

The Failure of Baekje's Prudential Diplomacy: *Revisiting the Samguk sagi from an International Relations Perspective*

KU Daeyeol

Abstract

This paper is designed to analyze why Baekje, one of the Three Kingdoms in Korea that existed up to the latter part of the seventh century, became the first victim in diplomatic and military struggles among the Three Kingdom, including Goguryeo and Silla. The Samguk sagi (Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms) gives the impression that Baekje, by dint of its geographical location, had pursued the most active and shrewd diplomacy. Located in the southwest of the peninsula, Baekje enjoyed not only easy communication and transactions with China and Japan, but also could put pressure on relatively weak Silla and move to the north when Goguryeo engaged in struggles with Chinese dynasties over the Liao river. However, this paper concludes, from an international relations perspective, that Baekje became the first kingdom to lose its independence due to its clumsy management of alliances, lack of understanding of the foreign policy priority of Chinese dynasties, as well as inconsistent and self-centered diplomacy vis-à-vis China.

Keywords: Three Kingdoms, Goguryeo, Baekje, Silla, *Samguk sagi*, Tang, Sui, Wei, Yan, Silla-Baekje alliance, King Gaero, King Gwanggaeto, King Jangsu

KU Daeyeol is Professor of International History and International Relations at Ewha Womans University. He received his Ph.D. from London School of Economics in 1980. His publications include *Korea under Colonialism—The March First Movement and Anglo-Japanese Relations* (1985), *Hanguk gukje gwangyesa yeongu* (A Study on the History of Korean International Relations) I and II (1995). E-mail: dyku@ewha.ac.kr.

www.kci.go.kr

Introduction¹

The foreign relations of the Three Kingdoms, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla, from the later part of the sixth century led, in the final analysis, to the demise of the first two kingdoms, which were destroyed by the combined forces of Tang China and Silla. Baekje, located on the southwest of the peninsula, was the most fertile plain and enjoyed easy access to China and Japan. It also put pressure on a relatively weak Silla and moved forward to the north when Goguryeo engaged in diehard struggles with successive Chinese dynasties. The *Samguk sagi* (Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms), the oldest “official” version of the Three Kingdoms’ history, compiled by Kim Bu-sik in 1145 during the Goryeo dynasty, gives the impression that Baekje, by dint of its geographical location, had pursued a most active, agile, and shrewd diplomacy. This paper is designed to analyze why Baekje became the first victim in diplomatic and military warfare among the Three Kingdoms, while Silla would emerge as the last man standing. It may be concluded from international relations perspectives, albeit tentatively, that Baekje’s demise was largely due to multiple factors, including the clumsy management of alliances (with Silla), inconsistent and self-centered diplomacy vis-à-vis China, and above all, a lack of understanding of China’s changing foreign policy priority.

Why does Baekje seem to have been more active than the other two kingdoms in the field of diplomacy? First and foremost, its geographical location enabled Baekje freer contact with the continental dynasties in the north and south of the Yangtze river and Japan, not to mention with its neighboring kingdoms, Silla and Goguryeo. Second, when it came to contacts and exchanges with China, Goguryeo had been the forerunner, but the nature of their contacts was more

1. The translated version of *Samguk sagi* (Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms) by Lee Kang Lae (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1998) is used as the standard but the original text (in Chinese) in the translated version by Yi Pyeng-do (Seoul: Eul Yoo Publishing, 1996) is referred to, if necessary. Unless specified in footnotes, the years mentioned in the text are recorded in *Samguk sagi*.

violent than peaceful, as this Korean kingdom had been repeatedly attacked and pillaged by Chinese dynasties based in northern China. When it came to the necessity of alliances, Silla felt this pressure more than anyone else, but this kingdom in the southeast corner of the peninsula was the weakest among the three. Moreover, its endeavors to reach China were prevented by its geographical location. Thus, Baekje could take initiatives in handling bilateral relations with a weak Silla and a foreign-invasion-infested Goguryeo. Third, it may be assumed that Chinese dynasties in the north and south also wanted Baekje as a means to restrain the ever-growing power of Goguryeo. Fourth, Baekje's active diplomacy was also evidenced by exchanges of hostages with Wae (Japan). Although Silla also sent hostages to Wae, they seem to have been more a sort of pledge for good behavior, as witnessed in the case of Bak Jesang in the early fifth century.²

