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The UNESCO World Heritage List as a stage:

The case of the ancient Koguryŏ/Gaogouli Kingdom

Iris Dingemans

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Prof. dr. R.E. Breuker

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1. Introduction

In the history of the Korean peninsula, the time period from 57 B.C.E. until 668 A.D. is traditionally regarded as the "Three Kingdoms". These kingdoms consisted of Paekche, Silla and Koguryŏ/Gaogouli, and are often considered to have formed the foundations of Korea. However, the "ownership" over one of these kingdoms is up for debate. As throughout time, the ancient Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom has covered land on what is now considered North and South Korea, China and at its peak even covered a small part of Russia, the question of "Whose heritage is Koguryŏ/Gaogouli?" has been raised by China.

Located within the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli area are two significant UNESCO World Heritage sites. These two heritage sites are as two sides on the same coin: the "Complex of Koguryŏ Tombs" is located in North Korea while the "Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Koguryŏ Kingdom"-site is located in north-east China. Both listings include Koguryŏ/Gaogouli-era tombs and were simultaneously registered on the World Heritage List (hereinafter referred to as WHL) in 2004. When comparing the listings, the only difference between the two are their modern-day locations on each side of the Chinese-North Korean border. Only a few years ago in February of 2017, China nominated another significant site in the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli area to the UNESCO WHL: the "Vertical Vegetation Landscape and Volcanic Landscape in Changbai Mountain". In 2020, North Korea has also started the process of registering their part of the mountain range as a UNESCO Global Geopark.

In the short history of UNESCO as an institution, shared heritage is an issue that has not often been explored. This is an issue likely caused by UNESCO's Eurocentrism and focus on Western ideas of heritage, which is directly involved in UNESCO's nomination process.[1] This is due to the fact that UNESCO naturally favors easier nomination processes, as they require less work from UNESCO's side while sites of shared heritage naturally require more attention.[2] Despite UNESCO's inclination towards Western heritage, China's number of heritage sites has increased exponentially over the years. Since 1987, China has accumulated 55 World Heritage sites. Within the first year, no less than 6 sites were put on the list. In the following years, China has continued to enlist multiple sites at a time. To compare, North Korea is listed as having 2 World Heritage sites, with South Korea having 14.

[1] Reyes, "'World Heritage' Site Selection Is Eurocentric – and That Shapes Which Historic Places Get Love and Money."
[2] Ibid.

More recently, the number of heritage sites and practices put on the WHL as a collective effort between countries has increased. Such has been the case with the nomination of the Silk Roads in 2014, for example, where the site was put on the list for China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan after their collective effort to pursue a joint nomination due to the size of Silk Road network. However, in the case of the Changbai Mountain/Mount Paektu heritage site on the border of China and North Korea, this option was forgone for reasons still unclear. With the mountain range being of major importance to both China and North Korea, it seems that something is preventing a cooperative effort to preserve this heritage site. This begs the question of what is forming this blockage in the road and additionally, what the significance of the WHL is in this conflict.

The main research question I aim to answer is: "How has the UNESCO World Heritage List been used to prove ownership over the ancient cultural heritage of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli by China and Korea since the 20th century?" In order to answer this question, sub-questions I will be addressing are "What is it this cultural heritage?", "Why is it used?" and "How is it used?" I will be using qualitative research methods to answer my questions. These methods will mainly consist of discourse analysis in order to study various documents, such as the UNESCO documents as available on their website and the listing of the heritage sites in question, as well as responses issued by the Chinese and South Korean government as far as they are available. I will also take in consideration Chinese and Korean news articles reporting on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage and the dispute, as these tend to reflect sentiments regarding the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict.

An important factor in my analyses of these sources will be the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), a term coined by Smith in her book "Uses of Heritage" published in 2006. Central to the point Smith makes is that heritage is a discourse, rather than a fact. Heritage has a purpose and a use that is often neglected when considering the origin of heritage and how we think about history. Similar to how the present conflict between China and Korea about Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage is not entirely about the past, heritage is not a straightforward result of the past, either, but rather how things of the past are used in the present.

In this thesis, I will be arguing that Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage is used as a way of proclaiming power over the other in both identity politics and border politics. The connection between identity politics and collective history is important to this argument. Matten argues that it is memory and the memorialization of collective heritage that attributes to the creation

of national identity and by extension, influences identity politics.[3] Taking in consideration the importance of memory in identity politics, I hope that through analyzing these sources, I will be able to determine the intentions behind the revival of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage through the UNESCO WHL and the start of the controversy between China and the Koreas.

Chapter 2 will consist of a literature review of relevant studies on the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli discussion, as well as a minor overview of other border disputes of a similar nature that involve China in order to get a broader understanding of the nature of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli dispute. In this literature review, I will also discuss the use and importance of heritage. In chapter 3, I will be looking into the details of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli dispute and similar disputes, as well as related projects launched by China and South Korea. In chapter 4, I will be discussing the UNESCO listings and documents regarding UNESCO nominations offered by the state parties in question. Additionally, I will discuss the extend of UNESCO's expertise and influence by comparing the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage conflict with two similar cases: the Preah Vihear temple in Cambodia and the "Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls". Finally, I will be answering my main research question in the conclusion.

As my thesis will be focusing on the contemporary usage of ancient Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage, I will not be going into an in-depth discussion of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history. Rather I will give a general overview of relevant Koguryŏ/Gaogouli-era relations before moving on to publications starting from the starting point of this conflict, which is commonly believed to be in the 1990s.

In this thesis, I will be using English and Korean language sources. Additionally, while it would serve my discussion of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli dispute well to use North Korean sources, many of these are of limited use. Therefore, I will not be using any North Korean sources other than the published UNESCO documents issued by the North Korean state party in charge of nominating heritage sites.

Because the rightful ownership over the kingdom in question is disputed, I will be referring to it by both its Korean and its Chinese name, which are "Koguryŏ" and "Gaolougi", respectively. This is also the case for Mount Paektu, as it is referred to in Korea, and Changbai Mountain as it is referred to in China.

[3] Matten, "Introduction."

2. Literature review

2.1 The historiography on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli and Sino-Korean relations

Within this paper, the question of who is in the right historically is not the main focus. Therefore I will not analyze the history of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom and its geopolitics in detail with the purpose of arguing for or against China's claim on the history that is commonly understood to be Korean. However, when discussing the conflict surrounding Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage, we have to consider it in relation to the historical meaning given to it as history is commonly used in order to create and substantiate a nation's national identity. Therefore, it is necessary to shortly explore the history of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom and Sino-Korean relations before moving onto the current conflict.

In the history of the Korean peninsula, the Koguryŏ kingdom lasted from 37 BC until 668 and was one of the "Three Kingdoms", which also included Paekche and Silla.[4] The three kingdoms were important in the formation of what Korea is today. The Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom has been an important aspect of Korean history as well as Korean culture and Korean national identity. The kingdom was situated on the northern part of the Korean peninsula, which spanned across a large area that at its peak partially covered the northeast of China and even small part of Russia. In the time period of the Three Kingdoms, Koguryŏ/Gaogouli, while a frequent trading partner of various Chinese kingdoms, also formed a strong defense against foreign invaders. Initially, Silla paid tribute to Koguryŏ in exchange for protection from Paekche, before Silla was able to unify the three kingdoms through an alliance with T'ang China.[5] After the unification, part of what used to be Koguryŏ formed Parhae, with the unified Silla more commonly regarded to having laid the foundation for cultural and material forms of traditional Korean civilization.[6] Thus, whilst Koguryŏ was defeated by Silla and ultimately formed a united Silla, this newly united kingdom did not reach as far as Koguryŏ had done. Within the alliance between Silla and T'ang China, the latter held its own objectives in helping Silla unite the three kingdoms and prevented Silla in taking over the entirety of the Koguryŏ kingdom.[7] Parhae formed a new kingdom and were recognized as such by T'ang China. This new kingdom was organized partly by former Koguryŏ leadership. However, according to Wells, Parhae can be considered an early Manchurian state, rather than an early Korean state.[8]

