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## Archaeological Perspectives on the Early Relations of the Korean Peninsula with the Eurasian Steppe

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# Archaeological Perspectives on the Early Relations of the Korean Peninsula with the Eurasian Steppe

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## I. INTRODUCTION: OVERCOMING THE NORTHERN ORIGIN HYPOTHESIS OF KOREAN CULTURE

From a geographical perspective, it seems only natural that ancient Korea would have had, in several aspects, considerable interaction with, and influence from, the region to its north. However, actual access for most people to that region has been completely blocked since before the 1990s. Even if this barrier were all at once to disappear, a practical study on this subject requires considerable effort and seems unlikely to take place soon.

My study aims to provide evidence, based on archaeological findings, that demonstrates the actual interchange between the Korean Peninsula and the northern Eurasia steppe region. Chronological sequences of the earliest relationships between Korea (including a part of Manchuria) and the Eurasian nomadic culture began 3500 years ago and can be divided into seven periods, as detailed below. In particular, the Silla dynasty is cited as a concrete example of this exchange with ancient Eurasian culture.

A distinctive emblem of the Silla dynasty is the *kurgan*, a tomb made of stacked stones and possessing an interior wooden chamber (적석목곽분 in Korean). It is regarded as important evidence for the supposed northern origin of Korean culture, and so, for the past hundred years, the Korean archaeological community has focused on Korea's relationship with ancient Eurasia.

Contrary to popular expectation, however, in practice, examination of the cultural lineage of the Korean Peninsula based on Silla's northern culture has actually proved quite vague. A hypothesis that refutes this "northern region" proposal has been developed, which posits a spontaneous appearance for the piled-stone tombs with their wooden chambers.

But there have in fact been no efforts to take a systemic approach to examining the archaeology of the northern region. Lacking as it did concrete scientific knowledge, the period of the past hundred years has been a counterproductive cycling between the hypothesis that was introduced during Japanese militarism and the opposing spontaneous-appearance hypothesis (Kang 2017).

In a way, it is not an overstatement to say that such superficial approaches were foreseeable. The northern region<sup>1</sup> was never a single culture, but instead was a vast area many times the size of the Korean Peninsula, where groups of diverse nomad cultures coexisted. Without a systematic approach to studying the northern region, no simple hypotheses such as the original hypothesis and its counterargument will be helpful, and instead each is a mere repetition of the diffusion theory paradigm, which was popularized through Japanese militarism, or its counter-theory.

This paper seeks to reveal the relationships developed between Korea's ancient culture (especially early Silla or Samhan) and the northern region in the fourth–first centuries BCE; it is an extension of the research that I have been conducting recently. I will show in this article that the interaction of Silla and Eurasia started not from the fourth century CE, the peak period of Silla, but in the fourth–first centuries BCE, when the Silla state was formed, and that this phenomenon was linked with dramatic social changes in the lives of nomad peoples in the Great Wall region of northern China.

It is worthwhile to mention that the fourth century BCE has special meaning in East Asian history. At that time Saka culture was flowing rapidly to the Great Wall region of China, and, in Manchuria, Gojoseon went through a drastic social transformation from networking migratory lifestyles to territorialism. This paper will examine not only how the spread of Saka culture from Central Asia progressed into the formation of early Xiongnu, but also how it spread into the northern culture during

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<sup>1</sup> The designation "northern region" would seem to be too vague in the context of world archaeology. The term is, however, relatively widely used in Asian archaeology in countries including Korea, China and Japan. It mainly designates the nomadic culture located in the steppe region, north of the sedentary civilization. In this paper, the concept also includes the nomadic culture located in the northern part of East Asia.

the early Silla period. Throughout this paper, I will re-examine the Northern Cultural Theory of the Korean Peninsula in the context of Eurasian archaeology and present concrete and archaeologically-based alternatives to the existing hypotheses.

## II. OVERVIEW OF EURASIA AND THE KOREAN PENINSULA IN ANCIENT TIMES

The Korean Peninsula and Eurasia have been linked in various ways since the Bronze Age. A brief look at these periods is as follows.

**Period 1:** The first Bronze Age of Korea began with the expansion of the Seima-Turbino metallurgy phenomenon (1500–900 BCE). In 2016, a necklace made of stone wrapped in bronze was found in Bronze Age subterranean dwellings in Auraji, Jeongseon, Gangwon Province, in the central part of the Korean Peninsula. The site dates to the fifteenth–twelfth centuries BCE. It is well known that Seima-Turbino bronzes were spread widely over the northern part of China, to Manchuria and still further. The clue to the finding and dating of this bronze implement is the typological features of the pottery jars that have been found in association with it, which are strikingly similar to those from the Xingcheng Culture (兴城文化) of the Tumen River basin. Thus, it was at this time that the bronzeware was introduced into the Korean Peninsula through the Tumen River basin.

**Period 2:** Upper Xiajiadian Culture formed and interacted with that of the Karasuk and early Scyto-Siberian periods in 1100–700 BCE. During this time, Karasuk-style bronzeware spread not only to the Upper Xiajiadian, but also to North Korea, the Liaoning area, and the far eastern region of Russia (Primorisky). Recently, evidence of the metallurgical tradition of the Seima-Turbino phenomenon has been found in many parts of East Asia — not only in the Xinjiang and Gansu area, but also on the central plain of China. And the Northeast Asian region was no exception to the Seima-Turbino Bronze Age expansion.

**Period 3:** In 700–300 BCE, Scyto-Siberian Culture and the Lute-shaped Dagger Culture<sup>2</sup> existed in Manchuria. During this time, the Lute-shaped Dagger Culture was clearly present in Manchuria and the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. Some animal decorations of the Scythian style were

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<sup>2</sup> Also known as the Mandolin-shaped Dagger Culture (비파형동검문화).

introduced around the Liaoxi region. The Lute-shaped Dagger Culture, however, led to the political system of the early Gojoseon and formed a strong cultural-political unity in Eastern Liaoning and the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. It is evident that few cultures from the Eurasian steppe had been introduced to the Korean Peninsula.