However, the case of Baekje was different: it sent a crown prince to Japan, who later returned with Japanese guards to become king, as shown in the case of King Jeonji in 405, a fact that certainly facilitated a close and friendly relationship between Baekje and Japan.³ Last, but not least, Baekje's activities in creating a sort of colony system along the Chinese coastal areas played an important role. This fact is not recorded in the *Samguk sagi*, but some Chinese official histories, including the *Songshu* (Book of Song) and *Liangshu* (Book of Liang) contain some references to Baekje's colonies on the Chinese coast. *Liangshu* wrote that Baekje colonized and occupied the west of the Liao river in Manchuria; it also added to Baekje's vocabulary through such words as *goma* (capital city) and *damno* (big city), which mirrored the same terms as in Chinese, and indicated commanderies (*gun*) and districts (*hyeon*). Furthermore, its vocabulary was so mixed with Chinese that Silla merchants could trade with their Chinese counterparts with only Baekje people as interpreters.⁴

2. See the story of Bak Je-sang in "Yeoljeon" (Biographies) 5, in volume 45 of *Samguk sagi*.

3. See the record of the 1st and 5th years of King Jeonji in "Baekje bongi" (Records of Baekje) 3, in volume 25 of *Samguk sagi*.

4. See *Jungguk jeongsa joseonjeon*, vol. 1, pp. 400, 480, 492. Parts on Korea (includ-

Thus, this paper will address some problems in Baekje's diplomacy, which seems to have been prudent on the surface but ultimately led to its demise by way of reinterpreting the *Samguk sagi* and some of the "official" Chinese histories. Other secondary sources are used mainly for reference.

Baekje's Relations with Goguryeo and Silla before the Mid-fifth Century

One of the serious problems in Baekje's external relations was threats from Goguryeo, which, though having mostly engaged in dealing with constant harassment from the Chinese dynasties over the Liao river, had slowly recovered its national strength by the mid-fifth century. However, in earlier years, Baekje showed its astute and opportunistic diplomacy and military skill. In 246, Baekje, taking advantage of a Chinese invasion to Goguryeo, sent its troops to the north, taking Lelang (Nangnang in Korean) people as hostages near its border. The Chinese invasion, led by Guanqiu Jian, the regional inspector of Youzhou (present-day northern Hebei), virtually devastated Goguryeo, sacking its capital city, Hwandiseong, and forced King Dongcheon to flee to the south. The next year, the king deserted his capital city and moved to Pyeongyang, which was described in *Samguk sagi* as "the place where Wanggeom, the founder of the Korean kingdom, had once lived." However, Baekje was obliged to return the hostages to their original owners when Lelang, the largest among the four Chinese commanderies created by Han China in 108 BC, showed its fury against Baekje's surprise attack.⁵

ing Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla) in China's twenty-five "official" histories are translated into Korean under the title of *Jungguk jeongsa joseonjeon* by National History Compilation Committee in 1987 (hereafter cited as *Joseonjeon*). As for overseas activities of Baekje people, see Shin (1992, 32). Of course, it is not conclusive as *Samguk sagi* did not discuss overseas colonial activities of Baekje.

5. See the record of the 20th year of King Dongcheon in "Goguryeo bongi" (Records of Goguryeo) 5, in volume 17 of *Samguk sagi*; and the record of the 13th year of King Goi's reign in "Baekje bongi" 2, in volume 24 of *Samguk sagi*. Goguryeo's

Baekje began to send diplomatic and “tributary” missions to Chen (Chin) south of the Yangtze river in 372 and 373 during the reign of King Geunchogo. In 416, Chen China invested King Jinji with the title of “King of Baekje,” which was later inherited by his son, King Biyu, in 430. But the second investment was made not by Chen but by another dynasty in southern China, Song, when the latter received tributes from Baekje in 429 and 430. King Geunchogo also sent his envoys to Silla in 368 with two fine horses.⁶ Friendship between the two kingdoms was highlighted with the exchange of gifts—horses and falcons from Baekje and gold and glass beads from Silla—in 434, when they entered into a military alliance against Goguryeo.

These measures were meant to strengthen Baekje’s rear at the time when military conflicts with Goguryeo were intensifying, largely due to the southward drive of the latter. It is noted that Goguryeo turned its attention to the south even before it had fully recovered from the invasions of China in the previous years. Goguryeo had suffered particularly from a series of attacks by Yan Emperor Murong Sheng during the reign of King Gogugwon in the early part of the fourth century. The Yan army burned down the king’s palace and took 50,000 Goguryeo people to China. In spite of these setbacks, however, in 371 the Goguryeo king mobilized 20,000 troops to attack Baekje, which, on receiving Goguryeo’s plan in advance, ambushed and defeated the invading troops. Baekje King Geunchogo drove his army right up to the Goguryeo’s capital, where the Goguryeo king was killed in action.⁷ These events indicate that the second half of the

transfer of its capital to present Pyeongyang is generally known to have taken place in the 15th year of King Jangsu’s reign (472), and therefore, the place called “Pyeongyang,” where King Dongcheon had moved, was not the present one.