[4] Wells, *Korea: Outline of a Civilization*. 15, 17
[5] Ibid, 16
[6] Ibid, 21
[7] Ibid, 22
[8] Ibid, 21

In the 9th century, Parhae dissolved. Out of a weakened Silla, the period of the Later Three Kingdoms emerged. "Later Koguryŏ" was established in 901 and would go on to unite the Later Three Kingdoms under one political center in 936 as the Koryŏ dynasty.[9]

In contrast to Wells, there are Chinese interpretations of Korean history that go against the Three Kingdoms' independence. Logie argues that due to China's view of the three kingdoms as the Samhan or "Three Han" polities that are part of Lelang and Daigang commanderies, it negates the possibility for the "Three Kingdoms" of Koguryŏ, Paekche and Silla to have existed prior to the 3rd century.[10] The meaning given to the Three Kingdoms is projected onto it in order to substantiate Korea's place in East Asia. The kingdoms not having existed earlier goes against the deep and ancient "meaning" of the Three Kingdoms in Korea's history.[11] Some sources also claim that the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom was a vassal state of China, which would imply considerable cultural and economic dependency on China.[12]

Throughout the various states of Korean, Chinese and Manchurian relations, Gries argues that China is often regarded as Korea's 'Other' against whom Koreans identify themselves.[13] As such, Gries even goes as far as to argue that Korean identity cannot be understood without considering Sino-Korean relations.[14] The legitimization of Korean ownership over Koguryŏ/Gaogouli is about more than "just" Koguryŏ/Gaogouli. As Logie points out, the proving of such ownership has implications for the "grandeur" of the Korean peninsula over Japan and China as well as Japan's occupation of Korea from 1910 until 1945.[15] Additionally, the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom in particular is seen as a symbol of resistance against foreign invaders.[16] To Korea, the Koguryŏ kingdom then becomes a symbol Korean independence—an independence they lacked from 1910 until the end of World War II.[17] This trauma of modern colonization, Logie argues, is tied to Korea's preoccupation with ancient history and feeds into the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict.[18]

Starting from the 1930s, Byington argues that China was starting to move in on Korean history, as a Chinese historian developed a model of racial descent that in his eyes proved the

[9] Ibid, 21
[10] Logie, "Diagnosing and Debunking Korean Pseudohistory." 60, 61
[11] Ibid, 60-62
[12] Gries, "The Koguryo Controversy," 1
[13] Ibid, 8
[14] Ibid.
[15] Logie, "Diagnosing and Debunking Korean Pseudohistory.", 38
[16] Gries, "The Koguryo Controversy," 8.
[17] The Korean peninsula was officially occupied by Japan from 1910 until 1945. Shortly after the Japanese occupation of Korea came to an end, the country was divided into North and South Korea by the United States and the USSR.
[18] Logie, "Diagnosing and Debunking Korean Pseudohistory," 69

Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom to have been built by people of Chinese descent.[19] This decision to claim Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history and heritage cannot be simply ignored or relativized to a minor disagreement over ancient history, as some have argued it is a conflict of East Asian hegemonism imposed by China hanging threateningly over the Korean peninsula.[20]

2.2 National identity

2.2.1 The purpose of heritage

In order to understand the historical impact of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom, it is necessary to explore the topic of national identity and to see how heritage is generally used. Additionally, we must discuss what exactly heritage is and why we preserve it before it can be applied to Koguryŏ/Gaogouli.

Heritage, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, constitutes as "features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, that were created in the past and still have historical importance"[21]. The phrase "historical importance" used in this definition is vague, because it is implied that the importance of history or the meaning behind heritage is inherent to it. However, it is the community who interprets history or heritage and gives it its meaning or historic value. The value of history and heritage is always subject to change and is always newly interpreted. This is also argued by Smith, who emphasizes that the value or worth of what we consider to be heritage is not intrinsic to it, because heritage is not simply a result of the past with its own inherent meaning, but rather a way to ascribe value to things of the past; an interpretation and celebration of history tailored to meet a community's present-day purposes.[22] Taking into consideration that the value of heritage is not fixed, this not only allows heritage to be used, but also to be modified and re-appropriated to fit political agendas and ideological frameworks.[23] Subsequently to this theory, Hall argues that heritage "inevitably reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context"[24] as heritage is used to represent the "correct" narrative those in power are trying to substantiate. Heritage does not only reflect current assumptions, he argues it is "infected" by the past and those who held a position of power and authority. As such, there is reason to assume that the management of cultural heritage is dependent on the context of a nation, which not only includes domestic

[19] Byington, "The War of Words Between South Korea and China Over An Ancient Kingdom: Why Both Sides Are Misguided,"
[20] Gries, "The Koguryo Controversy," 1.
[21] Cambridge English Dictionary, "Heritage."
[22] Smith, "Discourses of Heritage."
[23] Ibid.
[24] Hall, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'the Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation." 6

politics and culture, but also international politics and by extension, geopolitics. Returning to the dictionary definition offered by Cambridge, it is important to understand heritage as a discourse rather than only the preservation of historical objects deemed important. It is as Smith describes it a "subjective political negotiation of identity, place and memory"[25] which is always subject to change. As Hall argued, heritage changes according to the context in which it is used and dependent on who it is used by. China using Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage to fit an arguably "new" narrative is done with a specific purpose or objective.

Heritage has multiple purposes and uses depending on whether it is tangible or intangible heritage and depending on if it is natural or cultural heritage. Heritage sites or practices are usually surrounded by traditions, such as commemoration. Heritage also plays a part in the education sector, where memories of and knowledge about this heritage are passed on to the next generation. Hall emphasizes the importance of "belongingness" and "culture as social incorporation."[26] Heritage is especially useful to a nation when the majority can relate to it, as that is when it would be most effective. Visiting a heritage site or participating in cultural practices help the creation of heritage as it encourages people to actively identify themselves with it.[27] This interaction with heritage also includes discourse, as that would also have an effect on how people view, experience and relate to that heritage. As will become clear in chapter 4, the relation between Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage and the ethnic Korean people living in the Yanbian prefecture near the North Korean border is a clear example of how Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage is currently being used and placed into a different context by the Chinese government.

Heritage has become an integral part of national identity. However, the link between heritage and identity is forged. As heritage is given meaning by local communities or a nation's people, it also gives heritage a representative quality to outsiders and allows for tourists from other communities and nations to visit institutions such as museums or heritage sites in order to experience that culture and its corresponding heritage. Since the creation of the WHL, UNESCO has become an internationally renowned authority on heritage matters. When a heritage site is approved for the list, it means the site has gone through rigorous examination that takes in consideration the site's authenticity and how valued it is universally. This UNESCO "seal of approval" brings in additional tourists and boosts the economy. The acknowledgement and recognition of heritage practices or sites by authority figures confirms its legitimacy and endorses its importance. As heritage sites have to meet certain criteria in

[25] Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.
[26] Hall, "Whose Heritage?" 22
[27] Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 303

order to attain a place on the UNESCO World Heritage List, UNESCO approving them for the list confirms the importance of a particular heritage site or practice. This system attributes a certain value of importance to heritage sites of major communities as well as minorities within a nation. UNESCO's "power" in this process is mediated by a council made up of representatives from 21 state parties who collectively decide on what is added onto the list, advised by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). The countries making up the World Heritage Committee (hereinafter referred to as WHC) are allowed to serve for a maximum of six years at a time in order to have each of the 193 participating nation states take part in a debate on what heritage should attain a place on the WHL.

UNESCO takes up a neutral position in applying heritage sites and practices to the list, however the acknowledgement of receiving a place on the list has more underlying implications. As Hall points out, heritage has come to represent a worldwide system of museums and organizations founded with the purpose of protecting and preserving what is seen as "valuable" to local communities or as representative of a nation. Historical sites, artworks or objects that were damaged during the Second World War led to the establishment of UNESCO; founded in 1946 and tasked with the preservation and registration of cultural and natural heritage—later extended to include intangible heritage—to protect valuable historical attributes from the destruction of warfare and other conflicts leading to the destruction of heritage. While UNESCO was created with the goal of preserving heritage, there are certain side-effects. UNESCO has certain limitations, which expose a greater issue about how and why heritage is preserved. This limitation becomes especially apparent in heritage disputes related to border conflicts and how ancient borders and ownership can be applied to modern nation states. This is apparent in the case of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom, as well as other cases that will be discussed in chapter 4.

