

Editorial Note

The Tomb of King Muryeong—Providing the Impetus for Overcoming Misunderstandings of Baekje History

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The royal fortress of Baekje, Sabiseong Fortress, was captured by Silla and Tang forces in 660 CE. Baekje's King Uija (義慈王 r. 641–660) and many of his noble subjects were taken as prisoners to Tang China, and Baekje's former lands came to be ruled by Silla and the Tang Dynasty. Many of Baekje's remaining population resisted and mounted a revival movement, but even this failed completely in 663 CE. As a result, the kingdom of Baekje was erased from history, and the Baekje people began to live as Silla people or left their homeland and crossed the sea to emigrate to Japan, where they pioneered new lives for themselves.

At the end of the ninth century CE, a country called Later Baekje was established by Gyeon Hwon, but this was only for political purposes and was not a true restoration of Baekje. After the chaotic period of the Later Three Kingdoms period, the Goryeo Dynasty was founded, followed by the Joseon Dynasty, in which the beginnings of Korea's modern history can be traced. Even after modern historical research perspectives were adopted, only the mighty Goguryeo of the northern lands and Silla, which had achieved unification, were recognized as the protagonists in the historical narrative of ancient Korea. Baekje, which was defeated in its competition with Silla, was relegated to a supporting role in Korea's history alongside Gaya, which had

failed to consolidate into a powerful ancient state.

The reason behind Baekje's collapse was the appearance of the unified dynasties of Sui and Tang that brought an end to the long-standing political division of China. It was never due to bad governance or the greed of a single person, such as Baekje's King Uija. However, after the fall of Baekje, the notion that Baekje's demise was due to the faulty actions of King Uija (with his 3,000 court ladies) became the dominant view in the minds of many. Nakhwaam Rock in Buyeo came to symbolize the tragic court ladies who threw themselves off the rock when the capital fortress, Sabiseong, was captured. Naturally, negative images, such as incompetence, destruction, and sadness, came to imbue the very idea of the Baekje Kingdom.

This negative attitude also influenced research on Baekje's history. The number of articles related to Baekje in the key historical sources for ancient Korean history, such as the *Samguk sagi* (三國史記, History of the Three Kingdoms) and the *Samguk yusa* (三國遺事, Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), is small compared to those for Goguryeo and Silla. Data for the study of Goguryeo's history are relatively plentiful due to the Chinese sources that mention Goguryeo and the information on everyday customs and the spiritual world that can be obtained from mural tombs. Silla's history is enriched by many accounts of monks and

Hwarang warriors that appear in the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa*. In addition, the splendid artifacts excavated from Silla tombs have long attracted the attention of archaeologists and art historians. On the other hand, archaeological data relating to Baekje mainly consisted of broken roof tile fragments. Such a lack of historical records and archaeological data acted to hinder active research on Baekje's history.

The opportunity to overcome these difficulties was provided by the Tomb of King Muryeong (武寧王, r. 501–523), which was discovered by chance in the summer of 1971. The final resting place of King Muryeong of Baekje and his Queen Consort had never been robbed and therefore was entirely intact. It has thus played a crucial role in solving many mysteries of Baekje's history, which were previously obscured or misunderstood, and in readjusting the perspective from which Baekje's history is viewed.

The Academic Value of the Tomb of King Muryeong

King Muryeong was born in 462 CE, ascended to the throne of Baekje in 501 CE, and died in 523 CE. His place of birth, his whereabouts prior to ascending to the throne, and whether his father was Baekje's King Gaero (蓋鹵王, r. 455–475), King Dongseong (東城王, r. 479–501), or King Gaero's younger brother, Gonji, are all uncertain. The discovery of the Tomb of King Muryeong in 1971—where two stone plaques containing the epitaphs of the King and Queen, proof of land purchase for the burial, and characters of the Chinese zodiac that represented different directions were discovered—has played a key role in solving some of the mysteries surrounding King Muryeong. It was also possible to clearly establish that the King passed away in 523 CE and was buried in the present tomb in 525 CE and that the Queen passed away in 527 CE and was laid to rest beside the King in 529 CE.

Full-fledged research on the Baekje tombs of the Ungjin period became possible after issues, such as the structure of the royal tombs, construction technology, and the production of bricks, were clarified through studies on the Tomb of King Muryeong. In addition, studies undertaken on the various personal ornaments discovered in the tomb, such as crowns, earrings, belts, and shoes worn by the King and Queen, have made it possible to evaluate the superior nature of Baekje's crafts technology.