6. These were the first “official” missions of Baekje to China. However, the fact that Songshu (Book of Song) changed the heading from “Mahanjeon” (History of Mahan) to “Baekje” in the Joseonjeon indicates that there had existed some contacts between Chinese dynasties south of the Yangtze river and Korean kingdoms in the Baekje region (Yoo 1995, 17).
7. See the record of the 26th year of King Geunchogo in “Baekje bongi” 2, in volume 24 of *Samguk sagi*; and the records of the 9th, 12th, and 41st years of King Gogugwon in “Goguryeo bongi” 6, in volume 18 of *Samguk sagi*.

fourth century and especially the reign of King Geunchogo marked the peak of Baekje's power vis-à-vis the other two kingdoms. However, its supremacy in power relations among the Three Kingdoms never recovered, largely due to the growing power of the other two kingdoms.

During the next hundred years, under the reign of King Gwanggaeto (392-413) and his son, King Jangsu (413-491), Goguryeo reached its zenith, partly by its military prowess and partly through shrewd diplomacy in dealing with China. Although military conquests by King Gwanggaeto were aimed in all directions,⁸ the main target was Baekje, the deadly foe who had killed his forefather King Gogugwon two decades prior. King Gwanggaeto's reign was dotted with sporadic wars with China, and in this sense his reign was as hard as previous ones in terms of its relations with Chinese dynasties. However, he was much more flexible in the realm of diplomacy. In the ninth year of his reign (399), he sent a tributary mission to Yan,⁹ but the latter, saying arrogantly that Goguryeo's attitude was rude, retorted with a military expedition of 30,000 troops. The Chinese army took two fortresses from Goguryeo, occupied 700 *ri* of Goguryeo's territory, and returned home with 5,000 Goguryeo people as slaves. After that, military engagements went on with no resounding victory for either side until 408, when the Goguryeo king showed his homage to the Yan court as "the same race." The grandfather of the Yan emperor stemmed from the royal house of Goguryeo, a fact that was, according to *Samguk sagi*, specifically recognized by the Yan dynasty, and thus Murong Yun, the Yan emperor, was satisfied with the submissive atti-

8. Chinese studies of King Gwanggaeto's stele argue that his conquests were solely directed at Baekje, while he sent no military expeditions to the Chinese borders. However, his stele as well as some descriptions of the *Samguk sagi* clearly addresses his expeditions to the western part of Liao river. See the record of the 11th year of King Gwanggaeto in "Goguryeo bongi" 6, in volume 18 of *Samguk sagi*. See also Wang (2004, 266); Soichiro (2004).

9. As for the rise and fall of the Yan dynasty in northern China during this period, see <http://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%ED%9B%84%EC%97%B0>.

tude of Goguryeo, which recognized the superior position of Yan over Goguryeo.¹⁰

Although King Gwanggaeto's reign constituted the heyday of Goguryeo, the above story demonstrates the fact that it was unable to match Yan, although the latter suffered from internal factional strife over the succession of the throne. King Gwanggaeto's son, King Jangsu, who had ruled the country for 79 years, faced a somewhat different situation. Yan was under siege by another emerging power, Wei, in the northeastern plain of China, and Emperor Feng of Yan, having been defeated by Wei, sought political asylum in 435 in Goguryeo, from where he could prepare for his future return to power. King Jangsu acceded to Emperor Feng's offer of asylum, but Feng acted as if he were still the emperor of China, a heavenly son entitled to treat other neighboring kingdoms such as Goguryeo as vassal state. King Jangsu pillaged Yan's defenseless fortresses near the Goguryeo border and allowed Emperor Feng to go to Chen in the south, but killed him before he reached his next asylum.¹¹

It may be noted that during his reign of 79 years and especially in his later years, King Jangsu sent tributary missions to Chinese dynasties in the north and the south almost once a year, sometimes twice, except for 15 years from 440 to 455. During this period, Goguryeo had maintained an uneasy peace along the Liao river against Wei, which was growing after the collapse of the Yan dynasty. It was also during this period that both Baekje and Silla, fearing Goguryeo's ever-growing drives to the south, entered a military alliance against the northern kingdom. However, King Jangsu was skillful enough and renewed its tributary diplomacy to Wei from 465, a measure that prevented the

10. See the record of the 1st year through 22th year of King Gwanggaeto in "Goguryeo bongi" 6, in volume 18 of *Samguk sagi*.