2.2.2 Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage

We have established that the meaning of heritage is dependent on the context of a nation state and how heritage is used within that context. Enlisting a heritage site, then, is using that heritage. As the context of a nation state changes, so does the role of heritage. China using Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage to fit an arguably "new" narrative is done with a specific purpose. By enlisting Koguryŏ heritage—as well as other claims discussed later—China not only claims

heritage that is commonly seen as Korean, but it also asserts the Chinese viewpoint that Korea has depended on China throughout history and lasting into the future. This assertion is an extreme one, as history is an important factor in the construction of national identity amongst nation state's people. It cannot be denied that for a long time, China was a dominant power in East Asia. Park argues that over a long period of time—in contrast to the commonly understood "shock" at the arrival of Western powers in at Asia—both Japan and Korea have recontextualized their own country's autonomy in a Sino-centric East Asia.[28]

Park argues for a gradual shift from Japan and Korea's Sino-centric worldview to one that does not step away from that worldview altogether, but incorporates and negotiates new concepts with its own idea of autonomy. This change is visible in Schmid's discussion of Korea's "decentering of the Middle Kingdom". By decentering and othering China, Korea formed a new "Koreanness". To create this "new" identity, there was a need for a distinction between what belonged to China and what belonged to Korea. Creating this new cultural identity of "Koreanness" involved Korean intellectuals nationalizing inherited cultural forms. An example of this would be the *Tano-je* Festival, a tradition of Chinese origin that continued to develop in Korea independently from the Chinese version, which is also enveloped in controversy due to conflicting ideas surrounding ownership.[29]

Park suggests that the debate on Korea's own autonomy is contextualized a Sino-centric East Asia as the already existing sovereignty concept coexisted with new, Western concepts and knowledge.[30] Schmid argues that between the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895[31] and the annexation of Korea in 1910, Korea was globalizing at an accelerating pace whilst simultaneously trying to identify their nation separate from their neighbors. The treaty of Shimonoseki was of particular significance in this process because the Qing recognized the absolute sovereignty of Korea, which was not acknowledged before.[32] Japan's victory over the Chinese military was argued to be a symbolic end to the "old knowledge" (*kuhak*) by the "new knowledge" (*sinhak*) of the west.[33] A new era that came with new relationship dynamics

[28] Park, "Changing Definitions of Sovereignty in Nineteenth-Century East Asia"
[29] Other cases that include contested ownership over heritage practices, including the *Tano-je* festival, are further discussed in chapter 4.
[30] Park, "Changing Definitions of Sovereignty," 282
[31] The Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) ended the First Sino-Japanese war that lasted from 25 July 1894 until 17 April 1895. The war was fought over influence over Choson Korea. Ultimately, this war shifted Chinese influence over the Korean peninsula.
[32] Schmid and Brook, "Decentering the 'Middle Kingdom': The Problem of China in Korean Nationalist Thought, 1895–1910," 85.
[33] Ibid.

between Korea, China and Japan as well as a new understanding of national identity that was no longer defined by China.

China played a major role in this as the core of what Schmid calls the "Middle Kingdom". The Middle Kingdom is explained to be a "transnational cultural realm within which (…) elites participated"[34], with Korea on the outside of this core. In this mechanic, China is the cultural other against which Korea could distinguish themselves, thus decentering China in East Asia. Park argues Korea's autonomy had always been relative to China's sovereignty up until the end of the 19th century.[35] This change, though not completely eradicating the Sino-centric order Park speaks of, did fuel a larger change in dynamic among China, Japan and Korea.[36] By first answering the question of "what is Chinese?" Korea could redefine themselves and abandon that Chinese element from their new definition of "Korea". [37] National identity and national independence go hand in hand in these early examples of Korea redefining their national identity, particularly through Korea adopting a national flag and addressing the writing system.[38]

However, the notion that there is a natural and a clearly distinguishable separation between what is Korean and what is Chinese is unlikely considering their long history of cultural exchange and interaction. As Schmid points out, it is assumed that a pure "Korean" essence can be excavated from centuries of interaction and exchange. Instead, it is more likely that this separation between Korea and China has been escalating since the rise of Korean nationalism at the end of the 19th century.

With Japan's occupation of Korea and the division of North and South Korea following in 1945, the Korean peninsula's tumultuous 20th century formed a blockage in the road to the assertion of Korean nationalism. While China arguably started moving in on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage during Japan's occupation of the Korean peninsula, Byington argues that the conflict

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[34] Ibid, 84
[35] Park, "Changing Definitions of Sovereignty," 298
[36] Ibid.
[37] Schmid and Brook, "Decentering the 'Middle Kingdom'" 84.
[38] The flag was officially recognized 1949 as the flag representing the ROK, however it was created in its first iteration in 1882. During Japan's occupation of the Korean peninsula, the flag was forbidden but still used as a symbol for the independence movement protesting against Korea's colonizer. The final revision for the flag was in 1984 ("History of the South Korean Flag," accessed May 19, 2020, https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/kr_hist.html.) In a similar timeframe, the *Han'gŭl* alphabet was first used in official documents in 1894, shortly after which elementary schools began using the alphabet and *Tongnip Sinmun* became the first newspaper publishing in *Han'gŭl*. During the Japanese occupation, the use of *Han'gŭl* was prohibited and Japanese was made the official language of Korea. ("The Providing Process of Hangeul," National Institute of Korean Language, accessed May 19, 2020, https://www.korean.go.kr/eng_hangeul/supply/001.html.)

started escalating in 1993 when a North Korean historian challenged Chinese historians' views on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli as part of Chinese history.

Rawski refers to a fear of instability in the border regions that may have caused China to take action in a new way more recently.[39] With instability in both North Korea and the Jilin Province in northeast China, an attempt to stabilize the situation is what has caused China to "distort" history. When we take into account China's other border regions as well as South Korea's rise in the international economy it may be that China is trying to ensure stability through other means: heritage. Byington argues that the Chinese government legitimizes its current policies and concerns by looking at the past.[40] As part of the ancient Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom is part of present-day China, in order to involve non-Han Chinese citizens in Chinese society and history it is necessary for the Chinese government to "claim" that history.

[39] Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia*, 252.
[40] Byington, "The War of Words Between South Korea and China Over An Ancient Kingdom"

3. Border conflict

3.1 Sino-Korean border politics

3.1.1 Sino-Korean border

In the previous chapter, Koguryŏ history and heritage were discussed. In this chapter, we will look at the developments that have led to the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict since the end of the 19th century, and the change in dynamics between China and the Korean peninsula since the formation of Korean nationalism. Rawski refers to the "clashing" of nationalist histories that are at the source of conflicts such as "ownership" over Koguryŏ/Gaogouli.[41] By redefining the origins of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage and claiming Korean ancient history, China is undermining Korean sovereignty whilst simultaneously furthering the narrative that the Chinese Koreans in the Jilin Province in northeast China are part of the larger Chinese narrative.

The Yalu and Tumen rivers form the border between North Korea and China. At some points, these rivers are narrow enough to allow people to cross and settle in the Liaoning and Jilin Provinces, the latter of which currently already hosts a significant community of ethnic Koreans. Many of this community settled in the area during colonial times or shortly after. However, since an influx of North Korean refugees in the 1990s, it is estimated that between 10,000 and 300,000 North Korean refugees reside somewhere in China—most of which settled in the Yanbian Prefecture, Jilin Province, due to the already significant amount of ethnic Korean people living there.[42]

It is commonly accepted that illegal immigration from North Korea into China has become a problem since North Korea's economic decline and the Arduous March in the 1990s, when people fled the North Korean regime to survive the food shortage.[43] This influx in refugees has exposed the gradual decline of North Korea in terms of poverty. Byington argues that it might have been fear of a collapse of the North Korean regime that triggered China's position in claiming Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history.[44] As most of the refugees end up amongst the ethnic Koreans in the Jilin Province, instability and unrest in the area may also incite unrest among other minorities in border regions, causing a domino effect throughout China.

