

Ancient Literacy: Comparison and Periodization

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Introduction

Concerning the origins of written language in ancient China,¹ some literary pieces – such as the *Lü shi chun qiu* 呂氏春秋, *Han fei zi* 韓非子, *Huai nan zi* 淮南子, and *Shou wen jie zi* 說文解字 – state that Cang Jie 蒼頡, a subject of Huang di 黃帝, first invented Chinese characters from the tracks of birds, but these accounts are not reliable. Other works trace the origins of written characters to knotted rope (*jie sheng* 結繩) or the Eight Trigrams.

On the strength of archeological discoveries, some scholars have looked to symbols inscribed on Neolithic pottery for clues, such as those found in the archeological sites of various cultures such as Yangshao 仰韶, Dawenkou 大汶口, and Majiayao 馬家窯.² These inscriptions date back to as early as 4,000 BCE,

1. For the origin of Chinese characters, see Ying Falu and Xu Shuan, eds., *Zhongguo gu dai wen hua shi* (Cultural History of Ancient China), (Beijing: Beijing daxue chu ban she, 1989), v. 1, ch. 4; Wang Fengyang, *Han zi xue* (Chinese Pictography), (Changchun Shi: Jilin wen shi chu ban she, 1989), ch. 3; Atsuji Testuji, Kim Ōnjong, and Pak Chaeyang, trans., *Hancha ūi yōksa* (A History of Chinese Characters), (Seoul: Hangmins, 1999), ch. 1.

2. Sun Yingmin and Li Youmao, eds., *Zhongguo gao gu xue Tong lun* (A Survey of Chinese Archeology), (Kaifeng: Henan da xue chu ban she, 1990), 151-152.

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but whether they were mere symbols or a primitive form of written language is still under debate. At this point, it is safer to argue that Chinese characters began with the inscriptions on oracle bones and tortoise carapaces that made their appearance in the Shang period. Indeed, Shang China had already begun to employ chroniclers for government records, and the use of written language expanded greatly in scope during the Zhou dynasty, evident in the rise of epigraphy³ and in the publication of historical works such as the *Shang shu* 尚書 (Classic of History) and *Chun qiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals).

The development of literacy in Korea and Japan, however, is necessarily distinct from that in China because both countries imported their writing systems from China. The resulting discrepancies between oral and written language necessitated a difficult process of learning and assimilating a foreign writing system. During this process, the Koreans invented *idu*, *hyangch'al*, and *kugyŏl* and the Japanese invented *kana* (and the Vietnamese, *chu nom*).

Furthermore, these countries lagged at least a millennium behind China in the inception of literacy, thus giving rise to different patterns of literate life. For example, paper was invented in China by Cai Lun in 105 CE, nearly fifteen hundred years after the advent of inscriptions on bones and tortoise carapaces,⁴ whereas the Japanese began to use Chinese characters and paper almost simultaneously.⁵ Moreover, bamboo writing tablets were no longer in use in China the Sui and Tang period (581-906), having been replaced by paper, whereas in Paekche, Silla, and Japan, tablets were still widely used – a *décalage* often found on the peripheries of a cultural center. In fact, Korea and Japan used both paper and writing tablets from the early stages of having a writing system.

The historical case of Japan, therefore, is of greater help than that of China to gaining an understanding of literate life in ancient Korea. There are few comprehensive studies on literacy in ancient Korea to date, despite a number of studies on the inscriptions found on pottery, metalwork, and stone monuments.⁶

3. For the literate life in the Qin and Han era or earlier, see Hayashi Minao and Yi Namgyu, trans., “8. munsŏ, sŏjŏk” (Ch. 8: Documents and Books), in *Kodae Chunggugin iyagi* (A Story of the Ancient Chinese People), (Seoul: Sol, 1998).

4. “Cai Lun chuan” 蔡倫傳 (Biography of Cai Lun), in *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Old Official History of the Later Han Dynasty), v. 78. But paper had already been in use. Indeed, a paper map has been found. See Hayashi and Yi, “8. munsŏ, sŏjŏk,” 200.

5. Kitō Kiyoaki, “Li, kami, and shofu” (Wood, Paper, and Styles of Writing), in Kishi Toshio, ed., *Nihon no kodai* (Antiquity of Japan), v. 14, *Kotoba to moji* (Oral and Written Language), (Tokyo: Chuō koronsha, 1996), 506.

6. For general studies on the literate life in ancient Korea, see Kim Yŏngr’ae, “Paekche ū tae Ilbon muncha pulgyŏng ch’ojŏn kwa kū sigi: kudūk pulgyŏng siyu muncha rŭl chungsim ūro” (Impartation of Written Language and the Buddhist Scriptures from Paekche to Japan and Its

Numerous papers have been published on literacy in ancient Japan, however, so I draw on both Japanese and Korean studies.⁷

In this article I first examine the context of the introduction of Chinese characters from the prehistoric period to the early Three Kingdoms period, drawing on archeological as well as documentary sources. Second, I conduct a comparative investigation of the full-scale dissemination of literacy in the Three Kingdoms period by studying the milestones recorded in documentary sources and inscriptions on artifacts. Also of use to this discussion is the historical experience of Japan during the same period. Third, based on the history of Silla, whose extant sources are relatively abundant, I attempt to periodize the whole development of the literate life. The case of Parhae, through the limited historical sources available, is also examined. Although these three topics may seem unrelated, when synthesized in terms of mutual relationships, they help illuminate the overall characteristics of literacy in ancient Korea.⁸

Occasion: With Emphasis on “The Inception of Written Language at the Time of the Acquisition of the Buddhist Scriptures”), *Yōsan Yu Pyōngdōk paksa hwagap kinyōm Han’guk ch’ōrhak chonggyo sasangsa* (Collection of Research Treatises on the History of Korean Philosophy and Religions in Commemoration of the Sixtieth Birthday of Dr. Yōsan Yu Pyōngdōk), 1990; Yi Kimun, “Samguk sidae ū ōnō mit muncha saenghwal” (The Language and Literacy of the Three Kingdoms Period), *Han’guk sasangsa taegye* (An Outline of the History of Korean Thought), v. 2 (Sōngnam: Han’guk chōngsin munhwa yōn’guwōn, 1991); Yi Sōngsi, “Kodai Chōsen hanto no kanji jijō to Nihon: roku seiki shoto no Silla wo chushin ni” (The Use of Chinese Characters in the Korean Peninsula in Ancient Times and Japan: Focusing on Early Sixth-Century Silla), *Shinika*, v. 9, *Kanji ga yatte kitakoro* (The Time When Chinese Characters Were Imparted), (Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten, 1992); Kim Ch’anggyun, “Samguk sidae ū muncha saenghwal kwa kū sōngkyōk” (Literacy in the Three Kingdoms Period and Its Nature), *Han’gukhak nonjip*, v. 21 (Kyemyōng taehakkyo Han’gukhak yōn’guwōn, 1994); Fujimoto Yukio, “Kodai Chōsen no gengo to moji bunka” (Language of Ancient Korea and Its Culture), in Kishi Toshio, ed., *Nihon no kodai* (Antiquity of Japan), v. 14, *Kotoba to moji* (Oral and Written Language), (Tokyo: Chuō koronsha, 1996); Yi Sōngsi, “Kanji bunka no dempa to juyō” (The Spread and Adoption of the Chinese Writing System and Its Culture), *Higashi Ajia bunkaken no keisei* (The Formation of the Cultural Community of East Asia), (Tokyo: Yamagawa shupansha, 2000). For more references and visual materials, see the articles by Chu Podon, Sōn Sōngnyōl, and Hong Posik published in Pusan kwangyōk sirip pangmulgwan Pokch’ōn pungwan, *Yumul e saegvōjin kodae muncha* (Ancient Written Language Inscribed on Antiquities), (Seoul: Pusan sirip pangmulgwan Pokch’ōn pungwan, 1997).

7. For the related articles, see *Shinika*, v. 9, *Kanji ga yatte kitakoro*; Kishi Toshio, ed., *Nihon no kodai*, v. 14, *Kotoba to moji*. For illustrated sources, see Ueda Masaaki, “Kanji bunka no juyō to tenkai” (The Adoption and Development of the Chinese Writing System and Its Culture), *Kodai no Nihon to torai no bunka* (Ancient Japan and Imported Culture), (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1997); Nishijima Sadao, “Kanji no denrai to sono henyō” (The Introduction of the Chinese Writing System and Its Adoption), *Wagoku no shutsugen* (The Advent of the Wa State), (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1999); Nara kokuritsu hakubutsukan, *Tokubetsuten: haktsu sareta zaimai inho* (Special Exhibition: Excavated Ancient Relics with Inscriptions), 1989.

8. I give many thanks to the graduate students in my class in the second semester of 1999 for the

The Dawn of Written Language in Korea

The oldest primary sources for written language are the patterns inscribed on pottery. Geometric figures were found on the bottoms of the bowls excavated from Neolithic site #31 in Nanjing.⁹ Some pottery of the Bronze Age, excavated from a site in Ch'odo in Najin County, is engraved with certain designs like ☒ and X.¹⁰ A character that resembles ※才 has also been spotted on the wooden dishes from tomb #12 in Yun'gach'on.¹¹ The inscriptions found in Chodo, in particular, have been examined in comparison with the inscriptions on bones and tortoise carapaces found in China; one of the inscriptions has been identified as the character 五 (Ch. *wu*).¹² This inscription, together with the inscriptions found in Yun'gach'on, is also understood as a deliberately inscribed character. These inscriptions remind us of the inscription *yama* 山 (Ch. *shan*), which is dated to the Yayoi period and regarded as the oldest character in Japan.¹³ For this reason, some view these inscriptions as the starting point of written language in ancient Korea,¹⁴ but this theory requires additional evidence.

We need to turn our attention to the historical accounts of Wiman Chosŏn 衛滿朝鮮. According to the “Chosŏn chŏn” 朝鮮傳 (Ch. Chaoxian chuan) of the *Shi ji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), the neighboring states of Chinbŏn 眞番, Chungguk 衆國 (lit., “many states”), and Chin'guk 辰國 (the Chin state) attempted to “present a letter” requesting an imperial audience with the Son of

classification of the sources related to this paper: to Nam Kisang, Pak Sŏnghyŏn, Ch'oe Changnyŏl, Nam Hŭisuk, Ch'oe Sun'gwŏn, Sim Wŏnsŏp, Hong Sŭngu, Yi Hansang, and Remco E. Breuker.

9. Kim Yonggan and Sŏk Kwangjun, *Namgyŏng yujŏk e kwanhan yŏn'gu* (A Study of the Ruins of Nanjing), (Pusan: Kwahak paek kwa sajŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1984), 52.

10. Kwahagwŏn, *Lajin Ch'odo wŏnsi yujŏk palgul pogosŏ* (A Report of the Excavation of the Ruins of Ch'odo in Najin County), 1956, illustrations CXXI-1 and CXXI-4.

11. Cho-Chung kongdong kogohak palguldae, *Chungguk tongbuk chibang ŭi yujŏk palgul pogo* (1963-1965) (A Report the Korea-China Joint Excavation of the Ruins in the Northeast Region, 1963-1965), (Seoul: Sahoe kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1966), 116.

12. Yi Hyŏnggu, “Kogo sidae ŭi Han'guk muncha: Hambuk Najin Ch'odo yujŏk ch'ult'o sŏnsa sidae yuja t'ogi (tomun) ŭl chungsim ŭro” (Korean Characters in the Prehistoric Period: An Examination of Prehistoric Pottery with Characters on It, from the Site of Ch'odo in Najin County, Hambuk Province), *Han'gukhak nonch'ong* 6 (1981): 407-425.

13. Okazaki Kuniaki, “Bunka to kigō” (Characters and Symbols), in Kishi Toshio, ed., *Nihon no kodai* (Antiquity of Japan), v. 14, *Kotoba to moji* (Oral and Written Language), (Tokyo: Chuō koronsha, 1996), 435-440.

14. Yi Hyŏnggu, *Han'guk kodae munhwa ŭi kiwŏn* (The Origin of Ancient Korean Culture), (Seoul: Kkach'i, 1991), 113-119.

Heaven, but Ugŏ 右渠, the king of Wiman Chosŏn, prevented them from communicating with China.¹⁵ If understood literally, this account suggests that the political entities in the southern region of the Korean peninsula had already been using the Chinese writing system and had even attempted to send diplomatic notes to China in the late second century BCE. Given the failure of their communiqué and the ambiguous language (“wanted to present a letter” 欲上書), the compiler of the *Shi ji* may have been using the expression 上書 loosely. In fact, the literate life in the southern part of the Korean peninsula later evolved in such a way that leads us to conclude that it was unlikely that the Chinese writing system was advanced enough to be used in documentary diplomacy in the late second century BCE.

Another means of communication in use during this period were the drawings incised on rocks, uncovered throughout the southwest region of the Korean peninsula, especially in Taegong-ni and Ch’ŏnjŏn-ni in Ulsan County and in Yangjŏn-dong and Alt’ŏ in Koryŏng County.¹⁶ The drawings incised on rocks at Pan’gudae 盤龜臺 in Taegong-ni depict about two hundred pictures, including among other images, wild animals, humans, boats, and fishing nets on broad surfaces,¹⁷ implying that the drawers intended to convey specific messages with respect to hunting and fishing. From this perspective, the designs on these archeological artifacts should be regarded as a form of pictograph. Since such incised rock drawings are generally dated from the Bronze Age to the early Iron Age, with some surviving into the early Three Kingdoms period,¹⁸ one can conclude that the pictograph was gradually replaced by the imported Chinese writing system.

The general influx of the Chinese writing system into the Korean peninsula began after four Chinese commanderies were established in the north during the

15. “Chaoxian chuan” 朝鮮傳, in *Shi ji* 史記, v. 115. The original text reads, “傳子至孫右渠, 所誘漢亡人滋多, 又未嘗入見。眞番旁衆國, 欲上書見天子, 又擁闕不通。”

16. It is possible that other designs or patterns also functioned as written language. Some examples include the designs on an armor-shaped copper artifact found in Kyŏngju and the animal designs on the jar with a base excavated from Samgwang-ni in Ulsan County. See Kungnip chungang pangmulgwan and Kungnip Kwangju pangmulgwan, *Han’guk ūi ch’ŏngdonggi munhwa* (Bronze Culture of Korea), (Seoul: Pŏmsa, 1992), 91, 99; Chŏn Hot’ae, “Ulchu Ch’ŏnjŏn-ni sŏsŏk sesŏn kakhwa yŏn’gu” (A Study of the Drawings Incised with Thin Lines on the Writing-Rock of Ch’ŏnjŏn-ni in Ulchu County), *Ulsan yŏn’gu*, v. 1 (Ulsan: Ulsan taehakkyo pangmulgwan, 1999), 21-23.

17. Chŏn Hot’ae, “Ulchu Taegong-ni Ch’ŏnjŏn-ni amgakhwa” (Incised Rock Drawings of Taegong-ni and Ch’ŏnjŏn-ni in Ulchu County), *Han’guk ūi amgakhwa* (Paju: Han’gilsa, 1996).

18. Chang Myŏngsu, “Han’guk amgakhwa ūi p’yŏnnyŏn” (The Periodization of the Incised Rock Drawings in Korea), *Han’guk ūi amgakhwa* (Paju: Han’gilsa, 1996), 186, 226.