11. Before this incident, King Jangsu had already strengthened Goguryeo's position by paying a tribute to the Chen dynasty in the south while sending a tributary mission to Wei, as a gesture of submission, asking the Wei emperor to inform Goguryeo of his name. The Wei emperor commended the Goguryeo king for his good behavior and presented him with the genealogy of his royal family and recognized the king as the ruler of Goguryeo. See the record of the 23rd and 26th years of King Jangsu in "Goguryeo bongi" 6, in volume 18 of *Samguk sagi*.

combination of potential enemies in the south and the west. Goguryeo also replied politely to the Southern Qi, a new dynasty in the south, in 480 when the latter invested King Jangsu as the ruler of Goguryeo, apparently as leverage to check its rival Wei in the north. In the same year, the Wei emperor arrogantly demanded that Goguryeo send its royal princess to become his concubine, perhaps in order to gauge Goguryeo's loyalty in their mutual relations. In such diplomatic dilemmas, King Jangsu did not incur anger of Wei by showing obedience to the Chinese emperor, while he could prevent his daughter's marriage to the Wei's emperor with various pretexts. Thus, he was able to ward off the disaster that might otherwise have engulfed the kingdom, though Goguryeo's military had been greatly strengthened after the calamitous defeats of his forefathers' reigns.¹²

One story, briefly mentioned in the *Samguk sagi* but elaborated upon in *Nanqishu* (Book of the Southern Qi), may illustrate Goguryeo's status in East Asian international relations at the time. In 481, Goguryeo sent a tributary mission to Wei. Though this Chinese dynasty in the northern plain did not unify the whole of China, it was the great power *par excellence* among the Chinese dynasties, and thus had several tributary missions in its capital from other dynasties in China and abroad. According to the *Samguk sagi*, the Wei court designated the second-largest residence to the Goguryeo envoy next to that of the Southern Qi envoy, because "our country (Goguryeo) is now strong and prosperous." The *Nanqishu* adds: The Southern Qi dynasty, which had succeeded Song in the south of the Yangtze river, tolerated Goguryeo's exchange of diplomatic missions with "the northern barbarian Wei" in the hope Goguryeo would be useful in checking Wei's power. However, in 489 the Southern Qi envoy to the Wei court faced a somewhat embarrassing situation in that the northern dynasty treated the Qi on a par with Goguryeo by arranging both envoys to sit side by side with the same-sized chair. The following is the protest of the Southern Qi envoy:

12. The Southern Qi dynasty lasted from 479 to 502. See the record of the 54th and 68th years of King Jangsu in "Goguryeo bongi" 6, in volume 18 of *Samguk sagi*.

I come to your country by order of a Chinese dynasty, and the only country that can stand equally with my country is Wei. Barbarians from outside China cannot dare to look at even the dust created by our carriage. How can you treat my country as equals with a small one such as Goguryeo, which serves us as vassal?¹³

Perhaps the Wei court wanted to tell, albeit implicitly, the Southern Qi envoy that his country could not match Wei. Goguryeo also successfully exploited this conflict between the two Chinese rivals and gained recognition from both sides. In view of the handling of these intriguing international circumstances during his reign, it is not an exaggeration to say that King Jangsu was truly one of the great diplomat kings in Korean history. Moreover, his success stands here revealed in full light, contrasting the failure of Baekje's diplomacy during the same period.

Baekje's Prudential Diplomacy and Its Failure

Thus, by the mid-fifth century, Goguryeo stabilized its relations with the Chinese dynasties, Yan and Wei, and King Gwanggaeto and Jangsu turned their military muscle to the south, mainly aiming at Baekje. As a result, the Baekje kingdom was on the verge of extinction at the hands of Goguryeo's military prowess. According to the stele of King Gwanggaeto,

Both Silla and Baekje had been vassals and paid tributes to Goguryeo. However, from Sinmyo year (391) onward, Wae pirates crossed the sea to attack Baekjan and Silla and made the two kingdoms their subjects. The king himself led the Goguryeo navy in his sixth year (397) to suppress Baekjan. When Goguryeo troops crossed the border and captured several fortresses of Baekjan, the latter, instead of surrendering to the king, dared to come out of the

13. "Namjeseo" (Book of the Southern Qi), in vol. 1 of *Joseonjeon*, p. 418. See also H. Kim (1999, 168-169).

fortresses to fight. In anger, the king crossed the Arisu (present-day Hangang river) and advanced upon Baekje's capital city. The enemy ran away to its den (to the capital). Goguryeo troops surrounded the city, and the lord of Baekjan (Baekje King Asin), in utter destitution, came out of the city with 1,000 prisoners and 1,000 *pil* of fine linen. He kneeled down and pledged, "I shall be your slave forever from now on." The king forgave the Baekjan king and decided to watch how the latter would fulfill his humble promises. The king gained 58 fortresses and 700 villages in all, and returned home with the Baekjan king's brother and ten high-ranking officials. After that, Baekjan paid tributes and followed Goguryeo's directions.¹⁴