**Period 4:** At this time took place an influx of Saka culture in the Great Wall region of China spreading to the Korean Peninsula (300 BCE – 100 BCE). During this period, the Saka Culture, which flourished in Central Asia, flowed through the Xinjiang and into the northern part of China. The culture is characterized by its splendid and non-naturalistic animal decorations, made in gold and silver.

**Period 5:** Saka influence further expanded with the collapse of the Xiongnu state and spread to the surrounding area, including Manchuria (100 BCE – 200 CE). With the weakening of Xiongnu, the surrounding forces, including Xi'anbei, Buyeo, Wusun, and Yuezhi emerged, and nomadic culture spread with them.

**Period 6:** Silla's confidence that it was Xiongnu's successor to power (fourth–sixth centuries CE) reached new heights. This period coincided with the Great Migration and the Huns' appearance in Eurasia. Historical accounts attest that Silla's ruling class called itself the descendants of Xiongnu. During this time, Eurasian-related relics and *kurgans* in the southeastern part of the Korean Peninsula were not simply the result of exchanges. Instead, they were actively used to justify their governance and elitism. Many characteristic elements of Eurasia, including the gold crown of Silla and various other pieces made with filigree techniques, the *kurgan* made of piled stones, with its interior wooden chamber, and glass vessels, were widely popular among the ruling classes of Silla and Gaya at that time. Furthermore, the weaponry and house furnishings of the Sanyan Culture (三燕文化) of Murong Xianbei (慕容鲜卑) greatly influenced Silla and Gaya.

**Period 7:** Bohai and Unified Silla period (eighth–tenth centuries CE) were established. With the founding of the Unified Silla and the expansion of the Tang dynasty to the Silk Road, Silla's relationship with Eurasia extended to Arabia and Persia, as reflected in barbarian-shaped figurines (胡人像), myth, and historical record. Not only Silla but also Balhae (Bohai), located to its north, were in close contact with the Uighur Khaganate. Recent excavation of the Koksharovka site, located in the far eastern region of Russia, in the years 2007–2014, yielded remains and a ritual site (or mausoleum) of the Uighur

Khaganate. And it made it possible to speculate on the relationship between Balhae, in the far east, and the Eurasian steppe.

As noted above, I will discuss in further detail the matter of Saka intrusion into the Korean Peninsula and its significance for Silla.

### III. SAKA CULTURE OF CENTRAL ASIA AND NORTHERN CHINA

Historically, the Saka Culture became best known in the sixth century BCE for paying tribute to Darius I (BCE 522–486), the Persian king of the Achaemenid Empire. However, in terms of Eurasian archaeology, Saka culture is characterized by its gold and its burial mounds in Central Asia, between the eighth and third centuries BCE. In particular, the period between the sixth and third centuries BCE is known to be the golden age of Saka culture, with the widespread use of gold and the building of the *kurgan*, its mound built of piled stones, with an interior wooden chamber tomb. Saka culture, primarily characterized by these stone mound tombs, is distributed particularly in the Zetysu (=Semirechiye) region of Western Kazakhstan. This resulted in the creation of Saka-style golden animal ornaments (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Gold ornaments from Issyk Golden Man *kurgan* (photos by author)

Some key examples are the famous Issyk burial mound of Golden Man, as well as the Beschatyr and Shiliktyr burial mounds (National Research Institute of Cultural Properties 2018). In particular, Beschatyr is regarded as having structures most similar to Silla's *kurgans* (Fig. 2).



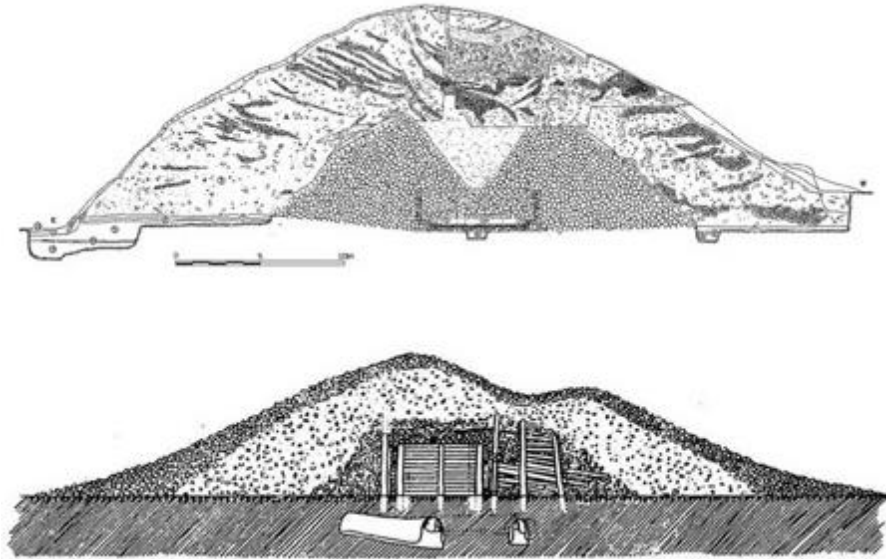


Figure 2. Comparison of profile of *kurgan* in Silla and Saka, Kazakhstan. Above: Chenmachon, Silla. Below: Bechshatyr, Kazakhstan) (from Bureau of Management of Cultural Properties Chenmachong 1975 and Akishev 1963)

Present also is the Pazyryk Culture, represented by the Berel burial mound (Fig. 3) in Northwestern Kazakhstan and Altai, Russia. In addition, the Tasmola Culture of the early Scythia Culture is spread across Central Kazakhstan, while the Savromat and Sarmat cultures<sup>3</sup> are distributed along Western Kazakhstan and the Ural Mountain regions. The Taksai *kurgan* of Western Kazakhstan and the Pokrovka *kurgan* of the Ural Mountains are the distinctive archaeological remains found in those regions. Represented by these, Saka Culture refers to the groups of people who built great burial mounds and created gold relics based on the nomadic economy of Central Asia centered in Kazakhstan. In other words, Saka is a separate steppe culture, quite distinct from the steppe culture of Siberia, which is regarded as part of the Scytho-Siberian world.

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<sup>3</sup> Historically, Sauromat and Sarmat actually mean the same group. But Soviet archaeologists were inclined to separate these into two (Maksimenko 1983). Subsequently, these two cultures are named as different cultures in time and space.

