The greatest problem in Koguryo linguistics is establishment of the phonology, especially the vowel system. Because the language is preserved exclusively in the form of lexical items transcribed with Chinese characters—a wholistic writing system rather than a segmental ‘alphabetic’ system1—the phonology can only be derived through the difficult filter of the little-known Korean Peninsular variety of the equally little-known northeastern dialect of Middle Chinese. (Even the standard dialect, T’ang Chinese or ‘Late Middle Chinese’, has not yet been accurately established.) It is also likely that the transcription was influenced significantly by Old Silla Korean, another language we know little about.

This chapter constitutes an attempt to define the phonemes, syllable structure, and word structure of Old Koguryo and to explain the phonological processes that changed Archaic Koguryo into Old Koguryo. Well-attested Old Koguryo forms are used to establish the phonology, and constant reference is made throughout to cognate Japanese forms.

In the present chapter selected forms are used for both Koguryo and Japanese citations. This does not mean that the forms given are the only examples, or even perhaps the best examples; it means simply that they are the representative examples used here. In cases where partial forms have been cited, complete forms, with supporting information, are available elsewhere in this book. For other examples, full citations, further information on textual forms, interpretations of transcriptions, or other philological questions, see Chapter 2 (for Archaic Koguryo) and Chapters 3 and 6 (for Old Koguryo).

**CONSONANTS**

Old Koguryo has a fairly simple consonant system that is greatly obscured by the variety and complexity of the Chinese transcriptions, which themselves often have more than one reading even in Chinese.

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1 See the discussion in Chapter 11.
It is generally agreed that there was no phonemic distinction between voiced and unvoiced obstruents in Old Koguryo; it is also evident that there was no phonemic distinction between aspirated and unaspirated obstruents, and that most of the velar fricative transcriptions (with one important class of exceptions) represent simple oral stops, as they do in Old Japanese transcriptions. It is unclear if the two classes of affricates were phonemically distinctive in Old Koguryo. They appear to be in complementary distribution, palatal *ts before palatal vowels and apical *ts before others. Etymologically, however, there is a three-way distinction to be made. The Old Koguryo apicodental affricate derives from AKog *t and is cognate to OJpn *t, both from PJK *t. The Old Koguryo palatal affricate *ts has two origins. In most cases it is cognate to OJpn *ts ~ *ts ~ *s and thus derives from PJK *ts ~ *s. However, OKog *tsu ~ *tsü derives from AKog *tü and is cognate to OJpn *tō, with the simple PJK onset *t. The rounded feature of the Koguryo vowel is clearly responsible for the affrication, and its height for the palatalization; the distinctive vowels preserved by Koguryo in this case have merged in pre-Old Japanese, to become OJpn *ö. What appears at first to be anomalous is thus regular. The consonant inventory is, as expected typologically, different for onsets and codas, both of which disallow clusters. Many consonant phonemes can occur as the onset, but very few as the coda. The liquid is exceptional in occurring only word-finally or intersyllabically.²

Words can begin with a vowel, either as a simple V syllable or in a VC syllable. Several specific phonological changes are evident in coda position, most notably the evident merger of all final alveodentals as the liquid /r/, phonetically probably [], after a high vowel, though etymological or ‘original’ final r is found after all vowels. The existence of an articulated final velar nasal /ŋ/ is uncertain. Because a number of words exist in transcriptions both with and without the [ŋ] phone, it may be a relic of Chinese transcriptional phonology. However, since the velar stop /k/ seems to be preserved as such, and loan-

² When it occurs intersyllabically, it would normally be interpreted (according to theoretical phonology) as an onset—e.g., *tsiran would be syllabified as tsi-ran. However, the liquid never occurs in word-initial onset position, and in some cases the transcription has been deliberately chosen so as to place the syllable boundary after the coda of a preceding syllable even when the following syllable has a zero onset, transcriptionally violating the Maximal Onset Principle. By contrast, the transcription has sometimes followed the Maximal Onset Principle even at the expense of obscuring the etymology; see for example s.v. Tao-lieh hsien in Chapter 3.