruction of the Bohai would merely allow Silla to occupy much of its lands – thus further strengthening Silla's power in the region. Tang clearly did not see such an outcome as being in its geopolitical interest. Thus, when Silla asked China to attack Bohai again\*\*\*\*, the Tang Empire probably considered this as being part of an attempt by Silla to seize Bohai lands, as it had done with Koguryō. When viewed in such a light it is not surprising that the Tang Empire did not accede to such requests. Tang wanted to keep Bohai as a buffer, a counterbalance to Silla's power on the Korean Peninsula.

At the same time, however, Chinese officials sought to use Da Menyi against his brother. Such attempts though proved to be unsuccessful. In spite of Da Menyi's assistance to Chinese army at Madoushan, his value proved to be limited. The Bohai people did not support him against his older brother, Da Wuyi, and China could not put him on the Bohai throne.

So, as we can see, the victory of the Tang Empire and its allies in war with Bohai was not total. The reasons are not to be found in Bohai's military strength, but distrust between Tang and its allies.

#### Notes

1. In the Soviet Union, scholars used the Chinese for identification of names in the Bohai (Parhae) state. Therefore, this article uses Chinese names for Bohai rulers. Russian specialists in Korean and Bohai studies began to use the name "Parhae" only from the 2000s.

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## Appendix 1

### *List of Bohai rulers*

- Da Zuorong (大祚榮), 698 – 719.  
Da Wuyi (大武藝), 719 – 737.  
Da Jinmao (大欽茂), 737 – 793.  
Da Yuanyi (大元義), 793 – 794.  
Da Huayu (大華與), 794 – 795.  
Da Sonlin (大嵩璘), 795 – 809.  
Da Yuanyu (大元瑜), 809 – 812.  
Da Yanyi (大言義), 812 – 817.  
Da Mingzhong (大明忠), 817 – 818.  
Da Renxiu (大仁秀), 818 – 830.  
Da Yizhen (大彝震), 830 – 857.  
Da Qianhuang (大虔晃), 857 – 872.  
Da Xuanxi (大玄錫), 872 – 894.  
Da Weixie (大瑋階), 894 – 907 (?).  
Da Yinzhuan (大諲譔), 907 (?) – 926.