The Development of Royal Tombs in Silla

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Introduction

Royal tombs, which first began to be built during the Three Kingdoms Era, were continuously built in Korea up until the reign of King Sunjong (1874-1926) of the Joseon dynasty. These royal tombs stood as independent entities which could be distinguished from the graves of other members of the royal family or subjects by the scale of the tomb mound. Furthermore, the political, economic, philosophical, and cultural characteristics of specific eras were distinctly reflected in such elements as the artifacts buried inside the tomb, the stone walls surrounding the grave (hoseok), and stone statues arranged in front of the tomb. Therefore, the development of a correct perception of the origins and changes in the royal tombs which were constructed during the days of ancient kingdoms can be identified as being essential in terms of the fostering of a proper understanding of the political and cultural trends associated with ancient society.

It is against this backdrop that various discussions have been held on the topic of the royal tombs and graves of Silla. While these discussions have helped to shed some much needed light on the process through which changes were made to royal tombs during individual periods, the general level of knowledge as relates to the royal tombs and graves of

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Silla has remained rather limited.

To this end, this study analyzes, based on the results of existing studies, major trends associated with Silla’s royal tomb system, including the introduction of Buddhist culture and the influence exercised by the royal tomb system of Tang. To attain this, this study examines the problems associated with the generic royal tombs identified as the tombs of kings in the Gyeongju area, the changes in the sites where Silla royal tombs were constructed, the structure of the hoseok, or stone walls surrounding the grave, and the stone statues found in front of royal tombs.

**Era of Group Tombs**

A number of tombs constructed during the early-ancient era of Silla (57 BC- 514), or before the reign of King Beopheung (23rd king of Silla) have been uncovered. In this regard, archeological scholars have identified the occupants of those tombs whose location and nature of the artifacts found hint at the presence of higher level individuals as chieftains or members of the ruling elite. More to the point, while the wooden coffins and wooden chamber tombs built before the reign of the 17th Maripgan (early word for king) Namul are referred to as chieftain tombs, the wooden chamber tombs with stone mound during the Maripgan Period are identified as the tombs of members of the ruling elite. Viewed from a political standpoint, the era of wooden coffins and wooden chamber tombs can be said to have belonged to the period in which small statelets were formed and to the age in which more powerful groups emerged as a result of the integration of such small statelets. Meanwhile, the period in which wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds were built can be regarded as the era in which early states were formed.¹

However, other terms, such as royal tombs (wangneung) and the graves of the royal family (wangjokmyo) have been used to refer to these ancient tombs. From an academic standpoint, referring to wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds as royal tombs (wangneung) can be regarded as
contradictory in nature. The layman, who is generally unaware of the gradual progression which Silla tombs underwent, may unconsciously reason that royal tombs (wangneung) should, given the authoritative nature of the very term, be much larger than those of common people.

If some of the larger wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds can be categorized as royal tombs, then the emergence of wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds can be linked to the emergence of ancient states. More to the point, as a subjugate relationship would have been established between the king and his royal subjects, such human relations should be reflected in the scale of the mound, or the artifacts buried in the tomb of the monarch. However, this conclusion reached by many archeological scholars, is not consistent with the rendering of history found in the <Guksa (國史, National History)> compiled by Silla historians in 545, or the related accounts found in the <Samguk sagi (三國史記, History of the Three Kingdoms)> and <Samguk yusa (三國遺事, Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea)> compiled during the Goryeo era.

Historians have, based on historical references, identified the political structure during the Maripgan period as one in which confederated states were established, and the bu (部) system generally put in place during the initial stages of ancient states was put in place. However, this was not a period in which a king wielding superior power existed. Rather, the trappings of a centralized ancient state were only put in place during the middle of the ancient era, or more specifically during the reign of King Beopheung, who oversaw the promulgation of administrative laws. That being the case, the conclusion can be reached that there were in fact no royal tombs in Silla society during the early stages of the ancient era, or prior to the reign of King Beopheung. In this regard, this assertion is consistent with the archeological evidence analyzed in the latter part of this study.

Nevertheless, a total of 11 tombs believed to have been those of kings (queen) during the early stages of the ancient era of Silla, which spanned from the founder of Silla to the 22nd Maripgan Jijeung, have been
discovered in the capital area of Gyeongju. To this end, the tombs from the so-called wooden coffin period which lasted from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD consist of the Five Tombs (oreung) and the Tomb of King Talhae (4th king of Silla), all of which are located in the Namrok area of Mt. Geumgang in the Dongcheon-dong district of Gyeongju. The Five Tombs (oreung) are those of Park Hyeokkeose, Queen Al-yeong, King Namhae, King Yuri, and King Pasa.

The royal tombs from the wooden chamber tomb era that lasted from the 2nd century to the early 4th century consist of those of King Jima (6th king of Silla), King Ilseong (7th king of Silla), and King Adalla (8th king of Silla) located along the western slopes of Namsan (South Mountain), as well as the Tomb of King Michu (13th king of Silla) situated within the Daereungwon (Royal Burial Grounds). Meanwhile, the Tomb of King Namul (17th king of Silla) located within the Gyerim or Rooster Forest stands as an example of the royal tombs built during the wooden chamber tomb with stone mound period that lasted from the late 4th century to the early 6th century. Interestingly, of the 56 queens of Silla, Queen Al-yeong is the only one whose tomb is still extant today.

