

Ki-moon LEE: *Geschichte der koreanischen Sprache*. Deutsche Übersetzung herausgegeben von Bruno Lewin. Wiesbaden, Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1977, 326 pp.

The present publication is a German translation of Ki-moon Lee's well-known *Kaejōng kugōsa kaesōl* (Seoul 1972), the first edition of which appeared already in 1961 under the name *Kugōsa kaesōl*. Through the German translation of this work the Western student now has easy and comfortable access to a clear and well arranged survey of the history of the Korean language, without any prerequisite of proficiency in the Korean language. Although primarily intended for Korean students without much previous knowledge of historical linguistics, Lee's work also has a lot of valuable information to offer more advanced scholars. The German translation has been carried through at the University of Bochum by a team of scholars under the guidance of professor Bruno Lewin. The result of their effort is extremely good. The translation is very thorough and well edited and the typographical shape, including a large portion of Chinese characters, is clear and easy to read.

The bulk of the book is divided into nine chapters, preceded by the prefaces of the author and the editor, a table of contents, a list of abbreviations, tables of transcriptional signs and two maps, and followed by notes by the author, one index of forms and one index of subjects. One characteristic of the translation is the diversified use of different transliterations for different periods of the language. Thus, the vowel systems of Old Korean, Early Middle Korean, Late Middle Korean, Modern Korean (Neukoreanisch) and Contemporary Korean all have their own different row of transliteration letters. Although, formally, such a method would not be required within the sphere of strict transliteration, the choice of transliteration letters with an additional transcriptional potential, peculiar to each period of the language, is a very practical compromise indeed, and is helpful in separating items from different periods occurring in the text. Names are transcribed throughout the text according to the McCune-Reischauer system.

After some introductory remarks on methodology and language history (Chap. 1), the origin of the Korean language is dealt with in the second chapter. The main part of this section treats the Altaic-Korean linguistic relationship in a brief but well illustrated way. The account concentrates on the „positive“ features speaking in favour of an Altaic genetic relationship, while the „negative“ features speaking against such a relationship are treated in a very brief manner. It could have been more explicitly stated that the number of non-Sino-Korean words which permit more or less acceptable comparisons with Altaic and/or Japanese is comparatively small. At the moment the majority of Korean lexical items do not lend themselves to any etymologization at all, a fact which calls for caution when we declare Korean an Altaic language.

The third chapter is devoted to the formation of the Korean language, and the views here put forward by Lee – sometimes in opposition to traditional Korean scholarship – are of fundamental importance for our understanding of the development of the Korean language. On a sufficiently stable evidential basis the author demonstrates the existence of three different languages on the Korean peninsula during the Three Kingdom's period. The fact that the Koguryō, Paekche and Silla states actually had different languages with more than dialectal differences, and that Middle Korean is a descendant of the Silla language and not of any Koguryō-Paekche-Silla language unity, is obviously of fundamental importance for all types of historical studies pertaining to the Korean language. These conditions are especially important to bear in mind for all kinds of comparative studies.

Although the Koguryō materials are very scarce and rudimentary, Lee has succeeded in securing enough evidence to be able to indicate the place of Koguryō genetically in an intermediary position between Silla and Japanese. The following chapter is a short account of the different types of writing systems used at different times in Korea, and includes short presentations of the different usages of Chinese characters (*idu*, *kugyōl*, *hyangch'al*) and of the alphabetical script from the middle of the 15th century (*ōnmun* or *han'gūl*). The remaining five chapters are all devoted to descriptions of different periods of the language from Old Korean up till Contemporary Korean. All these chapters are structured in a similar way, i. e. first a listing of the source materials followed by descriptions of phonology, grammar and lexicon. The section on Old Korean is based on the limited textual data which is available, i. e. the records of place names and personal names in *Samguk yusa* and *Samguk sagi*, the *idu*-material and the small corpus of *hyangga* poetry. In spite of the limitations of the source material the author has succeeded in establishing a number of important facts about this stage of the language, i. a. the existence of an opposition between aspirated and non-aspirated consonants, the non-existence of geminated consonants and the maintenance of the „normal“ sound value of the consonants also in final position. The Middle Korean period has been subdivided into Early Middle Korean (Chap. 6) and Late Middle Korean (Chap. 7), a division well founded on textual/linguistic evidence demonstrated in the articles. This comparatively detailed section of the book serves as an excellent introduction to a more penetrating study of Middle Korean grammar and texts. In the last two chapters (Chap. 8 Modern Korean and Chap. 9 Contemporary Korean) the transition from Middle Korean to Contemporary Korean is outlined, and each stage of the language is described along the same lines as in the previous sections.

In spite of the meritorious efforts by the translators and the editor it has not always been possible to conceal the fact that originally the book was written for a reader with good knowledge of Korean and of Chinese characters. Indeed, this is one of the weakest points of this German edition. Some of the discussions might be difficult to follow in detail for a non-specialist reader. These difficulties are most clearly felt in chap. 4 (e. g. pp 54–55) and to some extent in chap. 5 (e. g. P 92), where the relationship between the Chinese characters and the Korean readings will be understandable only to a person who already possesses considerable knowledge of the problems discussed in these parts of the book. The only possibility to evade this complication would be to supply some text passages more generously with transliterations and translations, thus giving also the less advanced student a fair chance to follow the argumentation.

However, these small objections are of a marginal importance, and in no way diminish the value of this indispensable handbook of Korean language history. Author, editor and students are to be congratulated that this remarkable work is now available in such a competently executed edition in a Western language. The „Geschichte der koreanischen Sprache“ will remain the major work in its field for a long time to come.

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