The Yemaek Cousins in the Southern Peninsula:
Paekche, Silla and Kaya

Wontack Hong
Professor, Seoul University

States of the Ye-maek Tungus were initially formed through the confederation of clan leaders and tribal chiefs, as shown by the five tribe federation in Puyeo and Koguryeo, and the six tribe federation in Silla and Kaya. There were eight large clans in Paekche as well. The loose tribal confederations evolved into centralized monarchies of hereditary kingship. The organization of a tribal federation resulted in a hierarchy of hereditary official ranks and the institution of council of nobles to deliberate important matters.

The Ye-maek people believed in shamanism. The use of such a title as Cha-cha-ung (chief shaman) to designate the title of kings in old Silla reflects the influence of the shamanism (see Lee and deBary, 1997, p. 29). Buddhism was introduced to Koguryeo in 372, to Paekche in 384, and to Silla in 527. During its dissemination, Buddhism absorbed shamanist beliefs.

According to the Dongyi-zhuan, there were 78 states in the Three Han (i.e., the old Chin) area, and their people bred horses, produced silk, and enjoyed drinking, singing and dancing. In the fifth month when the sowing has been finished, and also in the tenth month when the farm work is finished, they sacrifice to their ghosts, spirits and the Lord of Heaven. They sing and dance day and night without ceasing. In their
dancing, dozens of men form a line and, looking upward and downward as they stomp the ground, they move hands and feet in concert with a rhythm. Among these states, Paekche was in Ma-han area, Saro (Silla) was in Chin-han area, and Kuya (Kaya) was in Pyun-han area. Chin-han was the old Chin. The Dongyi-zhuan states that the Pyun-han people were adept at infantry warfare, and every one of those 12 Pyun-han states “also” had a king. The Dongyi-zhuan records that both the Chin-han and Pyon-han people practice horseriding, but somehow contends that the Ma-han people do not know horseriding and hence use horses only for immolation.1

The Dongyi-zhuan has told us that the Puyo people drink, sing and dance every day, alleging that, since every one keeps singing on the road, the sounds of singing can be heard all day long, and also that the Koguryeo people enjoy singing and dancing every night. It is now telling us that the Three Han people enjoy drinking, singing and dancing day and night.

The Chinese frontier officials stationed at the Le-lang and Dai-fang commanderies granted numerous independent tribal chiefs of peninsular walled-town states titular office and rank, official seals, ceremonial attire, and precious gifts of Chinese origin on an individual basis. Through the military outposts such as these, the Han Chinese court tried to convince the “barbarians” of the great material gains and prestige garnered from nominal submission. It was the traditional Han Chinese policy designed to discourage political union among petty tribal chiefs in “barbarian” lands and disrupt any possible unification movement among them.

The Dongyi-zhuan records that, by the late second century (c.146-89), the (Ye or Ye-mae) Han states became too strong to be effectively controlled by the Le-lang commandery, and as a result a large number of people defected to the Han states. The period specified corresponds to the reign of King Chogo (166-214) in Paekche.

Saro (Silla) in the Chin-han area was founded on the Kyung-ju plain by six native clans. The Kaya (Karak) federation emerged from the twelve Pyun-han walled-town states, but it never reached the same level of political centralization and territorial extension as Silla and Paekche. According to the Samguk-yusa, the (pre-Kaya) ancient title for the Pyun-han

1 三國志 卷三十 魏書 三十 羅丸鮮卑東夷傳 第三十 韓傳

馬韓在帶方之南 有三種 一曰馬韓 二曰辰韓 三曰弁韓 辰韓者 古之辰國也

馬韓在西… 伯濟國 … 桓靈之末(146-89)韓濊彊盛 郡縣不能制 民多流入韓國 建安中(196-220)公孫康分屯有縣以南荒地為帶方郡…景初中(237-9)明帝…越海定二郡 諸韓國臣賜加陽邑君印綬 …自服印綬衣幘千有餘人 …不知乘牛馬 牛馬盡於送死 … 常以五月下種葬 祭鬼神 綜聚歌舞 飲酒宴會 無休 其舞數十人俱起相隨 踏地低昂 手足相應 … 十月農功畢 亦復如之 信鬼神 國邑立一人主祭 天神 名之天君

辰韓傳 … 其言語不與馬韓同… 始有六國…

弁辰傳 … 狗邪國… 斯盧國 … 土地肥美 宜種五穀及稻 嚮蠶桑 … 乘駕牛馬 … 俗喜飲酒歌舞 有瑟 … 便步戰 兵仗與馬韓同…與辰韓雜居 亦有城郭 衣服居處與辰韓同 言語法俗相似… 十二國亦有王