In order to prevent the formation of a larger ethnic Korean community in the northeast region, China has been sending back North Korean refugees who are caught in China. It may also explain the overlooking of what can be regarded as provocative behavior from North Korea

[41] Rawski, "Beyond National History: Seeking the Ethnic in China's History," 49
[42] Human Rights Watch, "The Invisible Exodus: North Koreans in the People's Republic of China."
[43] Byington "The War of Words Between South Korea and China Over An Ancient Kingdom"
[44] Ibid.

towards other countries, including China. In order to strengthen and stabilize the border regions, the Chinese government is trying to ensure a strong national identity amongst its diverse inhabitants by centralizing the country's history and unifying the minority groups. By strengthening Chinese culture in ethnic Korean minorities in the Jilin Province, it seems that the Chinese government aims to create a bigger contrast between the ethnic Koreans already residing in the area and refugees or migrators.

The ethnic Korean, or Chinese Korean people living in China are commonly referred to as "Chosŏnjok", a name that refers to the Chosŏn dynasty combined with "chok" or "people". During the Japanese occupation, many refugees fled to China. After the DPRK was formally established, China established the Yanbian Korean Nationality Autonomous Region on 3 September 1952. However, the region was downgraded to an autonomous prefecture within the Jilin Province only three years after its founding. Since the establishment of the Yanbian province, 60% of its citizenship consisted of ethnic Koreans.[45] However, over time this amount has shrunk dramatically to about 30% in 2013.[46] As a result, Korean language and cultural education has lessened and assimilation into Han Chinese culture has heightened. Evidently, Chinese border politics and the assimilation of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history and heritage is not just about ancient history, but is currently affecting the ethnic Korean community.

Part of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict is about the Chosŏnjok community. Choi traced back China's "distortion of history" to the Northeast Project (discussed further in chapter 3.1.2), a project motived partly by the earlier mentioned North Korean refugees as well as a South Korean law pertaining to Chosŏnjok.[47] The establishment of the Northeast Project, in turn, dates back to a time when China took a "proactive measure to deal with a potential border dispute" in case of a reunification between North and South Korea, perhaps fearing that the Chosŏnjok residing in China would be "confused" with their identity.[48]

Chung suggests that the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict is exasperated by the further diverging Sino-Korean relations, as seen in South Korea's trade dependency on China which has risen over time.[49] Additionally, Chung mentions China's disregard of human rights violations in North Korea and their extradition of North Korean refugees to be a factor in the diverging relationship.[50] When it came to claiming Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history as a non-Han

[45] Denney and Green, "How Beijing Turned Koreans Into Chinese."
[46] Ibid.
[47] Choi, as cited in Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia*, 251
[48] Ibid, 252
[49] Chung, "China's 'Soft' Clash With South Korea," 471
[50] Ibid, 472

local administration, the issue at hand was initially decided to be of academic nature that should not affect Sino-Korean relations.[51] However, upon the Chinese Foreign Ministry deleting the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli section on their website in 2004, Koreans' opinions on China deteriorated.[52] South Korea became actively involved in this conflict due to China changing a summary of Korean history on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[53] Instead of acknowledging Koguryŏ/Gaogouli as part of Korean history, China started to refer to Koguryŏ/Gaogouli as "China's Koguryŏ".[54] Concerning the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli dispute specifically, the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) states that:

> "The Korean government considers issues concerning the history of Goguryeo to be a matter of national identity, and thus places such issues among its highest priorities. Accordingly, the Korean government has responded to the distortion of Goguryeo's history with resolution and has, in reference to the 2004 verbal agreement, called for the correction of these distortions of history."[55]

This information is currently published on a page of the KMFA website dedicated to policy information, which also lists the KFMA's position on the East Sea. Due to the secretive nature of the North Korean regime, it is unknown what the general reaction was. In South Korea, however, news articles appeared critical of China's attempt at claiming Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history and heritage, and demonstrations were launched in front the Chinese embassy in Seoul.[56] Perhaps as a way of calming the situation, China then deleted references towards pre-war Korean history altogether. This was also not received well in South Korea as some regarded this as an attempt at erasing Korean history altogether.[57][58] Chung additionally mentions the 'one history, dual use' theory which suggested that Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history could be regarded as both Chinese and Korean. However, as Chinese scholars began to adopt more radical ideas on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history, scholarly associations rose up arguing for Koguryŏ/Gaogouli to be part of local Chinese history. These later ended up forming the 'Northeast Project'.

As Choi states, South Korea should aid North Korea in this conflict as it is unclear whether China would draw the line at claiming Koguryŏ/Gaogouli if this conflict is left

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid, 473
[53] Gries, "The Koguryo Controversy," 1.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, "Goguryeo."
[56] Gries, "The Koguryo Controversy," 4.
[57] Ibid, 1.
[58] Chung, "China's 'Soft' Clash With South Korea," 472-473

unresolved.[59] Arguably, the conflict has already met some of its consequences considering China's registering of their side of Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain in 2017, separate from North Korea. The mountain range was already a site of controversy due to South Koreans traveling to Mount Paektu in the Yanbian Prefecture occasionally proclaiming nationalistic slogans, such as "Paektu is our territory" or "*Manse*" (Hurray), upon reaching the top of the mountain.[60] However, it was an incident involving South Korean athletes holding up signs saying "Mount Paektu is our territory" during an award ceremony at the 2007 Asian Winter Games in Changchun, China, that became a significant point of turnaround in Chinese public opinion on Korea according to a report made by *Chosun Ilbo* in 2011.[61] While in the past claims have been made by pan-nationalistic Koreans that suggest the entirety of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli territory should be part of a unified Korean nation, this does not appear to happen often. In itself, it seems highly unlikely that the claims made by pan-nationalistic Koreans will spur on any real action towards these claims. However, as a consequence of the events at Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain, attention was brought back to these claims. Considering the growing Korean population on the Chinese side of the border with North Korea as well as the roughly 1 million ethnic Korean-Chinese population already living in the Yanbian province, Ahn argues that should the Korean peninsula unite, it could inflate the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict with the North and South Korea as a united front.[62] Byington also brings up concerns among Chinese scholars and politicians about a potential change in borders should North Korea collapse, which would not work out to China's advantage.[63]

3.1.2 China's Northeast Project

Before the nomination of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli tombs and the listing in 2004, the Chinese government started a project under the name of "Serial Research Project on the History and Current State of the Northeast Borderland", more commonly referred to as the "Northeast Project". It was launched with the purpose of creating an "internal unity in security and stability in Northeast Asia."[64]. The project was launched by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a

[59] Choi, as cited in Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia*, 252-253
[60] Ahn, "China and the Two Koreas Clash Over Mount Paekdu/Changbai: Memory Wars Threaten Regional Accommodation."
[61] Chosun Ilbo, "chunggugin 'han'gugin yŏksajŏk chaŭisik chinach'yŏsŏ silt'a" 중국인 '한국인 역사적 자의식 지나쳐서 싫다 [Chinese "hate Korean historical self-consciousness"]
[62] Ahn, "China and the Two Koreas Clash Over Mount Paekdu/Changbai"
[63] Byington. "The War of Words Between South Korea and China Over An Ancient Kingdom"
[64] Jun Byoung Gon 전병곤, "Chungguk 「tongbukkongjŏng」ŭi chŏngch'ijŏk hamŭi" 중국 「동북공정」의 정치적 함의 [Political Implications of China`s North-East Project]

Chinese research institute affiliated with the Chinese state council. This 5 year plan lasted from 2002 until 2007, but studies on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history started 6 years before the official start in 2002. Yeo argues that the Northeast project aimed to accomplish not only the increase of social stability in the Northeast region of China and the facilitation of China's "reform and opening" [65] policy, but also to increase political influence over Manchuria and the Korean peninsula.[66]

The project is widely regarded by Korean academics, as well as other academics focusing on the area, as the distortion of history by China. Jun argues that while China's Northeast Project does not primarily aim to influence the Korean peninsula directly, the project can be considered aggressive towards the Korean peninsula.[67] Yeo identifies China's claim on Koguryŏ history as an attempt to unite its multiethnic society and history through a common history.[68] Through the singular history the Chinese government has tried to create, China is attempting to hegemonize the northeast of Asia. This criticism is often repeated in news articles reporting on new developments in the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict, as it is viewed as an "attack" on Korean identity.

