Bohai (Parhae) Studies in the Soviet Union from the 1920s to the 1970s

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ABSTRACT

The history of Bohai studies in Russia is more than 150 years old. But only from the 1950s to the 1970s did Soviet specialists pay attention to the main problems of Bohai history and archaeology and develop research in related areas. Russian scholars combined the use of written sources with the study of materials from archaeological sites, an approach which was evidently impossible for researchers in the Republic of Korea or Japan until the 2000s. At the same time, Bohai studies in the USSR were relatively free from the manifold political influences and pressures that heavily influenced research conducted in North Korea and China. In spite of this, Soviet Bohai studies remain practically unknown in the Western academic world, largely because most Soviet scholars do not publish in English. The goal of this survey is to trace the history of Bohai studies in the Soviet Union from the 1920s to the 1970s and illustrate the specific characteristics of the Russian approach to this field.

Keywords: Bohai (Parhae), Far East, history, archaeology, East Asia

The History of Bohai Studies in Russia in the Pre-Soviet Period

The study of Bohai in Russia began in 1851 when the famous Russian missionary sinologist Nikita Iakovlevich Bichurin (Никита Яковлевич Бичурин; a.k.a. archimandrite Iakinf/архимандрит Иакинф) included a chapter entitled “Supplement on Bohai Kingdom” in his book A Collection of Information about Nations that Inhabited Middle Asia in Ancient Times (Bichurin 1950, 178). As indicated by its title, Bichurin's book is a collection of materials from Chinese texts dealing with non-Han ethnic groups and states that existed in Central and North East Asia.

The study of actual Bohai sites in Russia began in 1870-1871, when the Russian Geographic Society sent an expedition to the South Ussurijsk region led by Peter Ivanovich Kafarov (Петр Иванович Кафаров, 1817-1878) (church rank and name: archimandrite Palladij), a prominent historian of Asia. He found many ancient sites in the southern part of the Russian Far East. Kafarov considered Bohai culture as part of Manchurian culture and proposed the first classification for sites in the Russian Maritime Region (Kafarov 1871, 91-96; Vasil’eva 1989, 39), which included fairly accurate dates for the Bohai period, which he dated to the eighth to tenth centuries AD (Kafarov 1871, 92). His dating of archeological sites in the Russian Maritime Region became the basis of the dates currently accepted, and...
was more accurate than that proposed by the Russian officer and scholar Vladimir Klavdievich Arsen`ev (Владимир Клавдиевич Арсеньев, 1872-1930) (Arsen`ev 1947, 313-18), who did most of his work in the early twentieth century (Vasil`eva 1989, 40).

P. Kafarov was the first scholar who used archeological materials to demonstrate that Bohai culture once existed in the territory of the modern Russian Primorye Region (Shavkunov 1994, 4). While he also used textual sources, he unfortunately did not inform his readers which texts he had selected for his research. From his writings it seems obvious that he had access to some texts which remain unknown to modern scholars, and some of his remarks based on those texts were eventually confirmed by archeological excavations (Vasil`eva 1989, 39-40).

Some Russian scholars believe that the first archeologist to start Bohai-related research was Mikhail Ivanovich Venyukov (Михаил Иванович Венюков, 1832-1901), an officer of the Russian Army. However, Venyukov’s publications clearly demonstrate that he only observed and wrote about archeological sites but did not conduct any significant excavations (Venyukov 1952). Therefore it is difficult to describe him as an “archeologist.”

In 1884 a branch of the Russian Geographic Society was founded in the southern part of the Russian Far East. It became known as Obshhestvo izucheniya Amurskogo kraya (Общество изучения Амурского края/The Society for Studies of the Amur Region (SSAR)]. The SSAR conducted studies of archeological sites, including those dated to the Bohai period. Results of these studies were regularly published in the society’s periodical Zapiski Obshhestva izucheniya Amurskogo kraya (Записки Общества изучения Амурского края/Mémoires de la Société des études de la région de l’Amour]. However, the Russian Geographic Society did not have many contacts with the SSAR.

Members of the SSAR advanced Bohai studies. The first SSAR chairman, Fedor Fedorovich Busse (Федор Федорович Буссе, 1838-1896), also proposed his own classification of archeological sites of the Russian Maritime Region (Busse 1888, 3-5). This classification is in many aspects similar to the system suggested by Kafarov. In 1908 Lev Alexeyevich Kropotkin (Лев Алексеевич Кропоткин, 1842-

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1 In the Soviet Union scholars followed the Chinese usage in referring to the Bohai (Parhae) state. Therefore I will use Chinese names for Bohai rulers. Only beginning in the 2000s did some Russian specialists in Korean studies begin to use the name “Parhae.”