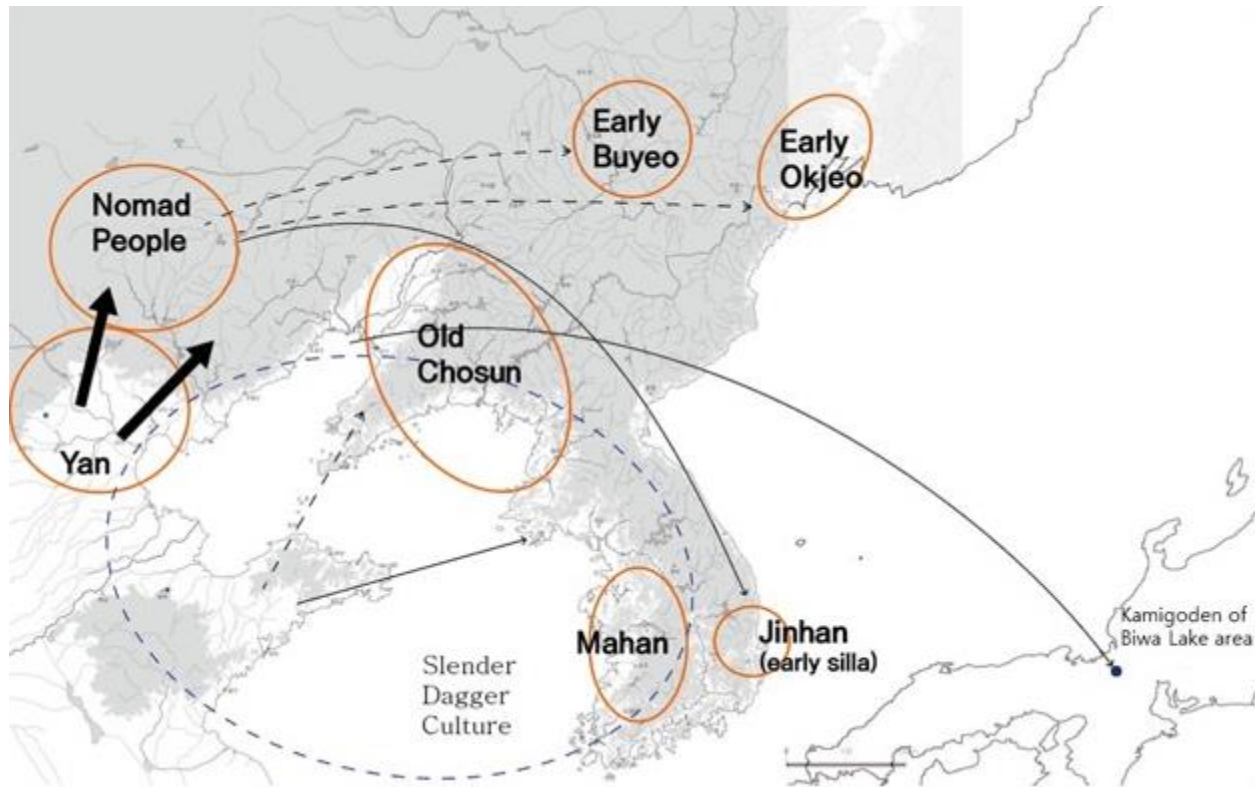


Figure 3. Gilt horse equipment made of gold, silver, and wood, Berel Kurgan (photo by author)

With this explanation, we can see that the main Saka Culture was a nomadic culture that was dispersed throughout Central Asia around 800–300 BCE (Map 2). However, the Saka culture marked a major change in the fourth century BCE. Around that time, the Kazakhstan Saka style of gold artifacts penetrated throughout the Turfan basin of Xinjiang and spread widely in the Great Wall region of North China, and then on to the highlands of Yunnan and Sichuan and throughout Tibet (following the ancient tea route) (Map 1). The Saka-style *kurgan* tombs can be observed in the nearby Xinjiang Ili district, and some have been found as far away as the Turfan region.



Map 1. Expansion of Saka culture to East Asia



**Map 2.** Influx of nomad culture into Korea, Manchuria, and Japan during fourth–second centuries BCE

The barrow of Alagou (阿拉溝) is a representative example of the influence of Saka-style culture in the Turfan area. In addition to Alagou, recently, a number of Saka-style gold relics have been excavated around the northern route of the Xinjiang region's Silk Road (Fig. 4). The influx of Saka-style gold-crafting culture can be observed in the various regional cultures along the northern Silk Road, such as at Turfan Basin in Central Xinjiang (Molodin & Kang 2000) and Hami Basin.



Figure 4. Saka-style gold ornaments from Xinjiang (from Kang 2018c, originally from Bureau of Cultural Relics Xinjiang, 2011). 1, 2, 3 – Alagou, Toksun 10 – Wulabo (烏拉泊), Urumqi, 8, 11, 13 – Sikeshu, Wusu (烏蘇四棵樹), 4, 5 – qikulansareke, ehe (阿合奇庫蘭薩日克), 7, 9 – bietebasitao, nileke (尼勒克別特巴斯陶), 6 – qiapuihai, tekesi (特克斯恰普其海), 12 – Xiata, zhaosu (昭蘇夏塔).

The influx of Saka-style culture reached to the Gansu Corridor and is well reflected on the Majiayuan (马家塬) tombs of the Xirong (西戎) Culture. The ornaments and gilt belts with highly exaggerated animals excavated from Majiayuan, Gansu, can be seen to be influenced by the Saka style (Fig. 5). It was also discovered that along with the introduction of golden relics, there is evidence of the influx of Saka-origin inhabitants in the Xirong group, once the builders of Majiayuan. More precisely, a figurine of a man wearing a pointed hat has been unearthed. The pointed hat is a common feature among the groups that followed Saka culture. As depicted in the murals of the Persepolis ruins, the pointed hat was a symbol for the Saka people. Furthermore, this peaked hat tradition spread eastward with the flow of Saka culture into East Asia. These pointed hats can also be observed on the Pazyryk *kurgan* in the Altai region of southern Russia, and in Mongol sites such as the Ukok and Olon-Kuringol *kurgans* (Map 3). The eastward influence of pointed hats and Saka-style gold culture demonstrates that this was not a mere technology exchange, but is instead evidence of the steppe-based Saka culture migrating to the northern region of China.



