

Keyhole-shaped tombs in Korean Peninsula

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Introduction

The most representative type of archaeological burial remains during the period between the 3rd century and 6th century A.D. in Japan is the keyhole-shaped tomb. At present, archaeologists have found more than 5000 keyhole-shaped tomb scattered over a wide area from Kyusyu to Honsyuu. The largest of these measure 486m in length. The larger tombs measuring over 200m are mostly concentrated in the Kinki region which has been identified as the center of the ancient state of Yamato for this reason.

However in 1985 Dr Kang in-gu (姜仁求) caused a stir when he claimed that he had discovered keyhole-shaped tomb in the Korean peninsula at the tomb of Changgo-bong. There are several reasons why his find has caused such a sensation in not only in Korea but also among Japanese scholars.

The main part of this talk will be divided into three parts; First, I will describe the particular archaeological features of what a “Korean” keyhole-shaped tomb is; focusing on its burial distribution, its architecture and excavated remains. Second, I will give a brief historical background to why the archaeology of South Cholla province beginning with the early colonial period (1917-1918), when the first excavation were conducted on large urn burials concentrated in this region. Third, I will trace the development of burial system relying on the proliferation of archaeological excavation reports since the early 1980's. Finally, I will offer my analysis of the burial data that attempts to resolve the key issue of who are the owners of the keyhole-shaped tombs in Korean peninsula.

1 The features of keyhole-shaped tombs in Korean Peninsula

We have found 13 keyhole-shaped tombs in Korea, and six of these have been excavated. Here I will summarize briefly their key characteristics.

First, all the thirteen keyhole-shaped tombs were identified in South cholla province. Second, tombs are all surrounded by moats. Moreover we have found many “haniwa (埴輪)” like cylindrical potteries placed on top of these mounds. Ceramic analysis of the manufacturing techniques reveal that they were made in Korea peninsula did not come from Japan.

Third, these tombs also have corridor-style stone chambers, some of which the walls are painted with red coloring. These characteristics closely resemble corridor-style tombs in North Kyusyu dating the 5th and the 6th century.

Fourth, the contents of the tombs reveal as very mixed assemblage of materials including pottery types from South cholla province as well as Kaya and Japan. The most prestige goods, especially gilt-bronze ornaments are undoubtedly of Paekche origin. Based on these finds, archaeologists have dated these tombs from the latter half of 5th century to the first half of 6th century.

2 the history of controversial interpretations; Wa? Vs. Paekche? Vs local elite?

Dr. Kanig in-gu's theory that Korean keyhole-shaped tombs influenced the building of Japan's keyhole-shaped tombs can't be accepted since the oldest keyhole-shaped tombs in Japan are much earlier dating to the 3rd century. On the other hand, the majority of Japanese archaeologists have insisted that the Korean keyhole-shaped tombs were instead constructed by Japanese immigrants or invader. Most Korean archaeologists believe that these tombs were constructed by the local elite groups of South Cholla province. In order to understand the disagreements among Korean and Japanese archaeologist, I will provide a brief background to the history of archaeological research in South Cholla province.

During the colonial period, Japanese archaeologists working for the Governor-General Office of Chosen had a virtual monopoly over archaeological surveys, investigations, research excavations, registration and preservation of Korean remains and relics. The first systematic archaeological survey of Korea was launched in 1916. In 1917 and 1918, Seiichi Yatui (谷井濟一) excavated tomb No.9 at Naju Sinchon-ni in South Cholla province. This tomb has a large square mound, measuring over 30m in length and 5m in height. He uncovered 11 giant jar coffins capable of placing an adult in supine position, along with abundant relics, mostly from one of the giant jar coffin No.2 (乙棺). Japanese archaeologists noticed that some of the relics, especially a crown and a couple of shoes made out of gilt-bronzes, and pommeled shaped iron swords were similar to the kinds of relics excavated in Japan. They proposed that the potteries found in this tomb were similar to Japanese stone-ware pottery, sueki (須惠器), while the cylindrical potteries were similar to Japanese Haniwa. In 1999, Korean national research institute of cultural properties excavated Tomb No.9 at Sinchon-ni again, and row of cylindrical potteries on top of the mound. However they differ significantly from

the haniwa in shape and manufacturing techniques.