2 Russian and Soviet scholars used the name “Middle Asia” for Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, and Kirgizstan. However, Bichurin considered modern Mongolia and the Western part of China to be a part of Middle Asia.

3 However Bichurin mentioned the Bohai ethnic group as one population that existed in the Jin Empire in the book The History of First Four Khagans of the Chingis Family, published in 1829. Bichurin (1777-1853) was the first Russian scholar who conducted research in the field of East Asian Studies.

4 Before the Civil War the Modern Primorye Region was referred to as the South Ussuriysk region.

5 P. I. Kafarov (1817-1878) was a Russian sinologist and member of the Russian Orthodox Church mission in Beijing (1840-1878).
1921), a member of the SSAR, obtained access to the work of Busse and published “Ostati drevnostej v Amurskom krae” [Остатки древностей в Амурском крае/ Ancient remains in the Amur region] (Busse and Kropotkin 1908, 25-48). In this work Kropotkin described all archeological sites known at the time and also provided details on the persons who had first discovered these sites. Busse and Kropotkin collected many artifacts from Bohai sites as well as information about them. The members of the Society believed that Bohai was a Manchurian state.

A. Z. Fedorov, an officer in the Russian army and member of SSAR, discovered many Bohai sites in the Ussuriysk district. He published the book “Pamyatniki stariny v gorode Nikol`sk-Ussuriyskom i ego okrestnostyah” [Памятники старины в городе Никольск-Уссурийском и его окрестностях/ The ancient sites in Nikol’sk-Ussuriyskij town and district] in 1916. Fedorov considered Bohai to be a state of the Tungus people.

It can therefore be seen that many Russian scholars who worked before 1917 believed that Bohai was an independent state. But after the October Revolution (1917) many archeologists and historians fled the country, and it took a few decades before a new generation of scholars began their work in the field. We must therefore note that during the period of the First World War, the 1917 Communist Revolution and the Russian Civil War (1917-1922) Bohai studies in Russian could not develop and fell into stagnation. After the Civil War only a few Russian scholars had an interest in researching the history of the Russian Far East.

Bohai Studies in Soviet Union until the 1970s

In 1929 Zotik Nikolaevich Matveev (Зотик Николаевич Матвеев), then a professor at Far East State University (located in Vladivostok), published a small book titled Bohai (1929). In this work he used then available materials in the form of Chinese and Japanese manuscripts dealing with the Bohai state. For a long time this work remained the most detailed study of the political history of Bohai (Vasil’eva 1989, 41). It was also the first book in Russia (then a part of the USSR) which dealt exclusively with the history of the Bohai state (Ivliev 2006). Matveev considered diplomatic relations between Bohai and Japan and believed that they were conducted on the basis of equality (Matveev 1929, 38). Moreover, Matveev used materials from some of the archaeological sites in Primorye in the monograph. His book played a very important role in Russian studies of Bohai, remaining an important guide in that field in subsequent decades. For example, this publication by Matveev influenced works by Professor A.P. Okladnikov, a leading authority on the archeology of the Russian Far East (Okladinov 1959), who, in his own book used materials of other Russian scholars, including Russian translations of Japanese and Chinese texts.

Matveev believed Bohai to be an independent Mohe state, but also recognized Koguryŏ cultural elements in it (Matveev 1929, 6). Some modern

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6 Ussuriysk Town is located in the district of the same name.
7 The modern town of Ussuriysk had another name, Nikol’sk-Ussuriyskij, until the 1930s.
Russian scholars hold a similar position while Chinese historians understand Bohai as a provincial power that was part of the Chinese Tang Empire and Korean specialists consider Bohai to be a Korean state. Japanese scholars hold a variety of different opinions, with some specialists believing that Bohai was a Korean state and other historians considering it to be a Mohe country.

However, from the 1930s to the 1950s, Soviet East Asian studies (including the Bohai field) did not actively develop. The reasons for this stagnation in Bohai studies were: 1) a small number of young scholars and 2) the fact that in the 1920s many scholars with no training in Asian languages and history, but with “proper” political credentials, entered Asian studies (including Bohai and Jurchen studies), leading to the deterioration of oriental studies (Barannikov 1940, 6), 3) the lack of interaction among Soviet scholars (they belonged to three different groupings: old school, new school, and the Harbin school), and 4) the intensity of ideological pressure.