On the other hand, Goguryeo had maintained an amicable relationship with Silla, which, according to the stele, acknowledged its vassalage position to the former. In the ninth year of King Gwanggaeto (400), Baekje broke its pledge to enter friendly relations with Wae Japan, and Silla begged for Goguryeo's help against the invasion of the Wae whose warriors were "full in Silla's capital." King Gwanggaeto dispatched next year 50,000 chivalry and infantry and drove back Wae troops by destroying them.¹⁵

14. This is slightly modified by the author based on the text from Wang (2004, 355-364). Baekjan, "remnants of Baekje enemy," was a derogative name of Baekje used by Goguryeo after the death of King Gogugwon.

15. This is one of the most controversial parts of Korea-Japan relations in ancient times. It may be true that the Wae Japanese warriors, mostly marauders, created Japanese communities inside the peninsula, and as described in the stele, they invaded and pillaged Silla's villages, towns, and even its capital city, Gyeongju, from time to time. In the matters of creating its own communities, Baekje's activities along the Chinese coast can be viewed in the same vein. What is important from the perspective of international politics is whether these Japanese marauders (or Baekje's *damno* in China) had created a sustainable state independent of nearby bigger political entities such as Silla, Gaya, and other Korean kingdoms. In European history, the Vikings who frequently pillaged the British Isle established in 866 the Jorvik kingdom in the Yorkshire area, which had enjoyed an independent status until 1066. In this respect, the Japanese claim of the existence of Imna Ilbonbu (Mimana Nihonbu in Japanese; Japanese Gaya colony) as an independent political entity, even though in a primitive stage, is untenable.

King Jangsu followed his father's policy of southern advance. Although his target was primarily Baekje, Silla also felt threatened by the ever-growing power of this northern kingdom. This resulted in an alliance between the two southern kingdoms in 433. This alliance remained the most important pillar in power relations among the three Korean kingdoms for the next hundred years, as the combination of the two could prove to be an effective barrier to Goguryeo's southern drives. It must be noted, however, that the relationship between Baekje and Silla had not been entirely amicable by that time as Silla had suffered greatly under Baekje's offenses. This fact indicates that the peace gesture came mostly from Baekje, while Silla was obliged to accept it. With this background, King Geunchogo was able to lead Baekje troops up to the Goguryeo's capital in 368.¹⁶ In this sense, the alliance of 433 was a sort of *mariage de convenance*, for the seeds of conflict had not been eliminated in their mutual relationship.

At this juncture, another issue in Baekje's diplomacy must be mentioned, that of Baekje's relations with Wae Japan. Faced with threats from Goguryeo, Baekje was eager to obtain Wae's support. In 397, King Asin of Baekje sent his crown prince to Wae as hostage; six years later the king himself extended a warm reception to visiting Wae envoys; and in 428, the Wae envoy entered Baekje's capital with an entourage 50-men strong. Baekje's efforts to secure Wae friendship against Goguryeo should not be blamed on a theoretical level. However, we must question to what extent Wae support across the sea could have been a practical help when Baekje engaged in life-and-death struggles against Goguryeo, and Silla in later years. Effectiveness must be the first and foremost yardstick in judging the operation of alliance. For instance, take two alliances before and during World War II: the Anglo-American alliance was effective in the sense that they had discussed and coordinated allied strategies against the Axis powers through a series of war-time conferences, while Germany and Japan

16. Baekje's invasions of Silla, together with its peace offensives, are dotted in the record of the year of 105 in "Baekje bongi" 1, in volume 23 of *Samguk sagi*; and in the records of the years of 261, 266, 286, and 368 in "Baekje bongi" 2, in volume 24 of *Samguk sagi*.

followed their own strategies, regardless of the other's interests, as shown in the German attack in June 1941 on the Soviet Union, the very country that was considered by Japan to be one of the pillars in its master plan. This aspect of alliance is all the more true in ancient times when transportation and communication were much slower.

