WHAT KIND OF people were the residents of Parhae (Ch. Bohai; 698–926)? Were they the people of old Koguryo (first century BCE-668 CE), or were they Malgal (Ch. Mohe), a people without any connection to Koguryo? The generally accepted view has been that Parhae’s ruling class was made up of Koguryo descendents while the lower classes were Malgal. If, however, the vast majority of the population were Malgal who had nothing to do with Koguryo, then it would be only right to say that Parhae was a Malgal kingdom. It would be hardly appropriate to contend that Parhae was a kingdom of Koguryo people if they only constituted a minority ruling class.

Simply put, the people of Parhae were the old people of Koguryo who continued to reside in the area during the 30 years between the fall of Koguryo and the founding of Parhae. There were some people known as Malgal residing in the area, but the Malgal were not a distinct ethnic group but rather Koguryo subjects who lived in border regions to which Malgal was applied as a pejorative name.

When we talk about the ethnic composition of Parhae, it is important to consider whom the people of Parhae thought to be their forebears. The issue is whether the people of Parhae thought of themselves as descendents of Koguryo or as descents of the Malgal. It is, of course, unlikely that the people of that time had the same kind of consciousness of state or nation as we have today, but there seems to be no reason to doubt that the dynasty itself had some sense of succession from an earlier entity or entities. The key issue
to understanding the ethnic composition of Parhae is to shed light on the Malgal.

The conventional view among scholars of Korean history, as is reflected in middle- and high-school history textbooks, is that the ruling class of Parhae were persons of Koguryo origins and that those over whom they ruled were the Malgal, a people whose ethnic origins were different from Koguryo. Of course, Chinese and Russian scholars argue that the entire population was Malgal and they reject the idea that the ruling class was from Koguryo. But even if we attach some significance to the idea that the ruling class was composed of old Koguryo people, if the vast majority of the population were Malgal, then we would have to say that the history of Parhae was Malgal or Manchurian history.

The reality, however, is that both the ruling class and the general population of Parhae were old Koguryo people. That the ruling class of Parhae was made up of Koguryo elements was revealed as early as 1955 by the Japanese scholar Shiratori Kurakichi. Shiratori based his argument on Parhae diplomatic documents contained in the *Shoku Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan, continued, from 697–791) which contain such statements as “Parhae has recovered the old lands of Koguryo,” and the Parhae king describing himself as the “King of Koguryo Tae Hundu (Dae Heummu).” Shiratori also noted that 26 of the 85 emissaries dispatched to Japan by Parhae bore the typical Koguryo surname of Ko (Go), and that the Japanese referred to Parhae as Koryo or Koguryo. The North Korean scholar Pak Sihyong and the Japanese scholar Mikami Tsugio subsequently supported Shiratori’s view which has now become the standard interpretation in Korea and Japan. But scholars who follow this interpretation also generally subscribe to the view that the ordinary people of Parhae were Malgal. The one major exception has been the North Koreans who have argued since 1990 that the majority of the common people of Parhae were of Koguryo origins. Their argument, even while recognizing the presence of Malgal elements, proceeds from the common sense proposition that since Parhae arose in the old territory of Koguryo most of its residents must have been Koguryo descendents.

Chinese scholars, however, contend that the even the ruling class of Parhae was composed of Malgal and that the Malgal were of different origins from the Koguryo people. Their position is based on the record in the *Xin Tangshu* (New History of the Tang) that describes Tae Chuyong (r. 698–719) as belonging to the Songmal Malgal (Ch. Sumo Mohe). Korean scholars, on the other hand, rely on the *Jiu Tangshu* (Old History of the Tang), the history compiled closest in time (940–945) to the fall of Parhae, which states that Tae Chuyong belonged to a branch of the Koguryo people. Even the *Xin Tangshu* states that Tae had been politically subordinate to Koguryo. The difference between the two Tang histories is the ethnicity of