Paekche: An Offshoot of the Puyeo-Koguryeo in Ma-han Land

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The Samguk-sagi records that Chu-mong came down from the Northern Pyueo to the Chol-bon Pyueo area (around the Hun-Yalu river valleys) to found the Koguryeo dynasty, and also that a son of Chu-mong and his followers came down to the Han River basin area to found the Paekche Kingdom. The majority of the Paekche population was apparently composed of the Ma-han people. The Paekche rulers had maintained the court ritual of presenting sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, and also to the shrine of Tong-myung, the legendary founder of both Puyeo and Koguryeo (identified as Chu-mong by the Samguk-sagi who was the father of Onjo, the official founder of Paekche kingdom). Paekche later moved its capital further south to Sabi at the Kum River basin area in 538, calling itself, even briefly, the Southern Puyeo.

According to the Dongyi-zhuan, a large number of Han Chinese was taken prisoner by the Han people sometime between 17-19 AD. It was during the reign of King Onjo (18 BC-28 AD), the founder of the Paekche kingdom. The Dongyi-zhuan further records that the allied forces of Le-lang and Dai-fang commanderies (under the dominion of Wei) launched a large scale attack against the Han River basin area in 246. In the ensuing battle, the governor of Dai-fang was killed.¹ It was during the reign of King Koi (234-86) in Paekche. By the mid-third century, Paekche seems to have been actively expanding and consolidating its power base around this area. This attack by the Le-lang and Dai-fang forces was
apparently to disrupt and prevent the unification of tribal chiefdoms under the emerging leadership of the Paekche. The Dongyi-zhuan, however, simply records that Paekche was one of the Ma-han states in the Three Han area.

In 260, King Koi appointed six ministers to handle specified administrative functions, established sixteen grades of official rank, and prescribed colors for official dress in accordance with rank. In 262, King Koi decreed that officials who accepted bribes or practiced extortions would be expelled from office after paying a three-fold penalty. The king received his subjects in majestic attire. Such a conspicuous performance by King Koi, as was recorded in the Samguk-sagi, coupled with his military exploits against the Le-lang and Dai-fang allied forces, seems to have made the Zhou-shu record him (K'iu-yi) as “the founder of Paekche in the Dai-fang area (see CCI, p. 618).”

By the time King Mi-cheon of Koguryeo conquered the Le-lang Commandery in 313, Paekche came to occupy the Dai-fang Commandery. With the final southward flight of the Jin court in 317, the Han Chinese went out of the picture.

Paekche under the reign of the warrior kings Keun Chogo and Keun Kusu represents the most expansionist era (346-384) for the kingdom. In Samguk-sagi, the expression of “King Keun Chogo and (or let) Crown Prince Kusu” very conspicuously appears three times. One can find such an expression in Nihongi also. According to the Samguk-sagi, Keun Kusu, in the year 369 as the Crown Prince, routed the 20,000-man-strong Koguryeo army and captured five thousand Koguryeo soldiers. In November 369, the King held a grand military parade south of the Han River, fluttering yellow flags [just like the Chinese emperors]. The conquest of the entire Ma-han area occurred immediately thereafter. In 371, King Keun Chogo, together with the Crown Prince, invaded Koguryeo with 30,000 troops, and King Koguk-won (331-371) of Koguryeo was killed by an arrow in a battle at Pyung-yang. In 377, King Keun Kusu led thirty thousand soldiers and attacked Pyung-yang. Before the appearance of King Kwang-gae-to the Great in 391, Koguryeo had constantly been battered by Paekche.

According to the Jín-shu (in Annals), an embassy
be the grave of King Keun Chogo. The step-pyramid design of these tumuli compares closely to the stone tombs of Koguryeo in the Tong-gou region including the one believed to be the grave of King Kwang-gae-to. See Best (2002: 183-89).

6 晉書卷九 孝武帝十一年 以百濟王世子餘暉為使持節都督鎮東將軍百濟王


8 Prior to 567, with the exception of the single embassy sent to the Northern Wei court in 472 (inciting Wei to take military action against Koguryeo), the exchange of emissaries was conducted exclusively with the southern dynasties. Perhaps the existence of a Paekche colony in the Liao-xi area had prevented an early development of friendly relationship between Paekche and northern dynasties. Paekche sent more than 63 missions to the courts of mainland China during 372-652. See Best (1982: 452).