China's Northeast Project has sparked South Korea's own variant of a research foundation in 2006, named the "Northeast Asia History Foundation". The mission statement calls for "the shared acceptance of a current historical record" through long-term research.[69] While activity directions within the mission statement do not mention Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history specifically, the prevention of distortions of Northeast Asian history is stated to be one of the goals within the foundation.[70] Elsewhere, however, Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history and China's perception on this history are named as one of the foundation's major activities in correcting history.[71]

[65] "Reform and Opening" started in 1978, where China accused foreign scholars and institutions of demanding Chinese territory and rewriting history to fit this demand. Coincidentally, a shift in policy toward China's border regions is cited to have started in the 1980s. (Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia*, 252)
[66] Yeo, "China's Northeast Project and Trends in the Study of Koguryŏ History."135-136
[67] Jun Byoung Gon 전병곤, "Chungguk 「tongbukkongjŏng」ŭi chŏngch'ijŏk hamŭi" 중국 「동북공정」의 정치적 함의 [Political Implications of China`s North-East Project]
[68] Ibid, 143
[69] Northeast Asian History Foundation, "Mission."
[70] Ibid.
[71] Northeast Asian History Foundation, "Correcting History."

3.2 Chinese border politics and disputes

While the main focus of this thesis is on the conflict between China and Korea, this conflict is part of a larger, underlying problem: China is not only addressing the northeast border area, but also other border regions and areas of interest in regards to heritage and history. Therefore, I will also discuss incidents related to or of similar nature to the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict in order to show a pattern and expose a broader problem involving China, specifically.

The Korean peninsula is no singular instance of China attempting to hegemonize a vast area adjacent to Chinese land. There is a pattern that becomes more evident when looking at China's various other projects surrounding the border. More obvious are cases like Hong Kong and Taiwan, for example. However, China is trying to spread its influence through other projects, as well. As we start to look into these cases, it becomes obvious that over the past few decades, China has started to move in on its borders. It also becomes obvious that heritage pertaining to Chinese heritage and economic benefits is elevated to higher standards than another nation's heritage. Some projects are started under the guise of national identity, such as the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict, however other projects are more economically-inclined, such as China's interest in the heritage site Mes Aynak, in Kabul, Afghanistan. This Buddhist archaeological site is located along the Silk Road and is situated on a copper mine. Excavation and safe-keeping of the cultural artifacts found in Mes Aynak was threatened by a Chinese government-owned mining company, Metallurgical Group Corporation, who invested $3.4 billion[72] into the mine as local people attempted to hastily save Mes Aynak.[73] This heritage site is controversial in its own right and has gathered many opposing opinions as well a documentary called "Saving Mes Aynak" bringing to light the involved parties' differing interests. There are several reasons why China is involving itself with Afghanistan and the border regions, and these reasons are comparable to the purposes of China's Northeast Project: keeping at bay the unrest in border regions of China, such as the Muslim Uyghurs in the autonomous region of Xinjiang.

China is also expanding its role in Asia with projects such as the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The "Belt and Road Initiative" refers to what some have chosen to call the "new Silk Road" due to its historical connotations. The BRI is a global development strategy adopted by Xi Jinping in 2013. From China, it extends into as far as Western Europe. The BRI

[72] Huffman, "How a Historic Buddhist Site Has Eluded Destruction—for Now."
[73] Ibid.

is said to aim for cooperation between the countries the (new) Silk Road passes through, however it is mostly referred to as "China's initiative" or China's project.[74] The initiative is aimed to reach its completion in 2049, which, more or less, coincides with the PRC's 100 year celebration. The project was formerly known as "One Belt One Road", however, the 'one' used in the title was prone to misinterpretation. Notable in this particular change is that Chinese media still use the term "One Belt One Road".

There is apprehension about this project, as it is expected that China's objective is to become a major player in surrounding countries' economy as an alternative to the United States. As such, the BRI is not welcomed everywhere. Some critics have also argued that the initiative pushes Chinese dominance in Asia. South Korea's response was to initiate their own project. Former president Park Geun-hye started the "Eurasia Initiative". However, this initiative was replaced by current president Moon Jae-in's own foreign policy initiatives called "the New Southern Policy"[75] to strengthen ties with Southeast Asia, and "the New Northern Policy" which aims to strengthen ties with countries in central Asia as well as Russia and Mongolia.[76] These initiatives collectively create more varied trade opportunities for South Korea outside of China and the United States, which both carry geopolitical influence over South Korea.[77] The creation of these alternative initiatives once again reiterates South Korea's apprehension about Chinese hegemonization.

[74] Coincidentally, UNESCO is developing what they call a "Sustainable tourism Strategy for the Silk Roads Heritage Corridors" that aims to support heritage sites along the Silk Road which have been receiving increasing numbers of tourism.
[75] "Role of Committee | Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy."
[76] Do, "Moon's New Northern Policy Gaining Spotlight."
[77] Ibid.

4. UNESCO

4.1 Listing of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage

Byington identified the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict to have started in 1993, with the roots of China's historical rewriting dating back to early 20th century. However, it gained international attention in 2004 when Koguryŏ/Gaogouli-era tombs were added onto the WHL for both North Korea and China. The tombs collectively cover a significant area and are spread across old Koguryŏ/Gaogouli territory, and so the listings are split into two by the border between North Korea and China, "The Complex of Koguryŏ Tombs" located in North Korea and the "Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Koguryŏ Kingdom" located in the north-east region of China.

North Korea applied their tombs to the WHL in 2001. This nomination was initially denied due to concerns regarding authenticity as well as a lack of accessibility for the UNESCO delegation making a report on the tombs. China followed with their own application of the tombs on the Chinese side of the border two years later in 2003. In theory, the only difference between these two separate listings are the countries under which they are listed on the UNESCO WHL. As neither has claimed ownership over the tombs on the opposite side of the border, both are in their right by applying their part of the tombs to the list and as such, it does not prohibit them from registering their heritage sites. Historically, however, both listings are part of the same heritage, albeit interpreted differently.

The UNESCO webpage of the tombs states that around 100 tombs of the ancient Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom have been discovered so far.[78] However, as there is evidence of around 10,000 tombs existing in the area, the archaeological process is still ongoing.[79] The tombs that have been discovered so far have typically been located surrounding old Koguryŏ-era capital cities, such as Pyongyang. The people buried within these tombs would all have been part of the aristocracy or royal families.[80] This can be recognized by the difference in size, shape and decoration, with some tombs consisting of a single chamber while others are made up of multiple chambers.[81] The size, shape and decoration are also influenced by the time period in which they were built within the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli era.[82] The tombs are characterized by the drawings on the walls of the tombs. The drawings typically refer to Koguryŏ/Gaogouli culture

[78] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Complex of Koguryo Tombs."
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

such as daily life, food, dress as well as religious practices relating to Buddhism, Taoism and the Four Deities and as such can contribute a lot to what we know about the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom.[83] The tombs' "outstanding universal value"[84] is attributed mainly to these drawings. Within the description both state parties delivered, Rawski points out China nominated their heritage site as part of an effort to gain international recognition of Chinese achievements, as the listing specifically notes the "impact of Chinese culture on the Koguryo (who did not develop their own writing)"[85] whilst North Korea's listing states the tombs' importance in "ingenious engineering solutions" as well as "burial typology."[8687]

North Korea's nomination of the tombs was not without its problems. In 1999, the DPRK received $30,000 in international assistance in order to prepare for the nomination of the tombs in order to create a nomination dossier and organize a study tour to examine the tombs.[88] From this, we can assume that it is unlikely North Korea has the funds to put more sites on the list in quick succession. Additionally, in a document referring to the 2003 World Heritage Committee (hereinafter referred to as WHC) it is stated that the WHC defers the nomination of the tombs and that technical issues need to be resolved before it a place on the list can be finalized.[89] This "technical issue" most likely refers to concerns regarding authenticity and integrity due to natural weathering of the tombs.[90] However, in 2004, the WHC inscribed both China's and North Korea's sites according to cultural criteria 1 through 4, citing that the wall paintings are "masterpieces of the culture" and the special burial customs had an important influence on other nearby cultures.[91] The Chinese site additionally qualified for criterion number 5: "The capital cities of the Koguryo Kingdom represent a perfect blending of human creation and nature whether with the rocks or with forests and rivers."[92]