Han dynasty. The five brushes excavated from tomb #1 in Taho-ri in Ch'angwŏn County are considered critical evidence of the literate life in this period. Since they were found alongside an iron stiletto used for engraving letters on blocks, they are more likely to have been used for writing than for lacquering or drawing.¹⁹ Also unearthed from the tomb were four bronze rings that probably functioned as the weights of a balance; one can therefore conjecture that the person buried in the tomb may have been engaged in trade with China. This tomb is dated approximately to the late first century because five-zhu coins 五銖錢 (*wu zhu qian*; the weight of 1 *zhu* is equal to 100 grains of millet) and star cloud mirrors (*xing yun jing* 星雲鏡) were also found inside.²⁰ One can therefore conclude that written language had already been diffused even to the southern region of the Korean peninsula by the late first century of the common era, though the extent of diffusion is unknown.

However, according to Chinese records, in the Nangnang 樂浪 (Ch. Luolang) society in the northwest region of the Korean peninsula, the number of prohibitory articles increased from eight to about sixty due to acts of thievery committed by Chinese merchants.²¹ This dramatic rise in number suggests that the prohibitory articles were no longer customary laws but a codified penal system. Even if this proves to be unsubstantiated, the many inscribed artifacts excavated from the ruins in Nangnang suggest that the literate life in the region of the Chinese commanderies rivaled that of China proper: some examples of such artifacts are bronze spears of the Qin period (256-257 BCE), articles of the Han period (206 BCE-220 CE),²² wooden blocks inscribed with characters, and writing instruments such as the tips of brushes, inkstones, inkstone cases, and ink water containers.²³

19. Yi Kŏnmu, "Taho-ri yujŏk ch'ult'o put (p'il) e taehayŏ" (On the Brush Found from the Site of Taho-ri), *Kogohak chi*, v. 4, 1992.

20. Yi Kŏnmu, Yi Yŏnghun, Yun Kwangsik, and Sin Taegon, "Üich'ang Taho-ri yujŏk palgul chinjŏn pogo (I)" (A Report of the Progress of the Excavation of the Site of Taho-ri in Üich'ang County, I), *Kogohak chi*, 1 (1989): 53.

21. *Han shu* 漢書 (Official History of the Han Dynasty), v. 28B, "Zhi li zhi" 地理志, 8B, The original text reads, "郡初取吏於遼東, 吏見民無閉臧, 及賈人往者, 夜則爲盜, 俗稍益薄. 今於犯禁寢多, 至六十餘條."

22. Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han'guk kodaesa kŏmsŏngmun* (Ancient Epigraphies in Korea: Translation and Annotation), v. 1 (Seoul: Karakkuk sajŏk kaebal yŏn'guwŏn, 1992), 201-447.

23. Komai Kazue, *Luolang, Chuko shinsho*, v. 308 (Tokyo: Chuō koronsha, 1972), 111-117; Lyu Pyŏnghŭng, "Widae han suryŏng Kim Ilsŏng tongji üi hyŏnmŏyŏng han lyŏngdo mit e kogohak punya esŏ iruk han sŏngkwa" (Achievement in the Field of Archeology under the Wise Guidance of Comrade Kim Il Sung, the Great Leader), *Chosŏn kogo yŏn'gu* 2 (1992): 2.

The literate life of Chinese commanderies, and the Luolang commandery in particular, undoubtedly exerted some influence on the native powers in their vicinities. The Tahoe-ri remains are one example. But because it would have taken an extended period of time for local inhabitants to acquire a fluent command of writing, most likely only a limited number of people from privileged backgrounds understood the Chinese writing system. It is difficult to confirm when the Chinese writing system was adopted in each region. Since the earliest inscribed materials for each state are dated to the fourth century for Koguryŏ, the fourth to fifth centuries for Paekche, the mid-fifth century for Silla, and the sixth century for Kaya, the timeline could be drawn at the third century for the north of the peninsula and at the fourth or fifth century for the south.²⁴

As mentioned above, some evidence suggests that the Chinese writing system spread in certain regions, albeit limited to certain classes, between the first and third centuries. While there were most likely blocks and paper with writings on them, they have not survived because of their fragile and corrosive nature. Thus coins, mirrors, and seals, found in archeological sites and dated to the period, serve as precious evidence of the literate life.

First, the crescent-knife coin (*ming da qian* 明刀錢), the five-zhu coin (*wu zhu qian* 五銖錢), and the Wang Mang coin (王莽錢) are good examples of coinage with inscriptions. The crescent-knife coin, circulated during the Warring States period (fifth century BCE-221 BCE); the half-tael coin (*ban liang qian* 半兩錢); and other coins such as the *yi hua coin* 一化錢 (inscribed with the characters *yi* and *hua*) have been excavated in Liaodong as well as the northern part of the peninsula. The crescent-knife coins in particular have been found in large quantities, inscribed with symbols resembling characters, such as *ming* 明, *xing* 行, *zuo* 左, and *you* 右. However, since they were only found north of the upper stream of the Taedong River,²⁵ they probably exerted little influence on the literate life in Old Chosŏn and other native societies.

24. See Table 3 below. However, since some archeological remains provide evidence of an earlier dissemination of letters, no timetable, including that shown in Table 3, can be considered definitive

25. Fujita Ryōsaku, “Chōsen hakken no ming da qian to sono iseki” (The Crescent-Knife Coins Found in Korea and Their Ruins), *Chōsen kokogaku kenkyū* (A Study of Korean Archeology), (Kyoto: Takagiri shoten, 1968), 283; Son Yanggu, “Yodong chibang kwa sŏbuk chibang esŏ tŭrŏnan myōngdojŏn e taehayŏ” (On the Crescent-Knife Coins Found in Liaodong and the Northwest of the Korean Peninsula), *Kogo minsok lŏnmunjip*, v. 10 (P’yŏngyang: Sahoe kwahak ch’ulp’ansa, 1990), 34-36; Pak Sŏnmi, “Kiwŏn chŏn 3, 2-segi Ko Chosŏn munhwa wa myōngdojŏn yujŏk” (Culture of Old Chosŏn in the Third and Second Centuries B.C. and the Sites That Produced Crescent-Knife Coins), (Master’s thesis, Seoul: Sŏul sirip taehakkyo, February 2000), distribution map on p. 11.

The five-zhu coins were first minted in 119 BCE, but those found in the peninsula are dated to the late period of the Former Han (206 BCE-9 CE) and have been excavated from the sites in Hŭkkyo-ri and Unsŏng-ni in Hwanghae Province, Sanjihang in Cheju Island, tomb #1 in Taho-ri, the three wood-coffin tombs in Imdang-dong, and the shell mound in Ch'angwŏn County in the south.²⁶ From the site in Sanjihang, various types of the Wang Mang coin, such as *huo quan* 貨泉, *da quan wu shi* 大泉五十, and *huo bu* 貨布, were found together with some five-zhu coins. *Huo quan* were also found in the shell mounds in Hoehyŏn-dong in Kimhae County and Kun'gong-ni in Haenam County. A number of five-zhu coins, thought to have been minted between the late first century BCE and the mid-second century CE, were excavated from a site in Kŏmun Island off the port of Yŏsu.²⁷ The site of the earthen-walled town of P'ungnap-tong also yielded one five-zhu coin.²⁸ Since all the five-zhu coins and Wang Mang coins found in the peninsula are believed to have been minted during the first century BCE and the first century CE,²⁹ they are estimated to have reached the peninsula between the late Former Han and early Later Han periods. Also, that most of these coins have been found in the coastal area suggests that their influx was related to maritime trade. Furthermore, the sites of the earthen-walled town of Mongch'on and the walled town of Singŏm in Hongŏng County produced some broken pieces of Chinese pottery imprinted with a coin that had been circulated in Western Jin (265-316).³⁰

26. Munhwajae kwalliguk, *Masan Oe-dong Sŏngsan p'aech'ong palgul chosa pogo* (A Report of the Excavation and Examination of the Shell Mound of Sŏngsan, Oe-dong, in the City of Masan), 1976, 127-128; Okauchi Mitsuzane, "Handai wu zhu qian no kenkyu" (A Study of the Five-Zhu Coin in the Han Period), *Chōsen gakuho* 102 (1981): 106-107; Han'guk t'oji kongsa and Han'guk munhwajae poho chaedan, *Kyŏngsan Imdang yujŏk* (VI): *E-chigu kobun kun* (The Site of Imdang in Kyŏngsan County, VI: The Tombs of District E), (Seoul: Hanguk munhwa chaeboho chaedan, 1998), 374.

27. Chi Kŏn'gil, "Namhaean chibang Handae hwap'ye" (The Coins of the Han Period Found in the South Coast Region), *Ch'angsan Kim Chŏnggi paksa hwagap kinyŏm nonch'ong* (Collections of Research Treatises in Commemoration of the Sixtieth Birthday of Dr. Ch'angsan Kim Chŏnggi), (Seoul: Ch'angsan Kim Chŏnggi paksa hwagap kinyŏm nonch'ong kanhaeng wiwŏnhoe 1990), 541-543; Ch'oe Sŏngnak, *Han'guk wŏn sanguk munhwa ū yŏn'gu: Chŏnnam chibang ū chungsim ūro* (A Study of the Culture of the Original Three States: The Case of Chŏnnam Province), (Seoul: Hagyŏn munhwasa, 1993), 225.

28. Hansin taehakkyo pangmulgwan, *P'ungnap-tong Kyŏngdang chigu palgul chosa sam-ch'a chido Wiwŏnhoe charyo* (Materials for the Third Guidance Committee of the Excavation and Examination of the Kyŏngdang District in P'ungnap-tong), April 25, 2000.

29. Chi Kŏn'gil, "Namhaean chibang Handae hwap'ye," 546.

30. Mongch'on t'osŏng palgul chosadan, *Mongch'on t'osŏng palgul chosa pogosŏ* (A Report of the Excavation and Examination of the Earthen-Walled Town of Mongch'on), (Seoul: Seoul National University Museum, 1985), 140; Ch'unghnam taehakkyo pangmulgwan, *Singŏmsŏng*

The second type of archeological source is mirrors with inscriptions. The Luolang region has produced several Chinese mirrors inscribed with auspicious phrases.³¹ Many Chinese mirrors, dated to the Former Han period or later, have also been found in the southern Korean peninsula, mostly in the southeast region: Chisan-dong in Taegu city, Ŏn-dong in Yŏngch'ŏn County, Choyang-dong in Kyŏngju city, Imdang-dong, Kyŏngsan city in the former Sangju County, Yangdong-ni in former Kimhae County, and Taesŏng-dong in Kimhae city.³² Site #1 in Taho-ri in Ch'angwŏn and site #38 in Choyang-dong in Kyŏngju are dated approximately to the late first century BCE.³³ The earliest dates for these inscribed mirrors, therefore, can be established in the same period.

Yet another source of evidence is official seals. The ruins in the Luolang commandery have yielded about thirty seals and 200 mud seals with imprints.³⁴ Among them, the "Seal of Pujoyegun" (夫租蒧君印) in particular is believed to have been bestowed upon a native chieftain. The conferment of seals upon native rulers would not have been limited to those who lived in the region under the jurisdiction of the Chinese commanderies. According to a Chinese account, there were as many as one thousand conferees in the Samhan 三韓 (Three Han) region of the southern peninsula in the early third century.³⁵ For example, a chieftain of Pungmyŏng 北溟 was presented with the Seal of the King of Ye (Yewang in 濊王印) during the reign of Namhae ch'ach'aung (r. 4-24).³⁶ In fact, the southeast region has produced copper seals with the inscriptions *Wei solsŏn Han paekchang* 魏率善韓佰長 (lit., "the Seal of the Han ruler loyal to Wei") and *Jin solsŏn Ye paekchang* 晉率善濊佰長 (lit., "the Seal of the Ye ruler loyal to Jin").³⁷

(The Walled Town of Singŭm), (Taejon: Ch'ungnam taehakkyo pangmulgwan, 1994), 166.

31. Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han'guk kodaie kŏmsŏngmun*, v. 1, 422-445.

32. An Kyŏngsuk, "Tanyugyŏng esŏ han'gyŏng ŭro chŏnhwan e taehan yŏn'gu" (A Study of the Transition from the Multi-knobbed Mirror to the Han Chinese-style Mirror), (Master's thesis, Seoul: Hanyang taehakkyo, June 1998), 62-64; Yi Chaehyŏn, "Kaya chiyŏk ch'ult'o tonggyŏng kwa kyoyŏk ch'egye" (Bronze Mirrors Excavated in the Kaya Region and the Trade System), *Han'guk kodaesa nonch'ong* 9 (2000), 42-47.

33. Takakura Hiroaki, *Nihon kinzokuki no kenkyu* (A Study of the Advent of Metalware in Japan), (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1990), 222-223; Yi Ch'ŏnggyu, "Yŏngnam chibang ch'ŏngdonggi munhwa ŭi chŏn'gae" (The Evolution of the Bronze Culture in Yŏngnam Region), *Yŏngnam kogohak* 21 (1997), 70-71. Meanwhile, the mirror found on the site of T'aebong-sa temple in Iksan is estimated to have been made in Western Jin China (265-317 CE); Hong Sajun, "Chŏnbuk Iksan ch'ult'o yukchogyŏng" (The Six Dynasties Chinese Mirror Excavated from the Site of Iksan in Chŏnbuk Province), *Kogo misul* 1, no. 1, (1960).

34. Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han'guk kodaie kŏmsŏngmun*, v. 1, 301-356.

35. "Han chuan" 韓傳, *Wei shu* 魏書, in *San guo zhi* 三國志, v. 30.

36. However, the chronology is not very reliable; *Samguk sagi* 三國史記, v. 1, second month in the 1sixth year of Namhae ch'ach'aung.

According to both Chinese and Korean historical accounts, Puyŏ was given an official seal from Han China in 120 CE,³⁸ as well as a seal that read *Yewang chi in* 漢王之印 (the Seal of the King of Ye).³⁹ The Korean source, moreover, gives an account of some Koguryŏ seals: the Golden Seal of the King (*kŭmsae* 金璽) of King Taemusin (r. 18-44), the Great Seal of the King (*kuksae* 國璽) of King Sindae (r. 165-179), and the Seal of the King with cord (*saesu* 璽綬) of King Mich'ŏn (r. 300-331).⁴⁰ While it is somewhat doubtful that these Koguryŏ kings actually used their own seals during their reigns, the three copper seals granted by Western Jin (265-317) found in the southwest nonetheless indicate that Koguryŏ kings also received official seals from China. In the case of Japan, a golden seal granted by the Guangwu Emperor in 57 CE was found in Shikanoshima.⁴¹

Finally, there are copper implements to be considered: the copperware found at site #E-52 in Imdang-dong with the inscription *jang nak* 長樂 (lit., “lasting happiness”);⁴² the copper kettle excavated from site #322 in Kimhae County with the inscription “West Palace” (*Sŏgugung* 西口宮);⁴³ and the copper bell found at site #IV-A-52 in Pongmyŏng-dong, Ch'ŏngju city, with the inscription “great luck” (*taegil* 大吉).⁴⁴ In general, these artifacts are estimated to have been buried between the first and the third or fourth centuries.

Next, I will address the channels through which the extant sources streamed into the peninsula. There were two different means of exchange between China and Korea in the early Three Kingdoms period.⁴⁵ One was via tribute trade:

37. Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han'guk kodaese kŭmsŏngmun*, v. 1, 217-218.