In a similar vein, the idea that struggles between the so-called East-West alliance (between Tang/Sui and Silla) and the North-South axis (among Tujue, Goguryeo, Baekje, and Wae) were waged in the East Asian scene after the unification of China by Sui in 589 must be viewed as theoretical and illusive rather than real.¹⁷ It is true that the countries in one group showed friendship to each other largely due to the fear they felt toward the countries belonging to the other group. However, when it came to the effectiveness of the alliance, the countries in the latter group could hardly render any service to each other in cases of emergency. The military aid of Wae Japan for Baekje shed full light on this fact. Wae mobilized and sent an enormous fleet with 30,000 sailors with the explicit aim of rescuing Baekje in 663, but it was a belated move; Wae's ally in the peninsula had been wiped out for three years. Moreover, the Wae fleet was also crushed at the mouth of the Geumgang river by Tang and Silla allies.¹⁸

On the other hand, Baekje's alliance with Silla from 433 to 550 proved to be the most effective tool in deterring Goguryeo's growing ambitions toward the south. In a broader sense, it constituted a sort of balancer (either for Baekje or for Silla) in maintaining the triangular relationship in a more stable manner. In other words, though Goguryeo was the strongest among the three, this northern kingdom alone could not subjugate the two in the south because it could not concentrate all of its troops on the south when it faced a more formidable enemy in the west. When Goguryeo attacked Baekje, Silla was able to render a helping hand to its ally, thus driving Goguryeo troops north; Baekje helped Silla when the latter faced threats from the north. However,

17. For example, see Lee (1984, 47).

18. For the battle and subsequent defeat of the Wae fleet at the mouth of the Geumgang river, see *Ilbon seogi* (Chronicles of Japan), trans. by Jeon Yongsin (Seoul: Iljisa, 1989), pp. 485-491.

Baekje needed Silla's support more than Silla needed Baekje's, as Goguryeo's southern advance was more or less directed at Baekje.

In 433, Baekje dispatched its mission to Silla with the purpose of creating an alliance, and next year presented "two fine horses"; in autumn Baekje again presented a gift, "a white hawk."¹⁹ However, the Baekje part of *Samguk sagi* did not mention how the alliance had operated until the country faced the tragic death of King Gaero in 475. Instead, the Silla part gives us some clues in this respect: in 455 (the first year of King Gaero), Silla, at the request of its ally, sent troops to save Baekje from Goguryeo's attack; in 475 when King Gaero was captured and killed near Hanseong (southern part of present Seoul) by Goguryeo troops, Baekje's crown prince, Munju, personally came to Silla's capital for military assistance. When Munju, with Silla's 10,000 troops returned to the battlefield, however, the Baekje capital had fallen to Goguryeo troops, its king already slaughtered. This event clearly shows the effective operation of the alliance between the two kingdoms.

Baekje also tried to enlist China's support in its defense against Goguryeo. In his eighteenth year (472), King Gaero sent a memorial to Wei China, begging the Chinese dynasty to attack Baekje's enemy in the north. In his tributary letter, the Baekje king expressed his deep admiration for the gracious virtue of the "Son of Heaven" to the extent that he would send his daughters to the Wei court to be servants who would sweep with a broom the concubines' quarters, and his sons would clean the royal stable. He lamented, however, that he could not send his envoy with tributes because "wolves and coyotes," that is Goguryeo, obstructed his way to China. Then, Baekje's letter narrated how King Gogugwon of Goguryeo imprudently had led his army to attack Baekje and how his reckless venture ended in failure with the loss of his life. The letter went on, however, to detail how Baekje had suffered through ceaseless wars with Goguryeo, its treasury impoverished and the nation becoming weaker and weaker. King Jangsu, the

19. "Namjeseo" (Book of the Southern Qi)," See the records of the 7th and 8th years of King Biyu in "Baekje bongi" 3, in volume 25 of *Samguk sagi*.

letter blamed, was guilty of ruining his country, killing his ministers and aristocrats, and begged that the time had come for Wei to dispatch a punitive unit to Goguryeo. Moreover, the circumstances were conducive for the expedition as the Yan people, who had come to Goguryeo with its Emperor Feng, had been waiting impatiently for their liberation from Goguryeo's yoke. If Wei would not take action immediately, the Baekje king warned, the Chinese would regret it in the future as King Jangsu had been approaching Song in southern China (which lasted from 420 to 478).