Standing some 5-12 m tall, the mounds of the tombs of these royals (kings and queen) are much bigger than those of regular tombs. Therefore, if we accept the claim that the occupants of these generic royal tombs can be dated back to the early-ancient period of Silla, we must also accept the assertion that these large-scale royal tombs must have been built during the Saroguk period associated with the early stages of Silla. Furthermore, we must also accept that a strong royal power already existed during this Saro period. However, archeological studies conducted in the Gyeongju area over the past 100 years raise some doubts about the historical characteristics of these royal tombs.2

As mentioned above, wooden coffin tombs were built from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD, a period that coincides with the founding of Saro as one of the 12 statelets of Jinhan. Relics from this period which have to date been found include those excavated in Ipsil-ri, Oedong-eup, from the tomb complex in Jukdong-ri, the Oedong-eup, the
tomb complex in Joyang-dong, the tomb complex along the river banks in Hwangseong-dong, and the tomb complex in Sara-ri, Seo-myeon. In this regard, scholars have paid special attention to Tomb No. 38 in Joyang-dong\(^3\) and Tomb No. 130 in Sara-ri,\(^4\) both of which have been regarded as the tombs of ruling elites in the Gyeongju area.

\(<\text{Picture 1}>\) Tomb No 38 in Joyang-dong, Gyeongju

The interior (myogwang) of these ancient tombs is on average 1-2 m wide and 2-3 m long. A wooden coffin was installed inside of the tomb,
and several artifacts were also buried within the chamber. With the exception of the two tombs found in the relics located along the river banks in Hwangseong-dong, these wooden coffin tombs were uncovered as part of tomb complexes found at the foot of mountains or in hilly areas along the outskirts of Gyeongju. It is also unknown whether individual grave mounds were initially present, or whether these were simply flattened over time.

<Table 2> Tomb No. 130 in Sara-ri, Seo-myeon, Gyeongju

Tombs became more developed from the 2nd century to the mid-4th century with the emergence of the wooden chamber tombs. Related relics include those uncovered in the tomb complex in Hwangseong-dong, the tomb complex in Gu-eo-ri, tomb complex in Sara-ri, and the tomb complex in Gujeong-dong. The majority of these wooden chamber tombs featured elements of the wooden coffins popular during the previous period. A comparison of these wooden chamber tombs with the wooden coffin tombs popular during the previous era reveals that while the
interior of the tomb was generally larger, there were in fact very few differences in terms of their external shapes.

The wooden coffin or wooden chamber tombs said to have contained the remains of chieftains were not separated from other tombs within the tomb complex. In other words, there was no special site set aside for them which would have highlighted their social status; rather, they were simply placed alongside other tombs within the same complex. As a result, it becomes all but impossible to ascertain the existence of royal tombs based solely on the external characteristics of ancient tombs. Rather, the political status of the owner of the tomb can only be guessed by a look at the artifacts excavated from the interior of the tomb.

Lastly, by the time the wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds began to appear from the mid-4th century to the early-6th century, the center of the Gyeongju basin had replaced mountain slopes and hilly areas along the outskirts of Gyeongju as the site of predilection for such tombs. This rapid change in the location of tombs indicates that the powers that be during the initial stages of the founding of the ancient state that emerged after the integration of the various small statelets selected the Gyeongju basin as their main sphere of activity. While this theory is highly feasible, it has yet to be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Nevertheless, none of the wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds which have to date been identified as the tombs of kings or royal family members, namely, the large-sized wooden chamber tombs established in the Gyeongju basin which are regarded as being so distinct from the other tombs constructed prior to this period, can be said to possess the characteristics generally associated with royal tombs. This is because in addition to the fact that these wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds were included within tomb complexes that also featured wooden coffin or wooden chamber tombs, they also did not have any characteristics which could distinguish them from other tombs in terms of location or the grave mound itself.

According to the <Samguk sagi> and <Samguk yusa>, six kings, ranging from the 17th Maripgan Namul to the 22nd Maripgan Jijeung,
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ascended the throne during the period in which these wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds were constructed in the Gyeongju basin surrounded by the Namcheon, Seocheon, and Bukcheon Streams. However, the Japanese scholars who investigated the large scale-tombs in the Gyeongju basin during the colonial era did not find six tombs for kings and six tombs for queens, but a grand total of some one hundred and fifty-five tombs. Once the fifty-two tombs uncovered in the tomb complex in Geumcheok-ri are factored in, a grand total of in excess of 200 tombs have in fact been found in the area.

Put differently, it is clear that at least twelve of these large-scale tombs must have belonged to kings and queens. To date, golden crowns have been excavated from five of these large-scale tombs. The occupants of the Cheonmachong (Heavenly Horse Tomb) and Geumgwanchong (Gold Crown Tomb) have been identified as male kings. Meanwhile, the tenants of the Seobongchong (Sweden Phoenix Tomb) and of the northern tomb of Hwangnamdaechong (Twin Mound Tomb) have been identified as females. Moreover, the general consensus has been that the owner of the
Geumnyeongchong (Gold Bell Tomb) was a boy in his late teens.

A look at the external characteristics and artifacts which have been excavated from these tombs reveals that kings during the period in which wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds were prevalent had yet to secure an exclusive status that would clearly distinguish them from other members of the royal family or aristocrats. Rather, they represented one member of a group which wielded an equivalent level of power, and functioned as a symbol of this power elite.

The results of such archeological studies have had the effect of raising questions about the tombs in the Gyeongju area, which have long been perceived to be royal tombs dating back to the days before the reign of King Beopheung (23rd king of Silla). This can be construed as the main reason why archeological scholars have hesitated to include these generic royal tombs built during the wooden coffin tomb, wooden chamber tomb, and wooden chamber tomb with stone mound eras in their attempts to restore the history of Silla.

All of the tombs built during the wooden coffin tomb and wooden chamber tomb periods were accidentally discovered in a flattened state. As such, the term early stage of generic royal tombs in fact does not encompass these wooden coffin tombs or wooden chamber tombs, but rather only the wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds built during the 5th - 6th century and the corridor-style stone chamber tomb which emerged in Gyeongju from the mid-6th century onwards. In addition, a look at the size of the grave mound makes it amply clear that the owners of these generic royal tombs did not hold absolute power, but rather were part of the ruling elite during the Maripgan Period, and/or of the royal family or aristocracy from the reign of King Beopheung onwards.