38. *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, v. 85, Puyŏ guo chuan 夫餘國傳.

39. *San gou shu* 三國志, v. 30, *Wei shu* 魏書, Puyŏ chuan 夫餘傳.

40. *Samguk sagi* 三國史記, v. 14, fourth year of King Taemusin; v. 16, coronation year of King Sindae; v. 17, coronation year of King Mich'ŏn.

41. Okazaki Kuniaki, “Bunka to kigō,” 440-442.

42. Han'guk t'oji kongsa and Han'guk munhwajae poho chaedan, *Kyŏngsan Imdang yujŏk* (VI) (Seoul: Hanguk munhwa chaeboho chaedan, 1998), 141, 381-382. According to this report, this phrase is inscribed on a broken piece of a mirror.

43. Pusan kwangyŏk sirip pangmulgwan Pokch'ŏn pun'gwan, *Yumul e saegyŏjin kodaese muncha*, 8.

44. Ch'ungbuk taehakkyo pangmulgwan and Ch'ŏngju-si, *Ch'ŏngju Pongmyŏng-dong yujŏk palgul chosa yak pogosŏ* (A Brief Report of the Excavation and Examination of the Site of Pongmyŏng-dong in Ch'ŏngju City), (Ch'ŏngju: Ch'ungbuk taehakkyo pangmulgwan, 1999), 66; Kungnip chungang pangmulgwan, *T'ŭkpyŏljŏn: Paekche* (A Special Exhibition: Paekche), (Seoul: T'ong ch'ŏn munhwasa, 1999), 17.

45. Yi Hyŏnhye, *Han'guk kodaese ŭi saengsan kwa kyoyŏk* (Production and Trade of Korea in Ancient Times), (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1998), 265-280.

native rulers in the peninsula paid tribute to China and received Chinese titles and official seals. The other was commercial trade: Chinese merchants came to the peninsula to engage in trade. Accordingly, the uncovered seals and mirrors most likely came to the peninsula through tribute trade, while five-zhu coins and Wang Mang coins, found mainly along the coastline, were introduced by Chinese traders, who passed on the Chinese writing system to their Korean partners.

However, it does not necessarily follow that the Korean rulers understood the inscriptions on the mirrors and coins from China. Considering the corresponding Japanese case may help illuminate the Korean context. In Japan, the symbols resembling Chinese characters that were engraved on imitations of Chinese mirrors (bōseikyō 倣製鏡) suggest that the Japanese of that age did not yet understand written Chinese.⁴⁶ Moreover, the use of official seals from China appears to have been more closely related to political power or personal valuables than to the literate life.⁴⁷ However, some archeological evidence suggests that the Koreans began to understand the Chinese writing system earlier than the Japanese: the brush unearthed from tomb #1 in Taho-ri is dated to the late first century BCE; the earthen inkstone dated to the fourth century CE that was found in the pit dwelling #ko-40 in Misa-ri, Hanam city;⁴⁸ other inkstones, some similar to the one from Misa-ri, found at the site in the earthen-walled town of P'ungnap-tong;⁴⁹ and the mural in tomb #3 in Anak, dated to the mid-fourth century, depicting a scene in which a person is reporting to the king and recording the royal ordinances. Finally, unlike the imitation mirrors found in Japan, those found in the peninsula are not engraved with symbols.⁵⁰ This difference can be considered circumstantial evidence for the difference between

46. Takakura Hiroaki, *Nihon kinzokuki no kenkyū*, 260; Okazaki Kuniaki, "Bunka to kigō," 450; Sato Makato, "Shusho to rakusho" (Penmanship and Scribbles), in Kishi Toshio, ed., *Nihon no kodai* (Antiquity of Japan), v. 14, *Kotoba to moji* (Oral and Written Language), (Tokyo: Chuō koronsha, 1996), 644.

47. Okazaki Kuniaki, "Bunka to kigō," 442.

48. Koryō taehakkyo palgul chosadan, ed., *Misa-ri*, v. 5, (Seoul: Misa-ri sōnsa yujōk palgul chosadan, 1994), 193; Kwōm Oyōng, "Misa-ri ch'wirak kwa Mongch'on t'osōng ūi pigyo rūl t'onghae pon Hansōng ki Paekche sahoe ūi tanmyōn" (An Aspect of Paekche Society in the Hansōng Period, Viewed from a Comparison of the Dwellings of Misa-ri and the Earthen-Walled Town of Mongch'on), *Han'guk kodaesa nonch'ong* 8 (1996): 59-61.

49. Hansin taehakkyo pangmulwan, *Sōul-si P'ungnap-tong Kyōngdang yōllip puji yujōk palgul chosa chinggan pogo* (An Interim Report of the Excavation and Examination of the Site of Kyōngdang in P'ungnap-tong), (Seoul, December 1999), picture on p. 15.

50. Oda Fujio, "Nikkan chiiki shutsudo no dohan shodokyo" (The Same-Mold-Cast Small Bronze Mirrors Found in Japan and Korea), *Kobunka danso*, v. 9 (Kyushu kobunka kenkyukai, 1982), 101; Yi Chaehyōn, "Kaya chiyōk ch'ult'o tonggyōng kwa kyoyōk ch'egye," 51.

Table 1. The Existence of Written Language in East Asian Countries

States Histories	Koguryŏ	Paekche	Silla	Wa, Japan	Suksin	Ryukyu	Malgal	Parhae
<i>Samguk sagi</i> 三國史記	國初始用文字時，有人記事一百卷，名曰留記。	古記云，百濟開國已來，未有以文字記事。至是，得博士高興，始有書記。						
<i>Jin shu</i> 晉書					無文墨，以言語爲約。			
<i>Liang shu</i> 梁書			無文字，刻木爲信。語言待百濟而後通焉。					
<i>Sui shu</i> 隋書			其文字甲兵同於中國。	無文字，唯刻木結繩。敬佛法，於百濟求得佛經，始有文字。		俗無文字，望月虧盈以紀時節，候草藥枯以爲年歲。		
<i>Zhou shu</i> 周書		兼愛墳史，其秀異者，頗解屬文。						
<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> 舊唐書				頗有文字，俗敬佛法。		俗無文字	頗有文字及書記。	
<i>Xin Tang shu</i> 新唐書				有文字，尙浮屠法。				頗知書契。

Korea and Japan in terms of comprehension.

Chinese and Korean historical records can be used to build a more thorough comparison of the Korean states and Japan in the Three Kingdoms period with respect to the introduction of the writing system. For instance, the compilers of Chinese histories kept a record of whether a neighboring people or country was literate. Table 1 above shows the differences among the countries.

As shown in Table 1, Chinese historical accounts do not offer information about Koguryŏ and Paekche. This reflects the fact that those two states must have used Chinese characters earlier than the other countries. Fortunately, the *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (History of the Three Kingdoms), a Korean history, provides some information: the Koguryŏ people used written language for the

first time in the early phase of their country; and the Paekche people began to record their own history, entitled *Sŏgi* 書記, in the 30th year (375) of King Kŭnch'ogo's reign (r. 346-375). These accounts, however, have some problems that need to be scrutinized.

First, "the early phase" is a rather ill-defined time period.⁵¹ Based on the circumstantial evidence, it most likely does not refer to the founding of Koguryŏ. For instance, roof tiles engraved with characters (examined below) are dated to the early fourth century. It follows that the Koguryŏ people began to use the writing system no later than the third century. Though the exact date is debatable, it is clear that Koguryŏ adopted the Chinese writing system before Paekche or Silla.

The account about Paekche, in contrast, does not discuss when writing was introduced but rather when the practice of keeping historical records began. This information, in conjunction with the fact that an inkstone excavated from Misadong in Hanam city is dated to the fourth century, leads to the conclusion that the writing system was already well established in Paekche by the fourth century. Another historical account, which describes the complete organization of the state during the reign of King Koi (r. 234-286), suggests that Paekche began to use the writing system even earlier.

As examined so far, the existing sources suggest that Koguryŏ and Paekche began to use the writing system almost simultaneously. Silla, however, lagged behind significantly. The Chinese *Liang shu* 梁書 (Official History of the Liang Dynasty, 502-556), depicting the situation of the early sixth century, states that there was no writing system in Silla. According to the *Sui shu* 隋書 (Official History of Sui, 580-618), a history of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, Silla people had begun to use the writing system for the first time. These Chinese accounts, however, cannot be considered reliable sources of information about the domestic situation in Silla. In fact, some inscriptions found on the huge tombs of Hwangnam are estimated to have been made in the mid- or late fifth century.⁵² Thus there is almost a one-hundred-year discrepancy between Chinese accounts and estimations based on Korean archeological sources.

A similar inconsistency is found in the case of Japan. The *Sui shi* states that

51. Pak Sŏnghŭi, "Kodae samguk ŭi sasŏ p'yŏnch'an e taehan chae kŏmt'o" (A Reexamination of the Compilation of the Histories in the Ancient Three Kingdoms), *Chindan hakpo* 88 (1999): 26-27.

52. Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han'guk kodae kŭmsŏngmun*, v. 2, 211-214. Also, for the various views of dating the northern and southern tombs of Hwangnam, see Yi Chongsŏn, "Chŏksŏk mokkwakpun ŭi p'yŏnnyŏn e taehan che nonŭi" (Discussions on the Dating of the Stone Mound Wooden-Outer-Coffin Tomb), *Han'guk kodaesa nonch'ong* 3 (1992).

there was no writing system in Japan, and the *Tang shi* 唐書 (Official History of the Tang Dynasty, 618-906) reports that the Japanese had begun to use the writing system. But some iron swords with inscriptions, dated to the fifth century, have been found in Japan. In addition, given the introduction of Buddhist texts to Japan during the reign of King Sōng (r. 523-554) of Paekche, there is a one- to two-hundred-year discrepancy between Chinese accounts and other sources.

In consideration of chronological discrepancies in Chinese sources, Yi Sōngsi has concluded that the Silla people's command of the Chinese writing system was not sophisticated enough to write an official letter to China in the sixth century, when they relied on the Koguryō style of syntax.⁵³ Since it is unlikely that Silla exchanged official letters with China earlier than the late sixth century, Yi's interpretation is somewhat convincing. Yet as seen in Table 2, Koguryō had established diplomatic relations with China much earlier – a fact indicative of a good command of Chinese syntax. Thus it is possible that Chinese sources offer little information about literacy in Silla because Silla emerged relatively late on the international stage.

Nonetheless, a comparison of when the writing system is estimated to have spread to each East Asian state can be helpful (see Table 1). It is interesting that literacy did not spread to states and peoples on the periphery, such as Suksin 肅愼, Ryukyu 流求, and Malgal 靺鞨 (Ch. Moho) whereas Parhae (698-926), founded around the turn of the eighth century, used the Chinese writing system from the beginning. The order in which Chinese writing was adopted corresponds to the relative development of each state. For instance, Koguryō was founded before Silla, and accordingly began to use the Chinese writing system first.

Before concluding this section, I will briefly examine the theories holding that some Koreans had already developed their own writing systems long before the invention of the Korean alphabet in the early fifteenth century. Though continuously reintroduced, this theory has offered little evidence in corroboration.⁵⁴ Since 1993, North Korean scholars have argued that Old Chosŏn used *sinji* 神誌 characters;⁵⁵ they have even claimed that *ch'anghil*

53. Yi Sōngsi, "Kodai Chōsen hanto no kanji jijō to Nihon," 42; idem, *Higashi Ajia bunkaken no keisei*, 59-60.

54. Yi Kimun, "Samguk sidae ūi ōnō mit muncha saenghwal," 478-480.

55. Yu Yōl, "Uri minjok ūn Ko Chosŏn sigi put'ō koyu han minjok kŭlcha rŭl kajin sŭlgiroun minjok" (We Are a Wise People Who Already Had Our Own Written Language in the Old Chosŏn Period), *Tan'gun kwa Ko Chosŏn e kwanhan yŏn'gu lonmunjip* (Collection of Research Treatises on Tan'gun and Old Chosŏn), (P'yŏngyang: Sahoe kwahak ch'ulp'ansa, 1994).

characters (the legendary Chinese characters) were derived from *sinji* characters,⁵⁶ and that *sinji* characters were transmitted to the Three Kingdoms (Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla), Parhae, and Koryŏ. Given the lack of supporting historical evidence, these North Korean claims can be dismissed as politico-ideological propaganda.

Some scholars have also argued that Parhae had its own written language, based on some illegible characters inscribed on roof tiles and on an account in the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Official History of the Tang Dynasty).⁵⁷ However, the inscriptions on roof tiles have been shown to be derivative of Chinese characters.⁵⁸ Moreover, the *Jiu Tang shu* account, which states that “[they] have a writing system [in Parhae]” (see Table 1), does not provide enough evidence to substantiate the existence of Parhae’s own written language. Therefore, the claim cannot be credited as long as there is no concrete evidence, such as a sentence composed in Parhae’s unique characters.

The Commencement of the Literate Life: A Comparison of the Three Kingdoms

There are few sources that describe the literate life in the Three Kingdom period, but fortunately some of the murals found in Koguryŏ tombs – such as tomb #3 in Anak, the tomb in Tŏkhŭng-ni, and the Tomb of the Four Spirits (Sasinch’ong 四神塚) in Tonggou – provide some useful information.

The first mural to consider is found in tomb #3 in Anak. Situated on the western wall of the western chamber, the painting, aptly titled “Governmental Affairs,”⁵⁹ depicts a scene in which a man on the right side is reporting aloud

56. Kim Inho, “Uri nara kodae kŭlcha kwan’gye ūi lyŏksa yumul kwa charyo tŭl e taehan koch’al” (An Examination of the Historical Remains and Sources Relevant to the Ancient Written Language of Our Country), in *Tan’gun kwa Ko Chosŏn* (Tan’gun and Old Chosŏn), (Seoul: Sallim’tŏ, 1999); Yu Yŏl, “Sinji kŭlcha wa ‘ch’anghil’ muncha watŭi kwan’gye e taehayŏ” (On the Relations between the *Sinji* Characters and the *Ch’anghil* Characters), in *ibid.*; Kim Yun’gyo, “Sinji kŭlcha ūi sidaejŏk in ssŭim kwa pyŏnhwa” (The Use of the *Sinji* Characters and Its Temporal Transformation), in *ibid.*

57. Jin Yufu, *Parhae guo zhi chang bian* 渤海國志長編 (The History of the Parhae state), v. 20, (Seoul: T’aehaksa, 1977), Puyŏ 餘錄; Yi Yongbŏm, *Kodae ūi Manju kwan’gye* (Relations with Manchuria in Ancient Times), Ch’unch’u mun’go, v. 20, (Seoul: Han’guk ilbosa, 1976), 154.

58. For the characters imprinted on the roof tiles of Parhae, see Han’guk kodaesa yŏn’guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han’guk kodae kŭmsŏngmun*, v. 3, 473-480.

