

For the Sake of Bilateral Relations:

## Koreans Hope That Beijing Will Address Distorted Historical Facts As Quickly As Possible

South Korea has been facing a growing dilemma over the matter as it needs help from the Chinese side in mediating the protracted nuclear standoff over the North Korean nuclear weapons program. "The Chinese government's distortion of ancient Korean history was 'very regrettable,'" Deputy Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister Lee Soo-hyuk said. The South Korean government will map out short- and long-term countermeasures to restore the nation's history. "We must handle the matter in a way that unnecessary diplomatic friction is not amplified at this point," said Lee. "But we do expect some ice to form in Korea-China relations while our government proceeds to pressure Beijing through diplomatic channels in correcting the historic distortion. High-ranking officials are to continue addressing the issue with their Chinese counterparts."

The latest row over the Koguryo Kingdom erupted after the Chinese Foreign Ministry in April deleted references of the kingdom from the introduction of Korean history on its Web site. The move, which followed a series of similar actions by other Chinese academic and media organizations, was interpreted as an attempt by China to claim the kingdom as part of its own history.

Beijing has begun to question that view, culminating in the Chinese Foreign Ministry's deletion of sections related to Koguryo in its online account of ancient Korea. The move sparked an outcry from Seoul, which accused China of seeking to appropriate Koguryo as part of its own history and demanded that the deleted sections be restored.

Koguryo, which controlled the northern part of the Korean Peninsula and much of what is today's Manchuria, China, from 37 B.C. to A.D. 668, has been a bone of contention between South Korea and China in recent months. Koguryo, which along with Silla and Paekje form the Three Kingdoms Period, has long been viewed as a part of Korea's history.

In recent years, China has endeavored to forge Koguryo's history as part of its own ancient history. The outright distortion of the historical truth demonstrates China's refusal to acknowledge the dominance of a huge portion of its territory by the ancient Korean kingdom. It shows China's deep-rooted arrogance of looking down upon the old Korea as one of its tributary countries.

The Koguryo issue is not the first time South Korea has been involved in a dispute over historical claims by regional neighbors. China's Sui and Tang dynasties made several invasions on Koguryo in ancient times but failed to conquer it, gaining the small Korean kingdom recognition as the most powerful in Northeast Asia. After many failed takeover attempts, Tang, China's greatest emperor with an army that conquered almost every other power in the Far

South Korean government officials and lawmakers agreed to work together in forming an inter-agency to formally deal with counter-measures to China's distortion. They agreed that the government had to take a strong stance on the issue and actively pursue correction of the records on Koguryo.

Prime Minister Lee Hai-chan ordered his Cabinet to examine how South Korean history is introduced in foreign nations' textbooks, stressing that a multi-sided approach is needed to tackle China's move to distort Korean history involving the ancient Koguryo Kingdom.

"The people of other countries also need to know our history correctly," Lee was quoted by Jung Soon-kyun, head of the Government Information Agency, in a policy coordination meeting. "There should be distinct approaches toward China, the South Korean public and other foreign nations when coping with China's attempts to distort history," Lee was quoted saying. Chung explained that the Prime Minister instructed relevant offices to closely monitor any false descriptions of the nation's history abroad.

Foreign Affairs-Trade Minister Ban Ki-moon said, "The Seoul government will not tolerate any attempt by Beijing to claim the history of Koguryo. We will keep urging China to rectify its wrong-doings related to Koguryo and stop further attempts to distort history, such as the revision of its textbooks."

"The government will continue to demand corrections to any kind of distortion of history it finds, and will resolutely deal with any move by China to claim Koguryo as one of its own kingdoms," Minister Ban told reporters.

In a rare unilateral voice that echoes rising public anger, the nation's political parties are strongly condemning the Chinese government for laying claims to the ancient Korean kingdom of Koguryo. Aside from a resolution by 52 ruling and opposition members demanding a halt to the historical distortion, the National Assembly pushed to form a special committee to tackle the highly emotional issue.

The united move is in stark contrast to weeks of heavy mudslinging between the ruling Uri and the main opposition Grand National Party as each has tried to seize the upper hand since the National Assembly's official opening in June. The GNP also took its cue to bring the history issue into play in its attacks on the ruling camp, declaring that the government's ambivalent view on the nation's identity had led to this latest distortion of history.