9 Best (1982: 480)

The earliest diplomatic contacts recorded (between Paekche and Chinese dynasties) formally recorded in a Chinese dynastic history. Unlike Koguryeo that bordered upon the dynasties of mainland China and maintained a close relationship (namely, frequent warfare) with them from the time of its foundation, any detailed historical accounts relating to Paekche (or Silla) are absent from the Chinese dynastic chronicles prior to these Jin-shu records. Furthermore, one has yet to recognize the fact that Jin-shu records all these contacts with the Paekche kingdom in its Annals only. In its “Barbarian Section” of Lie-zhuan (Biographies 67), a careless copy of Dongyi-zhuan, it solely mentions the extinct Ma-han and Chin-han as if Paekche (or Silla) does not exist on the Korean peninsula.

The ritual acts of presenting nominal tributes and awarding grand titles in return enhanced the prestige of the rulers of both Paekche and the dynasties of mainland China, providing symbolic support for dynastic self-esteem and respective claims of legitimacy.8

By the turn of the fifth century, King Kwang-gae-to of Koguryeo overran Paekche’s capital (in 396). His son, King Changsu (413-91), moved the capital southward in 427 from the narrow mountain valleys of Yalu to Pyung-yang at the Taedong River basin, and seized the Paekche capital at Han-song in 475, beheading King Kaero. After the loss of the Han River basin to Koguryeo, Paekche had to relocate its capital south to Ung-jin.

Under the reign of Mu-nyung (501-23), Paekche was fully recovered from the aftermath of disastrous defeat of 475. Silla, however, occupied the Han River basin in 553, opening a direct sea route to China. Silla at last extinguished the entire
Kaya Federation by conquering Tae Kaya in 562, and encircled the entire land frontiers of Paekche. After Silla’s occupation of the Han River basin, Silla became Paekche’s primary foe.

When King Mu (600-641) of Paekche died, Tai-zong of Tang himself donned white robes and issued a statement of grief at the Xuan-wu Gate in the northern wall of the capital city. King Uija (641-660) of Paekche captured more than 40 Silla castles in 642 and, forming a military alliance with Koguryeo, laid a joint siege upon the Tang-hang Fortress at the mouth of the Han River in 643 in order to cut off the Silla’s access to the Yellow Sea. Queen Sun-duck (632-47), the first of the three woman rulers of Silla, sent a desperate memorial to the Tang court. Best (1982: 482) quotes Ce-fu Yuan-kui: Tai-zong promised to take some concrete measures to stop their aggression, but could not help voicing to the envoy his opinion that Silla’s troubles might be “attributed to the fact that the kingdom was ruled by a woman and consequently lacked the respect of its neighbors.”

What an odd prophecy to be uttered by Tai-zong on the impending fate of Tang under the Empress Wu!

**DATING THE FOUNDATION OF THE PAEKCHE KINGDOM**

Since virtually all Japanese historians accept the thesis that the Yamato kingdom was established in the Japanese islands sometime during the fourth century, they want to believe that the Paekche and Silla kingdoms also appeared in the Korean peninsula sometime during the fourth century.

Shoku-Nihongi was finished by the Yamato court in 797. It is the official history of the Yamato kingdom covering the period between 697 and 791. Its record for the ninth year of Kanmu (781-806) states that Kanmu’s mother was an offspring of the Paekche King Mu-nyung (501-23). The record also tells that Chu-mong (the founder of Koguryeo who was the father of the Paekche’s founder) was born to the daughter of River God (Habaek). It further declares that Kanmu’s mother was therefore a descendant of Chu-mong. The records of Shoku-Nihongi on the following year state that King Keun Kusu (375-84) was the “sixteenth” king of Paekche when counted from the Paekche’s great ancestor, Chu-mong. Shouku-Nihongi apparently regards Chu-mong as the symbolic