Research on the structure and the burials in the Tomb

of King Muryeong has had a significant influence not only on studies of the Ungjin period (475–538), but for the preceding Hanseong period (?–475) and the later Sabi period (538–660). The discovery of such a tomb in which it was possible to identify the exact date of construction, and which yielded high-end ornaments that were not disturbed by grave robbers (of which the latest possible date of use was known) was a miracle indeed for the archeology of Northeast Asia.

The structure of the Tomb of King Muryeong, which was constructed using thousands of bricks, was influenced by the contemporaneous brick chamber tombs of China's Southern Dynasties. Given that all of the emperors' tombs of the Southern Dynasties discovered up to that date were subjected to grave robbing, the results of research on the chronology of the Tomb of King Muryeong and the status of the interred deceased have subsequently been used to provide a standard for research on the tomb culture of China's Southern Dynasties.

The crown ornaments for the King and Queen recovered from the Tomb of King Muryeong are unique in form. In particular, they are entirely different from Silla's crown ornaments. The flame motif of the King's crown ornament is similar to those found on Goguryeo tomb murals, which suggests a possible link with the regions of Central Asia. The motif of the Queen's crown ornament, consisting of a lotus bud blooming in a flower vase, was also used in southern China and India, indicating that an East–West maritime exchange took place.

The dominant opinion on the sword decorated with a dragon motif, which the deceased King wore in death, was that it was produced in China's Southern Dynasties. However, advances in research on Baekje metalwork have revealed that it was, in fact, manufactured in Baekje. It has also been possible to trace how dragon motif decorated swords with ring-shaped pommels gradually spread to Dae Gaya and the Japanese Archipelago.

In the case of the celadon vessels, their provenance was proven to be China's Southern Dynasties, whereas the provenance of most of the thousands of glass beads was identified, through scientific analysis, to be Southeast Asia and India.

The King and Queen were laid to rest in the grand wooden coffins covered with black lacquer and adorned with gilt-bronze decorations. Analysis of the species of wood used for the coffins has revealed that it came from the Japanese Umbrella Pine which grows only on the Japanese Archipelago. The reason why Baekje royalty of the Ungjin period imported tons of wooden material from the Japanese Archipelago to make the coffins remains an unsolved mystery. However, the fact that the coffins placed in the Donghachong Tomb in the Neungsan-ri region

of Buyeo (known to have been the royal burial grounds of the Sabi period) and the Ssangreung Tomb in Iksan (believed to have been the tomb of King Mu (武王, r. 600–641)) were also confirmed to be made of the wood of Japanese Umbrella Pine demonstrates that further investigations into the relationship between Baekje royalty and groups residing on the Japanese Archipelago during the Ungjin and Sabi periods are required.

Due to these issues, academic conferences and volumes on the Tomb of King Muryeong have been plentiful compared to other topics. The year 2021 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the Tomb of King Muryeong and the 1,500th anniversary of King Mu of Baekje's diplomatic initiative to "re-emerge as a strong state" and bring an end to years of stagnancy. Special exhibitions hosted by the Gongju National Museum, as well as numerous academic conferences, have allowed extensive research on the value of the Tomb of King Muryeong to take place.

Introduction to Each Paper

This issue represents a compilation of papers that were originally presented at an academic conference held to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the Tomb of King Muryeong. They have subsequently been reworked. This issue comprises a total of four papers, the contents of which are as follows.

Cultural Exchange and International Interaction in East Asia as Seen through the Tomb of King Muryeong (by Kwon Ohyoung)

One of the many values of the Tomb of King Muryeong is that it presents vivid evidence of exchange, not only centered around the Korean Peninsula, but also across the whole of Northeast Asia, including China and Japan. The fact that not only the tomb's structure and artifacts but also the underlying perceptions of the afterlife and Buddhist ideology were shared throughout Northeast Asia can be regarded as proof of this fact. The results of the recently undertaken scientific analysis also revealed that the artifacts from the Tomb of King Muryeong include objects that were originally made in Northeast Asia and even beyond in Southeast and South Asia.

Research on the Excavation and Investigation of the Tomb of King Muryeong (by Kang Wonpyo)

The excavation of the Tomb of King Muryeong in 1971 faced many shortcomings due to the circumstances and resulting

limitations of the period during which the excavation took place. The loss of precise information on the context of the numerous artifacts has led to great difficulties in restoring the various ornaments and in interpreting the use of individual artifacts. In order to overcome these difficulties, Gongju National Museum has been continuously conducting research on the artifacts from the excavation during the fifty years since it took place. As a result, it was possible to identify new artifacts that were not recognized at the time of excavation, and to correct wrong information about some of the artifacts.