Therefore, we can conclude that the tombs that can be identified from an archeological standpoint as actually having been royal ones first emerged during the reign of King Beopheung, or when the administrative laws were promulgated, and the basic framework of the Golpum (bone rank) system was completed. In other words, while the large-scale wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds located in the Daereungwon...
(Royal Burial Grounds) in the Gyeongju basin, or those tombs in this area from which golden crowns were excavated, can be identified as the tombs of members of the ruling elite, they cannot without a shadow of a doubt be identified as royal tombs. This can be construed to mean that royal tombs did not appear in Silla before 600 or so of its 992 year-long history had elapsed. In this regard, the identification by some academics of such large-scale tombs as royal tombs is rooted in an inherent failure to separate the political situation that prevailed from the reign of King Beopheung onwards, by which point the royal power had been strengthened as a result of the establishment of the bone rank system, from that of the previous periods characterized by a ruling structure that revolved around the formation of political alliances amongst various ruling elites.

The Promulgation of Administrative Laws and Changes in Royal Tombs

During the middle of the ancient period (514-653) of Silla, the ruling class moved their burial ground from the plains of the Gyeongju basin to the foot of Mt. Seondo. This relocation of the burial ground was occasioned by the desire to build a royal palace and residential area for the members of the ruling elite in the Gyeongju basin. In this regard, Wolseong started to function as the royal palace during the late 5th century. The transformation of the Gyeongju basin from burial ground to the capital of Silla which occurred during this period is inherently reflected in the establishment of an administrative system during the reign of King Jabi, and in the actualization of a street unit system (坊里制) in the area as part of wider urban planning efforts.

It was under such circumstances that the tomb complex in Seoak-dong along the eastern slope of Mt. Seondo was constructed during the early 6th century. The largest of all the tomb complexes in the Gyeongju area in terms of scale, the tomb complex in Seoak-dong consists of four large
tombs that have been identified as royal tombs (king and queen) which are surrounded by smaller-sized tombs. The following conclusions can be reached with regards to the changes in the features of ancient tomb complexes which occurred during the early 6th century.

First, the establishment of the administrative law (*yullyeong*), great king (*Daewang*), and bone-rank (*Golpum*) systems, as well as the strengthening of the royal power, which took place during the early 6th century created circumstances in which it would no longer have been logical for the king, other members of the royal family, and aristocrats to be buried in the same space as part of a tomb group. In keeping with this line of reasoning, separate burial grounds began to be constructed for the kings, aristocrats, and royal family members. In this regard, the four large tombs uncovered in the tomb complex of Seoak-dong are clearly distinguishable from the other smaller-scale tombs erected in the surrounding area, and this both in terms of the independence of the tomb location and the size of the grave mound. The tombs of four of the seven kings who ascended the throne during the period spanning from the reign of King Beopheung to that of King Muyeol, namely those of King Beopheung, King Jinheung, King Jinji, and King Muyeol, are rendered in a straight line along the slope of Mt. Seondo.

On the contrary, the tombs of other royal family members and meritorious subjects during the same period were established in different sites that in effect surrounded the main royal tombs. Moreover, the size of these tombs was only half that of the royal tombs.

Although the actual site of the tombs of the kings and subjects were now effectively separated, the tomb complex was, in keeping with the long-held tradition of establishing tomb sites within the space known as the Gyeongju basin, rendered in such a manner that the smaller-sized tombs surrounded the royal tombs. Doubts however continue to exist as to whether the wooden chamber tomb with stone mound or corridor-style stone chamber tomb, or even, as has been asserted by some researchers, the walk-in stone chamber tomb, was in fact the prevailing type of tomb during this period.
However, a general analysis of the situation reveals that by the time the tomb of King Jinheung was erected within the royal tomb complex in Seoak-dong, by which point the queens were now buried with kings, the corridor-style stone chamber tomb style, under which the main room of royal tomb was effectively divided, had been adopted.  

The subsequent separate establishment of the tombs of King Jinpyeong (26th king of Silla) in Hanjibu, of Queen Seondeok (27th queen of Silla) in Nangsan, and of Queen Jindeok (28th queen of Silla) in Saryangbu reveals that the collective characteristics of Silla ancient tombs so prominently on display in the tomb complex in Seoak-dong had by this point been abandoned. This move towards the preparation of individual royal tombs decisively influenced the selection of royal burial sites during the Unified Silla era.

**Completion of the Royal Tomb System**

*The Influence of the Goguryeo and Tang Tomb Systems*

With the exception of large and wide tomb mounds, none of the tombs
built during the periods analyzed above featured any decorations on the tomb mounds, or ritual related facilities in the tomb area. Such practices, which first appeared in conjunction with the tomb of King Muyeol, began to be introduced when Silla unified the three kingdoms during the mid-7th century. These changes were influenced by Goguryeo, as well as by the imperial tomb system of the Tang dynasty.

In this regard, attention should first be paid to items found in or near the tomb of King Muyeol, such as the hoseok (stone wall surrounding the grave), sangseok (altar stone) placed to the east of the tomb, and the tomb stele. To this end, the seal script-style entry which reads “Taejong muyeol daewang jibi (太宗武烈大王之碑)” found on the head of the stele located in front of the tomb leaves no doubt as to the identity of the owner of this tomb. This has resulted in the tomb of King Muyeol being recognized as the only Silla tomb for which no questions exist as to the identity of the occupant. A look at the records found in the <Samguk sagi> and <Samguk yusa> pertaining to burial sites or the location of royal tombs makes it evident that there are very few such instances in which the identity of the owner of a generic royal tomb is clearly known. The fact that the identification of the occupants of the majority of royal tombs has not been based on any concrete proof only serves to further highlight the unique nature and importance of the stele of King Muyeol.