59. Chosŏn hwasŏsa, *Koguryŏ kobun pyŏkhwa* (Murals of the Koguryŏ Tombs), 1985, illustration 2-4; P’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, *Chosŏn yujŏk yumul togam* (The Illustrated Book of Korean Relics and Ruins), v. 5 (Seoul: Donggwang ch’ulpansa, 1990), illustration 21 (facsimile)



Figure 1. *Söngsa* (inspection), tomb #3 in Anak.

and a man on the left is writing something down. The man on the right is also holding a document in his hands while kneeling on the rug (see Fig. 1). On the document, there are two red horizontal lines and roughly eleven black vertical lines; the latter are thought to represent written characters. In front of the rug, there is a square board with vertical lines drawn on it that looks more like a wooden board than paper. It is difficult to determine whether it is supposed to be a document or a wooden salver designed to carry documents on it. If it is a document, then what the man on the right is holding may be a wooden board.

The title of the man on the right is written in red behind his head: *söngsa* 省事 (Ch. *sheng shi*), which literally means “inspection.”⁶⁰ One can infer from the details in the painting that this refers to the post first created in the Western

Zhou dynasty (1028-771 BCE) to assist a minister, Jia Zhong 賈充, who was then suffering from an eye disorder.⁶¹

The man on the left is holding a white tablet (baton)⁶² in his right hand and a short brush in his left hand (see Fig. 2). His title, *kisil* 記室, which literally means “a recording chamber,” is also written behind his head.⁶³ This post (Ch. *ji shi*) designated an official in charge of documents, composition, and archives, kept since Han China (206 BCE-220 CE).⁶⁴

It appears that the two men are attending to the main character in the

on p. 32, and pp. 38-41 as well.

60. Kwahagwŏn kogohak mit minsokhak yŏn'guso, *Anak che 3-ho pun palgul pogo* (A Report on the Excavation of Tomb #3 of Anak), (P'yŏngyang: Kwahagwŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1958), 14.

61. “Zhi guan zhi” 職官志 14 of *Jin shu* 晉書, v. 24. The original text reads, “尚書令, … 始賈充爲尚書令, 以目疾表置省事吏四人, 省事蓋 自此始.”

62. The word *hol* 笏 (Ch. hu) originally derived from the tablet for taking down the words of the throne, and it was also called *sup'an* 手板 (Ch. *shou ban*), which literally means “a hand-tablet.” See “Li yi zhi” 禮儀志 7 of *Sui shu* 隋書, v. 12. The original text reads, “笏, … 凡有指畫於君前, 受命書於笏. 笏畢用也. 五經要義曰, 所以記事, 防忽忘. … 晉宋以來, 謂之手板, 此乃不經, 今還謂之笏, 以法古名.”

63. Kwahagwŏn kogohak mit minsokhak yŏn'guso, *Anak che 3-ho pun palgul pogo*, 14.

64. *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Official History of the Later Han), Zhi 24, bo guan 1, tai wei. The original text reads, “記室令史主上章表報書記.”

painting: the *sŏngsa* is reporting aloud, while the *kisil* on the opposite side is recording the ordinance of the main character, whose identity remains unclear. There are two equally plausible possibilities. If it is Dong Shou 冬壽, a Chinese refugee to Koguryŏ, then the mural should be understood as a depiction of a Chinese scene, irrelevant to Koguryŏ history. But if the central man is assumed to be a Koguryŏ king – either King Mich’ŏn (r. 330-331) or King Kogugwŏn (r. 331-371), based on the inscription on the tomb (*sŏngsangbŏn* 聖上幡) and the white-net crown he wears – then the mural is a critical source of information about the literate life in fourth-century Koguryŏ.⁶⁵ In the latter case, one would infer from the scene that brushes were commonly used in the Koguryŏ court and that administrative documents were well organized.

The mural found in the tomb in Tŏkhŭng-ni, constructed in 408 CE, is also an important source. In the upper portion of the western wall of the burial chamber, there is a scene of horse-riding archers accompanied by two inscriptions, which read “This is the person in a game of horse-riding archery in the West Garden” (此爲西園中馬射戲人) and “The scorekeeper of the archery game” (射戲注記人). Three persons stand behind the latter inscription: one of them is recording the score with a brush (see Fig. 3), and the other two look like the umpires of the game.⁶⁶ Scholars have debated the identity of the person buried in the tomb; his surname is Chin 鎭, so he could have been either a Chinese refugee or a Koguryŏan (Korean).⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the game scene itself is most likely a depiction of a



Figure 2. *Kisil* (recording chamber), tomb #3 in Anak.



Figure 3. *Chugiin* (scorekeeper), tomb in Tŏkhŭng-ni.

65. Han’guk kodaesa yŏn’guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han’guk kodaie kŭmsŏngmun*, v. 1, 59-70.

66. Chosŏn hwasŏsa, *Koguryŏ kobun pyŏkhwa*, illustration 82; P’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, *Chosŏn yujŏk yumul togam*, 172.



Figure 4. *Sinin* (godlike man), Tomb of the Four Spirits.

Koguryŏ event, for Koguryŏ people began to keep the scores of games toward the end of King Kwanggaet'o's reign (391-413).

Yet another archeological source is the mural found in the Tomb of the Four Spirits in Tonggou, which is thought to have been constructed in the mid-sixth century. Two godlike men are depicted on the western ceiling of the burial chamber.

The one in the front, dropping a knee, is about to write something on the table using the brush, dipped in ink, in his right hand and the ink container in his left hand (see Fig. 4).⁶⁸ Ten vertical lines are drawn on the surface of the table before him, but he appears to have written not directly on the table but on the paper spread on top of it. The scene in this mural is distinct in that it depicts a person who writes while sitting at a table, whereas the scribes in the two scenes discussed above (Figs. 2 and 3) are standing. Although the subject is godlike in appearance, the scene must have reflected an aspect of contemporary life.⁶⁹

I will now compare how the literate life started in the three Korean kingdoms of Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla. Owing to the limited number of primary sources available, I also draw on some secondary sources. Table 2 is based on historical records that offer information about the spread of literacy.

First, let us examine the diplomatic documents. In the course of the diplomatic relations between Korean kingdoms and China, diplomatic notes were exchanged: a letter sent from China to Korea was called *chosŏ* 詔書 (Ch. *zhao shu*, lit., "imperial message"), while a letter sent from Korea to China was called *sŏp'yo* 書表 (Ch. *shu biao*). According to the *Samguk sagi*, Koguryŏ (28 CE) was the first to send a diplomatic note to China. However, if the accounts of the early Three Kingdoms period in the *Samguk sagi* are discredited, Puyŏ was

67. Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han'guk kodaek kŏmsŏngmun*, v. 1, 79-88.

68. Chosŏn hwasŏsa, *Koguryŏ kobun pyŏkbwa*, illustration 219; P'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, *Chosŏn yujŏk yumul togam*, v. 6, 212.

69. The celadon bottle, excavated from the site of Yuch'ŏn-ni in Puan County, with the design of Korean apricot on it (collected by the Museum at Ehwa Women's University, Seoul, Korea) is also worth examining, even though it is dated at the 13th century during the Koryŏ period (918-1392): in the inlaid drawing, one standing woman writes on the long paper that another woman is holding.

Table 2. Historical Accounts about Literacy in Korea and Japan

Earliest records		Old Chosŏn	Puyŏ	Koguryŏ	Paekche	Silla	Wa, Japan
Imperial letters	Content not recorded	109 BCE: “不肯奉詔” (<i>Shi ji</i> , v. 115)	—	—	—	565: “詔” (Bei Qi shu, v. 7; Samguk sagi, v. 4); 621: “賜以璽書” (<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> , v. 199A)	—
	Content recorded	—	285: “帝爲下詔曰” (<i>Jin shu</i> , v. 97)	122: “詔曰” (<i>Hou Han shu</i> , v. 85); 480: “詔責王曰” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 18)	420: “詔曰” (<i>Song shu</i> , v. 97, Koguryŏ-state)	*Kaya (479): “詔曰” (<i>Nan Qi shu</i> , v. 58, Kara state)	238 (239): “詔書報倭女王曰” (<i>San guo zhi</i> , v. 30)
Diplomatic notes or reports	Content not recorded	—	174: “奉章貢獻” (<i>Hou Han shu</i> , v. 85)	28: “貽書曰” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 14); 233: “奉表稱臣” (<i>San guo zhi</i> , v. 47); 413: “奉表” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 18)	“其[425]後每歲遣使奉表” (<i>Song shu</i> , v. 97 nging)	608: 乞師表 (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 4); 655: “上表” (<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> , v. 199A)	240: “上表” (<i>San guo zhi</i> , v. 30); 425: “奉表” (<i>Song shu</i> , v. 97)
	Content recorded	—	—	436: “上書稱” (<i>Wei shu</i> , v. 4A)	450: “上書”, “表” (<i>Song shu</i> , v. 97); 472: “上表曰” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 25)	—	438: “表求除正” (<i>Song shu</i> , vols. 5 & 97)
Dispatch of monks and students		—	—	Late fifth c.: 僧朗 (<i>Da cheng xian lun</i> , v. 1); 640: “請入國學” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 20)	526: Yŏmik's return to Paekche (<i>Mirŭk pulgwang-sa sajŏk</i>); 640: “請入國學” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 27)	549: Monk-student Kaktŏk's return to Silla (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 4); 640: “請入國學” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 5)	607: Request to send monk-students (<i>Sui shu</i> , v. 81); 653: Dispatch of Kose no omikusuri (巨勢臣藥) (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 25)
Educational institutions		—	—	372: “立大學, 教育子弟” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 18);	404?: “天皇問阿直岐曰, 如勝汝博士亦有耶” (<i>Nihon</i>	651: Creation of paksa, chogyo, taesa (<i>Samguk sagi</i> ,	671: 學職頭 (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 27); 675: 大

Table 2. (continued)

Earliest records	Old Chosŏn	Puyŏ	Koguryŏ	Paekche	Silla	Wa, Japan
			seventh c.: “謂之局堂，子弟未婚之前，晝夜於此讀書習射” (<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> , v. 199A)	<i>shoki</i> , v. 10); 513: “貢五經博士段楊爾” (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 17)	v. 38) 682: “立國學” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 8)	學寮(<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 29); 大寶令 (701): 國學
Import of books			372: “送佛像經文” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 18) 5C 말: “知讀五經” (<i>Nan Qi shu</i> , v. 58)	404?: “阿直岐亦能讀經典” (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 10); 450: “表求易林式占” (<i>Song shu</i> , v. 97)	565: “送釋氏經論千七百餘卷” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 4); 648: “賜以所制溫湯及晉祠碑并新撰晉書” (<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> , v. 199A)	404?: “論語十卷，千字文一卷” (<i>Kojiki</i> , Record of Ōjin); 717(early Kaiyuan reign): “盡市文籍” (<i>Jiu Tang shu</i> , v. 199A)
Historiography			Early time: Yugi; 600: “新集五卷” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 20)	375: 書記 (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 24)	545: 國史 (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 4)	sixth c.?: 帝紀，舊辭 (<i>Kojiki</i> , intro.) 712: 古事記
Poetry	箴引 (<i>Kogŭm chu</i>)		17 BCE: 黃鳥歌 (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 13); 612: 遺于仲文詩 (<i>Sui shu</i> , v. 60)	?: 禪雲山歌，無等山歌，井邑詞 (<i>Koryŏsa</i> , v. 71)	*Kaya: 龜旨歌 (<i>Samguk yusa</i> , v. 2); 28 CE: 兜率歌 (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 1); Reign of King Chinp'yŏng: 鼻荊詞 (<i>Samguk yusa</i> , v. 1); 長歌 (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 48)	The year of bogo of Jinmu: 來目歌 (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 3) and other verses recorded in <i>Nihon shoki</i> and <i>Kojiki</i> ; works of the Nara period in the late seventh c. (<i>Manyōshū</i>)
Body of law	8 provisions and 60 provisions (<i>Han shu</i> , v. 28)	3th c.: accounts of prison and punishment (<i>San guo zhi</i> , v. 30)	373: “始頒律令” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 18)	262: “下令，凡官人受財及盜者，三倍徵贓，禁錮終身” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 24); penal code	520: “頒示律令” (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 4)	603: 12 official ranks (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 22); 604: 17-provision code (<i>Nihon</i>

Table 2. (continued)

Earliest records	Old Chosŏn	Puyŏ	Koguryŏ	Paekche	Silla	Wa, Japan
				regulating rebellion, retreat, murder, thievery, adultery (<i>Zhou shu</i> , v. 49)		<i>shoki</i> , v. 22); 645: 大化改新 (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 25); 668: compilation of 近江令
Calendar			晉曆 (Tombstone of King Kwanggaet'o, Tomb of Tŏkhŭng-ni); 624: 請班曆 (<i>Zi zhi tong jian</i> , v. 190)	元嘉曆 of the Song (<i>Zhou shu</i> , v. 49); 553: 曆博士 (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 19)	674: 麟德曆 of the Tang (<i>Samguk sagi</i> , v. 7)	553: 曆博士 (<i>Nihon shoki</i> , v. 19); 690: 元嘉曆 of the Song (<i>Nihon sandai jitsuroku</i> , v. 5)

the first (174 CE), followed by Koguryŏ (233), Wa (240), Paekche (425), and Silla (608), in a chronology similar to the order in which the states received imperial messages from China.⁷⁰

Under a different criterion, the exchange of diplomatic notes became frequent in Koguryŏ beginning in 413, the coronation year of King Changsu (r. 413-491); in Wa, in 421; in Paekche, during the reigns of King Kuisin (r. 420-427) and King Piyu (r. 427-455); and in Silla, in the 600s. That Silla sent a letter to Japan in 621 for the first time⁷¹ indicates that Silla fell far behind other states in terms of documentary diplomacy and is also consistent with the account in the *Liang shu* 梁書, which states that Silla had no written language in the early sixth century.

The letters exchanged between China and its neighboring states were written in a very refined style, which reflected the level of learning. The finest writers were summoned to draft and polish the letters to China, in which they made full use of florid expressions, metaphors, and Chinese idioms. In the case of Silla, Wŏn'gwang, Kangsu, and Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn were such writers. At the initial stage

70. In 122 CE, Koguryŏ became the first state to receive an imperial letter from China, later followed by Wa (239), Puyo (285), Paekche (420), Kaya (479), and Silla (565).

71. *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Documentary Annals of Japan), v. 22, the 29th year of the Suiko Emperor 推古天皇. The original text reads, “是歲, 新羅遣奈末伊彌買朝貢, 仍以表書奏使旨。凡新羅上表, 蓋始起于此時歟。”

of learning, understanding and composing letters in Chinese posed great challenges.

According to a Japanese account, in 572 the Japanese emperor and his court struggled to understand a letter from Koguryō for three days until Wangjini 王辰爾 (J. Ōjinni) finally deciphered it.⁷² Some scholars have argued that the Japanese court had such difficulty because the letter might have been written in a style unique to Koguryō, but given Koguryō's longstanding diplomatic exchange with China, it seems unlikely that Koguryō would have composed a letter to a foreign country in its own syntax.⁷³ Others have attributed the Japanese court's difficulty to the difference in capability between the court chroniclers, who had immigrated to Japan long before, and the newly immigrated, who understood written Chinese fully.⁷⁴ Notwithstanding the differing interpretations, this anecdote illustrates the difficulties of translating diplomatic notes at the time. It is in this context that the Silla anecdote of Kangsu 强首 expounding a challenging letter sent from Tang China without difficulty should be understood.⁷⁵

To summarize, the rise of documentary diplomacy can be an indicator of the level of literacy in a country. In terms of composition and learning, Koguryō was far ahead, followed by Paekche and Wa, while Silla lagged behind. Wa began to conduct documentary diplomacy very early – evidence which supports the assumption that intellectuals from the Korean peninsula and China took an active part in the development of Japanese islands.