The problems and limitations exposed through the excavation of the Tomb of King Muryeong provided the Korean archaeological community with a great opportunity to improve. The excavation ensured that the investigation of the Silla royal tombs in Gyeongju, which took place from the early 1970s onwards, was carried out systematically. In this regard, the excavation of ancient royal tombs in Korea can be divided into those that took place before the discovery of the Tomb of King Muryeong and those that took place afterwards.

Cultural Exchange among the Three Kingdoms as Revealed by Artifacts from the Tomb of King Muryeong (by Lee Hansang)

The international nature of the Tomb of King Muryeong can also be observed in the adjacent tomb cultures of Gaya and Silla. The patterns and techniques that were created or advanced in constructing the Tomb of King Muryeong later spread to neighboring Gaya and Silla. The use of stone chamber tombs with tunnel-shaped ceilings in Goryeong, along with the custom of laying to rest married couples side by side, can be regarded as part of the influence of the tomb culture of the Ungjin period, representative of which is the Tomb of King Muryeong. The influence of the artifacts from the Tomb of King Muryeong can also be clearly observed in Dae Gaya's earrings, swords with ring-shaped pommels, and metal vessels. Conversely, it is also possible to confirm that Silla's metal craftsmanship influenced Baekje's technological manufacturing during the Ungjin period.

Critical Review on the Metalworks in the Tomb of King Muryeong (by Joo Kyeongmi)

Although there have been debates on the metalworks from the Tomb of King Muryeong regarding their place of manufacture, inferences on manufacturing technology based on detailed observations of artifact form and comparative studies with similar items from neighboring regions, have slowly shed light on issues of provenance. Nevertheless, there are still areas where research is lacking. The most severe of which are the bronze

mirrors. Three bronze mirrors were recovered from the Tomb of King Muryeong, which is an interesting fact given that the custom of depositing bronze mirrors as grave goods has rarely been observed in Baekje tombs. Due to this reason, comparative research has been undertaken on similar examples from China and Japan in order to ascertain the place of manufacture of the bronze mirrors, but a full-scale review has yet to be conducted. It is suggested in this paper that, based on detailed observations, it is likely that the bronze mirrors from the Tomb of King Muryeong were made by a Baekje craftsman.

The Openness and Dynamism of Korean Ancient Culture

It cannot be said that the full picture of the Tomb of King Muryeong and its excavated artifacts can be obtained through the four papers introduced in this volume. This is because the amount of information provided by the site is, indeed, enormous. Although fifty years have already passed since the studies on the Tomb of King Muryeong and its excavated artifacts first began, it is expected that new research will continue to take place, based on various perspectives and utilizing new methodologies and technology.

In the early days, research was driven by the visual observations of textual and material evidence undertaken by historians and archaeologists. Over time, however, scientific techniques were adopted to explore issues of production and technology. The emergence of new scientific methods and developments in conservation technology are expected to steer research on the artifacts from the Tomb of King Muryeong in an entirely new direction.

For example, in the early days of research, the main focus was on understanding the nature of foreign exchange with Chinese and Japanese regions through the study of artifacts. However, as a result of the confirmation that many of the glass beads from the tomb were imports that were produced in India or Southeast Asia, there have been changes in the direction of research. Research interests have now expanded beyond Northeast Asia to encompass Southeast and South Asia as well.

Baekje, during the reign of King Muryeong, competed fiercely with Goguryeo while at the same time maintaining friendly relations with the neighboring polities of Gaya, Silla, Wa of the Japanese Archipelago, and China's Southern Dynasties. Advanced science, technology, and ideology, rather

than slaughter and warfare, were exchanged between China, the Korean Peninsula, and the Japanese Archipelago. This played an important role in enhancing the overall cultural level of Northeast Asia and evening out large discrepancies between cultures. A cultural highway, in a sense, was laid out.

In this regard, the value of the Tomb of King Muryeong should be evaluated from the perspective of Northeast Asia and even East Asia, and not be limited to its relevance to ancient Korean history. Rather than emphasizing the tomb's role as a representation of the excellence and uniqueness of ancient Korean culture, the tomb should be evaluated as a vivid example of the value of cultural sharing and peaceful exchange in Northeast Asia. It is here that the outstanding universal value of the many heritage sites included in the Baekje Historic Areas, including the tomb of King Muryeong, should be found.