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11 續日本紀 桓武天皇 延曆 八年 皇太后 姓和氏諱新笠 ... 后先出自百濟武寧王之子純陀太子 ... 其百濟遠祖都慕王者 河伯之女 感日精而所生 皇太后 即其後也 ... 延曆九年七月 ... 貴須王者 百濟始興第六世王者 也 夫 百濟大祖都慕大王者 日神降靈 奪扶餘而開國 ... 諸韓面稱王 (NS 5: 448-52, 468-72)

12 帝王緯紀 百濟始祖名濁祚 ... 與母兄股祚南奔立國 股祚立五月而卒

三國史記 百濟本紀 第一 一云 始祖沸流王 ... 北扶餘王解扶婁庶孫 母召西奴 卒本本延陀勃之女 生子二人 長曰沸流 次曰沸祚 繭 寧居于卒本 後朱蒙不容於扶餘 南奔至卒本 立都 號高句麗娶召西奴為妃 ... 及朱蒙在扶餘所生禮氏子孺留來 立之爲太子 ... 於是沸流謂弟沸祚曰 我母氏傾家財助成邦業 ... 不如奉母氏南遊卜地 別立國都 與弟率黨類 ... 至彌鄒忽以居之 (S2: 15)

13 It also records that King Hye was the thirtieth king of Paekche when counted from Chu-mong while the Samguk-sagi records him as the twenty-eighth king of Paekche counted from King Onjo.
The Shinsen Shoujiroku records a clan that has the seventh king of Paekche, Saban (234 AD), as its progenitor. It further records two clans that have King Piryu (the eleventh King of Paekche, 304-344) as their progenitor who was, the Shinsen Shoujiroku specifies, the descendant of King Chogo (the fifth King of Paekche, 166-214). It records a clan that has a descendant of the thirteenth King of Paekche, Keun Chogo (346-375) as its progenitor. We can see that the Shinsen Shoujiroku records the Paekche kings who, according to the Samguk-sagi, ruled during 166-214 (King Chogo) and in 234 (King Saban) as the progenitors of some Yamato ruling clans. Furthermore, we can see that the Shinsen Shoujiroku clearly distinguishes Keun Chogo (the thirteenth King) from Chogo (the fifth King) by recording that the eleventh King Piyu was a descendant from the latter.

The Samguk-sagi regards Onjo (the third son of Chu-mong) as the official founder of Paekche. Samguk-sagi further records that King Keun Kusu was the fourteenth king of Paekche when counted from Onjo. That is, according to the Samguk-sagi, King Keun Kusu (375-84) should be the “fifteenth” king if counted from Chu-mong. The Chewang-un’gi, a Korean chronicle compiled in 1287, states, however, that Onjo’s elder brother (Chumong’s second son) was the first king of Paekche, who died five months after enthronement. That is, there was an ephemeral king between Chu-mong (the symbolic founder of Paekche) and his third son Onjo who should have been recorded as the official founder of Paekche. Such a possibility was indeed acknowledged by the Samguk-sagi itself in a footnote. According to the Chewang-un’gi, however, the Samguk-sagi should have recorded Onjo as the second king and his elder brother as the official founder of Paekche in the main text instead of suggesting such a possibility in the footnote as a mere conflicting story.12

The Shinsen Shoujiroku (A New Compilation of Clan Register) was finished by the Yamato court in 815 under the auspices of King Saga (786-842). It records that King Munju(475-77) was the “twenty-fourth” king of Paekche when counted from Chu-mong while the Samguk-sagi places him as “twenty-second” king of Paekche counted from the official founder, King Onjo.13

Unlike the tradition of Samguk-sagi, the tradition of both Shoku-Nihongi and Shinsen Shoujiroku that were compiled by the Yamato court was to have Chu-mong stand for the symbolic founder of Paekche. Furthermore, the latter two records apparently do not regard Onjo as the de facto founder of Paekche, or as the second king of Paekche when counted from Chu-mong but regard him, just like the Chewang-un’gi, as the third king of Paekche.14 In any case, these records of the extant Japanese chronicles clearly contradict the arguments of modern Japanese historians that Paekche was established in the fourth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY