Guest Editor's Introduction

Problems in the *Samguk Sagi*'s Representation of Early Silla History

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Without question the twelfth-century *Samguk sagi* contains within its chronicle of Silla, the *Silla Annals*, the most extensive body of evidence regarding the history of that major Northeast Asian polity. Yet there are significant problems, especially chronological problems, with its account of the early history of Silla. The *Silla Annals* provides a record, albeit at some points a sparse record, of events important to the Silla court from the alleged assumption of power in 57 BCE by the polity's putative first sovereign, Pak Hyŏkkŏse—who is reported to have been hatched from a gourd-shaped egg—to the kingdom's demise almost a thousand years later in 935 CE. Nor is it surprising that the early portions of the *Silla Annals*' narrative should be replete with chronological problems. According to the text itself, the *compilation* of the first official court history of Silla of which the editors of the *Samguk sagi* were evidently aware was not even authorized until 545, the sixth year of the reign of Silla's King Chinhŭng (540–576), and thus some six centuries after the court's alleged establishment in 57 BCE. Consequently, one must at least wonder what was the source of all the quite detailed information—names and titles of court bureaucrats and generals, reports of promotions in rank, place names, numbers of battle fatalities, etc., etc.—preserved in the *Silla Annals*' recounting of the initial six hundred years of the millennium that it ascribes to Silla's existence as a royal state.

It was to begin to address in a necessarily limited but public way this fundamental chronological problem posed by the *Samguk sagi*'s account of the early history of Silla that an interdisciplinary panel was proposed and accepted for the 8th Kyujanggak International Symposium held at Seoul National University in late

Seoul Journal of Korean Studies 29, no. 1 (June 2016): 1–6.

August of 2015. Indeed, four of the five articles appearing in this journal are the more detailed written elaborations of papers that were presented at that panel, and the fifth—that by Mark Byington—was subsequently solicited due to the known relevance of some of his current research to matters treated here.

All five of the essays appearing here directly address problems, especially chronological problems, in the twelfth-century *Samguk sagi*'s representation of the early—or, to be more precise with regard to these five studies in particular, the pre-sixth-century—history of Silla, but they do so from several disciplinary vantage points. Two of the papers, those by Jack Davey and Lee Sungjoo, approach these concerns from the perspective of archaeology: in essence they compare the material evidence produced by archaeology with the written evidence of not just the *Samguk sagi* but also the third-century Chinese source, the *Sanguozhi*. The remaining three papers can, in broad view, all be characterized as examples of comparative history in which the evidence from other primary written sources are deployed to assess the chronology assigned to certain entries in the *Silla Annals*. Yet even in these three primarily textually based studies there are salient differences in approach: Richard McBride uses epigraphic evidence as the basis for much of his comparative textual analysis, whereas Byington relies primarily on comparative data from early Chinese sources, and I make extensive use of information preserved in both early Chinese and Japanese sources. It is notable, but not surprising, that one Chinese source in particular, namely the late third-century *Sanguozhi*, plays a major role in four of the five essays presented here—only in the case of McBride's study of Silla's bureaucratic structure does it not figure prominently.

As a final comment before briefly introducing the content of these five studies, it is important to note that not only are there differences in the methodologies and the kinds of evidence that they employ, but there are also significant differences in the nature of the results that they produce, yet they all reveal the problematic nature of the dates assigned in the *Silla Annals* to particular aspects of the early history of southeastern Korea.

In Davey's and Lee's papers that emphasize archaeological evidence, that evidence is recurrently compared to the relevant data contained in early written sources, especially to the widely differing accounts of the *Samguk sagi* and the *Sanguozhi*. Davey's study opens with excellent discussions both of the limitations inherent in using archaeology to critique the accuracy of written accounts of the distant past, especially those containing closely dated reports of events, and of the methodology that he will employ in his paper in recognition of these difficulties. He then turns to explicating the *Samguk sagi*'s and the *Sanguozhi*'s contrasting representations of the overarching political structure that obtained in the Yŏngnam region during the Iron Age (especially during the two-hundred period between 100

and 300 CE). To be more precise, Davey contrasts the *Samguk sagi*'s depiction of centralized, royally ruled polities—most notably Silla and Taegaya—as then exercising control over large domains with the *Sanguozhi*'s description of the region as fragmented into the Chinhan and Pyŏnhan groupings of small, semi-independent polities. He then analyzes the burial archaeology of the region as evidence of patterns of mortuary ritual practice in order to assess to what extent that particular body of material evidence tends to support one or the other of the two starkly contrasting textual characterizations of the political structure existing in southeastern Korea during the second and third centuries. Davey's analysis is detailed and compelling, and his results pose an insurmountable challenge to the *Silla Annals*' representation of Silla as having been already a royal state with expanding borders as early as the first century BCE.