<Picture 5> Tomb of King Muyeol and the Stele
In addition, the stele of King Muyeol also helps to chronicle the fact that King Muyeol died sometime after June 661. Moreover, the tombs which were established during the 7th century can be chronicled using the structure of the *hoseok* (stone wall surrounding the grave) of the tomb of King Muyeol as the standard. In other words, these structures play an important role in facilitating the analysis of royal tombs before and after the unification of Silla.

As mentioned above, the tomb of King Muyeol represents a departure of sorts in terms of the royal tomb system in that it is clearly distinct from previous Silla royal tombs. The main difference in this regards is the presence of a more advanced *hoseok* structure that features an additional support stone, as well as an altar stone (*sangseok*) and tomb stele.7

The introduction of a support stone installed to protect or adorn the *hoseok* (stone wall surrounding the grave) was greatly influenced by Goguryeo. Simply put, the existing *hoseok* structure was reinforced by adding natural stone which functioned as a support stone to the *hoseok*. This kind of structure can be regarded as having been one step more advanced than the basic *hoseok* royal tombs produced during the preceding period.

The introduction of such a support stone can in all likelihood be traced back to the menhir culture of Central Asia and the Altai region, where stones were used to surround wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds. These menhirs were used in Central Asia to demarcate the boundaries of tombs or burial sites. However, a look at pyramid style-stone mound tombs such as the Tomb of the General (*Janggunchong*) located in Jian in China’s Jilin Province, and the ancient tomb complex in Seokchon-dong, Seoul makes it clear that Goguryeo and Baekje used such stones not only as a means of supporting the *hoseok*, but also as a tool with which to highlight the grandeur of these tombs.

The ancient tomb complex in Seokchon-dong, Seoul is home to the tombs of members of the royal family of Baekje whose roots lay in Goguryeo. In this regard, Tomb No. 3 is believed to have been the tomb of a king who ruled during Baekje’s Hanseong era. There is a strong
probability that this tomb complex was discovered by Silla people when King Jinheung occupied the Han River basin. This potential discovery does not appear to have had any influence on the Silla tombs constructed at that time. However, the inclusion of a support stone in the Tomb of King Muyeol (661) constructed before the collapse of Goguryeo (668) highlights the fact that knowledge of the existence of such support stones became widespread in Silla during the period in which the three kingdoms were unified. As such, although the origins of the support stone can be traced back to Goguryeo’s tomb system, there is a very real likelihood that Silla’s introduction of such support stones in its royal tombs was in fact influenced by Baekje’s tomb system.

Therefore, the hoseok structure can be regarded as one of the important characteristics of Silla’s tombs during the late 7th century. This type of hoseok structure is also evident in the tombs of King Namul, King Jinpyeong, King Hyoso, and Kim In-mun. Thereafter, the support stone used in conjunction with the hoseok became, along with stone spikes, important elements behind the emergence of a new tomb structure in which statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs (sibijisinsang) were rendered. This new structure was in place by the time the tomb of King Seongdeok was constructed during the mid-8th century.

Second, the tomb of King Muyeol was the first to have an altar stone (sangseok) installed to the east of the grave marking the direction which the head of the occupant of the tomb faced. However, in the case of the tomb of King Seongdeok, the altar stone was moved to the south or center of the tomb, because stone statues of human figures were symmetrically placed to the left and right of the tomb, a move which was greatly influenced by the tomb system of Tang dynasty.

Third, contrary to what had been the general practice during the Three Kingdoms Era, epitaphs began to be erected to the left of the altar stone (sangseok) from the reign of King Muyeol onwards. The erection of such tomb steles can be taken as a sign of Silla’s acceptance of Tang’s rather than Goguryeo’s tomb system. While stone steles first emerged in the aftermath of China’s Han dynasty, the use of tomb steles became
widespread from the Southern and Northern Dynasties Period onwards. These tomb steles were, much as was the case in China, generally erected southeast of the tomb in Silla, or to the left of the path of the soul (sindo).

Although the presence of tomb steles has been confirmed in some of the Silla tombs constructed after the tomb of King Muyeol, Silla people were not inherently fond of erecting such structures. This assertion is evidenced by the fact that amongst the tombs of the 27 kings who reigned after King Muyeol, only the tombs of King Munmu (30th king), King Seongdeok (33rd king) and King Heungdeok (42nd king) feature such stone steles. A similar situation was prevalent where other members of the royal families or meritorious subjects were concerned, as such steles were during the Unified Silla period only erected to the east of the tombs of Kim Yu-sin and the younger brother of King Munmu, Kim In-mun. Moreover, both of these structures were erected at the behest of King Munmu.

Another aspect of the tomb of King Muyeol which should be highlighted is the so-called satellite-tombs (baejangmyo). The satellite-tomb system, under which an emperor or king’s family members and retainers were buried next to the emperor or king, is on display at Goguryeo’s Tomb of the General (Janggunchong). However, as evidenced by the tombs of Wei Qing, Huo Qubing, and Jin Midi situated near the tomb of Emperor Wu of Former Han, this satellite-tomb system was a typically Chinese tomb system.

This satellite-tomb system was fully employed during the Tang dynasty, when many satellite tombs were established around the tombs of Tang emperors. In the case of Silla, the tombs of Kim In-mun and Kim Yang were established to the east of the tomb of King Muyeol. An entry related to the funeral of Kim Yang found in the <Samguk sagi> states that King Munseong ordered that “Kim Yang be buried next to the tomb of King Muyeol.” Thus, although no other example have to date been found, there is a very real likelihood that Unified Silla accepted Tang’s satellite-tomb system.
Changes Wrought to the Hoseok Structure and the Emergence of Stone Objects

Although the presence of the hoseok and of a support stone made of natural stones have been confirmed at the tomb of King Muyeol, the presence of the gapseok which functioned as the stone covering the hoseok has yet to be ascertained because the latter may be buried under the grave mound. However, the tomb of King Sinmun established in Baeban-dong located east of Nangsan boasts a hoseok structure that is more advanced than that of the tomb of King Muyeol.