In this excavation report, Seiichi Yatsui concluded that this tomb was made by Japanese, because the features of this tomb were similar to the remains excavated from Japanese tombs. This excavation is the only site that Japanese archaeologists have linked to the Japanese military outpost of Mimana or Imna. Relics excavated from Shinchon-ni were displayed along with Japanese relics in the museum of the Governor-General Office of Chosen.

In the Post-war period, South Korea's most prominent archaeologist, Kim Wol-lyong reexamined tomb No.9 at Shinchon-ni. His opinion was that giant jar coffins were unique to South Cholla province, because his 1963 excavations of the cemetery of jar coffins (2nd century B.C.) at Shinchang-ni site in Kwanju. Kim's position was that some features of tomb No.9 at Shinchong-ni had exerted a great influence on tombs in Japan. His assertion that the great jar coffins belonged to Paekche, was accepted because most Korean historians thought Paekche's territorial range had spread as far south as the southern coast of South Cholla province, during the reign of Kunch'ogo-wang (latter half of the 4th century).

Since 1980's, Korean archaeologists have discovered many more cemeteries of giant jar coffins in South Cholla province. We know now the tombs with giant jar coffins are widely distributed over Yongsan river area and the western and southern coastal region of South Cholla province. And through the chronological studies of giant jar coffins, it is demonstrated that giant jar coffins were popularly used from the 3rd century to the first half of the 6th century. Through the archaeological data, the archaeologists of South Cholla province began to insist that elite group who made the tombs with giant jar coffins maintained their traditional identity and political power, and they belonged to Mahan, not to Paekche. It is very interesting that this interpretation is popular with not only archaeologists but citizen in South Cholla province, and some of them insist that the Korean government must make the national museum of Mahan in South Cholla province.

For a hundred years, many archaeologists have studied the tombs of three dynastic periods in South Cholla province, but their interpretations don't have agreed with each other. I think that this difference of the interpretations is related with colonialism, nationalism, and regionalism in Korea and Japan. And the Discovery of keyhole-shaped tombs in South Cholla province complicated the solution of this disagreement.

3 the development of burial system in the south-west part of the Korean Peninsula

Still now, many Korean and Japanese scholars have concentrated on the issue of who are the owners of the keyhole-shaped tombs in Korean peninsula. But we must resolve the another issue of why the keyhole-shaped tombs were constructed in South Cholla province from the latter half of 5th century to the first half of 6th century. Then I will begin by providing an overview of the long term development of the burial system in the south-west part of the Korean Peninsula beginning from the first century A.D. to the end of the 7th century A.D. I have divided its archaeological development into three phases. In terms of geographical areas, I have concentrated on sites located in the following three delta regions of the Han River, Kum River, and Yongsan River which have yielded the most archaeological materials. My analysis addresses patterns of regional development in burial systems and accompanying changes in the types of burial goods. My initial findings reveal that there were indeed active exchanges and interactions amongst the different social groups spread out through this wide region in the early centuries A.D.

Phase 1 of Development (c. 1-3 rd century A.D.)

The Kum river region between the 1st and 3rd century B.C. is regarded by most archaeologists as the center of the “Korean slim-dagger cultural sphere.” However, with the establishment of the Nangnang commandery in the Taedong river basin (present capital of P'yongyang) in 108 B.C., we notice a corresponding decrease not only in the number of sites in the Kum and Yongsan delta areas but also a conspicuous lack of Nangnang related remains. On the other hand, in the provinces of North and South Kyongsang much further away from P'yongyang, we find an abundance of bronze vessels, Han mirrors, coins, and iron weapons reminiscent of Nangnang remains. This noticeable discrepancy in the number of remains and sites between the two regions could be the result of the relative lack of excavations in the Paekche regions but also we have to consider that it might indicate that there could have been considerable political pressure by Han commandery administrators who had banned the trade in certain items close to the Nangnang regions (Park 2001a).