Figure 5. Saka-style gold ornaments from Majiayuan, Gansu (from Kang 2018c, originally from Gansu Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, 2015)



**Map 3.** Pointed hats of the Saka peoples and Silla. From left to right: Saka from Persepolis (photo by Jo Jinseon), Issyk Golden Man (photo by author); reconstruction of a Pazyryk warrior from Olon-kuringo (photo by D. Pozdnyakov); figurines from Majiayuan, Gansu (photo from Wang Hui 2013); golden figurine from Xinzhuangtou (photo by author); horse-rider pottery of Silla from Geumnyeongchong Tumulus (photo from National Museum of Korea); figurines of Silla Jamaejeon, Gyeongju (photo from National Museum of Daegu)

The eastward-spreading Saka culture was also found on the Ordo Plateau. Some examples are Hulusitai (呼鲁斯太), Yulongtai (玉隆太), Nalingaotu (纳林高兔), Aluaideng (阿鲁柴登), and Xigoundban (西溝畔) (tombs no. 1 and 2). It is worth mentioning that a golden diadem was discovered in Aluaideng, and nothing like it can be found in the western region of Saka culture. In the large *kurgans* of the Saka Culture, from Central Asia to the Gansu Corridor, the buried wear pointed hats and have decorated gold ornaments on coat and trousers. The Golden Man of the Issyk Kurgan and Majiayuan tombs represents typical examples of this tradition. But in the Ordo Plateau, the golden diadem style appeared instead of any made in the Golden Man tradition. This means that this region had developed a nomadic culture based on different social backgrounds and governance. Therefore I suggest that there was a sudden social integration of the nomads of Xiongnu in the fourth century BCE,



extending to the border of China and into the Ordos region through a southern expansion (Kang 2010). This change in the fourth century BCE can be seen in historical records as well. By the fourth century BCE, Xiongnu had already conquered every region in northern China and ruled its territories by enthroning Donghu Wang (東胡王) or Dingling Wang (丁零王). Records show that, beginning in the time of Maotun Xianyu (冒頓單于), the Xiongnu had formed a kind of federation based on various nomad tribes. The people of Saka origin are assumed to have been active in northern China during the early Xiongnu period.

The eastward expansion of Saka culture reached as far as areas of the Yanshan Mountain region around Beijing. Xinzhuantou (辛庄頭) tomb no. 30 from the royal cemetery of the Yan dynasty in Yanxiadu (燕下都) offers the most significant case for this. The nomadic culture of Yuhuangmu (玉皇廟) in the Yanshan Mountain region north of Beijing existed since the eighth–seventh centuries BCE. Afterward, around the fifth century BCE, with the sudden expansion of the Yan dynasty, Yuhuangmu culture divided into several smaller groups that either gradually assimilated to the Yan dynasty or were expelled. Some of them influenced the Liaoxi area’s Lute-shaped Dagger Culture with animal decorations, as mentioned above in “period 3” in section II. Furthermore, the belthook with an animal style found in the Korean Peninsula originated from the Yuhuangmu Culture of the Yanshan Mountain area (Кан ИИ Ук, 2011). The chronological range of Xinzhuantou tomb no. 30 can be dated to around the fourth–third centuries BCE, after the near dissolution of the Yuhuangmu Culture in the Beijing area due to the expansion of the Yan dynasty culture. Some examples of gold artifacts found in Xinzhuantou tomb no. 30 are animal ornaments with exaggerated beaks, turquoise inlaid earrings, and oblong decorations of crouching animals or fantastic creatures (Fig. 6). It is particularly noteworthy that one gold ornament represents a human figure wearing a pointed hat and having a blunt nose and a beard. The features were far from those of the indigenous people in the region and can reasonably be seen as Central Asian. It is also remarkable that a sheep’s head decoration was discovered that is similar to the animal decorations seen in Pazyryk Culture, together with turquoise originating from Afghan regions. Evidently, tomb no. 30, of the Yan dynasty accurately demonstrates the expansion of Saka culture to northern China around the fourth century BCE.



Figure 6. Gold ornaments from Xinzhuangtuo tomb 30 (photo by author)

Meanwhile, although not as well-known, the site also yielded a very important piece of bronzeware of Korean origin. This is a Korean style of halberd called a *ge* (戈), and examples are usually found in the southern region of the Korean Peninsula (Fig. 7). In addition to the distinctive Korean *ge* halberd, many late-type lute-shaped daggers and examples of an early type of slender bronze dagger, which are commonly dated to the fourth–third centuries BCE on the Korean Peninsula, have been found in various regions of Hebei province, the former boundary of the lands of the Yan dynasty. This implies that there is a high possibility that the Yan dynasty and Gojoseon and its associated forces on the Korean Peninsula may have engaged in military activities.