In response to the controversy, UNESCO encouraged China and North Korea to consider a co-operative nomination of heritage relating to Koguryŏ/Gaogouli culture in the future.[93] In the decision report it is stated that UNESCO:

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[83] Ibid.
[84] "Outstanding Universal Value" refers to a list of 10 criteria. Among other requirements, a heritage site must meet at least one of the 10 criteria for Outstanding Universal Value to be considered for the World Heritage List.
[85] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "28 COM 14B.25 - Decision."
[86] Rawski, "Beyond National History: Seeking the Ethnic in China's History" 50.
[87] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "28 COM 14B.33 - Decision."
[88] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "23 COM XV.6.3 - Decision."
[89] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "27 COM 8C.19 - Decision."
[90] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Complex of Koguryo Tombs."
[91] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "28 COM 14B.33 - Decision."
[92] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Koguryo Kingdom."
[93] Historically, sites have rarely ever been taken of the list. The only two sites to be taken off the WHL are the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman in 2007 and the Dresden Elbe Valley in Germany in 2009.

> "Encourages the Chinese authorities and the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to consider the possibility of a future joint, transboundary nomination of the Koguryan culture."[94]

This is merely an advice, however, as UNESCO is unable to assert any legal pressure over international conflicts concerning heritage.[95] Both North Korea and China are free to follow or discard this advice. As such, it has not yet resulted in a cooperative nomination of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage. In the end, both North Korea and China's tombs were added to the list at the same time as to avoid political tensions in the build-up to the listing, with the advice stated above as a recommendation, without further action.

UNESCO plays the part of the "neutral third party" in this conflict, as sites that are added to the list are recognized internationally and understood to be of "universal value" to the world. The WHL is evidence of that value and by being on the list, a certain amount of protection is implied as in the World Heritage Convention it is stated that "the Convention recognizes the way in which people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two."[96] Other than the "technical issues" there were seemingly no issues related to the North Korea-China conflict in nominating the sites, as UNESCO added both sites to the list at the same time. Therefore, this can be regarded as a solved issue on UNESCO's part: the sites have been assessed and confirmed to adhere to the necessary criteria and can thus be added onto the list. UNESCO further involving themselves into this controversy over Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history would only happen if either site's safety was compromised.[97] Other than the listing of a heritage site and the implied safekeeping of that site, UNESCO has no further duties that would include their further involvement in the conflict.

In 2017, China started the nomination process of another heritage site located in the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli area: the "Vertical Vegetation Landscape and Volcanic Landscape in Changbai Mountain," which is a natural heritage site. The mountain range holds significant meaning to multiple parties including China and both Koreas. The mountain range in its entirety spans across the border between China and North Korea, but was only put up for nomination

[94] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "28 COM 14B.33 - Decision."
[95] Dumper and Larkin, "The Politics of Heritage and the Limitations of International Agency in Contested Cities." 34
[96] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The World Heritage Convention."
[97] Fiankan-Bokonga, "A Historic Resolution to Protect Cultural Heritage."

by the Chinese state party. In the listing, it is stated that the mountain range is valued because of its ecology, biology, geology and its history.[98]

It is important to state here that there are some shared heritage sites elsewhere in the world that are recognized to be part of or "owned by" multiple nations and are included on the UNESCO WHL as such. Most of these sites are natural heritage sites, like Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain. Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain, however, does not seem to be part of the shared enlisting despite UNESCO's previous advice to inscribe shared heritage as a joint effort between China and North Korea. Instead, North Korea has started the process to have Mount Paektu listed as a UNESCO Global Geopark on their own in 2020.[99]

Throughout history Mount Paektu has played an important role for Korea's national identity. As Rogaski argues, the mountain is "a vehicle for national identity and political resistance."[100] Up to this day, the mountain range can be regarded as a national symbol, as it is referenced in the South Korean national anthem: *Aegukka* (Song for Love of Country): "Until the East Sea's waves are dry, and Mt. Paektu is worn away, God will watch over our land forever! Our country forever!", as well as its North Korean counterpart: "Embracing the atmosphere of Mt. Paektu, nest for the spirit of labor." In North Korea specifically, the mountain serves as an important aspect for North Korean Personality Cult surrounding the Kim family. The mountain is regarded as sacred and the image of the mountain is used as a symbol for the state because it has become part of the "national myth"[101] since the mountain range was the stage for the guerilla struggle led by Kim Il Sung against the Japanese Imperialists.

Rogaski points out that the surroundings of the mountain have severely changed. China has attempted to boost tourism in the area since the 1990s.[102] In 2006, China already attempted to have the mountain nominated for the WHL, but evidentially failed.[103] This, again, was met with backlash from South Korea accusing China of it being a "strategy to claim possession of the region on an international stage."[104] This international stage, the UNESCO WHL, is a way of officiating China's claim over the mountain, but also other heritage sites and practices.

Earlier the topic of heritage creation and interpretation was discussed, where it was mentioned that the act of visiting a heritage site or participating in a cultural practice encourages

[98] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Vertical Vegetation Landscape and Volcanic Landscape in Changbai Mountain."
[99] The Korea Herald, "N. Korea Seeks to Have Mount Paekdu Listed as UNESCO Global Geopark."
[100] Rogaski, "Knowing a Sentient Mountain," 750
[101] Ibid, 751
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid, 751

people to create the link between culture and heritage. This is exemplified by the airport built in China in 2008 that was constructed to encourage tourism in the Changbai Mountain area. This encourages active identification with a heritage site, because people form a personal connection to it.

A peculiar detail in the nomination of Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain is the difference in names used for the official nominations. Whereas "Koguryŏ" is "Gaogouli" in Chinese, the official documents and websites of the listing of the tombs only names "Koguryŏ". Despite the difference in the name of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli, the listing for the mountain is listed under the Chinese name of Changbai Mountain. This may also be a way of claiming heritage, as North Korea was first in nominating the tombs while China was first in nominating the mountain range.

Sixteen years after the listing of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli tombs, the conflict continues on, seemingly without progress. Controversial listings of Chinese and Korean heritage sites and practices are likely to continue, as the conflict has not yet reached its conclusion. The core of the issue is that there is no clear division between what is purely Korean and what is Chinese when discussing ancient history and culture, and both of the Koreas as well as China have a valid claim on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage due to the placement of modern-day borders in comparison to the ancient borders of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli.

4.2 Heritage battle

North Korea and China's claim on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage was officiated through the UNESCO WHL. Between the tombs and the most recent nomination of Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain, the overall heritage conflict between Korea and China has extended to include heritage practices unrelated to Koguryŏ/Gaogouli, as well.

In November 2005, shortly after the inscription of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli tombs, the *Tano-je* festival of Kangnŭng[105] was inscribed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of South Korea. The festival originated in China, but spread to Korea and eventually evolved into its own phenomenon, according to Korea. Despite South Korea acknowledging the festival's origin, this nomination was met with anger from Chinese people claiming that South Korea was appropriating Chinese heritage. Chinese accusations claimed that UNESCO was endorsing this

[105] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Gangneung Danoje Festival."

appropriation by legitimizing it as UNESCO Intangible Heritage.[106] Upon the outrage that ensued, South Korea was quick to respond that the Kangnŭng *Tano-je* festival was a local variation of the Chinese *Duanwu* or Dragon Boat festival that throughout time had developed on its own and that South Korea never denied its authentic, Chinese origin. Six years after the fact, the *Chosun Ilbo* reported that Chinese public opinion on Korea had become more negative after the nomination of the *Tano-je* festival. Koryŏ University conducted a survey in which 1000 Chinese people's preference towards Korea was gauged, concluding that it had dropped from 73.0 in 2006 to 64.5 in 2008 and 53.0 in 2011, at the time of reporting.[107] Evidentially, conflicts surrounding the rightful ownership of land and heritage have drastically changed opinions and preference in South Korea and China towards the other party. Despite this change in preference, government-level attitude towards China did not change as academic and economical collaboration continued as in 2008 it was announced that Beijing and Seoul would upgrade their relationship from a "comprehensive cooperative partnership" to a "strategic cooperative partnership". [108] This upgraded partnership would also involve a greater cooperation in terms of security and trade. This "heritage battle" between China and Korea is not often talked about within the diplomatic realm. While the existence of this problem is acknowledged, it seems it is deemed less important than issues between Korea and Japan. This is evident from this upgraded partnership, as well as South Korea's Northeast Asian History Foundation, where Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage is only shortly mentioned between issues surrounding Dokdo and the East Sea.