Historical information about education also provides clues for a comparative study of the literate life in the Three Kingdoms. The three Korean kingdoms and Japan all dispatched monks and students to China to study advanced culture and thought. Sūngnang 僧朗, a Koguryō monk, went to China and played a very active role during the reign of the Wu Emperor (r. 502-549) in the Liang dynasty (502-556). Kyōmik 謙益, a Paekche monk,⁷⁶ and Kaktōk 覺德, a Silla monk,

72. *Nihon shoki*, v. 20, the first year (fifth month) of the Bidatsu 敏達 Emperor. The original text reads, “丙辰, 天皇執高麗表, 授於大臣。召聚諸史, 令讀解之。是時, 諸史, 於三日內, 皆不能讀。爰有船史祖王辰爾, 能奉讀釋。”

73. Yi Sōngsi, *Kodai higashi Ajia no minzoku to kokka* (The Peoples and States of East Asia in Ancient Times), (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1998), 290.

74. Ueda masaaki, “Kanjī bunka no jūyō to tenkai,” 23.

75. “Kangsu chōn” 强首傳 (Story of Kangsu), in *Samguk sagi*, v. 46.

76. “Mirūk pulgwang-sa sajōk” 彌勒佛光寺事蹟 (The Vestiges of the Mirūk pulgwang-sa Temple), the only extant account about Kyōmik, is mysterious enough to be called “illusive literature.” Requoted from Yi Nūnghwa, *Chosōn pulgyo t'ongsa* 朝鮮佛教通史 (General History of Korean Buddhism), v. 1, (Seoul: Sinmungwan, 1918). For this reason, strictly speaking, it is not very reliable. See Kotama Daieng, “Kyūhōsō Kyōmik to sono shūhen, I” (The Paekche Monk Kyōmik and His Surroundings, I), *Mahan Paekche munhwa* 8 (1985): 29-30. Nonetheless, I follow the

returned to their countries after completing their studies in China. Indeed, it was common to see monks from the three Korean kingdoms in China at the turn of the sixth century. Japan also sent several monks to Sui China to study Buddhism. It is unclear, however, when nonreligious students were dispatched to China.⁷⁷

The establishment of educational institutions should be considered in conjunction with the dispatch of monks and students to China. In Koguryō, the National Confucian Academy (T'aehak 太學) was established in 372, and the *kyōngdang* 局堂 in the seventh century, to extend educational opportunities to commoners. Although there is no information about the educational system of Paekche, the fact that the title of *paksa* 博士 (lit., "savant," the modern term for an academic doctor) was given to teachers of the Chinese classics supports the existence of educational institutions. According to a Japanese account from the fifth century, the Japanese emperor asked Ajikki 阿直岐, a scholar from Paekche, "Are there any who outdo you?" This suggests that the *paksa* system had been established no later than the early fifth century. In Silla, the titles of *paksa*, *chogyo* 助教 (assistant teacher), and *taesa* 大舍 were created in 651, and the National Academy (Kukhak 國學) was established in 682.

The historical accounts about the importation of books from China are also indispensable to a better understanding of the literate life in the Three Kingdoms. According to one source, Fu Jian 苻堅, the king of the Former Jin 前秦 dynasty, sent an envoy to Koguryō to present a Buddhist statue and sūtra in 372. Another account from the late fifth century testifies that the Koguryō people were able to read the Five Classics of Confucianism. As for Paekche, Ajikki, mentioned above, went to Japan and pursued horse-breeding but later became the mentor of the crown prince thanks to his expertise on the Five Classics, which suggests that scholars in fifth century Paekche were familiar with the text imported from China. Paekche also received fortune-telling guides such as the *Yi lin* 易林 and *Shi zhan* 式占 from China. In 565, Chen 陳 China (557-588) sent Silla a monk with about seventeen hundred volumes of Buddhist treatises and sūtras. In 648, Silla also imported the inscriptions on the *Wentang* 溫湯 and on a Jin shrine (*Jin*

more popular theory viewing the account as a historical source.

77. According to *Samguk sagi*, the three kingdoms sent students to Tang China in 640. However, since the Korean compilers routinely included the Chinese accounts from *Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑑 in the history of the three kingdoms, the secondhand information in the extant sources such as *Samguk sagi* is not of great help. See *Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), v. 195, the 14th year of the Zhengguan reign. The original text reads, "二月丁丑, 上幸國子監, ... 是時, 上大徵天下名儒爲學官, 數幸國子監, 使之講論, 學生能明一大經已上皆得補官. 增築學舍千二百間, 增學生滿二千二百六十員, ... 於是, 四方學者雲集京師, 乃至高麗百濟新羅高昌吐蕃諸酋長亦遣子弟請入國學, 升講筵者至八千餘人."

ci 晉祠) composed by Taizong (r. 626-649) of Tang China, along with the *Jin shu* 晉書 (Official History of the Jin Dynasty), which had been newly compiled. In the case of Japan, the initial importation of books is dated approximately to the early fifth century; *The Analects of Confucius* (*Lun yu* 論語) and *The Thousand Characters Text* (*Qian zi wen* 千字文) were imported by Wangin 王仁 (J. Wani).

The compilation of national histories is also very important in determining the spread of literacy. A work entitled *Yugi* 留記 (Extant Records) was published in early Koguryŏ and reworked into the *Smjip* 新集 (New Compilation) in 600. In Paekche, a history called *Sŏgi* 書記 (Documentary Records) was compiled by Kohŭng 高興 in 375. In Silla, a work entitled *Kuksa* 國史 (National History) was put together in 545, under the supervision of Kŏch'ilbu 居柒夫. It is also thought that a history of Kŭmgwan Kaya entitled *Kaehwangnyŏk* 開皇曆 (Chronicle of the Kaihuang Reign), also known as *Kaehwangnok* 開皇錄 (Records of the Kaihuang Reign), was compiled in the Kaehwang era (581-600). In Japan, two histories called *Teiki* (Imperial Records) and *Kyūji* (Old Words) were put together around the early sixth century. These two histories formed the basis of the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Records of Old Events) in 712.

Literary works can be a key indicator of the literate life. Unfortunately, since many works were first transmitted orally and only recorded later, it is difficult to determine when they first appeared in written form. For instance, some early pieces – such as Old Chosŏn's Konghuin 箜篌引 or *Kongmudohaga* 公無渡河歌 (Do Not Cross the River Song), Koguryŏ's *Hwangjoga* 黃鳥歌 (Song of a Yellow Bird), Kaya's *Kujiga* 龜旨歌 (Song of a Turtle Dish), and Silla's *Tosolga* 兜率歌 (Song of the Pure Land) – are dated back farther than the earliest evidence of the literate life found in each state. Therefore, literary works are not considered here.

It is useful to examine the enactment of certain systems that are closely related to the use of written language, such as the promulgation of legal codes (*yullyŏng* 律令) and the importation of calendars. Many regulations were systemized and their language reworked with the promulgation of the national code. In addition to the dramatic rise in the number of prohibitory articles under Luolang rule (discussed earlier), historical records give an account of prison and punishment in third-century Puyŏ. While these provisions may have been early forms of codification, a truly codified penal system can be found in the national codes of the Three Kingdoms. Koguryŏ promulgated its national code in 373, Silla, in 520, and Japan, in the seventh century,⁷⁸ while there is no account of

78. Yi Chŏnghŭi, “Yuk, ch'il-segi Ilbonsa esŏ yullyŏng suyong ŭi kwajŏng kwa ŭmi” (Adoption of the *Yullyŏng* System in the History of Sixth- to Seventh-Century Japan and Its Meaning),

when the national code went into effect in Paekche. Some argue that the Paekche *yullyŏng* system may have been enforced in the mid-third century, on the grounds that some penal systems were set up during the reign of King Koi (r. 234-286). But others place the codification in the fourth century, during the reign of either King Kŭnch'ogo (r. 346-375) or King Kŭn'gusu (r. 375-384).⁷⁹ The "Paekche chŏn" 百濟傳 (Story of Paekche) in the *Zhou shu* 周書 (Official History of the Northern Zhou Dynasty) mentions some Paekche rules of punishment for rebellion, retreat, murder, thievery, and adultery, an account supported by the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Official History of the Tang Dynasty) and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (New Official History of the Tang Dynasty). Therefore, the *yullyŏng* system had likely been promulgated by the mid- or late sixth century, when the Northern Zhou dynasty existed.

Now I shall discuss the introduction of the Chinese calendar system in the Three Kingdoms. In 624, Koguryŏ sent an envoy to Tang China to request a Tang calendar (*Wuyin li* 戊寅曆, Calendar of the Wuyin Reign). However, Koguryŏ must have adopted the imported Chinese calendar no later than the early fifth century, for the sexagenary cycles for 408, found at the Tomb of Tŏkhŭng-ni, and for 414, inscribed on the tombstone of King Kwanggaet'o (r. 391-413), match the Jin calendar (*Jin li* 晉曆).⁸⁰ Paekche adopted the Song calendar (*Yuanjia li* 元嘉曆, Calendar of the Yuanjia Reign) and declared the first month of the year the month of *yin* (*yin yue* 寅月).⁸¹ Indeed, starting from the first day of the tenth month in the fourteenth year (468) of King Kaero's reign (455-475), which is *kyeyu* 癸酉, the sexagenary cycle for the first days of some months, inscribed on the memorial tombstone of King Munyŏng (r. 501-523) and recorded in the *Samguk sagi*, matches that of the Song calendar.⁸² In 533, Japan asked Paekche for a calendar and a new expert on calendars.⁸³ The

Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'gu 4 (1991): 20-21.

79. No Chungguk, *Paekche chŏngch'isa yŏn'gu* (A Study of the Political History of Paekche), (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1988), 266-267.

80. Takeda Yukio, *Koguryŏ shi to Higashi Ajia* (The History of Koguryŏ and East Asia), (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 105, n. 21; Kong Sŏkku, "Tŏkhŭng-ni pyŏkhwa kobun ūi chuin'gong kwa kŭ sŏnggyŏk" (The Buried Person of the Tomb of Tŏkhŭng-ni and Its Nature), *Paekche yŏn'gu* 21 (1990): 358-359.

81. "Paekche chuan" 百濟傳 (Story of Paekche), in *Zhou shu* 周書 (Official History of the Northern Zhou Dynasty), v. 49. The original text reads, "用宋元嘉曆, 以建寅月爲歲首."

82. Otani Mitsuo, "Paekche Munyŏngwang tong wangbi ūi myoji e poinŭn yŏkpŏp e taehayŏ" (On the Calendar Seen on the Epitaph of King Munyŏng of Paekche and His Queen), *Kogo misul* 119 (1973); Yi Ŭnsŏng, "Mynyŏngwang nŭng ūi chisŏk kwa Wŏn'ga yŏkpŏp" (The Memorial Tombstone of King Mynyŏng and the Calendar of the Yuanjia Era), *Tongbanghak chi* 43 (1984): 45-47.

following year, Paekche dispatched Wangboson 王保孫 to Japan; thus one can conclude that Paekche was then already familiar with the *Yuanjia li*, which had been in use in the Song dynasty since 445. However, another Japanese history states that Japan began to use Song's calendar system in 690, years after Kwallük 觀勒, a Paekche monk, had passed it on.⁸⁴

According to the *Samguk sagi*, Silla adopted a new calendar called the *Linde li* 麟德曆 (Calendar of the Linde Reign) in 674, thanks to Tökpok 德福, a low-ranking official who had returned after studying Chinese almanacs in Tang China.⁸⁵ The *Samguk sagi* also includes the remark of Hanjirhō 邯軼許, Silla's envoy to the Tang emperor Taizong in 633: "Since King Pöphŭng (r. 514-540), Silla has informally used its own calendar."⁸⁶ It seems likely that Silla, under pressure from China, replaced its own calendar with the Chinese calendar system.

Finally, archeological sources provide crucial information. Table 3 shows the earliest sources, classified by item, for each of the countries.

The earliest inscription of Koguryō is found on the end piece of a roof tile (*wadang* 瓦當) from the ruins in Jian 集安. It reads *Danŭng shi nian* 太寧四年, the fourth year of Daning's reign, which corresponds to the year 325.⁸⁷ Other engraved end pieces of roof tiles, dated to the fourth century, have been excavated from the ruins of Koguryō.⁸⁸ The brush-writings on the plastered wall inside tomb #3 in Anak are traced back to the mid-fourth century. The tombstone of King Kwanggaet'o (r. 391-413) was erected in the early fifth century, but it was not until later in the same century that characters were first inscribed on Buddhist statues. Furthermore, some earthen vessels, with the inscriptions *hubudohyōng* 後部都兄, *chidohyōng* 支都兄, *yōmmohyōng* 牟冉兄, and *hagwan* 下官, have been recently excavated from the ruins of the mountain

83. *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, v. 19, the sixth year in the fourth year of the Kinmei 欽 Emperor. The original text reads, "別勅, 醫博士易博士曆博士等, 宜依番上下. . . 又卜書曆本種種藥物, 可付送."

84. *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代實錄, v. 5, sixth month of the third year of the Teikan 貞觀 reign. The original text reads, "十六日己未, 始頒行長慶宣明曆經. 先是, 陰陽頭從五位下兼行曆博士大春日朝臣眞野麻呂奏言, 謹檢豐御食炊屋姬[推古]天皇十年十月, 百濟國僧觀勒始貢曆術, 而未行於世. 高天原廣野姬[持統]天皇四年十二月, 有勅始用元嘉曆. 次用儀鳳曆."

85. *Samguk sagi* 三國史記, v. 7, King Munmu. The original text reads, "十四年春正月, 入唐宿衛大奈麻德福, 傳學曆術還, 改用新曆法."

86. *Samguk sagi*, v. 5, second year of King Chindök.

87. "The fourth year of the Daning" might have been a mistake for the third year. Li Dianfu, "Jian juan yun wen ming wen wadang gao bian" (An Examination of the Inscribed End Piece of the Cirrus Roof Tile Found at the Site of Jian), *She hui ke sue zhan xian* 4 (1984): 70.

88. Ibid.; Lin Zhide and Geng Tiehua, "Jian chu tu de Koguryō wa dang ji qi nian dai" (The End Pieces of the Koguryō Tiles Found at the Site of Jian and Their Dates), *Gao gu* 7, (1985).