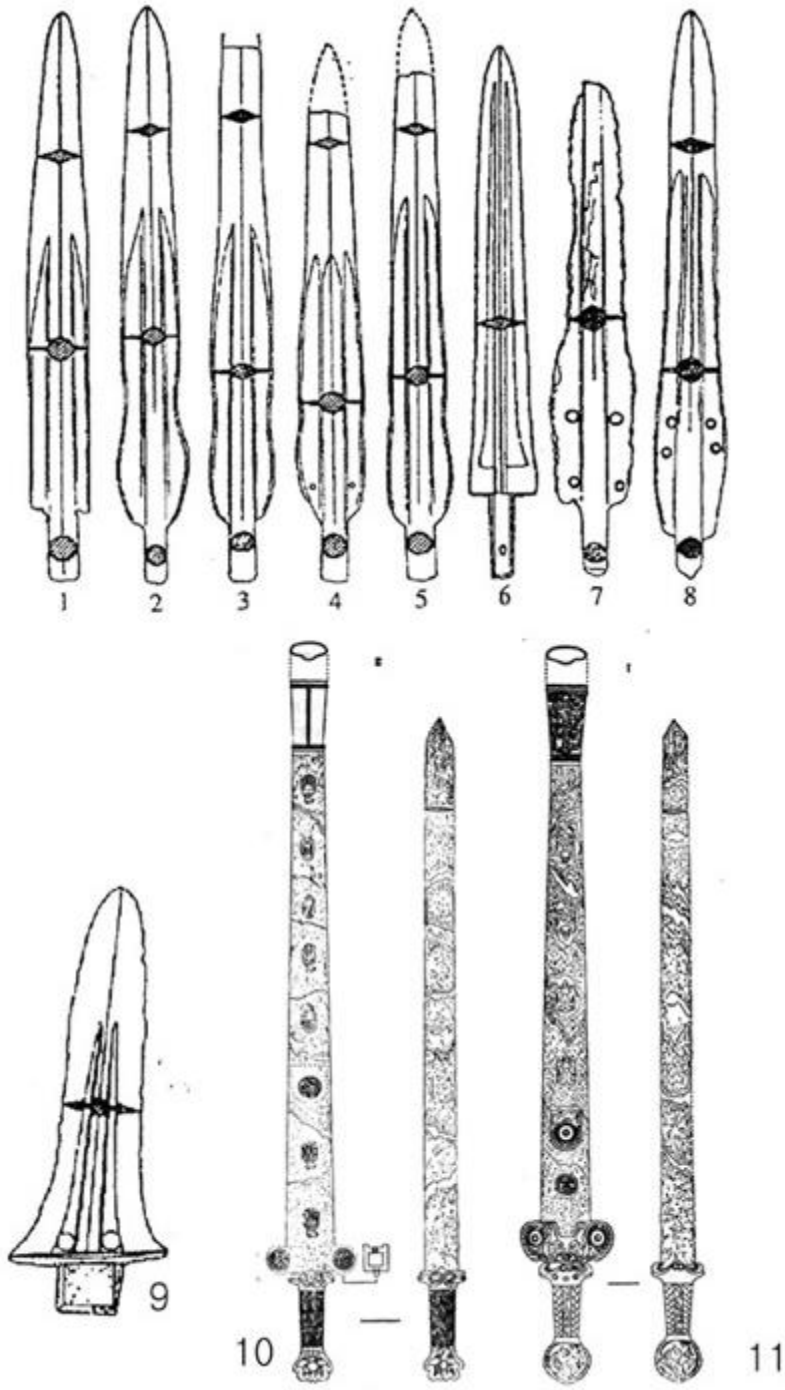


Figure 7. Korean-style slender dagger from Dynasty Yan and Qi (1-8), Korean-style halberd *ge* from Xinzhuangtou tomb 30 (7), and bimetallc sword of steppe style from Xinzhuangdou (Hebei Institute of Cultural Relics 1996, modified by author)

It is recorded in *Xiongnu liezhuan* (匈奴列传) of [*Shiji* 史记] and *Dongyi liezhuan* (东夷列传) of *Sanguozhi* (三国志) that Yan dynasty General Chinkai (秦開) was captured and held hostage by the Xiongnu (胡), who attacked Gojoseon again and thus weakened their influence. After defeating Donghu in around 300 BCE, Chinkai invaded Gojoseon in 280 BCE and established the Yan commandary Manbianhan (滿潘汗). Therefore, the artifacts from Xinzhuantou tomb no. 30 provide historical evidence of the interrelationship among the Saka Culture in the northern Great Wall region of China, the Yan dynasty, and the Korean Peninsula, showing that the Yan dynasty (燕), the Xiongnu (匈奴), Donghu, and East Asia generally (古朝鮮) were all influenced by the Yan dynasty's military activities.

#### IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INFLUX OF SAKA CULTURE AND ITS ROLE IN SILLA'S EURASIAN NETWORK

As observed above, in the fourth century BCE, a drastic cultural transformation swept through the Great Wall region of China with the rise of early Xiongnu. The historical background of this transformation can be found in the territorial governance process, in such projects as the building of the Great Wall, during the Warring States period of China. Between the fourth and second centuries BCE, the movements of nomadic people living around the Great Wall triggered massive cultural changes in the surrounding areas. As the cultural characteristics widely distributed around the Great Wall region in the fourth century BCE were very different from those of previous periods, it is clear that this was related to the influx of the widespread Saka culture of Central Asia.

It is clearly recorded in the *Shiji* that when the early Xiongnu of Touman and Maodun Shanyu arose in the second half of the fourth century BCE, there already existed the Rongdi (戎狄) peoples, including the Xirong, Linhu (林胡), Loufan (娄烦), and Donghu (东胡), all of which are believed to have had a Saka-style culture. The golden animal ornaments found abundantly in royal tombs in the Central Chinese Plain (Zhongyuan) towards the end of the Warring States period into the Han dynasty era, made as they are in the steppe style, are also related to this cultural transformation. A prime example is a golden buckle excavated from Seogamri tomb no. 109 in Lelang Commandery, a masterpiece that intricately combines steppe-based animal decoration under the influence of the Han

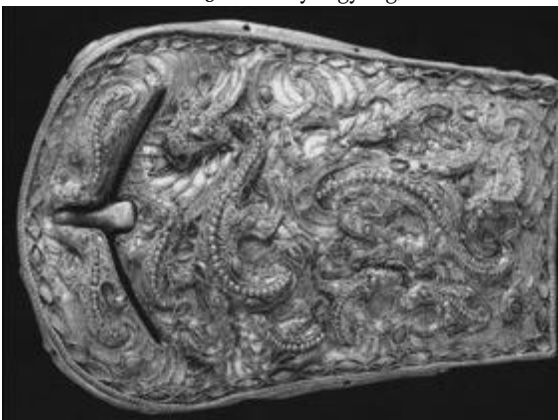
dynasty and processing techniques unique to Chinese patterns. However, artifacts of craftsmanship almost identical with that of Seogamri appeared after the expansion into the northern regions (Fig. 8). Around the same period, in the northern areas near the Great Wall, such as the northwest and northeast frontiers of China, figures representing a golden codfish almost identical to the one discovered in Seogamri were also found, in Xinjiang Karashar (焉耆“黑圪塔”) and Dalian Yingchengzi (大连营城子). The phenomenon of Saka-style relics is widely observed in East Asia. The highly influential Saka-style artifacts made their way to the Jinhan statelets confederacy (composed of one of the Three Hans and an early form of Silla), a southeastern region of the Korean Peninsula.



