

# A study on the Background of the Outbreak of the Warfare between Gojoseon and Yan

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**Abstract.** The warfare between Gojoseon(古朝鮮) and Yan(燕) during the Warring States Period(戰國時代) has historical significance because it was the first great warfare recorded in Korean history. Yan tried to invade Gojoseon around 323 BC in order to strengthen the authority of the king and to obtain human and material resources. Gojoseon frustrated the plan of Yan through military and diplomatic action. Since 316 BC Yan had been weakened because of civil war. As a result, the balance of power between Gojoseon and Yan had upset. Gojoseon had applied political and military pressure to Yan during that period. Consequently, tensions between two countries had escalated. The increase in tensions between Gojoseon and Yan was the background of the outbreak of the warfare.

**Keywords:** Gojoseon, Yan, Warfare

## 1 Introduction

The warfare between Gojoseon(古朝鮮) and Yan(燕) during the Warring States Period has historical significance because it was the first great warfare recorded in Korean history.

Relating to the warfare between both countries, most of the existing research is focused on the western border changes of Gojoseon. But the background of the warfare has not been sufficiently studied. The main purpose of this study is to examine the background of the warfare.

## 2 The International Situation in Northeast Asia before the Warfare

In 5th century BC the Warring States period began in Chinese history. Compared with the Spring and Autumn period(春秋時代) previously, the warfare became more frequent during that period.

Wei(魏) became a military power rapidly in the early Warring States period, because it had succeeded in political and economic reforms. But since 353 BC Wei had been defeated by Qi(齊). Consequentially, Qi became one of the hegemonic powers in the latter half of the 4th century BC.

Until the first half of the 4th century BC, the other countries regarded Qin(秦) as barbarian(夷狄). Since around 329 BC Shangyang(商鞅) had initiated reforms, Qin started to become a military power.

### 3 Diplomatic Relations between Gojoseon and Yan before the Warfare

#### 3.1 Figure



Around the 4th century BC in Northeast Asia

In the Warring States period Gojoseon bordered on Yan in northeastern Hebei(河北). Donghu(東胡) bordered on the north of Yan and Gojoseon.

In the latter half of the 4th century BC Qi expanded its influence in the south of Yan. Therefore Yan tried to invade Gojoseon around 323 BC in order to strengthen the authority of the king and to obtain human and material resources to win the

competition from other countries like Qi. But Gojoseon frustrated the plan of Yan through military and diplomatic action.

Because King Kuai of Yan(燕王 噲) had abdicated in favour of minister(相) Zizhi(子之) in 316 BC, a civil war broke out in Yan. Since 316 BC Yan had weakened because of the civil war. Qi(齊) and Zhongshan(中山) conquered the territory of Yan. Yan almost collapsed.

As a result, the balance of power between Gojoseon and Yan had upset. Gojoseon had applied political and military pressure to Yan during that period. The 『Weilue(魏略)』 that was compiled by Yuhuan(魚豢) around the middle part of the 3rd century contains important information on the relationship between Gojoseon and Yan in the Warring States period. The 『Weilue(魏略)』 mentions Gojoseon was arrogant and cruel(驕虐) towards Yan during that period.

Consequently, tensions between two countries had escalated. The increase in tensions between Gojoseon and Yan was the background of the outbreak of the warfare.

#### 4 Conclusion

Yan tried to invade Gojoseon around 323 BC in order to strengthen the authority of the king and to obtain human and material resources. But Gojoseon frustrated the plan of Yan through military and diplomatic action.

Since 316 BC Yan had weakened because of civil war. Qi(齊) and Zhongshan(中山) conquered the territory of Yan. Yan almost collapsed. As a result, the balance of power between Gojoseon and Yan had upset.

Gojoseon had applied political and military pressure to Yan during that period. Consequently, tensions between two countries had escalated. The increase in tensions between Gojoseon and Yan was the background of the outbreak of the warfare.

(★ This study is part of thesis for master's degree.)

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