The Wei reply was disappointing. The Wei emperor praised the loyalty shown in Baekje's letter and entertained its envoy with utmost hospitality, "because King Gaero did his best to send his envoy to the celestial court in defiance of all difficulties." Though Baekje was on bad terms with Goguryeo, sometimes suffering attacks by the latter, the Wei emperor assured them that nothing serious would happen in the future if the Baekje king treated his Goguryeo counterpart with justice and sincerity. Further, Goguryeo had been one of Wei's tributaries from ancient times and had not disobeyed Chinese orders. If Goguryeo would not follow the emperor's edict in the future, Wei would not hesitate to dispatch a large army to punish that kingdom. The Wei letter added that Baekje should prepare for guidance on the way to Goguryeo when such an expedition was decided. King Gaero "bore a grudge against the Wei Emperor for not complying with his request" and "stopped sending tributary missions hereafter."²⁰

In the final analysis, this action on the part of King Gaero led to his tragic death three years later. The outcome of diplomacy is the sum of the actions taken by all parties concerned. In the case of an alliance, the senior partner generally leads and decides the allies' common policies, while the junior partner, though not always being satisfied with the policies adopted in the name of alliance, should be constantly wary of "how the wind blows," that is, how the policy priority

20. King Gaero's memorial and the reply of the Wei emperor are recorded in the *Weishu*, *Joseonjeon*, as well as in the record of the 18th year of King Gaero in "Baekje bongi" 3, in volume 25 of *Samguk sagi*.

of its senior partner is changing, and thus behooves the junior partner to maximize benefits by following the policies of its partner. If Baekje was really eager to earn Wei's friendship to deter Goguryeo's pressure, it should have paid a higher price.

From 640 onward, Silla faced a similar, or perhaps harder, situation when the country approached Tang China. This time, Silla became the target of Baekje as well as Goguryeo, as both countries attacked Silla's border in a concerted manner after Silla had extended its territory to the mouth of the Hangang river, thus enabling it to reach China directly. In the beginning, Tang's policy was almost identical to that of Wei. This Chinese dynasty had more pressing matters in the present Xinjiang and Tibet areas, and therefore was biding its time for the pacification of these areas before it could turn its attention to other minor matters. Thus, what Tang could do on Silla's behalf was simply lip service, a persuasion that Baekje and Goguryeo should enter into good terms with Silla. However, Silla did not spare any effort to achieve its goal of a military alliance with the Tang, and the latter finally changed its attitude from peaceful persuasion to military expeditions toward the two Korean kingdoms when it had gotten rid of dangers in its rear.

King Gaero of Baekje, on failing his approach to the Wei court, quickly abandoned his efforts to enlist Wei China's help against Goguryeo. The consequence was the loss of an ally in international games, a situation that isolated and weakened Baekje in front of the growing military power of the northern kingdom. In autumn of 475, King Jangsu's army surrounded Baekje's capital and killed the Baekje king.²¹ It must be added that the Goguryeo king sent his tributary mission to Wei five times over two years from 475 to 476, a measure by which he could guarantee his rear area, which was threatened by the Wei Chinese, peacefully.²²

Baekje belatedly realized what it had done wrong in the handling

21. See the record of the 21st year of King Gaero in "Baekje bongi" 3, in volume 25 of *Samguk sagi*.

22. See the records of the 63th and 64th years of King Jangsu in "Goguryeo bongi" 18, in volume 26 of *Samguk sagi*.

of the alliance, but the price was too heavy. A month after the death of King Gaero, his successor King Munju moved his capital city from Hanseong to Ungjin (present-day Gongju); and in March he sent a tributary mission to Song, an act that indicates how seriously the new king regarded the alliance with a Chinese dynasty. In 490, on hearing that Southern Qi upgraded King Jangsu's rank, the Baekje king begged the Chinese dynasty to serve as its vassal state, which was accepted by Qi. However, Baekje's missions to China returned empty-handed twice in 476 and 490, because they were prevented by Goguryeo's navy from crossing the Yellow Sea. This shows how fierce diplomatic warfare was waged across the seas between China and the Korean kingdoms.²³

Baekje also endeavored to upgrade its alliance with Silla, which had rendered a helping hand to Baekje at a critical moment: in 485 it sent a mission to Silla; in 493 it requested a marriage between the two royal houses, a suggestion Silla acceded to by sending a daughter of a high-ranking official to marry the Baekje king; in 494 when Silla faced Goguryeo's invasion at Gyeona Fortress (near present Mungyeong), Baekje sent 3,000 troops; the next year it was Silla who aided Baekje to repel Goguryeo invaders; and in 528, King Seong of Baekje crushed invading Goguryeo troops with Silla's assistance at Doksan Fortress (present Yesan).