Lee Sungjoo's archeologically based study treats the period from the late fourth century to the start of the sixth century and thus picks up the narrative essentially where Davey's left off. Lee's study focuses on the so-called Maripkan period that encompassed the duration from the start of the fifth through the early sixth centuries, the period when, according to the *Samguk sagi*, the sovereigns of Silla were titled *maripkan* rather than *isagŭm* as had been the case previously or *wang* ("king") as would become the case subsequently. Through analyzing the archaeological evidence concerning the emergence of earthen fortresses, the development of villages organized in the Silla-style and containing Silla-style residences, and the appearance of grave goods in low-ranking cemeteries that are arranged in the style of Silla, Lee charts the gradual expansion beyond the Kyŏngju plain of Silla's influence and, ultimately, control. At all points in this study of the progress of Silla's incorporation of territories peripheral to Kyŏngju, he compares what archaeology indicates about the process with the *Sanguozhi*'s and the *Samguk sagi*'s contrasting characterizations of the circumstances prevailing in the region. Lee initially employs evidence from a variety of sites to create a broadly based study of the transition of a village or community beyond the environs of Kyŏngju from being essentially a discrete small polity of the sort described in the *Sanguozhi* as typical of the Chinhan and Pyŏnhan societies to that polity's effective absorption into the centralized Silla state. This investigation is followed by a more focused examination of the archaeological evidence of that transitional process in the vicinity of Kangnŭng in Kangwŏn province. The evidence cited by Lee concerning Kangnŭng reveals the same sequence of developmental stages and essentially the same chronological trajectory as that sketched in his preceding more generalized study of the process and the timing of its phases. Both in his overview and in the Kangnŭng case study, the *Sanguozhi*'s description of the situation in Yŏngnam fares better than that found in the *Samguk sagi*, no doubt in part because the Chinese source only deals with the starting point

in the developmental process and in part because it, like archaeology, provides no specific dates but only characterizes the conditions existing during that initial phase. The *Samguk sagi*, in contrast, not only offers specific dates for the events it narrates, but also asserts that by the middle of the first century CE, Silla was an effectively centralized royal state possessed of a complex bureaucracy and a domain that already encompassed a number of far-flung peripheral communities.

The analytic approach shifts with the next article from primary reliance on archaeological evidence to employing textual evidence as the basis for assessing the chronological accuracy of the *Samguk sagi*'s representation of Silla's early history. In this instance, Richard McBride makes compelling use of epigraphic evidence in addition to data drawn from a variety of primary Chinese and—although to a much lesser extent—Japanese textual sources to construct a well documented study of Silla's bureaucratic system and its councils of nobles. In his analysis he also draws on information found in the *Samguk yusa* and throughout the *Samguk sagi*, not solely in the *Silla Annals*. It is in his discussion of the seventeen-tier capital rank system that he makes careful use of a series of epigraphs dated between 501 and 561 that discloses the gradual development of the system and that indicates that the system of seventeen ranks as a whole only came into existence during the mid-sixth-century reign of King Chinhŭng—that is to say, some five hundred years after the *Silla Annals* reports the system's complete establishment in 32 CE (Yuri 9). The epigraphic evidence also reveals that even as late as the middle of the sixth century few of the bureaucratic titles conformed to those listed in the Silla chronicle's entry of 32 CE. McBride then turns his attention to the councils of nobles. More particularly, he investigates the *Silla Annals*' reports of the establishment of the Chŏngsadang ("Administrative Chamber") in 138 (Ilsŏng 5) and the construction of the Namdang ("Southern Chamber" or simply "Southern Hall") in 249 (Ch'ŏmhae 2), both being structures that the chronicle asserts were palace halls wherein the Silla sovereign met in council with his noble advisors and high officers of state. Using comparative evidence largely derived from Chinese sources, McBride argues that the accounts of the founding of both council halls are anachronistic and questions whether either hall dates prior to the late seventh century. Thus once again, but this time on the basis of much year-specific written evidence, entries from the *Silla Annals* that contain important information regarding the early history of Silla are shown to concern actual historical developments, but to be dated much too early in the text.

