CHAPTER FOUR

ARCHAIC NORTHEASTERN MIDDLE CHINESE

The reconstruction of Koguryo depends more than anything else on the Chinese phonetic value of the characters when they were adopted as transcriptions for Koguryo forms. The Chinese language or dialect underlying the transcriptions appears to have been a direct descendant of a northeastern dialect of Old Chinese. It maintained a number of archaic features from Old Chinese until its disappearance in the Middle Chinese period, evidently around the time of the fall of the Koguryo kingdom and the spread of Silla Korean across the peninsula. This chapter constitutes a preliminary attempt to describe some of the phonological features of this language; it does not by any means constitute a description of everything that might be known or discoverable about it. Some of the material has been discussed in the extensive literature in Korean and Japanese on the phonetic value of the transcriptions in the Samguk Sagi and other texts transcribed in Chinese characters. However, these studies do not deal with the material as a reflection of the distinctive Korean Peninsular form of Chinese. Isolated from China by political changes, it preserved many archaic features lost centuries earlier in the Central dialect of Chinese. Historical and epigraphical evidence attests to the continuous presence of this large, ethnomagnific Chinese community on the Korean Peninsula from the Former Han dynasty into United Silla times. This Northeastern Middle Chinese language or dialect provided the linguistic basis for the transcriptions of Koguryo and other non-Chinese languages spoken in the Korean Peninsula and neighboring areas.

Among the most remarkable features of Northeastern Middle Chinese are its retention of the Old Chinese *-r coda in certain environments, and its failure to undergo the Late Old Chinese–Early Middle Chinese palatalization that so radically altered the sound of Chinese. These features are discussed under the sections on Syllable Onsets and Syllable Codas. Other features of Northeastern Middle Chinese, including the apparent preservation of Old Chinese *o in some environments, are discussed in the section on Syllable Nuclei.

1 Abbreviated NMC in form citations below.
CHAPTER FOUR

SYLLABLE ONSETS

$OChi$ *k- $> MChi$ *tš- $\sim NMC$ *k-

The Old Koguryo transcription character 옆 was pronounced *key (or possibly *ki) rather than *tši as in the Central dialect of Middle Chinese. This is shown by the fact that OKog 與 옆—though seemingly glossed as ‘wing (翼)’—must be read *ükey $\sim$ üki rather than *ütši (the reading in both reconstructed Early Middle Chinese and in attested Late Middle Chinese) because of the new Silla name, which is a Chinese phonetic imitation, 昀 *yikkey, of the old name. The same unknown word is glossed again elsewhere with another phonetic imitation in which the second syllable implies *kir. The phonetic value of the character 옆 is further established through other parallel readings, including the transcriptions of OKog *key $\sim$ *ki [支] $\sim$ *key $\sim$ *γey [戋] ‘military, martial (武)’, probably the same word as OKog *kir $\sim$ *kin [斤] ‘brave (俛)’. Northeastern Middle Chinese thus clearly retained the Old Chinese value of the initial in [支].

$OChi$ *mî- $> Middle\ MOC$ *myi- $> MChi$ *nyi- $\sim NMC$ *mi-

The Old Koguryo syllable pronounced [仍], a word which means ‘the female principle, yin, woman (陰)’ and ‘banner (旐)’, and occurs also in the words for ‘the scholar tree, Sophora japonica (桜)’ and ‘grain (穀), should be read *miŋ rather than *nyiŋ or źiŋ (as would be the case if it were a standard Early Middle Chinese or Late Middle Chinese form, respectively). This is clearly shown by OKog *miŋ [仍] ‘banner (旐)’, which is phonetically imitated by the transcription *miŋ $\sim$ *myiŋŋ [冥], and is supported by Japanese transcriptional and comparative evidence (see below). It is also supported by Chinese internal reconstruction. It has recently been shown that EMC *ny- ($> *n\ ź- > LMC \acute{\varepsilon} > *z_{\acute{\varepsilon}} > OMan r-)$ derives not only from OChi *n- and *ŋ- but also from *m-, examples of the latter source apparently being more numerous than examples of the other sources (Beckwith 2002b). In the Central dialect of Old Chinese initial *m- was palatalized when followed by the long high vowel *i, eventually producing Early Middle Chinese *nyi-, but this palatalization apparently did not occur in Northeastern Chinese, as seen in unpalatalized examples from antiq-