Seokamri M. 9 tomb, Pyongyang, Korea



Bogedaqin fortress Yanqi, Xinjiang



Yingchengzi M. 76 tomb, Dalian



Eugene Thaw collection from North China, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 8. Gold belt hook from China and Korea (all photos by author, except the photo of Yingchengzi, by courtesy of K. M. Joo)

Unexpectedly, the influence of steppe culture and even evidence of migration are also found in the Japanese archipelago. A mold for an Ordos-style bronze dagger, dating from the fourth century BCE, recently excavated from the Kamigoden (上御殿) site in Shiga Prefecture (滋賀県), Japan, is of a style usually found in China’s Great Wall region (Nakamura 2014; Kang 2015). In particular, it shares close similarities with artifacts excavated from the tombs of Huilai Beixinbao (懷來 北辛堡) during the Warring States period and a bronze sword excavated from the Neimenggu Helingeer Fanjiayaozi (和林格爾 范家窯子) sites (Fig. 9).

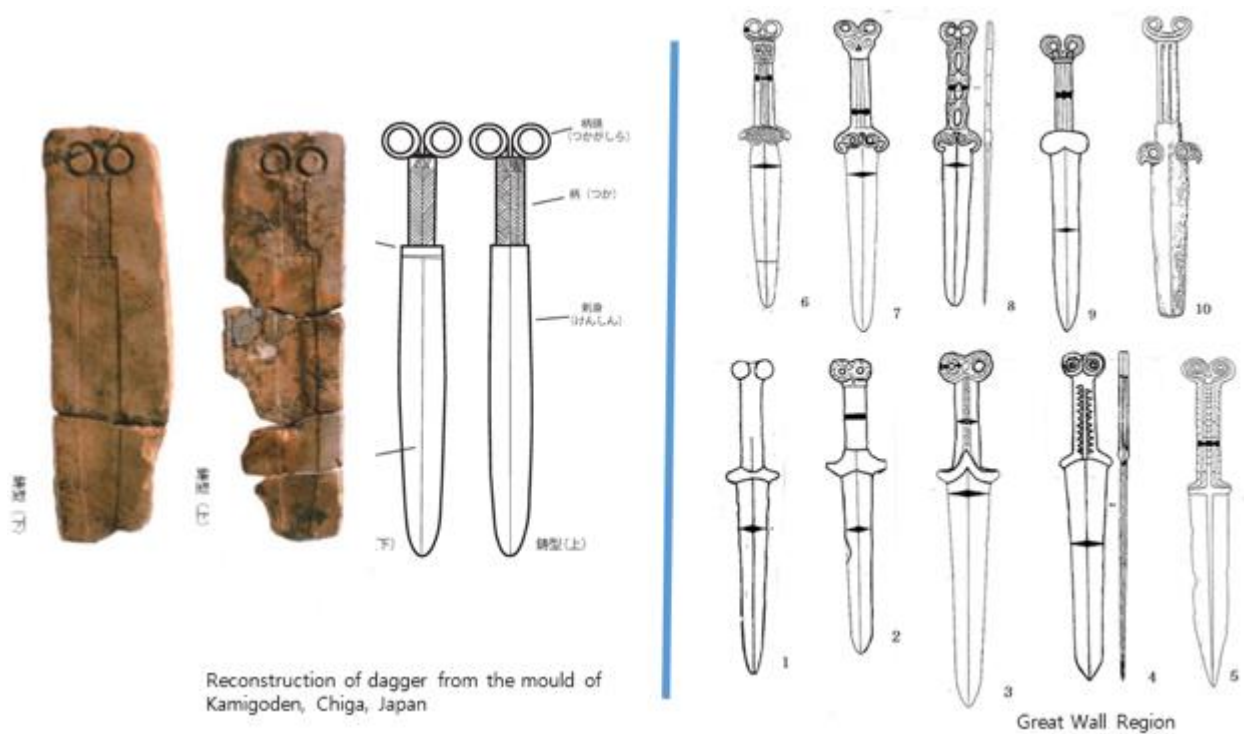


Figure 9. Typological comparison of Ordos-style dagger from the Ordos plateau (right) and reconstructed dagger from Kamigoden (left) (Shiga Prefectural Association for Cultural Heritages 2013, Kang 2015)

Another striking case of steppe culture’s influx to South Korea is the animal-style bronze from the wooden coffin tomb at 21–3.4, Tapdong, Gyeongju (Fig. 10). In this tomb were found iron weaponry, bronze horse equipment, a Chinese mirror, and a bronze belthook in a tiger-shaped style. A tiger-style belthook identical to the Tapdong example can be traced to the belthook from Gansu Qingshui Liuping

tomb. In addition, a horse girdle featuring a curled animal from Taptong is identical to the one from Xinzhangtou no. 30 (Fig. 11).



Figure 10. Steppe-style bronzes and a Chinese mirror from Taptong tomb, Gyongju, Korea (Korean Cultural Property Foundation 2011)





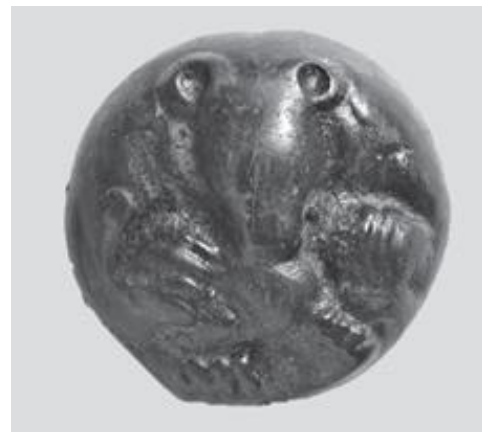
Tiger-style belthook from liuping, Qingshui, Gansu



Tiger-style ornament from Taptom wooden coffin tomb, Gyongju, Korea



Animal-style ornament of horse bridle from Xinzhuangtou tomb 30, Hebei



Tiger-style ornament of horse bridle from Taptom wooden coffin tomb, Gyongju, Korea

Figure 11. A comparison of animal-style ornaments (left above, Gansu Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology 2014; right above and bottom row, Korean Cultural Property Foundation 2011)

Apart from those at Tapdong, steppe-style bronzes are frequently found in wooden tombs from the southeastern part of the Korean Peninsula. While the nomad-style bronze goods were much more popular across the southeastern region, the southwestern part of Korea (approximately identical to the Mahan statelet confederacy), interred more Chinese goods, in the form of Chinese swords, bronze mirrors, lacquerware, and garments. Similarly, various statelets in Korea engaged in long-distance interactions with neighboring regions (Map 2).