There has been diplomatic friction between South Korea and China over the history of Koguryo since last year. Chinese academics and government bodies began asserting that Koguryo was a provincial administrative area under Chinese rule. The history conflict initially emerged as a diplomatic issue earlier this year after a state funded Chinese research project claimed Koguryo was a provincial government of China.

South Korea is considering joining with North Korea to address China's continued distortions of Korean history involving the ancient kingdom of Koguryo. During a press conference, Vice Unification Minister Rhee Bong-jo said, "As inter-Korean cooperation on China's misrepresentation of Korean history has gained momentum through various civilian exchanges,

"In accordance with the historians' consensus on the need to preserve and restore Koguryo's cultural relics, such as mural paintings and burial mounds, we hope to provide financial and technical assistance to the North," said Rhee.

Dokdo, a group of islets off the eastern tip of South Korea's Ullung Island, has been the center of a protracted tug-of-war between Seoul and Tokyo, which claims sovereignty over the islets. South Korea is also at odds with Japan over history textbooks that Seoul alleges whitewash atrocities committed during Japan's colonial rule of the Peninsula.

Park Sang-seek, rector of Kyung Hee University's Graduate Institute of Peace Studies, said, "It is ironic that the governments of the three countries continue to talk about regional cooperation. If we quarrel about these kind of issues, how can hope to achieve this?" Park supported a proposal by Seoul to establish a joint committee including Japan and China to come up with a consensus on sensitive historical questions.

Park presented Korea's case when he met China's Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi and other senior officials in Beijing, stressing that the ancient Koguryo kingdom is an inseparable part of Korea's history and China should stop distorting indisputable historical facts. South Korea is also looking into ways of cooperating with North Korea, which currently controls some of the geographical area that belonged to Koguryo, to counter China's claim.

When Japan glossed over its colonization of Korea in history textbooks in 2001, the Korean government threatened all possible diplomatic means to correct the problems. Korea warned that it would delay opening its market to Japanese popular culture, curtail bilateral businesses, stop high-level exchanges and oppose its neighbor's attempt to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council.

Then, President Kim Dae-jung himself stepped in to urge Japan to correct the distortion and "have a right perception of history." He also summoned his ambassador in Tokyo back to Seoul in strong protest. Three years later, another bitter historical dispute erupted - this time with China - but Korea's response falls far short of its barrage against Japan.

Many people want the government to show a stronger reaction but we have nothing to gain from emotional responses. China is now investing huge money in the Northeast Asia project, while we haven't prepared any measures that could fend off the threat. What we need right now is to draw up a long-term plan looking ahead 30 years.

Despite China's continuing claim to the ancient Korean kingdom of Koguryo, the government has failed to apply diplomatic pressure on Beijing, saying only it would resolve the controversy through joint research on the history of the kingdom with China and Japan.

Korea must make sure that our history and roots will not be distorted by China. If China's claims to Koguryo persist, it will bring serious damage to bilateral relations," an official at Seoul's Foreign Ministry said. The former battlefield foes in the Korean War have made major progress in trade and other areas since they established formal diplomatic relations in 1992.

In a document revealed, "The late Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai said that the Korean race has been residing in China's northeastern part since ancient times and that historic relics

Korea."

"Though some Chinese scholars claimed Parhae belongs to their history, it is not true," Zhou said in the document. "Those historical inaccuracies occur because of historians' chauvinism and nationalism."

The document quoted Zhou saying: "We cannot distort history. It is absurd to say that the land west of the Tumen River and the Yalu River has been Chinese territory or that Korea has been China's tributary from early times."

The remarks draw special attention amid the mounting tension between Korea and China on the historical issue as a Chinese top official had openly made the statement in an official meeting, silencing China's current argument.

Experts say that the latest historical debate is not something that can be settled with emotions but is a long-term issue that requires years of thorough study on ancient history.

The government may be keeping its low-key stance to prevent harming the relations between Seoul and Beijing. The government should have actively intervened in the issue in consideration of its grave impact on the pride of the Korean people and the image of the nation in the international community.

We sincerely hope that Beijing will address the distorted historical facts as quickly as possible for the sake of the bilateral relations and its status as a superpower. Unpleasant historical facts are also worth preserving because they serve as an invaluable reminder not to commit the same mistake.