The hoseok found at the tomb of King Sinmun was established by piling up well-refined square-shaped stones to form five layers and then placing gapseok (covering stone) on the hoseok. 44 refined support stones were used to establish the hoseok.

The Chinese character ‘門’ (door) has been inscribed on top of the support stone in the south of the tomb to indicate the entrance of the tomb. This would seem to indicate that the tomb was patterned after corridor-style stone chamber tombs. Moreover, while the sangseok at the tomb of King Muyeol featured a one-layer design, a two-layered altar stone was installed in the case of the tomb of King Sinmun, and stairs were added. Thereafter, the sangseok was developed in the form of a tablet, a practice which began with King Seongdeok and continued all the way to King Heungdeok.
However, it was with the appearance of the tomb of King Seongdeok (33rd king of Silla) during the mid-8th century that the outlines of the Silla royal tomb system were completed. Most importantly in this regards, the five-stair hoseok found at the tomb of King Sinmun was replaced by various pieces of plate stone. In addition, the gapseok (covering stone) used to cover the hoseok was transformed into a long and long arc-shaped stone known as a jangdaeseok. This also marked the first time that a taengseok, which functioned as a stone spike, appeared between the plate stones in order to prevent the latter’s collapse. This taengseok, a structural element which had not been found in previous royal tombs, also played an important role in terms of the sculpting of the statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs (sibijisinsang) that began to appear in the royal tombs constructed after the tomb of King Seongdeok.

In addition to the changes wrought to the hoseok structure, the number of decorative stone objects found around the tomb mounds and of stone
objects found within the tomb sites also increased exponentially. Some of the new elements which appeared that had been absent from the royal tombs during previous periods included statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs positioned between the *hoseok* of the tomb mound and the support stones, stone rails surrounding the tomb mound, four stone lion statues facing in the four cardinal directions, and stone statues of human figures established in front of the tomb. Nevertheless, the installment of 33 diamond-shaped support stones to protect the *taengseok* can be regarded as the development which most characterizes this transitional period.

The statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs were placed in the spaces between each of the support stones in the case of the tomb of King Seongdeok. More to the point, rather than all of these statues being placed in the center of these spaces, these pieces were in fact arranged in an unprincipled manner that saw some of them placed to the left, others to the right, and yet others in the middle. This seemingly unprincipled arrangement method used in conjunction with this particular tomb was in reality the result of a two-stage tomb manufacturing process. More to the point, after having accepted the practice of manufacturing statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs from the Tang dynasty for tombs, King Gyeongdeok ordered that such statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs be adorned to the tomb of King Seongdeok constructed during the reign of King Hyoseong. The statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs were regarded as the deities responsible for guarding the twelve traditional East Asian directions, and as such, each had his assigned position. However, the tomb of King Seongdeok was designed during the reign of King Hyoseong without any consideration given to this aspect.

Faced with this situation, an attempt was as such made to approximate the original directions of these twelve zodiac animal signs by having the relevant statues be accordingly placed in the spaces between the support stones used to prop up the *hoseok* of the tomb of King Seongdeok. Thus, the conclusion can be reached that the Silla royal tombs did not feature any tomb steles, stone statues of human figures, stone lions, stone objects,
stone rails, or statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs until King Hyoseong (34th king of Silla), who was the first son of King Seongdeok, died some five years after his ascension to the throne. However, by the time the tomb stele found at the King Seongdeok was completed in 753, or some 13 years after his second son King Gyeongdeok had assumed the throne, the majority of the elements of the tomb of King Seongdeok mentioned above had been put in place.

For its part, China first accepted the statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs from the west. However, China used these items as artifacts which it placed inside the tomb. In this regard, the arrangement of the statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs on the outside of the royal tomb, and as part of the hoseok structure, can be regarded as an example of the creativity of the people of Silla.

Actualization of the Philosophy of the ‘King as Buddha’

King Gyeongdeok’s inclusion of statues of stone human figures and other structures designed to create a solemn atmosphere should not be regarded as having been a decision accidentally arrived at, or a simple attempt to further adorn the tomb site. The stone rails which surrounded the tomb mounds were meant to mimic the stone rails associated with the Great Stupa of Sanchi and the Bharhut Stupa, both of which were known to house the sacred relics of the Buddha in India. Silla thus replicated the stone rails around these Stupas which housed the sacred relics of the Sakyamuni in its own royal tombs. In other words, this can be perceived as meaning that Silla attempted to liken the death of its king to the Buddha’s entering of Nirvana. No such stone rails surrounding the tomb mounds can be found in the case of the imperial tombs of China and Japan.

Previous studies have estimated that the statues of stone lions placed in the imperial tombs of China served as the inspiration for the introduction of a similar practice in Silla. However, such a statue of a stone lion can also be found amongst the group of statues featured on the top of the
stone rail where the entrance to the Great Stupa of Sanchi and the Bharhut Stupa is located. In addition, stone lions can also be found on the pedestals (*taejwa*) which support earlier statues of the Buddha. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the fact that stone lions were also placed in all four directions in the case of Stone Pagoda at Bunhwang Temple and the *Dabotap* (Pagoda of Many Treasures) at Bulguk Temple. As such, although the imperial tombs of China served as the direct impetus for the introduction of stone lions in Silla, the philosophical origins of elements such as these stone lions and rails can in fact be traced back to the Buddhist culture of India.