2 欽定 滿洲源流考

卷首論旨 後漢書三韓傳謂 辰韓人兒生欲令頭匾押之以石夫兒初墮地豈堪以石押頭奇說甚悖於理 国朝旧俗兒生数日置臥具令兒仰寢其中久而腦骨自平頭形似匾斯乃習以自然無足為異辰韓或亦類… 曲之之解甚矣其妄也若夫三韓
In his edict commissioning the Researches on Manchu Origins (Man-zhou Yuan-liu Gao), the emperor Qian-long of Qing noted the confusion in the Chinese records over the names of the Three Hans. The Chinese historians simply had not known that “han” was a term for a leader. With only guesses to guide them, they had somehow come to the conclusion that “han” was a word for a lineage, a notion that “is not worth a moment’s attention.” Such crude usage, having once taken root, was very hard to dislodge. Qian-long offered another example of such crude usage. According to the History of the Later Han, the Chin-han people had the peculiar practice of using stones to flatten the skulls of their infants. [Dong-yi-zhuan also records that the Chin-han people used stones to flatten their infants’ skulls, and consequently their heads were all flat.] Emperor Qian-han people had the same custom. Regrettably for historians, they left no records of their customs so that their progeny might have an informed view of their traditions rather than engaging in the sort of groundless speculation that fueled in preposterous notions. The Manchus and their immediate predecessors in the Northeast, the emperor Qian-long went on to emphasize, had also been subjected to just such mistreatment in the Chinese records. During the Ming period in particular, “propagandists of the most scandalous inclinations picked over every word, every line, every paragraph, with no object other than to defame.” The scholars of the time, after all, had been only dogs barking in the service of their masters (see Crossley, 1999, pp. 301-2). 

The Qing rulers believed not only that the imperial Aisin (Golden) Gioro lineage of the Qing dynasty were of the same people as the imperial Jin (Golden) Ruzhens, but also that the founder of the Jin dynasty had originally come from Silla.
and, consequently, the Silla royal surname “Golden” became their dynastic name.

Earthen pits containing iron shields, weapons and tools, Former Han Dynasty mirrors, lacquered knife sheathes and bronze artifacts dated to about 100 AD were found in the Kyung-ju area. As far as the early Paekche and Silla are concerned, however, the absence of more impressive archeological evidence of elite culture (in the form of, say, large mounded tombs and prestige grave goods), and also the absence of any systematic records in the Chinese dynastic chronicles, have led many historians to believe that the third century was still a formative period during which the Paekche and Silla were progressing toward full-fledged (spatially-defined, not racially-defined) nation states from walled-town states. Many historians indeed regard the period prior to 300 AD as the Proto Three Kingdom Period.

The southeastern peninsula possessed fertile land with rich deposits of iron ore and sufficient rainfall for rice cultivation. The Pyun-han people had been cultivating rice and steaming it in Mumun (and later in stoneware) pottery for nearly two millennia when they at last crossed over the sea c. 300 BC to commence the Yayoi Era on the Japanese islands. According to the Dongyi-zhuan, the Pyun-han people had supplied iron ingots to the Wa people [i.e., their Yayoi cousins]. There seems to have been a heavy traffic of comings and goings between the Pyun-han people in the Nak-tong River basin and their cousins in northern Kyūshū throughout the Yayoi period.

Social stratification of the southern coastal societies into elite and commoner categories is evident in the construction of large tomb mounds (namely the Ko-ryung one with 32 meters in diameter) built on the ridges, the practice of immolation (of both human and horse), and the burial of prestigious grave goods such as gilt-bronze crowns, ring-pommeled swords, and earrings in the main stone-lined pit-chambers and iron armor in the accessory chambers. The various archeological artifacts (including horse trappings, riveted iron helmet and cuirass, horse armor, iron ingots, iron tools, stoneware, vessels, knives and arrowheads) excavated from the tombs of the Kaya rulers further suggest a remarkable military strength and material affluence of

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4 Barnes (2001: 86)
Iron body armors and helmets (for both man or horse) dated to the 4th century were excavated at the Bok-cheon-dong and Yang-dong-ri (貝洞里 Kim-hae) sites. Those excavated at the Chil-san-dong (七山洞 Kim-hae), Ok-jeon (玉田 Hap-cheon), and Do-hang-ri (道項里 Ham-an) sites are dated to c.350-450 (see NRICP, 2001).


In the Japanese islands, a few helmets and cuirasses formed of vertical iron plates tied together with leather thongs have been found in the Early Tomb Period (c.300-375) sites, and then there began to appear the cuirass made of iron plates sewn together horizontally. Riveting replaced leather binding as a means of fastening the pieces of a cuirass or helmet together only after c. 425. A new type of visored helmet became popular (until about 500 when leather-bound lamellar armor began to replace the visored helmet and cuirasses of all types). According to Farris (1998: 75-6), “lamellar armor, the visored helmet, and riveting all came from the peninsula.” Barnes (2001: 142) notes that: a “riveted vertical-plated cuirass has been recovered from Bok-cheon-dong tomb No. 46, dated to the 4th century; if this dating is accurate, this is the earliest incidence of riveting in either Korea or Japan.”

Many Japanese historians, however, try to explain the discovery of iron armor and helmets in “the 5th century” tombs on the Japanese islands as proof of subjugation of “the 4th century” helmeted and armored peninsular warriors by the then-bareheaded, naked, insular warriors, led by the ghost of 3rd century Dongyi-zhuan queen, Pimihu.