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.² The study of actual Bohai sites in Russia began in 1870-1871, when the
Russian Geographic Society sent an expedition to the South Ussurijsk region³ led
by Peter Ivanovich Kafarov (Петр Иванович Кафаров, 1817-1878) (church rank
and name: archimandrite Palladij), a prominent historian of Asia.³ 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 Клавдиеевич 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, 1842-1

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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).