Table 3. The Introduction of Inscriptions associated with Early Literacy in Korea

Inscriptions	Koguryŏ	Paekche	Silla	Kaya
Tile-brick 瓦磚, pottery, and lacquered ware	太寧四年-inscribed end piece of a roof tile (325); earthen- ware found from the fortress on Mount Ach'a and the site of the Chŏngnŭng-sa Temple (mid-fifth to sixth c.)	大夫, 井-inscribed earthenware found on the site of the walled town in P'ungnap; 直-inscri- bed brick-stone (mid-fourth c. to 475); inscribed brick-stone from the Tomb of King Munyŏng (525)	Inscribed lacquered ware from the southern and northern tombs of Hwangnam (mid- or late fifth c.?); inscrib- ed earthenware from the gregarious tombs in Kyesŏng and Nuam-ni (late sixth c. or later); brush- writings on the tall cup with a lid 有蓋高 杯 (late sixth to early seventh c.)	大王-inscribed long-neck bottle with a lid 有蓋長 頸壺 and the inscribed short- neck bottle from Chŏp'o-ri in Hapch'ŏn County (mid- sixth c. or later)
Metallic ware	Inscribed bottle-like cup 壺杆 of King Kwanggaet'o (415)	The seven-branched sword 七支刀 (369?); inscribed silver armlet from the Tomb of King Munyŏng (520)	Inscriptions of 夫人 帶, 夫, and 百 from the northern tomb of Hwangnam (fifth c. or later?)	Inscribed iron sword from tomb #11 of Kyo-dong; inscribed ring- pommeled sword 環頭大刀 collected by Tokyo Hakubutsukan (sixth c.?)
Mirror		Sudahachiman bronze mirror 隅田 八幡畫像鏡 (503?); inscribed bronze mirror from the Tomb of King Munyŏng (525 or earlier)	Ch'ŏngdong panggyŏk kyugu chomun'gyŏng 青銅 方格規矩鳥文鏡 from the southern tomb of Hwangnam (mid- fifth c.?)	
Wooden tablets		Wooden tablets from Yŏn-ji of Kwanbung-ni, Namgung-ji, Ssangbung-ni, and the site of the temple of Nŭngsan-ni (538-660)	Wooden tablets from the mountain fortresses of Sŏngsan and Isŏngsan (mid-sixth c. or later) Amit'a samjon	

Table 3. (continued)

Inscriptions	Koguryŏ	Paekche	Silla	Kaya
Buddhist statues	大和十三年-inscribed stone Buddha (489?)	癸未-inscribed gilt bronze statue of the three standing Buddhas (563?)	samyŏn sŏksang 阿彌陀三尊四面石像 with the inscription of <i>kyeyu</i> 癸酉, Samjon ch'ŏnbul sŏksang 三尊千佛碑像 with the inscription of <i>kyeyu</i> 癸酉 (673)	
Stone	Tombstone of King Kwanggaet'o (414)	Memorial stone of the Tomb of King Munyŏng (525)	Monument of Naengsu-ri (503)	Monument of Maean-ni (531 or earlier?)
Tombstone	Brush-writings from tomb #3 in Anak (ca. 357) and from the Tomb of Tŏkhŭng-ni (408)	Memorial stone of the Tomb of King Munyŏng (525)	Brush-writings from the tombs in Ŭmnae-ri in Sŭnhŭng County (539) and from the Tomb of ŏsukchisulgan 於宿知述干墓 (595)	

fortress of Ach'a-san, far from the capital city of Koguryŏ. The pottery is dated to the sixth century and supplements the inscriptive sources of Koguryŏ.⁸⁹

The earliest inscriptions of Paekche are those on pottery and brick-stones excavated from the site of the earthen-walled fortress in P'ungnap-tong. They are dated approximately to the second period of Hansŏng Paekche (around 450 to 475).⁹⁰ The brick-stones, bracelets, mirrors, and a memorial stone uncovered in the Tomb of King Munyŏng (r. 501-523) all bear inscriptions. Wooden tablets, traced back to the period of Sabi Paekche (538-660), were also found on the archeological sites in Kwan'bung-ni, Namgung-ji, and Ssangbung-ni.⁹¹ More

89. Sŏul taehakkyo pangmulgwan, *T'ŭkpyŏljŏn Koguryŏ: Han'gang yuyŏk ūi Koguryŏ yosae* (Special Exhibition of Koguryŏ: Koguryŏ Fortresses in the Han Valley), May 2000, 52-53, and the picture on 106.

90. This date is quoted from Pak Sunbal, "Hansŏng Paekche ūi chungang kwa chibang" (Center and Periphery of Hansŏng Paekche), *Paekche ūi chungang kwa chibang* (Center and Periphery of Paekche), (Taejon: Ch'unghnam taehakkyo Paekche yŏn'guso, 1997), 133-134.

91. Yi Sŏngsi, "Han'guk mokkan yŏn'gu ūi hyŏnhwang kwa Haman Sŏngsan sansŏng ch'ult'o ūi mokkan" (A Tendency of the Study on the Korean Wooden Tablets and the Wooden Tablet Found at the Site of the Mountain Fortress of Sŏngsan), *Haman Sŏngsan sansŏng ch'ult'o mokkan ūi naeyong kwa sŏngkyŏk* (The Content and Nature of the Wooden Tablet Found at the Site of the Mountain Fortress of Sŏngsan), presentations at an international academic conference,

tablets from the same period have recently been uncovered at the site of the temple in Nŭngsan-ni.

The earliest inscriptions of Silla were found in the southern and northern tombs of Hwangnam (Hwangnam taech'ong 皇南大塚): *puin tae* 夫人帶 inscribed on a silver-buckled belt; *marang* 馬朗 on lacquered ware; *pu* 夫 and *paek* 百 on the decorations of a crown; and *chu kok tae chung* 主谷大中 on a bronze mirror.⁹² With respect to the precise dates of the artifacts, scholars have offered conflicting estimates, though most agree that they can be dated to the mid- or late fifth century. The inscriptions on the horse bell (*mat'ak* 馬鐸) and the three-legged bronze pot (*ch'odu* 鐺斗) excavated from tombs #16 and #17 in Hwango-dong are dated to the early sixth century. Later inscriptions, dated from the late sixth to seventh centuries, have been found in Silla sites: the group of tombs in Kyesŏng in Ch'angnyŏng County;⁹³ Nuam-ni in Chungwŏn County;⁹⁴ Maeryong-ni in Yŏju County;⁹⁵ Yean-ni in Kimhae County;⁹⁶ and Habukchŏng in Yangsan County.⁹⁷ The inscriptions on the pottery found in the tombs in

November 12, 1999.

92. Munhwajae kwalliguk munhwajae yŏn'guso, *Hwangnam taech'ong nambun palgul chosa pogosŏ* (*pommun*) (A Report of the Excavation and Examination of the Southern Tomb of Hwangnam – main texts), 1994, 100.

93. Nishitani Tadashi, “Chōsen sangoku jidai no doki to moji” (Pottery and Written Language in the Three Kingdoms Period of Korea), *Kodai no Nihon to Higashi Ajia* (Japan and East Asia in Ancient Times), (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1991), 376-381; Takeda Yukio, “Kaya-Silla Kyesŏng no taikan: Ch'angnyŏng Kyesŏng kofun gun shutsu doki no meibun ni tsuite” (The Large Shield of Kyesŏng in Silla-Kaya: On the Pottery Excavated from the Tombs of Kyesŏng in Ch'angnyŏng County), *Chōsen bunka kenkyū* 1 (1994); Sŏn Sŏgyŏl, “Ch'angnyŏng Kyesŏng kobun'gun ch'ult'o r'ogi myŏngmun ūi kŏmt'o” (An Examination of the Inscriptions on the Earthenware Excavated from the Tombs of Kyesŏng in Ch'angnyŏng County), *Ch'angnyŏng Kyesŏng kobun'gun* (The Tombs of Kyesŏng in Ch'angnyŏng County), (Pusan: Pusan taehakkyo pangmulgwan, 1995).

94. A lot of pottery with the engraved character *chŏng* 井 on it was found, and the median date of the tombs is thought to correspond to the late sixth century. See Ch'ungbuk taehakkyo pangmulgwan, *Chungwŏn Nuam-ni kobun'gun* (The Tombs of Nuam-ni in Chungwŏn County), (Ch'ŏngju: Ch'ungbuk Taehakkyo Pangmulgwan, 1993), 30, 36, 44, 87-90, 102-105, 140, 155-161, and 186. Symbolic designs such as ϕ and 卍 were also found.

95. One item of pottery with the engraved character *chŏng* 井 on it was found. See Hallim taehakkyo pangmulgwan, *Yŏju Maeryong-ni Yonggang-gol kobun'gun* (The Gregarious Tombs of Yonggang-gol, Maeryong-ni in Yŏju County), v. II, (Ch'ŏnju: Hallim taehakkyo pangmulgwan, 1989), 32, 73.

96. For the inscription *chŏng* 井, see Pusan taehakkyo pangmulgwan, *Kimhae Yean-ni gobun'gun* (The Tombs of Yean-ni in Kimhae County), v. I, text, (Pusan: Pusan taehakkyo pangmulgwan, 1985), 104. For the inscription *chŏng mul* 井勿, see *ibid.*, v. II, text, 1993, 230.

97. Pottery with characters such as *sang* 上, *chŏng* 井, and *saeng* 生 was found, and it is dated from the late sixth to the mid-seventh centuries. See Tonga taehakkyo pangmulgwan, *Yangsan Habukchŏng yuijŏk* (The Ruins of Habukchŏng in Yangsan County), 1992, 34-36, 52, 63-65, 71,

Ch'uam-dong, Tonghae, and in Imha, Andong County, probably date back to the same period.⁹⁸ A tall cup with brush-writings on it has also been reported.⁹⁹ In addition, wooden tablets that date back at most to the mid-sixth century were found on the sites of fortresses on Sŏng-san¹⁰⁰ and Isŏng-san.¹⁰¹ Other sources whose dates are relatively obvious include the stone monument of Naengsu-ri, dated to 503 CE, the epitaph with brush-writings (539), and the Buddhist statue (673). Lastly, a few pieces of pottery, long swords, and tombstones with inscriptions have been excavated from the ruins of late Kaya, but their dates are unclear.

In this section, I have examined various types of information available to estimate a time frame for the emergence of the literate life in the three kingdoms. To present the findings more clearly, I have put together Figure 5, which shows the earliest recorded date of each item, while Figure 6 presents each country's mean of the dates for all items.

Let us first examine Figure 5. The dates of the Koguryŏ sources range widely, from the second century to the end of the fifth century, but they display a concentration in the fourth century. The dates of the Paekche sources converge in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the narrowest range in the chart. Displaying the second highest degree of convergence, Silla sources are dated mainly to the sixth century. Lastly, the dates for Japanese sources are the most

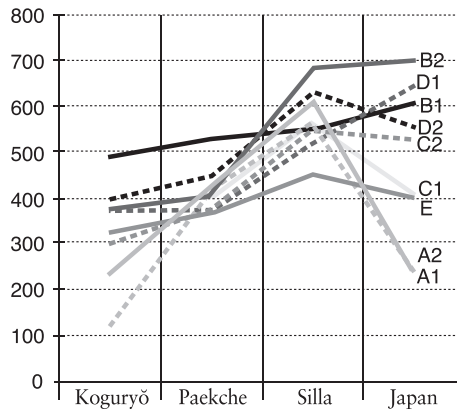
and 144.

98. Hong Posik, *Yumul e saegyŏjin kodaie muncha* (Ancient Written Language Inscribed on Antiquities), 1997, 74.

99. Pak Pangnyong, "Chŏn Yŏngnam chibang ch'ult'o muksŏmyŏng yugae kobae" (The Tall Cup with a Lid with a Brush-Writing on It, Said to Have Been Found in the Southeast Region), *Sŏgo Yun Yongjin kyosu chŏngnyŏn t'oeim kinyŏm nonch'ong* (Collection of Research Treatises in Commemoration of the Retirement of Professor Yun Yongjin due to the Age Limit), (Seoul: Sinhŭng Insoeso, 1996).

100. Kungnip Ch'angwŏn munhwajae yŏn'guso, *Haman Sŏngsan sansŏng* (The Mountain Fortress of Sŏng-san in Haman County), (Ch'angwŏn: Kungnip Ch'angwŏn Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, 1998), 179-184; Han'guk kodaesa hakhoe, *Haman Sŏngsan sansŏng ch'ult'o mokkan ū naeyong kwa sŏngkyŏk* (The Content and Nature of the Wooden Tablets Found at the Site of the Mountain Fortress of Sŏng-san in Haman County), presented at an international academic conference, 1999.

101. Hanyang taehakkyo and Kyŏnggi-do, *Isŏng sansŏng: sam-ch'a palgul chosa pogosŏ* (The Mountain Fortress of Isŏng-san: Report of the Third Excavation and Examination), (Seoul: Hanyang taehakkyo, 1991), 64-172; Hanyang taehakkyo and Hanam-si, *Isŏng sansŏng: sa-ch'a palgul chosa pogosŏ* (The Mountain Fortress of Isŏng-san: Report of the Fourth Excavation and Examination), (Seoul: Hanyang taehakkyo, 1992), 145-150; Hanyang taehakkyo pangmulgwan and Hanam-si, *Isŏng sansŏng: ch'il-ch'a palgul chosa pogosŏ* (The Mountain Fortress of Isŏng-san: Report of the Seventh Excavation and Examination), (Seoul: Hanyang taehakkyo, 2000), 181-184, 244-247.

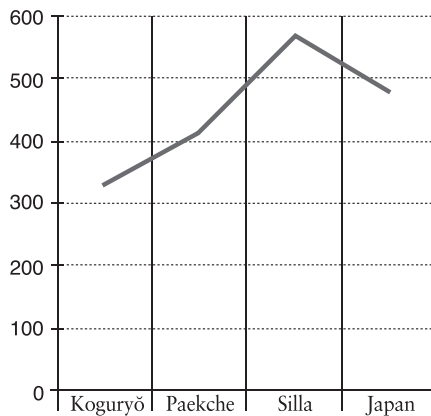


X axis: Koguryō, Paekche, Silla and Japan

Y axis: Year, CE

A1 = Letters from China, A2 = Letters to China, B1 = Monk-students, B2 = Educational institutions, C1 = Importation of books, C2 = Compilation of histories, D1 = Promulgation of legal codes, D2 = Adoption of calendars, E = Inscriptions

Figure 5. Earliest Dates of Various Sources by Item.

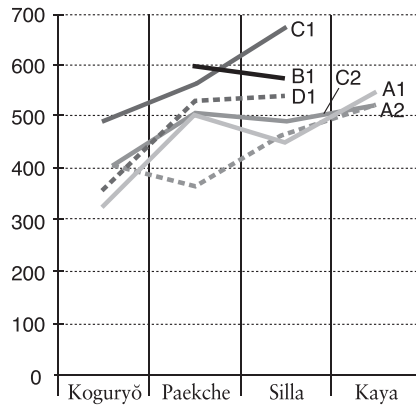


X axis: Koguryō, Paekche, Silla and Japan

Y axis: Year, CE

Figure 6. The Mean Date of First Record for All Sources.

divergent, ranging from the third century to the turn of the eighth century (701). Immigrants and visitors from China or Korea may have contributed significantly to the initial spread of literacy in Japan, but the highly dispersed dates indicate independent growth thereafter.



X axis: Koguryō, Paekche, Silla and Kaya

Y axis: Year, CE

A1 = Letters from China, A2 = Letters to China, B1 = Monk-students, C1 = Importation of books, C2 = Compilation of histories, D1 = Promulgation of legal codes

Figure 7. Earliest Dates of Inscriptions by Item.

Figure 6 shows that literate life emerged in Koguryō, Paekche, Japan, and Silla in that order chronologically. In comparing the initial rises, one notices a *décalage* of eighty-five years between Koguryō and Paekche; about 150 years between Paekche and Silla; about ninety years between Silla and Japan; and about sixty years between Paekche and Japan. Thus Japan commenced its literate life earlier than Silla, probably thanks to the contribution of Paekche scholars.