<Picture 8> Comparison of Front View and Floor Plan of the Great Stupa of Sanchi (left) and Tomb of King Heungdeok (right)

As such, the incorporation of Buddhist culture into the royal tomb structure of Silla was predicated on the philosophy of ‘the King as Buddha,’ a concept which also served as the inspiration for the creation of the notion of Buddhism as the protector of the nation, or *hoguk bulgyo*.
Buddhism during the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties Period in which Silla accepted Buddhism was also based on this core concept of the ‘King as Buddha.’ This philosophy also served as the basic framework behind the emergence of Buddhism as the protector of the nation in these countries as well. In the case of Silla, the emergence of such a notion created a situation in which both the monks and aristocrats developed the mentality of serving Buddha. As this philosophy of the ‘King as Buddha’ advanced, the theory that ‘Silla was Buddha’s land’ emerged. To this end, the site where Queen Seondeok is buried was compared to the site known as Trayasrtrimśas where the Buddha delivered a sermon to his birth mother Maha Maya. During the reign of King Gyeongdeok, Bulguk Temple was established in the capital of Silla as a symbol meant to denote the kingdom’s status as the Land of the Buddha. King Gyeongdeok, who emerged as the main political and religious trendsetter within Silla society at the time, also completed the tomb of King Seongdeok in accordance with the format employed in the Great Stupa of Sanchi and Bharhut Stupa.

In addition, the statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs introduced from the Tang dynasty were also regarded deities responsible for the protection of the Buddhist doctrine who fell under the auspices of the Medicine Buddha. Therefore, the placement of these statues around the hoseok of royal tombs can be regarded as denoting that the protection of these tombs occupants was tantamount to the guarding of the Buddhist doctrine or the Buddha himself. As such, the king’s body was equated with the sacred relics of the Buddha. Such characteristics are clearly evidenced by the placing the statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs along the foundation of Buddhist pagodas such as those of the two Three-Story Pagodas found at Wonwon Temple.

As no examples of stone statues of human figures have to date been uncovered in India, the conclusion can be reached that this practice in fact has its origins in the imperial tombs of the Tang dynasty. Although stone statues of human figures have been found in conjunction with earlier tombs such as the Qianling shared by Emperor Gaozong and Empress Wu
Zetian of Tang, Silla may have in fact drawn the inspiration for its own stone statues of human figures from the tomb known as the Qiaoling where Emperor Ruizong of Tang (662-716) is buried, which was completed before the tomb of King Seongdeok was constructed in 736. However, while the stone statues of human figures erected in front of the tomb of Emperor Ruizong of Tang were all military soldiers, those found at the Tomb of King Seongdeok are in fact a mixture of civil and military officials. More to the point, while the fronts of the statues resemble civil officials seemingly concealing long swords inside of their attire out of respect for the king, the figurines appear to be wearing armor when viewed from the back, a distinction which was meant to emphasize the fact that they were also guardians responsible for the protection of the royal tomb.

Meanwhile, in the case of the tomb steles erected to the left of the tomb from King Muyeol onwards, a wooden pavilion was established atop foundation stones of a certain height to protect the stele. There are presently eight such foundation stones found on the site of the tomb of King Muyeol, namely the four original foundation stones, as well as those that were added during the restoration project carried out in the 1970s to support the lower part of the foundation (komagi dol). This trend is also evident in the case of the stele pavilion found at the tomb of Kim Inmun. Although a stone platform was prepared, no stele pavilion was constructed in conjunction with the tomb of King Seongdeok. By the time the tomb stele of King Heungdeok was established, Silla was in clear political decline; in this regard, the stone platform had by this point disappeared altogether, only to be replaced by a turtle-shaped support stone which was placed directly on the ground.

Completion of the Royal Tomb System

The triangle-shaped support stone found at the tomb of King Seongdeok, which can be considered as an element characteristic of the transitional period, had completely disappeared by the time the tombs of
Kim Yusin, King Wonseong (38th king of Silla), and King Gyeongdeok (35th king of Silla) were erected. Moreover, the statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs, which had in the past been added after the carving process, were regarded as an intrinsic aspect of the hoseok’s supporting columns, and carved in relief on the surface of these supporting columns. In addition, the tomb of King Wonseong (38th king of Silla) featured not only the stone statues of human figures found at the tomb of King Seongdeok, but also statues of Manchurian men and octagonal-shaped ornamental pillars (hwapyoseok).

These stone statues of human figures and Manchurian men, which are believed to depict the famous Uighur warriors of Central Asia and equally renowned Sogdian traders who plied the Silk Road from parts further west, can be seen standing in front of the royal tomb guarding the king. Much as was the case with regards to the Tang tomb known as the Qianling, this particular arrangement was designed to highlight the international status of Silla.¹⁰

The tomb of King Wonseong boasts all the elements associated with the Silla royal tomb system, namely the ornamental pillar (hwapyoseok) designed to inform visitors know that they are entering the realm of the deceased and of a sacred tomb site, stone statues of human figures and Manchurian men which served as guardians of the tomb and
simultaneously symbolize the international status of Silla, statues of stone lions which protect the tomb mound where the body of king regarded as the Buddha is buried, as well as the stone rails and statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs usually associated with the protection the site where the sacred relics of the Buddha are housed. Thus, we can see that the royal tomb system of Silla was completed following the creative changes which were effectuated based on similar practices found in Tang culture. However, because of the ensuing political decline of Silla, this ‘complete’ royal tomb system is only evident thereafter in the cases of the tombs of King Heondeok (41st king of Silla) and King Heungdeok (42nd king of Silla).