As evidence, northern-style artifacts from the early Silla periods (or Jinhan) of the Korean Peninsula show consistent relevance to those found in the Great Wall region of China around the fourth

century BCE. This period coincides with the dates at which Saka-style culture thrived in the northern region of the Great Wall.

The influx of Saka culture into the Korean Peninsula was triggered during the Warring States period by the expansion of the Yan dynasty into the Beijing and Yanshan Mountain region, as evidenced in Xinzhuangtou tomb no. 30. This is also precisely related to the building of the Great Wall by the Warring States government and Qin dynasty forces, to mark their territories during the Warring States era. This expansion and conflict caused nomad tribes to endure stress, and subsequently some of them were assimilated and fled to Korea. Historical records show that one group undergoing this migration headed to the Jinhan statelet, in the southeastern part of Korea, as shown below.

『三國志』卷三十 辰韓在馬韓之東,其耆老傳世,自言古之亡人避秦役.....有似秦人,非但燕齊之名物也.

Some old men of Jin-han (former Silla) state that they immigrated to avoid compulsory labor (on the Great Wall). Their language is similar not only to that of the dynasties Yan and Ji, but also with Qin. (*Book of Wei* 30: Biographies of the Wuhuan, Xianbei, and Dongyi)

The text on Jinhan (辰韓) in the *Sanguozhi*, or the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, the most essential history record on which one can base a study of ancient Korean history, shows that the formation of early Silla included the migration of nomadic people from northern China. The credibility of this record is very high, and it also includes various vocabulary materials that support this conclusion.

I want to emphasize that the wide expansion of Saka culture from Central Asia (mainly in the eastern part of Kazakhstan) to Xinjiang and the Great Wall area of China during the fourth–second centuries BCE was deeply influential. In this period, the Chinese warring states built the Great Wall to enforce territorial governance, and subsequently there arose conflicts with such nomad peoples as the Linhu, Donghu, Loufan, Xirong, and the early Xiongnu (匈奴). All of these were characterized by their Saka-style material culture. At Xinzhuangtou, the no. 30 tomb, located in Yanxiadu, has yielded plenty of Saka-style ornament, including a Europhoid figure with a peak-topped hat, regarded as a

distinguishing feature of the Saka people, and it is worth mentioning that similar representations of hats are found in Silla (Map 3).

Similarly, in the area of Beijing, the Yan dynasty played an intermediary role between the nomadic peoples and the people of the Korean Peninsula. This means that the sentence quoted above from the *Sanguozhi* is verifiable. Furthermore, this kind of influx strongly implies the extension of the pre-Han period Silk Road to Korea.

The influx of nomadic cultures also influenced the southern part of the Korean Peninsula and may have extended into the Japanese archipelago. The spread of the Ordos Culture into Korea and Japan is supported by the discoveries of the mold for the Ordos-style dagger (= Akinakes) from Kamigoden (上御殿) site in Chiga, Japan, excavated in 2012.

At this chaotic period, nomad people bearing the Saka culture were disbanded and became scattered. Some assimilated to the Yan people, but others spread to and influenced areas such as Buyeo, Okcho, and Jinhan (early Silla), and Japan. In addition to Early Silla, the overall social changes in Northeast Asia in the fourth century BCE, represented by the emergence of Xiongnu, the construction of the Great Wall, and the subsequent dissolution of the Saka nomadic tribes, also facilitated the development of the other ancient states, like Gojoseon, which existed in Liaodong area and the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. In this way, the spread of Saka culture is linked to rapid changes in Northeast Asia in the fourth century BCE.

When we take into consideration that there was an influx of steppe culture from the Great Wall region before Silla, then we can re-examine the previously discussed idea that Silla had extensive relations with and influence from Eurasia, which has been a "hot potato" in Korean archaeology and ancient history for almost a century, ever since the discovery of the stone-built *kurgan* with its wooden chamber tomb in Gyeongju. This is because the stone *kurgan* suddenly appeared in the fourth century CE, remained for nearly two centuries, and then abruptly disappeared. It has never been discovered in other places throughout Korea. Such coffins are found only in the Gyeongju region and are unlike the other tumuli of Goguryo, Baekje, and Gaya. Nevertheless, the international archaeological community has focused on the wooden chamber tombs and inferred the relationship between the two regions, in discussions that have been kept intentionally ambiguous due to the lack of researchers who can authoritatively examine and coordinate the archaeology of the two regions.

As we have seen, a group of migrants from the north carried out the founding of Silla. Following that time, the connections between Silla and northern Eurasia have persisted. Silla's distinctive ancient tomb, the *kurgan*, which appeared in the fourth century CE, nevertheless did not appear suddenly, but followed hundreds of years of related events before that.

Since the fourth century CE, a huge cultural change in Eurasia (also known as the Great Migration Period) was represented by the Huns (or Xiongnu), and subsequently, Silla also recognized this phenomenon, and the Naemul-Maripkan (麻立干), of the Kim (金) clan, established a hereditary monarchy, identifying their lineage as being from Xiongnu. The significance of the Eurasian-style *kurgan* and many exotic elements of Silla lie in their long interrelationship with the early Silla, and the rise of Xiongnu (=Hun) influence (Table 1).