In the 1930s Stalin’s purged many scholars and destroyed important historical materials. Bohai studies were not untouched by these political processes. While in 1931 the SSAR was renamed the Temporal Vladivostok Urban Office of Regional Studies, research activity went unsupported. Moreover, the Soviet government wanted to establish a new foundation for education and research. Therefore Soviet leaders sought to destroy the old basis of education and science that had existed in the Russian Empire and establish a “proletarian base.”

In 1934, Margarita, the widow of Arsen’ev was arrested. She was executed in 1938. Policemen arrested Professor Z. N. Matveev of Far Eastern State University in 1937 and executed him the following year. Many scholars were afraid of repression and immigrated to other countries. Some specialists moved to China and continued their research in East Asian medieval studies in places located in Northeastern China, such as the Institute of Oriental and Commerce Studies, the Society of Russian Orientalists, the Society of Manchurian Region Studies, and the Society of Przheval’cev, undertaking research on materials related to the history of Manchuria and the Far East, including Bohai (Zapiski Harbinskogo obshhestva estestvospytatelej i jetnografov 1946).

Beginning in the 1940s, the Harbin school and other research and educational organizations in China ceased to exist, though some scholars of this school returned to the Soviet Union. The members of the Harbin school studied history and archaeology of the East Asian region, including Bohai. For example, they collected Bohai artifacts and discussed such facets of Bohai society as its religion, art, and governmental policy.

While, as we have seen, Soviet repression destroyed the old orientalist schools, the enthusiasm of young scholars led them to study the history and archaeology of the Far East. In 1953 the Far Eastern archaeological expedition of Alexei Pavlovich Okladnikov (Алексей Павлович Окладников) (1908-1981) began its work and excavated many sites in the Primorye and Khabarovsk regions.

8 In 1945 Soviet armies occupied Manchuria and liquidated all emigrant and other Russian organizations located in Northeastern China.
Okladnikov collected archaeological materials from Bohai sites, analyzed it and established the basis for the archaeological research of Bohai sites for the next generation of Soviet scholars. In the 1950s the archaeologist Ernst Vladimirovich Shavkunov (Эрнст Владимирович Шавкунов) excavated Bohai sites near the Krounovka River. Work in this interesting area continued well into the 1990s. In the process of this excavation scholars found new Bohai settlements and temples. This research provided important information on the religious side of Bohai society, for example, on the important role of Buddhism and shamanism. Data obtained from the archaeological sites of Krounovka now play a major role in Bohai studies.

In 1962 Ernst Vladimirovich Shavkunov completed his PhD (“Candidate of sciences”) dissertation dealing with a study of Bohai entitled “The State of Bohai and Cultural Sites in the Maritime Region,” though it was not until 1968 that he published a book on this topic. His PhD dissertation was the first work of this type dealing exclusively with Bohai issues. This author used very interesting Chinese-language historical data as well as archaeological materials from the Primorye Region, and his book is very popular among contemporary Russian, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese historians and archaeologists.

Some Soviet scholars (like N. V. Kyuner and I. E. Kychanov) actively used Chinese manuscripts (Kyuner 1961; Kychanov 1966) in their studies on the Bohai state and the Jurchen before the 1960s. During this time, Soviet Bohai studies were dominated by the opinions of Chinese scholars. Therefore many specialists believed that Bohai received its dominant cultural influence from Chinese civilization and did not consider the presence of Koguryo and Mohe cultural components. However, after the conflict between the Soviet Union and China in 1969 the situation in the Soviet academic world underwent radical change. The government of the USSR reconsidered policy in the historical fields and ignored Chinese influence in the states of the Far East in the ancient and medieval periods. Naturally, this position had a significant impact on works by Soviet scholars. Therefore historians in the Soviet Union did not recognize the importance of Koguryo and Chinese cultural elements in Bohai, instead contending that the base of Bohai was Mohe culture and that only Mohe tribes had established the Bohai state.

In 1973, Okladnikov with another specialist in Far Eastern archeology, Anatolii Panteleevich Derevyanko (Анатолий Пантелейевич Деревянко), republished the book The Distant Past of the Primorye Region (1959) under a new title the Distant Past of the Primorye and Amur Regions (Okladnikov and Derevyanko 1973). In this new publication Okladnikov revised several postulates of his previous works and, among other things, ignored or played down the influence of Chinese culture in the Bohai and Jin states. Okladnikov and Derevyanko were archaeologists and did not know East Asian languages. They therefore used the works of other scholars who had translated materials into Russian.