In Figure 7, the earliest dates for the archeological sources of inscriptions (see Table 3) are graphed by item. Since it is difficult to determine a precise chronology, the diagram only shows the approximate dates. It is nonetheless helpful to understand the general pattern: Koguryō, Paekche, and Silla produced their earliest recorded inscriptions in the order just listed. Given the scarcity of source material, it is not very meaningful to compare Kaya with other kingdoms.

The Expansion of Literacy: A Case Study of Silla and Parhae

It is interesting that Silla, which had lagged behind other states in terms of literacy, unified the Three Kingdoms in the end.¹⁰² Its victory consequently

102. Kim Ch'ölchun, "Samguk munhwa ū kyesŭng kwa palchŏn" (Succession and Development of the Three Kingdoms Culture), *Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'gu* (A Study of Ancient Korean History), (Seoul: Seoul taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1990), 220.

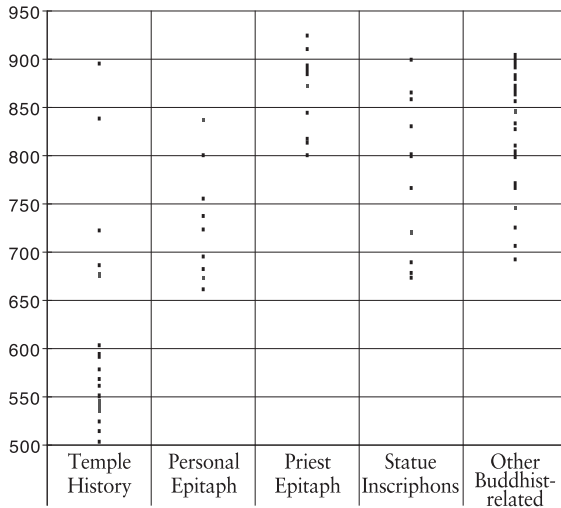


Figure 8. A Chronology of Silla Inscriptions.

rendered Silla a representative state in ancient Korean history and allowed it to pass down more historical sources than Koguryŏ and Paekche. For example, two ink-sticks, a gift from Unified Silla to Japan, have survived and can be found at the Shōsōin imperial repository in Nara, Japan.¹⁰³ On the strength of abundant source material, this section investigates the expansion of the literate life and its spread to the provinces. According to extant sources, Silla's literate culture was in existence for almost five hundred years – from the mid-fifth century to its last days in 935. Figure 8 offers a starting point for understanding the long-term process of expansion.

In Figure 8, all available inscriptions are divided into three groups: (1) monument stones, (2) personal epitaphs, and (3) inscriptions associated with Buddhism. The last group is divided further into priest epitaphs, statue inscriptions, and other Buddhism-related inscriptions.¹⁰⁴ The general timeline for each group is interesting. The monument stones are concentrated throughout the sixth century, while most of the memorial stelae are concentrated in the one-hundred-year span between the 660s and 750s. The practice of erecting monument stones for renowned monks seems to have begun after 800, and the

103. Yi Sŏngsi, Kim Ch'angsŏk, trans., *Tong Asia ūi wangkwŏn kwa kyoyŏk* (Royal Authority and Trade in East Asia), (Seoul: Ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, 1999), 25-26.

104. For the epigraphs included in this diagram, see Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han'gul kodaie kŭmsŏngmun*, v. 2 and v. 3.

dates of inscriptions on Buddhist statues range from 673 to 899. Other epigraphs associated with Buddhism consistently appear from the 690s to the last phase of the Silla dynasty.

In accordance with the general timeline above, the entire sixth century can be characterized as the “age of monument stones,” and the period from the unification (676) to the mid-eighth century, as the “age of personal stelae.” Artifacts associated with Buddhism cover the period from 673 to the end of the dynasty. However, since most Buddhist sources are concentrated in the ninth century, which includes all three categories associated with Buddhism, the ninth century can be considered the “age of Buddhist records.”

Literacy in Silla can also be divided into three periods that characterize each of the chronological stages outlined above: Period I (the sixth century to unification, 676) the age of national records; Period II (676 to the eighth century), the age of personal records; and Period III (the turn of the ninth century on), the age of Buddhist records. Once the three periods are established by studying the general trends and shifts in the inscriptions, this tentative periodization needs to be checked against the periodization of the general history of Silla based on documentary records. Let us first examine the inscriptions placed under the category of monument stones.

The four monument stones for King Chinhŭng’s tour of inspection and others in Naengsu-ri, Pongp’yŏng, and Unch’ŏn-dong were erected to declare either territorial expansion or important new decisions of the central government. Meanwhile, other monument stones recorded national enterprises like the construction of dikes and fortresses. For example, the inscription found on the Kwanmun-sŏng fortress (*musul ojak* 戊戌塲作) means: “Constructed an embankment in the year of musul.” Since most monument stones from the sixth century record national enterprises, this time period can also be understood as the “age of national records.”

The next category is centered on the many memorial stelae that were erected from the sixth to eighth century for people outside the royal family, such as Sŏrwŏllang, Kim Yusin, Hyangdŏk, Chŏngwan, Nallang, Ch’oe Yudŏk, and Sŏlch’ong. Sŏrwŏllang came from Myŏngju and was selected as the first *hwarang* 花郎 (lit., “flower of youth,” also known as *kuksŏn* 國仙 “national immortal”) during the reign of King Chinhŭng (r. 540-576),¹⁰⁵ but his stele’s date of erection is unknown. The stele for Kim Yusin was erected in 673, the year of Kim’s death or later.¹⁰⁶ Hyangdŏk, who came from Ungch’ŏn Province, was another man for

105. *Samguk sagi*, v. 3, Mirŭk sŏnhwa.

106. *Samguk sagi*, v. 43, Kim Yusin chŏn (The Biography of Kim Yusin).

whom a stele was erected.¹⁰⁷ The stele for a certain Chǒngwan is unique, in that it was erected for a woman who had been sent to China in 723 or 724 but later returned to Silla.¹⁰⁸ The text of the stele for Nallang, another *hwarang*, was written by Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn.¹⁰⁹ Also worth mentioning is the stele for Ch'oe Yudŏk, who financed the construction of Yudŏk-sa temple.¹¹⁰ In addition, stelae for those who contributed to the spread of Buddhism in the sixth century were erected in late Silla; the stele for Ich'adon's martyrdom at the Paengnyul-sa temple is one such example.¹¹¹ The stelae for Kim Yusin, Chǒngwan, and Hyangdŏk are representative of the "age of personal stelae"; over time, the subjects of the stele expanded, ranging from aristocrats (Kim Yusin) to female aristocrats (Chǒngwan) and even to provincial persons (Hyangdŏk). The expansion signifies the shift in interest from national enterprises to individuals; thus the period can be understood as the "age of personal records."

After the unification, Buddhist-related inscriptions became a regular feature. Starting with the ninth century, however, stelae for individual monks were erected. According to a documentary record called "Anham chŏn" (The Biography of Anham) in the *Haedong kosŭng chŏn* (Biographies of the Great Priests of Silla), the text of the stele for Anham, written by Sŏl Chungŏp around 779,¹¹² is regarded as the first stele for a Buddhist monk. Thus one can conclude that the stelae for individual monks were first erected in the late Silla period. As examined above, other inscriptions associated with Buddhism are mostly dated to the ninth century, thus allowing the ninth century to be established as the "age of Buddhist records."

107. *Samguk sagi*, v. 48, Hyangdŏk chŏn (The Biography of Hyangdŏk); *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), v. 5, (向得舍知割股供親: Saji Hyangdŏk cut off the flesh inside of his thigh and served it to his parent).

108. *Samguk sagi*, v. 8, 2, second year of King Sŏngdŏk.

109. *Samguk sagi*, v. 4, 3, seventh year of King Chinhŭng.

110. *Samguk yusa*, v. 3, Yudŏk-sa (The Yudŏk-sa temple).

111. *Samguk yusa*, v. 3, Ado kira (阿道基羅: Ado laid the foundation of Silla Buddhism) and Wŏngjong hŭngpŏp Yŏmch'ok myŏlsin (原宗興法厭膺減身: Wŏngjong promoted Buddhism and Ich'adon died a martyr); Yi Pyŏngdo, "Silla pulgyo ŭi ch'imt'u kwajŏng kwa Ich'adon sun'gyo munje ŭi sin koch'al" (A New Examination of the Infiltration of Buddhism into Silla and the Question of Ich'adon's Martyrdom), *Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'gu* (A Study of Ancient Korean history), rev. ed. (Seoul: Pagyŏngsa, 1985).

112. Sin Chongwŏn, *Silla Ch'ogi pulgyosa yŏn'gu* (A Study of Buddhism in Early Silla), (Seoul: Minjoksa, 1992), 240; Nam Tongsin, "Wŏnhyo wa Punhwang-sa kwan'gye ŭi sachŏk ch'ui" (The Historical Development of the Relations between Wŏnhyo and the Punhwang-sa Temple), in *Punhwang-sa ŭi chae chomyŏng* (A Reexamination of the Punhwang-sa Temple), (Kyŏngju: Tongguk taehakkyo Silla munhwa yŏn'guso, 1999), 90.

Now I will examine whether the periodization based on the general trends of inscriptions matches the conventional periodization of Silla: the Early-Middle period (*chunggo* 中古), the Middle period (*chungdae* 中代), and the Late period (*hadae* 下代). The beginning of literacy in Silla can be traced back to the mid-fifth century, or the end of the Early period, to which the oldest known inscriptions are dated (Figure 6). Throughout the Early-Middle period, literacy in Silla advanced steadily. In addition to the archeological sources discussed earlier, historical records clearly confirm the focus on national records during this period. For instance, King Pōphōng (r. 514-540) promulgated legal codes (*yullyōng* 律令) in 520, while entries in 536 and 555 provide the first accounts of the issuance of royal messages.¹¹³ In 654, sixty provisions for the Ibangbu 理方府 (Ministry of Justice) were amended.¹¹⁴ The *Kuksa* 國史 (National History) had been compiled in 545. During this period, a ruling system based on written law was established. In 608, Wōn'gwang wrote a request for troops to Sui China – the oldest surviving diplomatic note. The accounts about the official letter that Wōn'gwang sent to Japan in 621 suggest that Silla's documentary diplomacy dates back to this period. Furthermore, Kakdōk, a Buddhist monk who was the first man from Silla to study abroad, returned home in 549. Buddhist scriptures were first imported in 565, when Buddhist circles began to enjoy literacy under the sponsorship of the state. Indeed, Period I, or the Early-Middle period, was the age of national records, a time of expanding literacy in the central government and the royal house.

The nature of literate life in Silla changed gradually around the time of unification, marking the beginning of Period II. The shift was closely related to the establishment of educational institutions and the dispatch of students to Tang China. Kim Ch'unch'u paid a visit of inspection to the National Academy when he went to Tang China as an envoy in 648.¹¹⁵ As already noted, in 651 new titles related to education (such as *paksa* 博士, *chogyo* 助教, and *taesa* 大舍) were created¹¹⁶ to lay the foundation of an educational system, and a National Confucian College (Kukhak 國學) was finally established in 682. King Hyegong (r. 765-780) visited the national college in person twice, in 765 and 776.¹¹⁷ In 788, a kind of state examination system for the selection of government officials, called *toksō samp'umkwa* 讀書三品科 (examination in the reading of texts in

113. *Samguk sagi*, v. 4, 25th year of King Pōphōng and the 16th year of King Chinhŭng.

114. *Samguk sagi*, v. 5, first year of King Taejong Muyōl.

115. *Samguk sagi*, v. 5, second year of King Chindōk.

116. *Samguk sagi*, v. 38, Kukhak 國學.

117. *Samguk sagi*, v. 9, first year and the 12th year of King Hyegong.

three gradations), was inaugurated.¹¹⁸ Those who had been educated in Tang China or domestic educational institutions may have helped create an atmosphere in which capable individuals won recognition, and subsequently engendered a social phenomenon characterized by the advent of the individual – that is, society began to view individuals as independent beings rather than merely as a plurality of subjects. Thus it was no accident that the trend of studying in Tang China and the establishment of a national college marked the beginning of the age of personal stelae.

Thanks to institutional support, men of letters became very prominent. In the eighth century in particular, literary culture in Silla advanced so remarkably that in 737 even the Chinese, who had been dismissive of literate life in Silla, took notice: “Silla is a country of virtuous men, and they are as good at poetry and calligraphy as the Chinese.”¹¹⁹ In the political sphere, the year 756 recorded the first known petition from a subject to a king in Silla: the head of the supreme council (*sangdaedŭng* 上大等) presented a petition that discussed the gains and losses of governmental affairs.¹²⁰ In 714, the *t’ongmun paksa* 通文博士 (lit., “master of writing”), renamed from *sangmunsa* 詳文師 (lit., “teacher versed in writing”), took charge of diplomatic notes to China. Moreover, in the same year, a county named Kōro-hyōn, was converted into a kind of prebend called *nogŭp* 祿邑 (lit., “stipend land”) for students,¹²¹ in order to support the students at the national college.

As examined so far, the Middle period can be characterized as a time when individuals became the main subject of records. Indeed, this period witnessed the nationwide erections of personal stelae, the establishment of educational institutions, and the flourishing of writers and calligraphy as society began to value competent individuals. For this reason, this period is aptly known as the “age of personal records.”

The focus began to shift again, however, at the beginning of the Late period. Personal records still flourished, but most of the stelae were now for Buddhist monks, and stelae for individuals in the secular world were seldom erected. Indeed, the transition from the Middle to the Late period was accompanied by a shift in Buddhist thought from *Vijñānavāda* and *Avatamsaka* studies to the *Avatamsaka* and Sōn 禪 (Ch. Chan, J. Zen), or the Contemplative School.¹²²

118. *Samguk sagi*, v. 10, fourth year of King Wōnsōng.

119. *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, v. 199A, Silla guo chuan 新羅國傳; *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書, v. 220, Silla chuan 新羅傳.

120. *Samguk sagi*, v. 9, fifth year of King Kyōngdōk.

121. *Samguk sagi*, v. 10, first year of King Sosōng.

Buddhist texts continued to flow in from China, and Buddhist associations prospered in this transition period.¹²³ Not surprisingly, the ninth century saw a dramatic increase in the number of other inscriptions associated with Buddhism. As a result, most of the extant inscriptions from the ninth century are related to Buddhism.

In sum, Silla underwent three stages of development, following the inception of literacy: (1) the age of national records in the Early-Middle period, (2) the age of personal records in the Middle period, and (3) the age of Buddhist records in the Late period. In terms of inscriptions based on Figure 8, the process can also be viewed as a series of changes in landmarks, from monument stones for the state to personal inscriptions and, finally, stelae for Buddhist monks. In a broad sense, this process reflects the general historical trends of Silla, in that the main subject of records shifted from the state to individuals and then, by an expansion process, to Buddhist monks.

There is yet another way to explain the development process: the diffusion of literacy from center to periphery. The inscriptions dated to the period between the mid-fifth and the mid-sixth century have been found mostly in the huge tombs in Kyŏngju, the capital of Silla, and its vicinities. Meanwhile, some of the inscriptions dated to the late sixth century or later have also been found in Ch'angnyŏng, Chungwŏn, Yŏju, Yangsan, Tonghae, and Andong, areas farther away from Kyŏngju.¹²⁴ This geographical distribution suggests a diffusion of literacy to the periphery.