Up till now, I have mentioned sites that have been dated to the 2nd and 3rd century A.D. which constitute the first phase of Paekche development. My preliminary conclusions are the following:

First, each river area even at this early stage demonstrates very different burial architecture. The Han River area is distinguished by stone-piled mounds about 20 m in length which vary in shape from round, oval, or square. The Kum river area has burials made up of rectangular shaped moats surrounding four sides of an elevated platform. Inside this structure, a wooden coffin or a wooden chamber is placed and a mound built on top of it. The Yongsan river valley area, North Cholla province, and the southern coastal regions of South Ch'ungch'ong province, reveal square shaped moats with mounds on top. A main burial chamber is then constructed inside this mound.

The above described areas demonstrate differences in burial forms and structural features such as the presence or absence of coffins and/or chambers. It is actually difficult to ascertain any common features shared amongst the three regions. The Kum river area especially reveals graves that show distinct differences in the main burial chamber construction as well as the types of burial goods found. Considering such regional variations, these sites may have belonged to the many small kuk (states) mentioned in the Samgukji Wiji records of Mahan.

Secondly, the analysis of burial forms and grave goods indicate that the emergence of social stratification at this time. When we study the Kum river burials, depending on the presence or absence of Nangnang related materials (ornaments and iron objects) indicating accessibility to foreign trade goods, we can estimate the existence of at least three levels of social classes (Ham and Kim 1995).

In the Yongsan river area, though most of the burials are around 10 m in length, there are also some which exceed 20 m in length. The differences in the size of burials can also be an indicator of the social status of the deceased (Yoshii 2001a). At the same time, we can also find cemeteries where all kinds of graves are found mixed together without any distinctive architectural features or patterns. In such cases, we cannot distinguish any one outstanding burial in terms of burial size or prestige goods.

Thirdly, at this stage we can assume that the geographic spread of goods and materials reveal an active network of trade and exchange either directly or indirectly with the Nangnang commandery. In the Han river and the Kum river burials, Han style bells with inscribed names as well as small iron swords with round pommel handles have been excavated. At this stage, I do not believe that the archaeological evidence demonstrate the existence of one single group that could have dominated trade with Nangnang. The Samgukji confirm my archaeological findings since the records indicate that those groups living in the southern half of

the Korean peninsula had to travel to the commandery of Nangnang in order to receive Han items of clothing indicating rank and status,.

On the other hand, pottery types manufactured in the Yongsan and Kum river regions can be found spread throughout the Southern regions from Pusan, the southern coast, Taemado (Tshushima) and even as far as Northern Kyushu (Yoshii 2002b) . When we look closely at these sites remains, type artifacts from the Yongsan and Kum river regions are discovered together in a mixed –assemblage with local and Nangnang potteries. These mixed-assemblage remains from the southern part of the Korean peninsula indicate the establishment of a vast trading network engaged in exchanging iron goods that encompassed a wide area of the Yongsan and Kum river valleys and extending as far as Kyushu.

Phase 2 of Development (4-5 century A.D.)

During the latter part of the 3rd century A.D. with the declining influence of the Nangnang commandery, the southern part of the Korean peninsula went through enormous changes. As Prof. Park Sun-bal has pointed out, the archaeology of the Han River region displays major shifts in the kinds of archaeological remains. At this time, we see the emergence of pottery types in imitation of the bronze and the Chinese ceramic vessels. These potteries can be regarded as the proto-types foreshadowing the emergence of “Paekche” pottery dating to a later period after the capital had moved south to Kongju and Puyo. At about the same time, we can observe major social and technological changes with the rise of monumental tombs such as large stone –piled structures and wooden chambered mounds. Sokch'on-dong tombs found south of Seoul are the most famous examples that have been excavated over the decades. The excavations of earthen fortresses in the vicinity of these stone-piled tombs indicate that southern Seoul was probably the first location of an early Paekche royal capital. Excavated fortress sites such as P'ungnap and Mongch'on have also revealed an abundance of Chinese Han pottery. Park's 4th century estimated dates for Paekche state formation have been criticized by textual historians as being too late. However, the observed major shifts in the archaeological record do indicate that they constitute new evidence for understanding the processes of state formation in the Han River region.