In 2009, China nominated a Korean farmer dance as Chinese intangible cultural heritage. On the webpage of the listing, the dance is attributed to the ethnic Korean people living in the Yanbian Prefecture and is cited to be an "important expression of the cultural heritage of China's Korean ethnic group."[109] This is a starting point in China claiming Chosŏnjok culture as Chinese culture. Chosŏnjok culture in itself is an interesting gray area in terms of heritage and identity due to their ethnic backgrounds whilst living in another nation state. The Chosŏnjok residing in the Yanbian Prefecture have created somewhat of a hybrid culture by combining elements of both the Chinese culture they are actively affected by, as well as their ethnic Korean background. Since the rise of the South Korean economy and pop culture, the younger generations can more easily seek out Korean culture that correlates to their family heritage.

[106] China Heritage Quarterly, "Duanwu: The Sino-Korean Dragon Boat Races."
[107] Chosun Ilbo, 'Han'gugin yŏksajŏk chaŭisik chinach'yŏsŏ silt'a" 중국인 '한국인 역사적 자의식 지나쳐서 싫다.'"
[108] Qin, "Strategic Partnership with ROK Announced."
[109] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Farmers' Dance of China's Korean Ethnic Group."

However, with the Chinese government "centralizing" culture and bridging the gaps between ethnic minorities and the Han Chinese majority, this connection is fading.[110] Within the Chinese education system, the Chosŏnjok's ethnic backgrounds are taught as foreign. This further distances them from their Korean heritage, as that heritage is being taught as Chinese heritage. Meanwhile, as time passes, Chosŏnjok are less likely to be able to relate to the current state of the Korean peninsula and more able to relate to Chosŏn Korea.[111] In addition, as more time passes since the end of the Korean War, younger generations tend to not relate to the struggles associated with this era and are more likely to identify with the nation state they inhabit and have citizenship in.[112] Therefore, despite their ethnic Korean backgrounds, the Chosŏnjok are naturally moving towards complete assimilation into Chinese society. Because of a decrease in Chinese Korean schools in the Yanbian prefecture as well as the assimilation of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage—which is geographically close to them—into Chinese heritage, the clear difference between Chosŏnjok and the Han Chinese majority are lessened. By assimilating Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage into Chinese heritage, this allows the Chosŏnjok to identify with their ethnic Korean backgrounds more easily whilst still able to be considered fully Chinese, instead of challenging the dissonant identities within themselves.

After the nomination of the farmer dance, the Chosŏnjok version of *Arirang* was nominated to be Chinese intangible cultural heritage in 2011. *Chosun Ilbo* reports this as China "laying claim" on *Arirang*[113], with critics suspecting that it was done as part of the Northeast Project and the project's suspected aim to increase influence over the Korean peninsula. The Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) dismissed this notion and argued that only the Chosŏnjok version was registered, as opposed to "original" Korean version. The justification that only the Chosŏnjok version was registered is a lacking one, seeing as *Arirang* has different versions depending on where in the country you are. Each version is still regarded as "Arirang". In response to the controversy, the CHA decided to list each of the different versions in Korea, as well. South Korea eventually was able to register *Arirang* for the list in 2012[114], whilst North Korea registered *Arirang* in 2014. Regardless, *Chosun Ilbo* reports that it is "too late" because China had gotten a head start.[115] Overall this situation is rather comparable, and perhaps also a

[110] Denney and Green, "How Beijing Turned Koreans Into Chinese."
[111] Ibid.
[112] Denney and Green, "History and Identity: Chosunjok in Yanbian"
[113] *Arirang* is a traditional Korean folk song with many local versions.
[114] Notable here is that according to THEAsiaN, South Korea made an attempt to register Arirang as a joint nomination with North Korea. However, because of the death of Kim Jong Il in December of 2011 the matter could not be adequately discussed and as such South Korea nominated Arirang alone. ("'Arirang' Recommended for UNESCO Heritage," *THEAsiaN*, accessed May 25, 2020)
[115] Chosun Ilbo, "China Lays Claim to 'Arirang.'"

response to the conflict with the *Tano-je* festival in 2005: Heritage sites and practices carry significant importance to the community who "owns" it, regardless of their registration on the UNESCO WHL. Realistically, the timing of such nominations should be even less of a factor in this importance. However, the fact that China was able to register *Arirang* first, somehow damages Korea's registration and by extension, damages their ownership over it. Due to China's registration of it, *Arirang* can no longer be seen as purely Korean.

On 1 May 2013, China opened a museum showcasing elements of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history and culture in Jian, Jilin Province, which was once a capital city of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli Kingdom located on the modern-day borders between China and North Korea. It is now cited as one of the places where Koguryŏ/Gaogouli tombs can be visited. Upon studying the museum, the *Dong-a Ilbo* noted that the museum was built in accordance to the Northeast Project and that within the museum itself, Koguryŏ/Gaogouli was described as a local state of China, reinforcing China's claim on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage even after the agreement was made in 2004 to resolve issues surrounding the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom.[116] Museums are a way of educating a nation's people on their heritage and encourages the identification with heritage that is displayed within the museum. As such, with the museum explicitly writing about "China's Koguryŏ" [117], China is educating their nation on Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage as part of Chinese heritage, which reinforces Chinese ownership over it.

On 26 January 2013, *Hankyoreh* reported that Chinese scholars, most of which involved with the Northeast Project, found and conducted research on a Koguryŏ/Gaogouli memorial stone that is argued to reveal the true bond between the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom and China.[118] The stele is part of a series of memorial stones of which only two have been found so far. They include the Stele of king Gwanggaeto (also found in Jian, 19th century) and the Koguryŏ Stele of Chungju, also known as the Koguryŏ Stele of Jungwon (found in the 1970s in South Korea).[119] These are all considered important landmarks that are used to emphasize ownership over the entirety of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage. Realistically, more landmarks will be excavated in the future. As only about 100 out of 10,000 tombs have been found so far, it is to be expected that this excavation process will go on. The discovery of more tombs and landmarks pertaining to Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history and heritage is not likely to end the conflict

[116] Dong-A Ilbo, "China Should Stop Distorting History."
[117] Ibid.
[118] Park Min-hee, "China Conducting Closed Research into Ancient Korean Dynasty."
[119] Sim Sŏna 심선아, "Koguryo Stele Discovered in China."

of ownership. It will likely only prove how far the kingdom reached, which is information we already have. However, the pattern is still continuing with the recent nomination of Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain.

4.3 UNESCO Practices

In this thesis, I argue that the UNESCO WHL is used to claim ownership over heritage and history that is already in the hands of one of the parties involved. In this case, the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom is commonly believed to be one of Korea's "Three Kingdoms". However, with China calling the kingdom "China's Koguryŏ" and simultaneously starting to claim heritage sites and practices through the WHL, China is attempting to put Korea's ownership over the heritage and history up for debate. There is no question that the ancient borders of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom are presently situated in multiple countries. The fact is that the border has moved throughout the centuries and countries and kingdoms have changed. The conflict started when previously understood history of the area became a point of contestation because of China changed the narrative surrounding it.

In order to adequately see how the UNESCO WHL can be used, it is helpful to discuss the role UNESCO plays in cases that bare similarity to the nomination of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli tombs, as the tombs can be considered the catalyst of the conflict. By first discussing other cases, we will be able to determine how UNESCO typically handles conflicts over disputed ownership, location an identity.