Further evidence of this diffusion can be found in the monument stones for the state; names mentioned in their texts begin to include official ranks for local governments. For instance, the calligrapher of the monument stone at the mountain fortress on Myŏngwhal-san was of the *ach'ŏk*-rank, while the drafter of the monument stone of *Musul ojak* was an *ilbŏl*-rank holder. The *munch'ŏk* 文尺 (an official in charge of recording) of the monument stone at the fortress on Nam-san also listed those who held official ranks for local governments, such as *ach'ŏk* 阿尺, *ilbŏl* 一伐, and *ilch'ŏk* 一尺. It can be inferred that local government officials began to oversee the texts of some of the monument stones no later than the mid-sixth century.

122. Kim Poksun, "Silla hadae Hwaŏm ūi sŏnghaeng" (The Prevalence of the *Avatamsaka* in Late Silla), *Silla Hwaŏmjong yŏn'gu* (A Study of the *Avatamsaka* in Silla), (Seoul: Minjoksa, 1990); Kim Sanghyŏn, "Silla hadae ūi sahoe pyŏndong kwa pulgyogyŏ" (The Social Upheaval in Late Silla and Buddhist Circles), *Han'guk pulgyosa ūi chae chomyŏng* (A Reexamination of the History of Korean Buddhism), (Seoul: Pulgyo sidaesa, 1994), 139-140.

123. Kim Poksun, "Silla hadae Hwaŏm ūi sŏnghaeng," 75-76; Chŏng Pyŏngsam, *Ibid.*, 229.

124. Hong Posik, *Yumul e saegyŏjin kodae muncha*, 74.

Scholars have debated the function of the Silla census register, thought to have been created in 695.¹²⁵ Given the general development in literacy examined above, it seems unlikely that a census register was already in place for each hamlet on a nationwide scale at the time. It is more plausible that the census was limited to one of the districts under the direct control of the royal house. It would follow that Silla began to conduct a census of the population in special districts in the late seventh century, thereby contributing to the systemization of documentary administration in local governments.

However, a number of transcribers of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, which was completed in 755, resided in the southwest region of the peninsula. Thus one can conclude that in the mid-eighth century, scholars of Buddhist scriptures – and expert calligraphers – were not all concentrated in the capital.¹²⁶ The inscriptions excavated from the site of kilns in Sadang-dong, dated to 757 or a little later, are also helpful for understanding the literate life in the provinces. For example, a regional native who had received the official rank of *saji* 舍知 from the central government was in charge of the production of pottery in Kī'ch'on in Han-ju Province at the time. It can be inferred from his flowing and elegant style of handwriting that he was a man of learning.¹²⁷ In addition, Yōmjang, a local government official in Mujin-wu Province who had the title *yōlga* 列駕 (lit., “carriage”), also known as *pyōlga* 別駕 (lit., “special carriage”), sent a letter to Japan in 842.¹²⁸ All such documents illuminate aspects of documentary administration in Silla's regional governments.

In short, Silla witnessed the emergence of intellectuals in the provinces in the Middle period, but it was not until the beginning of the Late period that these regional intellectuals flourished. The inscription on the iron pennant pole found at the site of Yongdu-sa temple in Ch'ōngju, dated to 962, supports the existence of a school managed by a local power in the late Silla period.¹²⁹ In fact, the

125. Yun Sōnt'ae, “Silla Ch'ollak munsō ūi chaksōng yōndae was yongdo” (The Dating of the Silla Census Registers and Their Use), *Silla t'ongilgi wangsil ūi ch'ollak chibae* (The Rule of the Royal House over Hamlets in Post-Unification Silla), (Ph.D. diss., Seoul: Sōul taehakkyo, 2000).

126. Yi Kibaek, “Silla Kyōngdōk wang tae Hwaōmgyōng sagyōng kwanyōja e taehan koch'al” (An Examination of Those Who Transcribed the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* in the Reign of King Kyōngdōk), *Han'guk kodae chōngch'i sahoesa yōn'gu* (A Study of the Politico-Social History of Ancient Korea), (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1996), 363-365.

127. Song Kiho, “Sadang-dong yoji ch'ult'o myōngmun charyo wa t'ongil Silla chibang sahoe” (The Inscriptions Excavated from the Site of Kilns at Sadang-don and the Local Societies of Unified Silla), *Han'guksa yōn'gu*, 99 and 100 (1997): 133-134.

128. *Shoku Nihon koki* 續日本後紀 (A Follow-up Volume of Old Records of Nihon), v. 11, first month of the ninth year of [Jowa 承和]. The original text reads, “乙巳, … 仍責聞丈上筑前國牒狀參來者.”

origin of regional schools may be traced back earlier than this. In that case, such schools and master-disciple relationships would have helped local societies cultivate regional intellectuals, who would have risen to power as *hojok* 豪族 (semi-independent local power-holders in the period of late Silla and early Koryŏ).¹³⁰ In addition, the intellectuals in the capital city who retired to the countryside, as seen in the case of Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn, or who lined up with local powers, as seen in the cases of Ch'oe Sŭngu and Ch'oe Ŏnwi,¹³¹ are thought to have contributed to the development of intellectual circles in the provinces.

Lastly, we need to consider the unique case of Parhae (698-926). When Parhae was founded in 698, its people were already literate. Indeed, Chinese records reports that not only did Parhae have a written language but its people kept their own documentary records and were familiar with written contracts (see Table 1). Another record states that Parhae imported Chinese literature in the sixth month of 736.¹³² Literature from foreign countries may have been collected in the national archives, called Munjŏgwŏn 文籍院, and studied by scholars and students at a national college, Chujagam 胄子監. A sentence inscribed on a stele at the college reads, "Confucian students bustle in the East Hall."¹³³ Furthermore, the *chogo sain* 詔詰舍人 was in charge of drafting royal ordinances in Chungdaesŏng 中臺省 (a branch with policy initiation and report functions), while a writing secretary called *noksa* 錄事 traveled with the envoy to foreign countries.

The inscriptions on the tombs of Princess Chŏnghye and Princess Chŏnghyo reflect the level of literacy in the eighth century. These epitaphs, written in a rhythmical prose style, quote phrases from Confucian texts and histories of China and are marked by parallelism and ornateness, which was in vogue in Tang China at the time. Nevertheless, the texts of the two epitaphs are almost identical to each other, and the writer of the epitaph for Princess Chŏnghyo alluded improperly to a historical event of Han China.¹³⁴ Thus it can be inferred

129. Kim Kwangsu, "Namal Yŏch'o ŭi chibang hakkyo munje" (The Question of Local Schools in Late Silla and Early Koryŏ), *Han'guksa yŏn'gu* 7 (1972).

130. Kim Chusŏng, "Silla mal, Koryŏ ch'o chibang chisigin" (Local Intellectuals in Late Silla and Early Koryŏ), *Honam munhwa yŏn'gu* 19 (1990).

131. Kim Ch'ŏlchun, "Munin kyech'ŭng kwa chibang hojok" (Literati and Local Powers), *Honam munhwa yŏn'gu* 19 (1990): 263.

132. *Tang hui yao* 唐會要 (A Selection from the History of the Tang), v. 36, *Fan yi qing jing shu* 蕃夷請經史 (History of Tributaries' Requests for Scriptures).

133. Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'guso, ed., *Yŏkchu Han'guk kodaesa kŏmsŏngmun*, v. 3, 471-472.

134. Qiu Xiuyu 鄒秀玉, "Parhae Chŏnghye gong zhu mu zhi bing xu gao shi" (An Examination of the Additional Introduction to the Epitaph of Princess Chŏnghyo of Parhae), *Yanbian wen wu*

that comprehension and composition in eighth-century Parhae were not very sophisticated.

In the ninth century, however, many men of letters were dispatched to Japan, implying that the Parhae people enjoyed a relatively advanced level of literacy. In the early years of Parhae, the envoys to Japan were selected from among military officers. From the mid-eighth century on, however, civilian officials were appointed, and in the ninth century all the envoys were selected from intellectual circles in the government.¹³⁵ The scholar-envoys from Parhae were well received in Japan. When Chu Wŏnbaek arrived in Japan, Shimada no tadaomi 嶋田忠臣, the most renowned Japanese writer of the time, was in charge of receiving him. In another instance, in the middle of a reception party for Pae Chŏng, known as a man of “seven-step” talent in poetry 七步之才 (a Chinese idiom reserved for special talent in impromptu composition), a Japanese official, Hujiwara no yoshizumi 藤原良積, had to leave early because of his deficient writing skills.¹³⁶

These anecdotes reflect the literate life in Parhae, which must have advanced greatly in the ninth century. Indeed, the Chinese poet Wen Tingyun 溫庭筠 commented on Parhae culture: “[The Tang and Parhae] established the same house in terms of culture and institutions.”¹³⁷ Moreover, the Chinese eventually began to refer to Parhae as Hai dong cheng guo 海東盛國 (“the prosperous state in the east”). This literary tradition was later succeeded by the Liao 遼 dynasty (947-1125) and the Jin 金 dynasty (1115-1234).¹³⁸

Conclusion

Ancient Korean society, which did not have its own written language, had to undergo the challenging process of learning and adopting a foreign writing system. Naturally, Korea fell far behind compared to China. The difference between China and Korea in the use of divination bones (*pokkol* 卜骨; Ch. *fu gu*) is illustrative of this situation. Divination bones have been found at fourteen

zi liao hui bian (A Collection of the Cultural Sources in Yanbian), 1983, 81.

135. Song Kiho, “Pal, Il kuksŏ rŭl chungsim ūro pon 9-segi ūi sahoe pyŏnhwa” (Social Change in the Ninth Century, Focusing on the Official Letters of Parhae and Japan), *Parhae chŏngch’isa yŏn’gu* (A Study of the Political History of Parhae), (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1995), 135.

136. *Ibid.*, 136.

137. *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (All Tang Poetry), box 9, vol. 5, Song Parhae wang zi gui ben guo 送渤海王子歸本國 (Seeing off a Parhae Prince to his Country).

138. Song Kiho, “Yuhak kwa Hanmunhak” (Confucianism and Chinese Literature), *Han’guksa* (The History of Korea), v. 10, (Seoul: Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, 1996), 196.

different sites in the Korean peninsula and dated from the second century BCE to the fourth century CE.¹³⁹ These Korean divination bones, like the Japanese ones, have no inscriptions, whereas the Chinese divination bones, found along the Yellow River valley, are inscribed with characters. Moreover, it was after divination bones were no longer in use in China that they began to become popular in Korea and Japan. In other words, even though the Korean and Japanese divination bones were made much later than Chinese ones, they had no characters – a lag indicative of the wide gap between China and Korea-Japan in terms of literacy.

Written language in ancient Korea might be traced back to the Neolithic or Bronze Age, when pottery engraved with symbols was in use. However, whether these symbols can be considered characters cannot be determined until more evidence is available. Koreans may have used written language in the period of Wiman Chosŏn, but direct evidence is not available to support this theory. The incised rock drawings concentrated in the southeast region of the peninsula in this period, as well as various designs inscribed on pottery, may have functioned as hieroglyphic characters, but they did not develop into an independent writing system. Eventually, they yielded their place to Chinese characters.

The Chinese writing system may not have been in full effect until after the Luolang commandery was established in 108 BCE. Various archeological sources suggest that a documentary administrative system was already in operation in mid-fourth-century Korea, which was thus ahead of Japan in adopting Chinese characters. Nonetheless, based on the extant sources, the early Three Kingdoms period appears to have attained an elementary level of literacy, which allowed residents of the three Korean kingdoms to become familiar with Chinese characters through inscriptions on coins, mirrors, and seals brought from China. The oldest known inscriptions are dated to the fourth century for Koguryŏ, the fourth or fifth century Paekche, the mid-fifth century for Silla, and the sixth century for Kaya. The time prior to these earliest inscriptions can be identified as the dawn of literacy for each state.

Koguryŏ was the first ancient Korean kingdom to undergo the process of literacy development, followed by Paekche, Silla, and Kaya. This chronological order is verified by Chinese histories, as well as other historical accounts of the following: the beginning of documentary diplomacy, the dispatch of monks and students to China, the establishment of educational institutions, the introduction of Chinese literature and calendars, the compilation of national histories, and the

139. Ŭn Hwasu, "Han'guk ch'ult'o pokkol e taehan koch'al" (An Examination of the Divination Bones Excavated in Korea), *Honam kogohak po* 10 (1999): 22-23.

promulgation of legal codes. More specifically, Koguryŏ was 85 years ahead of Paekche, which was, in turn, about 150 years ahead of Silla. In a sense, these differing starting points reflect the larger context of respective national developments.

The Koguryŏ murals found in tomb #3 in Anak, the tomb of Tŏkhŭng-ni, and the Tomb of the Four Spirits in Tonggou provide some fragmentary scenes associated with literacy in the three kingdoms. Unfortunately, the relevant primary sources about Koguryŏ are also very limited. Inscriptions and historical accounts of literacy in Silla are relatively abundant, however, and consequently of much help in grasping the general patterns of literacy in ancient times.

In the case of Silla, following the inception of literacy in the mid-fifth century, the history of literacy can be divided into three periods. The first period, from the sixth century to the unification, can be characterized as the age of national records. The monument stones erected in this period, such as the monument stone in Naengsu-ri, mostly recorded state projects or the events of the royal house.

In the next period, ranging from the mid-seventh century to the end of the eighth century, Silla experienced a shift in interest from the state to individuals, illustrated by the widespread erection of memorial stelae for individuals and the emergence of many renowned writers. For this reason, it can be designated as the age of personal records.

Stelae for Buddhist monks were first erected at the end of the eighth century and spread widely in the ninth century. Inscriptions related to Buddhist temples also flourished throughout the ninth century, a phenomenon that suggests the increasingly influential role of Buddhist circles in official records. This period, therefore, can be called the age of Buddhist records.

In short, the periodization of the Silla based on general trends in literacy matches the conventional periodization of its general history – that is, the Early-Middle period, Middle period, and the Late period.

However, the development of literacy in Silla can also be explained as an expansion of literate life from center to periphery. Early inscriptions of Silla, dated from the mid-fifth century to the early sixth century, are concentrated in Kyŏngju, whereas the inscriptions dated to the late sixth century or later are found in the provinces as well. This expansion is also evident in the epitaphs of some monument stones from this period, which note their writers' ranks in the local government. Moreover, the census registers prepared for certain hamlets support the theory that documentary administration had already been systemized in the post-unification period. Some regional literati played a major role in transcribing the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, while others helped established local

schools that began to cultivate local intellectuals in the ninth century.

In the case of Parhae, the inscriptions on the tombs of Princess Chŏnghye and Princess Chŏnghyo provide a few clues about literature and scholarship during the reign of King Mun (r. 737-794). Based on the content of the epitaphs, one can conclude that general comprehension and composition in eighth-century Parhae were relatively rudimentary. In the ninth century, however, all the Parhae envoys sent to Japan were well received by members of the Japanese court, who admired their intellectual accomplishments. Thus it can be inferred that literacy in Parhae enjoyed dramatic improvements in the ninth century, to the extent that Parhae was deemed by the Chinese to be “the prosperous state in the east.”

In this article, I have provided a general survey of literacy in ancient Korea. As more archeological evidence becomes available, many of the dates will have to be revised. The existing sources, however, have allowed me to investigate the general trends of literacy development in ancient times. I hope that this article will serve as a useful starting point for other studies in this field.