These changes in the Han River basin seem to have had repercussions in the Kum River regions further south. For example, burials dated to the 4th century A.D. demonstrate overall decrease in burial size as well as the disappearance of the moat feature. We also uncover burial goods typical of later Paekche finds such as

polished grey stone-ware, gold accessories, and pommeled shaped iron swords. The abundance of Chinese ceramic finds spread out over a wide area in this region could also signify that the Paekche ruling class now possessed a monopoly over the redistribution of prestige goods imported directly from China. From the above archaeological evidence, we can postulate that after the 4th century A.D. the Kum river regions became incorporated into and were dominated by a centrally organized Paekche ruling apparatus. Thus, the local groups could only obtain foreign prestige goods handed out by Paekche.

During the latter half of the 4th century A.D. in the Yongsan Valley regions, we see the appearance of a burial style unique to this region in the form of giant jar coffins (onggwan). Even the burial goods do not show any evidence that these people had much direct contact with the Paekche central rulers. We also do not see any of the large scale stone-piled mounds found in the Han River basin but instead we find many concentrated groups of jar coffin burials placed inside small mounds scattered throughout the southern regions.

At this phase, the pottery types manufactured in the Yongsan river region can be found in North Kyushu and Kinki region in Japan, where was the center of Yamato kingdom. And "Sueki" stone-ware pottery manufactured from 5th century in Kinki bear close affinities with the Yongsan River finds. Furthermore, from Chungmak-dong site in the north cholla province, we found out abundant ritual relics related with local group, Paekche, Kaya, and Japanese Island together. The distributions of such archaeological finds indicate that this stage the social groups living in the South-western Korea had active trade relations with the Japanese island. The histories of the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki document that the King of Yamato had begun diplomatic exchange with Paekche around the late 4th century A.D. In Japan, we also do not find any archaeological evidence that indicate any direct links with the Han river valley so we have to assume that at this stage, the interactions between Paekche and Wa were mediated by local powers centered in the south part of the Korean peninsula and specifically concentrated along the Yongsan river valley.

Phase 3 of Development (6-7 Century A.D)

With the transfer of the royal capital to Ungjin in 475 A.D. we observe new developments in burial style in the emergence of the corridor style stone chambered tombs indicative of the central Paekche ruling elite. At about the same time, we also find such tombs appearing in the provincial areas. The Kum river burial structure

and goods begin to imitate the same styles, while we see the disappearance of earlier forms (Yoshii 1991).

On the other hand, along the Yongsan River we see a sudden appearance of key-holed shaped tombs and square shaped tombs measuring up to 30 m in length. The burial architecture of these tombs closely resembles those found in Northern Kyushu in the structure of main burial chamber as well as the shape of the mounds. On the hand, the burial goods such as gilt-bronze accessories and pommel shaped swords indicate that they were produced by the central Paekche rulers. At the same time, the traditional burial practices of giant jar coffins remain in use. The fact that these two major burial systems co-existed side by side in the Yongsan river valley demonstrates that the cultural complexities in this region reveal a continuing pattern of wide area of trade and cultural exchange that had incorporated both the newly arrived Paekche rulers' culture as well as the imported stylistic elements from rapidly evolving Japanese kofun societies across the sea.

By the mid 6th century, we observe the emergence and the spread of the new corridor style stone chamberd tombs, Nungsan-ri type. These tombs can be divided into several social classes based on the analysis of the structure of the architecture of the stone chamber, the absence or presence of decorations on the wooden coffins, and the kind of metals (gold, silver or gilt-bronze) used for the crown decorations. It is highly likely that the burial stratification reflected the many levels of bureaucratic ranks as documented in Chinese textual sources. Thus, from the middle of the 6th century, Paekche burial types throughout the area demonstrate a hierarchical social organization headed by a centralized bureaucracy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will attempt to integrate my broad overview of the development of the burial system in South Cholla province from an early Korean historical perspective.

In phase1, the situation generally coincides with the descriptions in the Three Han societies as recorded in the Hanjon Records of the Han section of the Weizhi. However, as we can see from the variety of burial forms and remains, I believe that at this stage we cannot talk about a unified statehood or uniform culture during the time of the Mahan. On the other hand, I think that a vast trading network engaged in exchanging iron goods was established at this phase encompassing a wide area of the Yongsan and Kum river valleys and extending as far as Kyushu.