Shared heritage is insufficiently explored by UNESCO and demands more attention. There are not many cases similar to the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict, which is why there is no available UNESCO "rulebook" for such issues. As of yet, it is unclear what the right way to proceed is and how similar issues will be treated in the future. While this thesis cannot offer a definitive solution to such issues, we may be able to conclude how and why UNESCO is used in international power plays. For this, the cases we are able to compare to the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli conflict are those of the Preah Vihear temple and the Jerusalem walls and city center.

The conflict in the case of the Preah Vihear temple is the rightful placement of modern borders, as the temple is situated close to the border with Thailand in Cambodia. Both nations fighting for control over the temple and the significance it holds. Cambodian-Thai relations have a complicated history leading up to this conflict, which in some ways may be comparable to China's current claim over Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage. Thailand is campaigning to claim

the Preah Vihear Temple as part of Thai national identity, despite its current-day location in Cambodia.

The Preah Vihear Temple is a Hindu temple that dates back to the eleventh century and was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2008 on account of it being a "masterpiece of human creative genius."[120] The listing continued despite an existing conflict of ownership between Cambodia and Thailand. According to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, listing a heritage site is only supposed to acknowledge the outstanding universal value of the site in question.[121] This would confirm UNESCO's neutral position to a certain degree, as UNESCO's task is described to approve the site's value. However, that is a rather simplistic way of looking at complicated cases like this. Nominating a heritage site is up to country it belongs to. Consequently, the listing should also be under the name of that country. In cases where ownership and borders are disputed, the listing of a site without sufficiently addressing such issues would only confirm one party's ownership over it. UNESCO does not actively encourage the solving of such issues, despite the possible consequences of such conflicts.

Despite UNESCO's widely accepted expertise, UNESCO as an institution does not hold much legal power. In the necessary cases, UNESCO is in no position to make legal demands when there is an instance of breaking protocol involving the potential damage to a heritage site or similar incidences. On top of that, in the history of UNESCO, there have been very little cases that have caused a previously recognized UNESCO World Heritage site to be booted from the list or to even be considered for removal off the list. Once a listing has gone through, it is fair to say it has a good chance of staying. This makes it hard for UNESCO to reconsider listings that have already been accepted.

That UNESCO does not and cannot make legal demands, becomes apparent when considering a case like the "Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls", another contested heritage site. The issue with this heritage site is that it was not nominated to be on the WHL by Israel, but by Jordan. Dumper and Larkin raise the point that "the nomination of a site is in the hands of the state in whose territory the site is located." [122] Israel initially refused to work together with UNESCO as a result. However, UNESCO was unable to assert any legal pressure over this noncompliance, exposing the heritage site to potential damage. With these kinds of limitations, issues of geopolitics are inadequately addressed by UNESCO.[123]

[120] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The Criteria for Selection."
[121] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "The World Heritage Convention."
[122] Dumper and Larkin, "The Politics of Heritage and the Limitations of International Agency in Contested Cities." 34.
[123] Ibid, 35.

UNESCO also does not take into consideration the varying intentions nation states may have when nominating a site for the WHL. Silverman argues that UNESCO should be mindful of already existing problems in a country and should anticipate conflicts that may arise when a heritage is nominated.[124] A solution Silverman offers is trans-border or borderless World Heritage sites, where the involved parties can cooperate in the nomination and management of a site.[125] This would also be in compliance with UNESCO's criteria of heritages sites being of "outstanding universal value", which would suggest that the value of a site transcends a single country.[126]

Currently, UNESCO's position in international politics conflicts is unclear. Whilst claiming to be a neutral organization in international conflicts over heritage, UNESCO is taking the side of state in whose territory a site is located. Additionally, like in the case of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli, UNESCO can only offer advice and recommendations. But as UNESCO has no legal power, it is uncertain if UNESCO's advice is even followed.

[124] Silverman, "Border Wars: The Ongoing Temple Dispute between Thailand and Cambodia and UNESCO's World Heritage List.", 15.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have answered the question of how the UNESCO World Heritage List is used by China and Korea in the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage conflict. I have argued that the list is used as a stage on which ownership over the ancient Koguryŏ/Gaogouli kingdom is publically proclaimed due to UNESCO's international status as well as other benefits that come from a place on the World Heritage List. Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage was used specifically for the meaning it holds in the history of the Korean people, and it is used by all parties involved as a vehicle for these conflicts of politics and national identity.

In chapter 2, the historical relationship between China and the Korean peninsula was discussed, as well as the role of Koguryŏ/Gaogouli history within Korean nationalism. It was also established that the current conflict about Koguryŏ/Gaogouli started much earlier than the UNESCO listing, but gained more traction once it was recognized by UNESCO, which then also sparked further nominations of other heritage practices in order to gain the upper hand. In chapter 3, we explored the present-day border conflict between China and Korea as well as China's role in other border region-related conflicts. What can be concluded from these chapters is that whilst on one hand the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli controversy is regarded as an infringement of Korean national heritage by China, the 'fight' is fought not in the diplomatic realm, but mostly through academic efforts as well as UNESCO officiality. It is lingering under the surface and ignored possibly for the betterment of the economy. In China's efforts to secure stability in the border regions, the venture into Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage is an attempt to secure that stability through national identity. The parties involved aim for ownership over heritage, but both have different goals within this conflict. In chapter 4, the UNESCO listings of relevant heritage sites and practices were discussed. Taking in consideration all of the aforementioned conflicts over ownership of national heritage and the way both South Korea and China claim heritage by registering it on the UNESCO World Heritage List before the other has only exasperated the conflict over who has more cultural authority and autonomy. In this history of unequal relations, Chung points out that "given the crucial role of asymmetry in international politics […] it is perhaps more up to China to determine whether the relationship can remain genuinely symbiotic."[127] As of yet, there are no signs of the current conflict halting, seeing as new heritage sites and practices continue to be claimed via the UNESCO World Heritage List.

While according to the World Heritage Convention, acknowledgement and preservation of heritage sites recognized to be of "Outstanding Universal Value", it cannot be said this is

[127] Chung, "China's 'Soft' Clash With South Korea," 483

what happens in practice. A UNESCO listing does not only prove ownership over heritage and the land it stands on or is acknowledged to be from, but it is also used to prove ownership over a contested history and culture that is connected to that heritage. This problem is exasperated by the fact that shared heritage as a concept is still relatively unexplored, whilst UNESCO is unable to assert any legal power when the situation calls for intervention in international conflicts. For this reason, all UNESCO is realistically able to do, is offer advice and recommendations to nation states in international and geopolitical conflicts over heritage. Consequently, it is uncertain whether advice and recommendations are followed when no major consequences are imposed when advice is disregarded. This is precisely what has happened with UNESCO's recommendation to register Koguryŏ/Gaogouli heritage as a collective effort: after the registration of the Koguryŏ/Gaogouli tombs, China has opted to nominate Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain alone whilst it is clear that North Korea also has stakes in the area. As such, Mount Paektu/Changbai Mountain was not put up for nomination in the interest of the preservation of World Heritage, but likely as a part of geopolitical conflicts.

There is no end to the conflict in sight as heritage sites and practices are continuously nominated. By extension, the assimilation of Chosŏnjok into Chinese culture will also likely continue. As of yet, UNESCO's position in international political conflicts remains unclear as there are no signs of change. While heritage sites and practices are still being processed for the list, more research should be done on shared heritage. Multiple parties have expressed an apprehension about the conflict should it not be solved between China and both of the Koreas properly. As Roehrig argued, "the stakes in the region are too high to let this dispute spiral out of control."[128] But because of the split between North and South Korea, there is no knowing of how the dispute will play out. UNESCO plays an important role in this conflict as a facilitator of the conflict, which is why more research needs to be performed on shared heritage in order to prevent UNESCO from being able to be used like this. As heritage can have a variety of meanings for every community, the communities affected should be taken in to consideration. This can only happen when we start thinking of heritage outside of our modern-day borders.

[128] Roehrig, "History as a Strategic Weapon," 24

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