

# Koryo's Pivot to Sogyong and Its Social and Historical Background

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The great leader Comrade **Kim Il Sung** said as follows.

**“Pyongyang is a city with a time-honoured history, a brilliant culture and very beautiful scenery.”**(**“KIM IL SUNG WORKS”** Vol. 6 P. 233)

Koryo, the first unified state in Korea's history, attached great importance to Pyongyang, a city associated with the time-honored history and brilliant culture of our nation, and made strenuous efforts to develop the country and nation with the city as its centre.

Koryo's pivot to Sogyong is illustrated in the following measures adopted by the feudal state.

First, Koryo paid close attention to raising the political and military position of Pyongyang.

Soon after the establishment of the country Wang Kon, founder king of Koryo, was faced with a number of heavy tasks—eliminating opponent forces, laying solid his political base by embracing separate forces in local areas, setting up new government organs, and adjusting its ruling system to meet his own interests. Even in such a complex situation he formed Taedohobu (local administrative organ) in Pyongyang in September 918, three months after the founding of the country.

This was an important measure aimed at strengthening his rule over the wider area of the northern section of the country centred on Pyongyang and building a strong military fortress and defence line to check the aggression of foreign invaders from northwest. It was a starting-point of the positive measure Koryo adopted with an ambition to build a powerful feudal state covering the vast territory of Ancient Joseon and Koguryo with Pyongyang as its centre.

In January 919 the feudal state promoted Pyongyang Taedohobu as Sogyong in the sense that it was an alternative capital city in the west of the country. The alternative capital system had continued in the long period from Ancient Joseon, Koguryo, Palhae to Later Silla even though there were some changes in its names and forms. In its early years Koryo, boasting itself as the successor to Koguryo, also set Pyongyang as its alternative capital with a view to inheriting and developing the alternative capital system of Ancient Joseon and Koguryo.

The promotion of Pyongyang, once the capital city of Ancient Joseon and Koguryo, as the alternative capital was a testimony to the fact that Koryo strived to model after Ancient Joseon and Koguryo and give prominence to their history and traditions.

Next, Koryo endeavoured to build Pyongyang as befits its future capital.

To this end, it relocated residents in several areas to Sogyong to increase the population of Pyongyang.

While raising the political and military position of Pyongyang, it ensured that the inhabitants in different areas including the capital city, Paekju (today's Paecheon) and Hwangju moved to Pyongyang in 918, 922, 932 and 949 and in later years.

In the meantime, after the collapse of Palhae in 926, Koryo embraced a stream of nomadic people from Palhae, numbering hundreds of thousands, and had them settle down in northwest area. This was how many people of Palhae, the descendants of Koguryo, came to live in Pyongyang.

The relocation to Pyongyang of many inhabitants in the south of the Taedong River and

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absorption of the surviving Palhae people was mainly aimed at building Pyongyang into a strong political and military base and, by relying on it, developing Koryo into a powerful country like Ancient Joson and Koguryo.

To make Pyongyang an alternative capital city, Koryo also made great efforts to build fortresses and royal palaces in the city.

Regarding it as a city of strategic importance, it constructed fortresses such as Jae, Ra, and Hwang in the period from 919 to 1011 in Pyongyang to fortify it into a bulwark in anticipation of possible invasion by other countries.

By building fortresses and royal palaces in Sogyong it provided full conditions proper to the capital city of the feudal state.

From the initial years of the dynasty to the early and mid-12<sup>th</sup> century it had such royal palaces as Jangrak, Jwa, U, Ryongdok and Taehwa built in Sogyong and monarchs of the feudal state frequently visited them.

Construction of several royal palaces in Sogyong is eloquent proof of how sincere the feudal state was in building it into a capital city of the future. Koryo rebuilt such royal palaces as Jangrak and Ryongdok at their original sites of the Koguryo period.. This fact alone proves that Koryo strived to inherit and develop the traditions of Koguryo in the building of royal palaces.

Koryo also set up numerous government offices in Sogyong and employed officials.

Wang Kon sent his cousin Wang Sik Ryom and Ryol Phyeong, a government official (today's vice minister), to Sogyong in September 918. Then he established Ranggwang, Agwan, Pyongbu, Naphwabu, Jingaksong, Naechonbu and other offices and staffed 46 officials there in 922. He set up Kukchonbu in 926 and Kwanthaeksa, Tohangsa and Taeobu in 934. Therefore, there existed nine government offices in Sogyong in 934.

Koryo continued to establish government offices of various appellations in Sogyong one after another; in 1076 the number of such offices reached 30 and that of the staff, hundreds. It also promoted several offices in Sogyong to the branch agencies of the government, with the result that some of them including Hobu, Pyongbu, Osadae, Kukjagam, Thaeuigam and Thaesakuk assumed special missions as agencies.

Koryo designated Sogyong as the biggest city next to the capital city. It also had schools built there earlier than in other local areas, as well as a library called Susowon.

In this way Sogyong took full shape as a capital city around the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Next, successive rulers of Koryo visited Sogyong frequently.

Regarding Sogyong as a city of strategic importance, monarchs of Koryo often visited it and stayed there for scores of days or sometimes more than 150 days.

According to an old record, monarchs of Koryo often visited the alternative capitals such as Sogyong, Tonggyong and Namgyong in the first half of the Koryo era. They visited Sogyong more frequently and stayed there longer. In this period a monarch of Koryo visited Tonggyong once and stayed there for 35 days in August 997 (Songjong 16); he visited Namgyong seven times and stayed there for 20 days on average. In contrast, monarchs visited Sogyong 38 times and stayed for 54 days on average. In particular the 17<sup>th</sup> monarch In Jong administered the country in Sogyong for 156 days

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from February to July 1127.

