CHAPTER TWO

THE ETHNOLINGUISTIC HISTORY OF KOGURYO

The Puyo-Koguryoic peoples shared the same origin myth, the earliest preserved account of which, the Puyo version, is recorded in a Chinese philosophical work from the first century A.D., the 論衡 Lun Heng, by 王充 Wang Ch’ung.1 Versions of the myth are found in several of the standard Chinese histories, as well as the 廣開土王 King Kwang-gaet’o memorial inscription of 414 A.D., and have been studied and translated by folklorists and other scholars (Gardiner 1982; Song 1974). The combined version of the legend presented here takes into account the main features of the different early versions, none of which include all of them.

Formerly in the north, in the country of Koryŏ (高麗),2 a maidservant who was the daughter of the River Lord3 (河伯) was sequestered by the king when he went out. In her chamber a beam of sunlight followed her around. Though she avoided it, eventually it touched her. When the king came back, he found she was pregnant, and wanted to kill her, but the maidservant said, ‘There was a vapor (氣) like a large chicken’s egg that descended from Heaven to me; that’s why I got pregnant.’ Later she gave birth to a large egg.4 The king cast it into the pigpen, but the pigs breathed warm air on it with their snouts; he moved it to the horse corral, but the horses also breathed warmly on it; he cast it into the wilderness, but the birds covered it with their feathers. The king tried to break the shell, but did not succeed. He gave the egg back to the mother, and eventually a boy broke the shell and emerged. When he grew up, he was made to be a horseherd. He was an excellent archer, so they called him Tüŋmen, which means ‘shoots well’.5 The king, who was afraid

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1 The next earliest version is a quotation from the Wei lüeh 魏略, a lost work, in the annotations to the San kuo chih (30: 842-843).
2 Henceforth ‘Koryo’. See the discussion of this name below.
3 I.e., the river god.
4 Wei shu 100: 2213; Pei shih 94: 3114; Szczesniak 1951: 255; Courant 1898: 227 and plate. According to some later versions, she bore a child (which the king tried unsuccessfully to get rid of by casting to the pigs and other animals, as in the early versions), rather than an egg. This appears to be an attempt to rationalize the legend as history.
5 The word order of the Chinese gloss 善射 (lit., ‘good shoot’) is Chinese, not Koguryo, since the word ‘good’ is attested also in Old Koguryo (where in at least one instance a Chinese gloss is attested twice, once in Chinese and once in Koguryo word order; see Chapter 3). The Chinese meaning of the characters used to transcribe the
Tüŋmeŋ would seize the kingdom, wanted to kill him. *Tüŋmeŋ’s mother warned him and he fled south. He reached a wide river that he could not ford. He struck the water with his bow, crying out, “I am the son of the Sun, and grandson of the River Lord. My enemies are upon me. How can I cross?” The fish and soft-shelled turtles floated together to make a bridge. After *Tüŋmeŋ had crossed over, the fish and soft-shelled turtles dispersed, so the pursuing army could not cross. *Tüŋmeŋ reached the land of Puyo and ruled there as king.

The river-crossing foundation myth has connections with Japanese legend and, evidently, with the ancient 越 Yüeh region of southeast China. The reconstructed text of the ancient Bamboo Annals records the oldest known version (Fan 1957: 27).

37th year [of the reign of 穆王 King Mu, traditionally 899 B.C.]. He raised nine great armies to invade Yüeh. He went east to the Ninefold River, and commanded the soft-shelled turtles (龜) and the alligators (鼍) to make a bridge [so he could cross].

This is the same motif as that in the Puyo-Koguryo royal origin myth, with another kind of soft-shelled turtle, 鳄 biē ‘soft-shelled turtle, Amyda sinensis’, from Middle Chinese ṭyiat (Pulleyblank 1991: 38). The word 龜yuán ‘soft-shelled turtle, Pelochelys bibroni’, from Middle Chinese ṭyuan (Pulleyblank 1991: 387), may be the loanword donor of Old Japanese ṭwani—an ‘unidentified aquatic creature’ said to look like a 鳄 biē, but described in the Wamyôshô as looking like a

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6 Written consistently with man’yôgana in the earliest texts, the word is later written with the character 鳄 (鱷) e ‘crocodile’ < EMC ṭyak (Pulleyblank 1991: 87), often in combination with other characters (JDB: 822).