In spite of the Damanskij incident and political pressure, several Soviet scholars continued their research on the Bohai state.
scholars continued research on the Bohai state in various areas. One of the few positive results of the politically motivated polemics of the 1960s and 1970s is that after this conflict Russian scholars began to take a more critical approach towards the positions of Chinese historians and archaeologists which had hitherto often been accepted wholesale. One of the arguments the Chinese frequently used when they described Bohai as a “provincial power of the Tang Empire” is the absence of Bohai coins. But Russian archeologists found in the area an Abbasid drachma from Central Asia, and therefore insist that it is an indicator of an economy in which foreign currency may have been used (Shavkunov 1988, 103). They laid stress on the argument that the absence of excavated coins is not sufficient evidence to deny that Bohai had existed as an independent state—after all, there are many cases (such as the ancient Kiev Rus’ (earliest period), Siberian Khanates, Turkish and Mongolian Hordes, and others) when a politically independent and rather developed state survived without its own coinage.

**Bohai Studies in the 1970s**

During the 1970s Soviet historians resumed research into Bohai history and archaeology. Bohai history was often studied through related fields of research rather than simply on its own. For example, scholars who studied the Jurchen and Mohe had to research the Bohai people as well, and archaeologists who specialized in Far Eastern studies had to learn Bohai history, because in the Soviet Union, Mohe, Bohai and Jurchen were studied together.

One example, a book by the prominent Soviet scholar Mikhail Vasil’evich Vorob’ev (Михаил Васильевич Воробьев)\(^{10}\) *The Jurchen and the Jin State (X-1234)* (1975) includes an analysis of the Jurchen state. In addition, the author conducted research not only on Mohe, Bohai, and the Jurchen, but also compared the Jurchen system of muke (one hundred houses) and mingang (one thousand houses) with the social system of the Manchurian mukung (one hundred houses), and made other comparisons as well. Moreover, Vorob’ev considered the position of the Bohai people in the Jin Empire. He believed that Bohai people played an important role in the Jin Empire, enjoying certain privileges and serving the Jin as high-ranking officials.

In 1976, the Russian Academy of Sciences established the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Peoples of the Far East in Vladivostok. Scholars of this institute have conducted practically all archaeological excavations in the Primorye and Amur regions. This institute also prepared some Soviet and Russian archaeologists to conduct research, some of whom worked in Bohai studies in the Soviet Union and Russia, such as Vladislav Innokent’evich Boldin (Владислав Иннокентьевич Болдин),\(^{11}\) Evgeniia Ivanovna Gelman

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\(^{10}\) M. V. Vorob’ev (1922-1995) was a Soviet and Russian scholar. He studied the history of the Jurchen, Korea, Japan, and the Far East.

\(^{11}\) V. I. Boldin excavated Kraskinskoe and other Bohai sites from the 1980s to the 2000s. In the 1990s Boldin researched the economic activity of Bohai people in Primorye.
Bohai (Parhae) Studies in the Soviet Union from the 1920s to the 1970s

Евгения Ивановна Гельман, Юрий Геннадиевич Никитин, Александр Львович Ивлиев, Николай Николаевич Крадин.

Soviet and Russian scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the Bohai social system. To some extent this is related to the old Soviet official approach which required historians to focus on social and economic history and expected that every society should be somehow placed at a suitable level in the officially required “five-stage scheme” of human history. Hence, Soviet historians were expected and even required to look for features which could be used to justify the positioning of a particular society in this scheme as say, “feudal” or “slave-owning.” For example, A. P. Okladnikov insisted that in Bohai there was a mixture of feudal and slave-owning structures (Okladnikov 1959; Okladnikov and Derevyanko 1973) while Evgeniia Ivanovna Derevyanko (Евгения Ивановна Деревянко) believed that Bohai society had a “feudal” structure (E. V. Shavkunov et alii 1994).

E. V. Shavkunov also wrote about the “early feudal system” in Bohai society, where “within class relations there still existed many anachronistic forms of primogenital relations, and also in several incidents there can be observed a dominant primogenital form in other relations” where exploitation was limited mainly to receiving tribute from the dependent population. In this regard, E. V. Shavkunov notes the land system in Bohai as evidence of the fact that the Bohai king was considered the exclusive holder of all lands in the realm (Shavkunov 1968).