As was mentioned above, in the corresponding period there were one visit to Tonggyong, seven visits to Namgyong and 38 visits to Sogyong, and the sojourning period in Sogyong was longer. This fact proves that Sogyong was given prominence among the alternative capital cities.

The enforcement of the policy of preferential treatment to the government officials and soldiers in Sogyong, holding of various kinds of mourning ceremonies and Buddhist rituals on the same days and scales as in Kaegyong, the capital city of Koryo—all these prove Koryo's pivot to Sogyong.

From the early years of the Koryo era it pursued a policy of attaching importance to Sogyong and made great efforts to this end. This was done against a certain social and historical backdrop.

First, the people of Koryo strongly desired to build a powerful country like Ancient Joson and Koguryo and ensure unified development of the country and nation by relying on the traditional position of Pyongyang.

Pyongyang was a cradle of human civilization, the former capital of Ancient Joson which was the first ancient state in the Orient, and the capital city of Koguryo which was known worldwide as the great power in Asia.

Setting great store by the traditional position of Pyongyang, the people of Koryo strived to develop the country and nation with Pyongyang as its centre.

Wang Kon, with a firm belief that the old territory of Koguryo was the heritage of his country, inspected Sogyong on a frequent basis even when Silla and Later Paekje refused to surrender to Koryo; in order to defend Pyongyang he sent his royal family there and had many government offices built, stressing that he would strengthen kingship of his ancestors by relying on the traditional position of Pyongyang; in the period of the first war against the Khitans General So Hui, commander-in-chief of the Koryo army, held peace talks, in which he insisted that Koryo was the successor to Koguryo, as implied by its name, and chose Pyongyang as an alternative capital city of the country—all these facts verify that the Koryo people craved for building a powerful country with Pyongyang as its centre by inheriting the traditions of Ancient Joson and Koguryo.

As Pyongyang was the capital city of Ancient Joson and Koguryo and the Koryo people themselves desired to unify the country and ensure its development with Pyongyang as its centre, Wang Kon underlined in his "Ten Instructions" that Sogyong was the centre of the terrestrial stratum of the country and would be the base of kingship for all ages because of its limpid rivers and wide fertile fields, and that it was advisable for kings to go and stay there for more than 100 days to ensure the safety of the royal families in the middle of each of the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn and winter.

This verifies that the people of Koryo attached importance to Pyongyang and had a great ambition and aspiration for building a powerful country with it as a stronghold.

Second, Pyongyang was a city of great economic and military significance.

Pyongyang had favourable conditions necessary for developing the economy. It was the hub of traffic as it is situated in the central part of the Korean peninsular. The Taedong River, wide and deep, flows across Pyongyang to provide favourable conditions for marine transportation. As it sat on a wide fertile plain at the lower reaches of the Taedong River, it had ample conditions for developing

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agriculture.. There were excellent prospects for fishing industry in the Taedong River and the West Sea of Korea. The surrounding mountains, high and low, were rich in wild animals and abundant in forest resources and various kinds of plants.

Pyongyang was important in military terms. Already built there were defence installations. As Pyongyang was situated at an importance location leading to the settlements of the Khitans and Jurchen hordes, it was absolutely possible to repel foreign invasion from northwest if Pyongyang was turned into a formidable fortress. The Pukdaebong mountain ranges stretched long to north and south in the east of Pyongyang, providing favourable conditions to check the enemy's invasion from northeast. Pyongyang also had enough conditions to strengthen naval forces in the Taedong River and the West Sea of Korea. As it had walls on Mt. Taesong, Mt. Sosan and Mt. Kobang, and the satellite walls on Mt. Hwangryong, Mt. Hulgol and Mt. Huryu, Pyongyang was advantageous as a military base.

Third, it was related to the interests of the ruling forces of Koryo in those days.

The feudal ruling forces, after overthrowing the kingdom of Thaebong set up by Kungye in 918 and founding a feudal state, had to lay a foundation of powerful forces to integrate the brother countries and the surviving forces into one.

However, the ruling forces of Koryo had no area wide enough to expand their sphere of influence in the south of the Taedong River. In this area, influential magnates were boasting themselves to be the lords and generals. They competed to win over certain areas and residents and formed government offices which were made up of bureaucrats including sirang, kyong, rangjung, wonwaerang and taegam. They also exercised arbitrary rule over the residents within their jurisdiction and built a so-called "small kingdom," thus emerging as a strong military opponent. They failed to define a nomenclature and designate a king but they had considerable economic and military strength.

Given the situation that separatist forces refused to surrender to Koryo and Later Paekje emerged as a powerful rival, it was impossible for Koryo to expand its sphere of influence to the south of the Taedong River.

Differently from the area south of the Taedong River there was no separatist force in Pyongyang because it was bordering Palhae. Therefore, it was appropriate for the newly-emerging Koryo ruling circle to seize this area first, build up its military and economic strength, and occupy the southern area by relying on it.

As Koryo boasted of being the successor to Koguryo, the seizure of Pyongyang was urgent because it would be easier to rally many surviving Koguryo people with strong yearnings for their homeland.

Koryo's pivot to Sogyong had several social and historical factors including the historical position of Pyongyang, aspirations of the Koryo people, economic and military advantages of the city and interests of the ruling forces. The main objective of the feudal state was to further strengthen feudal domination over this area.

However, Koryo's pivot to Sogyong, enforced with the aim of giving prominence to the old capital city of Ancient Joseon and Koguryo and inheriting the traditions of the nation, was a positive measure in Korea's history.