My paper also treats precisely dated anachronisms in the *Silla Annals*, a topic that has long been a major research interest of mine. The present study is focused primarily on one fairly egregious instance of anachronism, namely the chronicle's report of the arrival at the Silla court in 173 (Adalla 20) of an embassy from Queen Himiko, the ruler of the small Japanese polity of Yamatai. I understand the

chronicle's reference to Himiko not to be a fabrication or an inadvertently misdated record, but to be a consciously antedated account of an actual embassy sent by a much later female Japanese sovereign. Further, based on my analysis of the *Silla Annals*, it is my belief that not only the entry concerning Himiko but most of the text's entries dated prior to the sixth century that were derived from Silla-originated records are, in fact, systematically antedated accounts of actual later historical events. The epigraphy surviving from Silla indicates, not surprisingly, that as was the case throughout pre-modern East Asia, official and semi-official written accounts in pre-modern Korea were consistently dated in terms of the sexagenary cycle—in Korean known as the *kanji* cycle. Indeed, all of the epigraphs cited in McBride's paper are dated in accordance with the sexagenary cycle. Among the several dating systems employed in pre-modern East Asia, the sexagenary system alone offers the potential for *systematically* antedating or postdating. Consequently, if my understanding of how the sexagenary cycle was utilized to antedate the anachronistic early records in the *Silla Annals* is correct, then it should be possible to redate those records to their original chronological place in Silla's history. Accordingly, my present study of the anomalous report of an embassy from Himiko provides the opportunity to share in print some of the basic components of my understanding of how the systematic redating of such records was done and also to test the value of that methodology by redating the entry to what I believe is its proper place in time. Thus, in my paper I first introduce my methodology, then use evidence from the *Hou Hanshu* and the *Sanguozhi* to demonstrate that an embassy from Himiko could not possibly have arrived in Silla in 173, and then conclude by using evidence from the *Samguk sagi* and the *Shoku Nihongi* to establish a credible and much later date for the arrival at the Silla court of a diplomatic mission sent by a female Japanese sovereign.

In the fifth and final paper of this series, Mark Byington examines the *Silla Annals*' three earliest entries concerning interactions between Silla and Koguryŏ, all three of which are dated prior to the start of the fifth century. As was the case in the previous two studies, his approach to the material is essentially that of textually based comparative history. Concerning the first two entries—which are dated in the text to 245 (Chobun 16) and 248 (Ch'ŏmhae 2) and treat, respectively, a Koguryŏ assault on Silla's northern border and Silla's subsequent dispatch of a peace delegation to Koguryŏ three years later—Byington primarily employs the substantial quantity of relevant and quite detailed data from, again, the third-century *Sanguozhi*. In addition to noting like three of the four studies previously discussed that this essentially contemporary Chinese source contains no evidence that any centralized royal state of Silla existed in the third century, he also cites its extensive evidence relating both to the highly successful military campaigns of 244 to 246 launched by the Wei dynasty (220–266) against Koguryŏ and to the interposition of the Wei

commanderies of Lelang and Daifang between the territory of Koguryŏ in the north and the future domain of Silla in the south. Thus Byington is able to decisively demonstrate the anachronistic nature of the *Silla Annals*' entries of 245 and 248. With regard to the third of the chronicle's pre-fifth-century entries treating Silla-Koguryŏ relations, an entry concerned with the sending of a royal Silla hostage to the Koguryŏ court in 392 (Naemul 37), he cites evidence from the inscription of the Kwanggaet'o memorial stele of 414 to argue that in this instance the text's dating is, in fact, plausible. In discussing the three entries, he also compares the parallel versions of the entries of 245 and 392 in particular that appear in the *Koguryŏ Annals* with those in the *Silla Annals*, and makes the telling observation that in both instances the latter rendition is the more detailed. From this observation he then draws the significant conclusion that the versions found in the Koguryŏ chronicle evidently constitute abbreviated paraphrases of the accounts in the Silla chronicle. With regard to the entry of 245 that he demonstrated was anachronistic by comparison with evidence from the *Sanguozhi*, this inference is particularly significant because it indicates that the account was initially antedated for inclusion in the Silla chronicle and then inserted in modified form but at that same anomalous assigned date into the *Koguryŏ Annals*. This deduction is especially noteworthy because of what it reveals about how the text of the *Samguk sagi*—or perhaps some no longer extant source upon which it was based—was constructed. Finally in closing and after having persuasively demonstrated that the *Silla Annals*' entries of 245 and 248 are anachronistically dated, Byington quite appropriately reminds us that the historian's first duty is to determine the credibility of all of the sources under his or her consideration. Certainly in the case of the *Samguk sagi*, as has been repeatedly shown in this series of papers, adherence to this fundamental injunction of the historian's craft is essential.