Meanwhile, the tombs of Kim Yusin and King Gyeongdeok, both of which were clearly established after the mid-8th century, boast stone rails and altar stones (sangseok) but do not feature other stone objects found at the tombs of King Seongdeok, King Wonseong, King Heondeok and King Heungdeok such as the stone statues of human figures, statues of stone lions, and ornamental pillars. This kind of arrangement is reminiscent of the royal tomb located east of Hwangbok Temple established right after the tomb of King Seongdeok. As such, rather than blindly replicating the tomb system employed during the previous era, the people of Silla elected to have recourse to a more traditional tomb system which better reflected the emotions and reality of the day.

The Collapse of Silla and Decline of the Royal Tomb System

The political chaos that began to engulf Silla from the reign of King Hyegong (36th king of Silla) onwards reached a new zenith when King Heungdeok (42nd king of Silla) died without leaving behind a clear successor. The enmity that erupted between the various royal family members led to frequent assassinations, and to the political, economic, and cultural disarray that eventually led to the downfall of the dynasty. In this regard, royal tombs can be regarded as a good bellwether of the
situation that prevailed at the time. To this end, while the size of royal tombs continued to decrease, the practices of placing stone rails around the tomb mounds, and statues of stone lions and of stone human figures in front of the tombs were abandoned.

In the case of the square-shaped tomb found in the Gujeong-dong area of Gyeongju, one can find little more than stone lions and statues of Manchurian men situated on the corners of the tomb mound. Meanwhile, the tomb of Queen Jindeok established during the mid-9th century features only the statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs. Thereafter, as is the case with the ancient tomb found in Yonggang-dong, the statues of the twelve zodiac animal signs became artifacts to be buried next to the owner of the tomb, meaning that only the hoseok surrounding the tomb mound remained.

Meanwhile, in the case of the tombs of King Minae, King Heongang, and King Jeonggang built during the late-9th century, the plate stone-type hoseok was abandoned in favor of the two to four layered brick-type hoseok. This type of structure represents a reproduction of the form employed in conjunction with the tomb of King Sinmun built during the early period of Unified Silla. By the early-10th century, royal tombs no longer boasted a hoseok structure. Thus, outside of the sheer size of the tomb mound, there remained no elements meant to denote the solemnity
and authority generally associated with royal tombs. This denouement can be regarded as a direct result of the political collapse of Silla.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{tomb.png}
\caption{The Tomb of King Heongang (Supposed)}
\end{figure}

**Cremation and Royal Tombs**

Cremation is said to have become increasingly popular amongst the various states on the Korean peninsula following the introduction of Buddhism during the 4\textsuperscript{th}-5\textsuperscript{th} century. However, few instances of cremation have to date been uncovered in the cases of Goguryeo and Baekje. More to the point, while no cases of cremation have been uncovered in the case of Goguryeo, the number of cremation sites recorded in the case of Baekje has, despite the recent discovery of such a site in the Buyeo area that served as the last capital of Baekje, remained rather limited.

No cremation sites dating before the Unified Silla period have to date been reported. In this regard, the burial urns housed in the Gyeongju National Museum belong to the Unified Silla era. Thus, although Buddhism was adopted as the national ideology of the various states and the kings were Buddhists, the people of the Korean peninsula did not abandon traditional burial methods in favor of the Buddhist practice of cremation. This assertion is supported by the fact that not a single of
Goguryeo or Baekje’s kings opted for cremation.

In the case of Unified Silla, the Records of Silla (Silla bongi) section of the <Samguk sagi> contains entries which state that Kings Munmu (661-681, 30th king of Silla), Hyoseong (692-702, 34th king of Silla), Seondeok (780-785, 37th king of Silla), and Wonseong (785-798, 38th king of Silla) opted for cremation. Meanwhile, the Chronology section of the <Samguk yusa> mentions that Queen Jinseong (887-897, 51st queen of Silla), King Hyogong (897-912, 52nd king of Silla), King Sindeok (913-917, 53rd king of Silla), and King Gyeongmyeong (917-924, 54th king of Silla) opted for cremation. After cremation, the ashes of these eight kings and queens were either scattered or placed in an ossuary. This situation has led some to advance the claim that such Buddhist-style funeral methods had been accepted by not only the royal family and aristocrats, but also the general public.\textsuperscript{12}

\textless Picture 12\textgreater  Tomb of King Ilseong (Believed to be the Tomb of King Hyogong)

However, a recent excavation of the Stupa of National Preceptor Doseon in Okryong Temple in Gwangyang, Jeonnam Province revealed that the selection of cremation as a means of burial was not even widespread amongst Buddhist monks. Rather, the use of an aerial
sepulture in which the bones could be collected for eventual burial under a Stupa remained the main means of burial for even national preceptors up until the beginning of the Goryeo dynasty.  

Therefore, the possibility exists that the decision to cremate the eight kings and queens mentioned above during the Unified Silla era was not based on Buddhism per se. In this regard, only three kings were cremated in Buddhist temples, namely King Hyoseong at Beopryu Temple, King Wonseong at Bongdeok Temple, and King Gyeongmyeong at Hwangbok Temple. In addition, one finds many records which list the burial site as the temple where the prayers for the deceased should be carried out (wonchal), or as the closest temple. However, as the stone rail placed around the tomb of King Seongdeok was meant to denote the notion of the ‘King as Buddha’, we can see that the Buddhist concept of the world of the dead had in fact taken root in Silla.

Of these eight kings and queens, royal tombs were established for Kings Munmu, Wonseong, Hyogong, and Sindeok after their cremation. Meanwhile, while the ashes of King Hyoseong and King Seondeok were scattered in the East Sea, those of Queen Jinseong and King Gyeongmyeong were respectively scattered in Hwangsan and Seongdeunging Mountain. Therefore, with the exception of the tomb of King Munmu, whose internal structure has already been revealed, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the tombs of Kings Wonseong, Hyogong and Sindeok featured a cremation tomb structure that differed from the corridor-style stone chamber tombs that had served as the model for royal tombs since the mid-ancient period.