In Phase 2, we can clearly state that we now see the rise of a distinctive

Paekche central ruling class who was able to initiate direct contact with Southern China, bypassing the Nangnang commandery to the North. By monopolizing the lucrative trade route, it played the role of the chief redistributor of imported prestige goods for the surrounding local elite groups. At this time, we also see find largescale burials in the Silla region as well as in the Kinki region of Japan. The archaeological evidence for the rise of states in Northeast Asia therefore occurred simultaneously in a wide geographic region all over the Korean peninsula and Japan. The emergence of states in the Korean peninsula must be understood in the context of major geopolitical shifts of power in Northeast Asia when a chaotic situation was prevailing in central China, brought on by the fall of the Han Empire, the rise of nomadic empires, and the warring factions of the Six Dynasties.

Even though at this time, the Yongsan river valley unlike the Han River does not exhibit distinct signs of increasing social stratification, member of the local elite could construct their unique giant jar coffin tombs. We continue to see the development of trade and interaction over a wide area encompassing Kaya, Kyushu and the Japanese islands. And I think that the local elite could maintain its unique burial system during this phase, because they mediated the interactions between Paekche and Wa. It is highly unlikely that such a level of material and technological exchange could have been sustained for so long without the existence of social groups of a similar level in Kyushu.

In Phase 3, especially after moving the royal capital to Ungjin in 475 A.D. these regions begin to abandon their distinctive regional burial forms with the spread of the new corridor-style Paekche elite tombs. A similar phenomenon occurs at the same time in Silla and the Japanese islands. The uniformity of burial culture is a key factor in determining that there now exists a centralized state entity dominating the regional polities. We must notice that keyhole-shaped tombs and square shaped mounded tombs appeared in the transition from phase 2 to phase 3.

The majority of Japanese archaeologists have insisted that the Korean keyhole-shaped tombs were constructed by Japanese immigrants or invader from the historical perspective based on Kojiki and Nihon Shoki. But through their nationalistic perspective, they can't explain the two issues of why keyhole-shaped tombs were constructed in South Cholla province from the latter half of the 5th century to the first half of the 6th century, and why square shaped mounded tombs were also constructed at the same time. On the other hand, some Korean archaeologists, especially those studying South Cholla province, believe that

keyhole-shaped tombs and square shaped mounded tombs indicate the state formation of Mahan. Bud I can't find any archaeological evidence to prove the rise of a distinctive central ruling elite group in South Cholla province during that time.

I think that when the Paekche ruling elite began to expand their territorial control to the South Cholla province, some elements of the local elite incorporated both the culture of the newly arrived Paekche rulers as well as the imported stylistic elements from the rapidly evolving Japanese Kofun societies across the sea, for the sake of keeping their status. And the variety of very mixed assemblages including mound shape, burial structure, and burial goods reflect the relationship among the owners of these tombs and several neighboring groups, especially the Paekche ruling elite and the local elite in North Kyushu. Recently some scholars insist that the owners of the keyhole-shaped tombs in South Cholla province were bureaucrats of Paekche who were born in the Japanese islands. Bud I can't accept this hypothesis, because keyhole-shaped tombs in the Japanese islands were constructed by only a few elite living in Japanese Island, and some of them had emigrated from the Korean peninsula. The traditional burial practices, especially giant jar coffins indicate that the local elite constructed the tombs at this time. We can guess that the local elite in South Cholla province became bureaucrats of Paekche after the mid 6th century, because corridor style stone chambers of Nungsan-ri type were constructed in the mound of tomb No.3 at Pogam-ri. And the Chonghe-jin (淸海鎮) fortress built by Chang Po-go (張保臯) and the sunken ship at Shin'an (新安沈沒船) indicate that the local elite in South Cholla province continued to join the trade and interaction all over East Asia after the Three Kingdoms period.

In the Postwar era, strong nationalistic sentiments in both Koreas as well as Japan have hindered a rigorous analysis of archaeological data over a wide region. This paper is my attempt to overcome such twentieth century ethnocentric biases and offer my perspective on long term pre-historic/proto-historic archaeological developments, a perspective that is not confined to the current narrow interpretations imposed by political borders and national boundaries.