Meanwhile, field research and excavations continued. Throughout the 1960s to the 1980s Soviet scholars under the direction of Ernst Vladimirovich Shavkunov (1930-2001) and Valeriy Alexandrovich Horev (Валерий Александрович Хорев) carried out multiple archaeological expeditions and excavated several Bohai sites in the Primorye Region, including a group of Bohai archaeological sites near Krounovka Village, located in the Ussuriysk district. In spite of (or perhaps due to) the tense political polemics, intense studies continued to be conducted at the archaeological sites of Bohai. In the 1960s and 1970s Soviet archeologists

12 E. I. Gelman excavated many Bohai sites. Beginning in the 1990s she studied Bohai ceramics.
13 Yu. G. Nikitin is an archaeologist who from the 1990s on conducted research on Bohai cemeteries.
14 A. L. Ivliiev is a Russian archaeologist and historian. He has conducted research on Bohai, the Khitan, and the Jurchen. Recently Ivliiev and Kradin have studied Khitan sites in Mongolia where they found Bohai artifacts.
15 N. N. Kradin is a Russian historian and archaeologist. He began to have an interest in the social system of Bohai in the 1990s. Kradin took part in many international archaeological and historical projects.
16 According to Marxist theory, human society has five stages of development: primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. The Soviet regime supported this system and in the late 1970s added a sixth element to this scheme—communism.
17 Valeriy Alexandrovich Horev is a Soviet and Russian archeologist. He found and excavated many Mohe, Bohai, and Jurchen sites. Horev collected information on all archeological sites in the Primorye Region. He retired recently.
Semenichenko Lyudmila Efimovna (Семениченко Людмила Ефимовна) and Boldin Vladislav Innokent’evich (Болдин Владислав Иннокентьевич) excavated several new Bohai sites, among them the ancient town and rural settlement of Novogordeevskoe as well as the ancient towns Nikolaevskoe–I and Nikolaevskoe–II (Semenichenko and Shavkunov 1972; Semenichenko 1973, 1974; Boldin and Semenichenko 1976, 1977, 1978).

The rural settlement of Novogordeevskoe is situated near the Arsen’evka River and possesses two layers. During excavations of this site from 1972 to 1973 Russian archaeologists collected a number of artifacts and remains, including 5,500 animal bones or bone fragments. Semenichenko preserved bone materials from this site. By the end of 1980s, other Russian scholars indentified these bones (Alekseeva and Boldin 1989: 80). The ancient town of Novogordeevskoe is situated close to a village which bears the same name. This multilayer site includes two Bohai layers. Nikolaevskoe–I and Nikolaevskoe–II are sites which are located in Partizansk District. Russian scholars have been excavating both sites since the 1970s. As a result, archaeologists have collected rich materials that illustrate the economic activity and handicrafts of this population of Bohai people (E. V. Shavkunov et alii 1994).

On the basis of materials discovered by archaeological research in the 1960s and 1970s, V. A. Horev wrote a book on archeological sites in the Primorye Region that was published in 1978 and republished multiple times in the 2000s. In this book Horev collected information on all archaeological sites in the Primorye Region from the Neolithic to the Jurchen periods. In his entry for each site he provided information on the site’s location, name, who found it, when it existed, and so on. While there were some errors of course, information gathered in the 1980s and 1990s was used to correct mistakes in the subsequent editions of this book published in the 2000s. Mistakes aside, his book was the first monograph on archeological sites in the Primorye Region and contained important information on Bohai sites in the southern part of the Russian Far East. In contemporary Russian Bohai studies, the republished version of this book by Horev played a significant role because other Soviet archaeologists had not excavated some of the Bohai sites described in it in the 1970s.

The most challenging archaeological site was in Ussurijsk Town. Many Bohai and Jurchen sites were located there (Fedorov tried to excavate part of them), but a significant portion of them has been destroyed. Therefore Soviet archeologists actively excavated the many surviving Bohai sites in the area of the town.

So, as we can see, Bohai studies in the Soviet Union from the 1970s developed in two aspects: historical and archaeological. Soviet scholars produced a significant number of interesting publications, excavated many Bohai sites and analyzed East Asian annals, but political influence in some areas (for example, concerning the social system) hindered the development of the field of Bohai

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18 Semenichenko is a Soviet archaeologist. She took part in the excavation of many Mohe, Bohai, and Jurchen sites. Semenichenko retired recently.
studies from historical and ethnographical perspectives. In spite of this, by the 1970s, a base for the comparative study of Bohai from three sides (archaeology, history and ethnography) had been established, as had the foundation for osteological studies (Soviet specialists, who researched the bones of animals in the 1980s used materials from excavations conducted in the 1970). Moreover the Soviet government supported archeological expeditions in the Russian Far East, encouraging the discovery of new sites.

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19 We will consider these subjects in another article, “Osteological studies of archaeological materials from Bohai sites in Russia.”


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