**Conclusion**

Silla’s origins can be traced back to the small statelet of Saro which constituted one of the twelve components of the Jinhan Confederacy during the 1st century BC. While the trappings of an early ancient state were established during the late 4th - early 5th centuries, the period of
confederated politics in which no clear distinction existed between the authority of the king and meritorious subjects that ensued eventually gave way to a full-fledged centralized royal structure in the early 6th century. After a transitional period during the mid-ancient era, Silla achieved the unification of the three kingdoms and began to take on an active role within the international community.

Based on these political and social trends, Silla’s royal tombs can be classified into the era prior to Silla Unification in which royal power was measured by the amount of artifacts found inside of a tomb and the size of tomb mound, and the post-unification era in which a new style of tomb that featured tomb sites adorned with hoseok and stone objects emerged. This new style of tomb was at once influenced by the Tang tomb system and by Buddhist philosophy and arts which originated in India, but were introduced to Silla through China. In addition, Silla underwent a natural progression from wooden coffins to wooden chamber tombs, wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds and finally corridor-style stone chamber tombs. During this process, it moved away from group tombs and towards the use of single tombs.

As such, unlike the unchanging royal tombs of the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties, the royal tombs of Silla were established in a different manner during each period. The royal tombs of Silla should be regarded as important archeological materials. This is because they can be said to reflect the political and social developments which were taking place within Silla during specific periods. Furthermore, the advanced nature of the royal tombs of Unified Silla resulted in its tomb system being passed on to Goryeo and Joseon after its collapse, a denouement which provided the backdrop for the establishment of Korean-style royal tombs.

**Keywords:** royal tombs, Silla’s royal tomb system, generic royal tomb, the structure of the hoseok, support stone to the hoseok, the twelve zodiac animal signs (sibijisinsang), myeonseok, taengseok, cremation
Notes:


3. Inner space of the tomb (length: 258 cm, width: 128 cm, depth: 150 cm), wooden coffin (length: 190 cm, width: 65 cm, depth: 30-40 cm)

4. Inner space of the tomb (length: 332 cm, width: 230 cm wide, depth: 100 cm), wooden coffin (length: 205 cm, width: 80 cm)


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13 Choe In-seon, 1997, “National Preceptor Doseon’s Stupa and the Stone Coffin at Okryong Temple in Gwangyang (Gwangyang okryongsa seongak guksa doseonui budo jeonjiwa seokkwan), Korean Journal of Culture History (Munhwasa hak), vol. 6 and 7 (Double Issue).

14 Lee Cheong-gyu, 2000, “1,000 years of Silla as Viewed through the Ancient Tombs in Gyeongju (Gyeongju gobuneuro bon silla cheonnyeon), Critical Review of History (Yeoksahipyeong), vol. 52.

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신라 농묘의 발전과 전개과정

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고대 한국사회에 있어 왕릉은 봉분의 규모에서 왕족 또는 신하들의 묘와는 구분되는 것으로서 독자적 위상을 갖고 있다. 마찬가지로 신라 왕릉 역시 무덤 내부에 마련된 비상품과 함께 봉분을 장식한 호석(護石) 및 농묘에 배치된 석물(石物) 등에는 당대의 정치·경제·사상·문화의 총체적 양상이 반영되어 있다.

그런데 신라가 건국하는 기원전 1세기부터 고대국가가 완성되는 기원후 5세기 말에 이르는 기간인 상고기(上古期)에 수많은 고분의 축조되었으나 외형적인 농묘의 구분이 어려운 것이 사실이다. 즉 상고기에는 널리 알려진 바와 같이 목관묘(木棺墓)→ 목곽묘(木鬱墓)→ 적석목곽분(積石木鬱墳) 순서로 조영되었으나 무덤내의 출토유물 통해 특정묘를 수장묘 또는 최고지배층의 묘로 추정할 뿐 이들 고분의 외형에서는 위에서 언급한 왕릉만의 고고학적 특징이 확인되지 않는다.

그러나 율령(律令)이 반포(頒布)되고 신라만의 고유한 신분제도인 골품제(骨品制)가 근간을 갖추기 시작한 6세기 초의 중고기(中古期) 범흥왕(法興王)부터 왕권과 신권이 분리되었으며, 이를 계기로 신라 사회는 농묘와 묘를 엄격하게 구분하여 조영(造葬)하기 시작하였다. 즉 신라 농묘제도의 시원적 형태가 등장하는 6세기 초에 조영된 서약동고분군(西岳洞古墳群)에 이르면, 농묘에 대한 인식의 구분없이 동일한 규모로 경주분지내에서 고분군을 형성하던 이전과 달리 파장자의 신분에 따라 능역(陵域)과 묘역(墓域)으로 분리하여 조영된다. 또한 왕릉은 봉분의 규모와 입지조건에서도 이전 시기와 달리 묘인 고분과는 확연하게 구분되었으며, 동시에 신라 왕릉만의 모습을 서서히 갖추기 시작한다.

뒤이은 삼국시대 말기이자 통일초인 7세기 왕릉의 호석구조는 심이지신상을 호석구조의 일부분으로 채택하는 8세기의 전성기 왕릉으로 가는 과도기 형태
자세한 내용은 제공된 이미지에서 읽을 수 없습니다. 다른 언어로 제공된 정보를 사용하시는 것이 좋을 것 같습니다. 단, 제공된 내용을 이해하기 위해 일반적인 문법과 구조에 따라 빈번한 어휘를 사용하였지만, 문맥상 여러 번의 갭과 오류가 있습니다. 바르게 해석할 수 있도록 도와드리겠습니다.