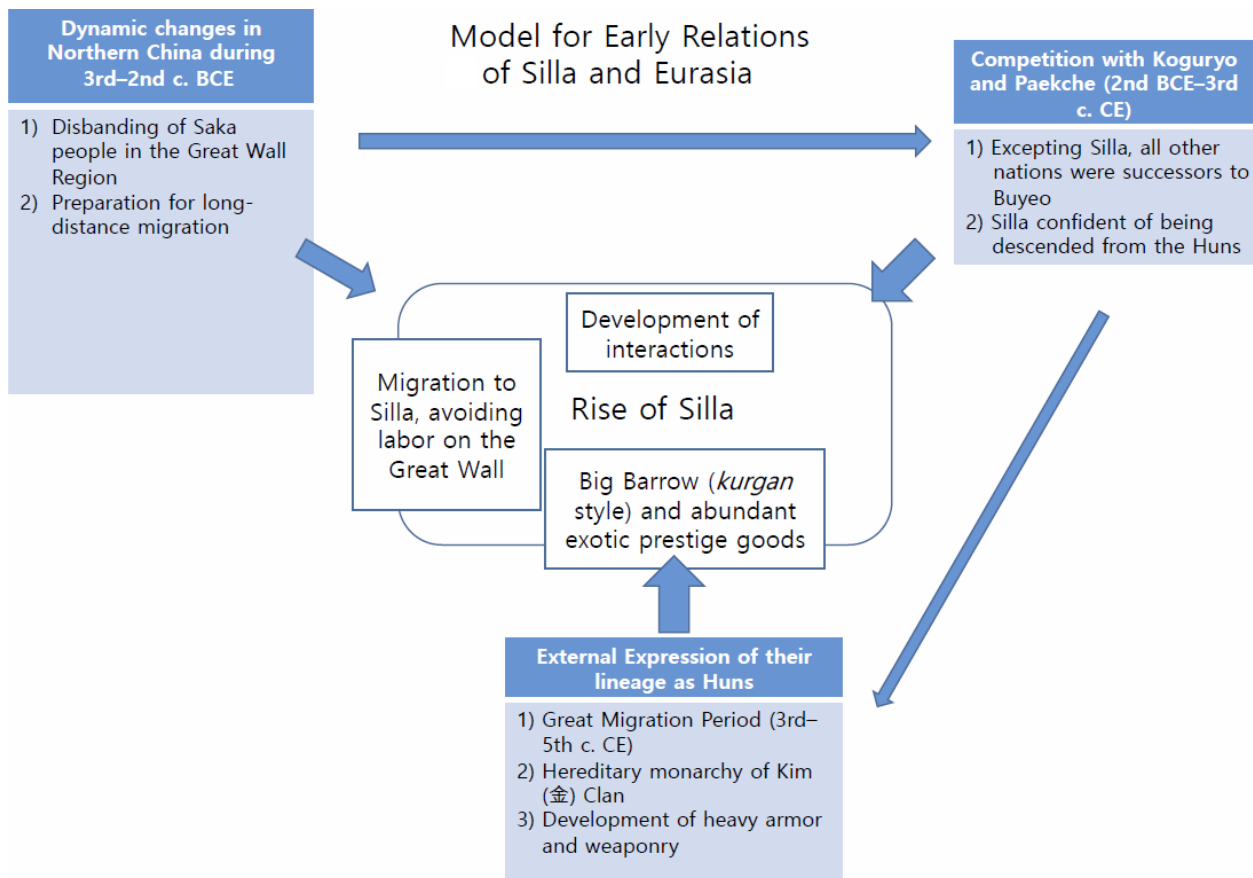


Table 1. Model for Silla-Eurasian Network

## V. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have concentrated my discussion on the influx of steppe-style bronze-working in the early iron age of Korea and early Silla and pointed out the spread of Saka culture from Central Asia (mainly in the eastern part of Kazakhstan) to Xinjiang and the Great Wall area of China during the fourth–second centuries BCE. In this period, the Chinese warring states built the Great Wall to stabilize the governance of their territory, and subsequently there arose conflicts with such nomadic peoples as the Linhu, Donghu, Loufan, Xirong, Chidi, Beidi, and early Xiongnu. It is noteworthy that the big barrow of the Yan dynasty excavated in Yanxiadu shed light on the influx and interaction of Saka culture to Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula. In Xinzhuangtou, the no. 30 tomb yielded a great deal of Saka-style ornament, including a Europoid human figurine with a peak-topped hat, regarded as a distinguishing feature of the Saka people, and weapons in gold, silver, and bronze in the Korean-style of halberd called the *ge*. These exotic materials in the Yan tomb were interred as a result of an intensive campaign with neighboring people and the expansion of the Yan dynasty. The expansion of the Yan dynasty led to the influx of the expelled Saka-style steppe culture into the Korean Peninsula and Japan after many of its people left their homeland. The finding of a mold for Akinakes from Kamigoden of Chiga prefecture is one of the most prominent pieces of evidence. Further, the finding of a wooden coffin tomb from Tapdong, Kyongju, offers concrete evidence of the Saka culture's influx onto early Silla culture. Materials from Tapdong such as the sitting animal-style belthook, animal-figure horse bit, iron cauldron, and other small animal figures in this style show the influence of Saka culture in the Great Wall area of China up to the early phase of Silla in second–first centuries BCE.

With such evidence, I hope to have enabled a reexamination of steppe cultural elements in the Iron Age and the early Silla phase as a result of Saka culture influx, which could provide a clue to identifying the steppe cultural element of ancient Korea in detail.

My study emphasizes that a cultural comparison between Korea and other regions must be performed from a cultural conversation perspective, and the study of the Silk Road in the twenty-first century must stem from a mind-set open to various cultures. I expect that this study can re-establish the relationship between Korea and the Silk Road in terms of cultural interchange between Eurasia and

the Korean Peninsula through archaeological analysis of the cultural interchange between the Korean Peninsula and the northern regions.

This study can present a model for archaeological communication between East Asia and Eurasia and rebuild the concept of the Silk Road, including in it the relationship between the Korean Peninsula and northern Eurasia from a cultural interchange perspective. Finally, I hope that my intent to balance and extend our focus beyond the mainland of China and perspectives on archaeology beyond borderlines will benefit the condition of Asian archaeology.

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