At this juncture, there occurred one of the most spectacular betrayals in Korean diplomatic history. In 550, Baekje, with the support of Silla, destroyed Goguryeo forces and recovered the lower part of the Hangang river, which had been taken by the latter in 475. However, instead of congratulating Baekje for the recovery of its lost territory, Silla, "taking advantage of the total exhaustion of Baekje and Goguryeo troops," attacked and captured all the fortresses in the region. Baekje could not tolerate Silla's betrayal, much less allow its former ally to own this strategic part in the central part of the peninsula. Naturally, war followed Baekje's attack on Silla. In the wake of the confusion, however, Baekje's King Seong was ambushed and killed by Silla troops in 554, and his troops were decimated to the

23. See the records of the 2nd year of King Munju and the 6th year of King Dongseong in "Baekje bongi" 4, in volume 26 of *Samguk sagi*.

extent that “not a single horse returned.”²⁴

However, oddly enough, King Seong’s daughter married the Silla king as a secondary queen in 553, a year before his father’s death, when the relationship of both kingdoms turned from friendship to animosity due to Silla’s betrayal of their alliance. This marriage was mentioned both in the Silla and Baekje parts of *Samguk sagi*, but Yi Pyeng-do, a leading scholar on the history of this period, commented on it as “unlikely.” However, it may indicate that Baekje still wanted to maintain the alliance, at whatever cost.²⁵

From Silla’s perspective, it was not merely an opportunistic attempt. Silla had been preparing to capture this part of the Hangang river in order to obtain direct routes to China. The point is how this event can be explained from an international relations perspective: should Silla be blamed for its betrayal to the allies’ cause, as commonly happened between ordinary individuals, or can state behavior be explained from a different perspective? Political realism describes the international arena as a place where “war of all against all” is constantly taking place. Here, weaker nations are inclined to unite against a greater power that pursues hegemonic policies.

Apart from deterring the expansionist trend of the hegemonic power, however, the objectives of each ally are not identical. This implies that as soon as the common objective is achieved, the allies cannot be expected to follow the same path that they had faithfully adhered hitherto. According to the so-called *raison d’état* theory, the state does not have a moral obligation, and moreover, it takes national interest as a guide for its behaviors in the international arena (Wight 1992, 245-249).²⁶ Additionally, if it is admitted that conquest in history has been the source of legitimate right, conflicts over how to divide war spoils have generally taken place after allies have achieved victory, as shown in the case of the Vienna Congress of 1814-

24. These events were also recorded in detail in *Nihon shoki*, pp. 314, 333, 335, 341-345.

25. As for Yi Pyeng Do’s comment, see *Samguk sagi*, trans. and com. by Yi Pyeng Do (Seoul: Eul Yoo Publishing, 1996), vol. 2, p. 81.

26. On the *raison d’état*, see D’Entreves (1967, 44-49).

1815 (Albrecht-Carrie 1973, 7). It may be also added that, as described in the well-known stag hunting analogy of Jean Jacques Rousseau, self-interest may make cooperation impossible, even when all parties have an interest in one enterprise; the same conditions may also make war inevitable, even though none may wish it (Lieber 1973, 106).

The impact of Silla's seizure of the Hangang region was far-reaching in Korean history, because Silla's march toward unification was further facilitated by this acquisition. If Silla's act was justified from an international relations perspective, this may beg the question of what was wrong with Baekje? The answer may lie in its lack of watchfulness to and preparedness for what may be called the "post-war alliance politics." By expelling Goguryeo from the Han basin, both countries eliminated common threats to their security from the north, a thing that implied that both allies would return at any moment to the old days of rivalry, which had dominated their relations before 433. And Silla forestalled this contingency by securing these strategic points from which it could put pressure on the Baekje's northern border and reach China directly. Baekje surely felt "stabbed in the back," and now extended its hands to its former enemy, Goguryeo, in order to fight its former ally, Silla.

The last and perhaps most serious case of diplomatic mishandling by Baekje was its approach to Sui and Tang, the two successive dynasties that unified China. When the Sui emerged as the master of China in 589, Baekje sent its mission immediately, congratulating Sui's achievement on the continent. Goguryeo, however, upon hearing in 590 that Sui had pacified Chen, the last dynasty south of the Yangtze river, was terrified and began to prepare for a possible war against this new empire by repairing fortresses and saving provisions. Sui Emperor Mundi, who had expressed his special satisfaction for Baekje's voluntary submission, exempted the latter from sending the tributary mission annually, while reprimanding Goguryeo for its defiant behavior.²⁷ (The first contact of Silla with Sui was made in 595.)

27. See the record of the 36th year of King Wideok in "Baekje bongi" 5, in volume 27 of *Samguk sagi*; and the record of the 32nd year of King Pyeongwon in "Goguryeo bongi" 7, in volume 19 of *Samguk sagi*.

This situation heralded a new round of diplomatic warfare by which the three Korean kingdoms were vying for the favor of the unified dynasty in China, Sui (and later Tang). In this contest, it was Baekje that was outwardly swift, agile, and successful, but in the end, turned out to be the first victim, while Silla emerged the last man standing.

As early as 598, Baekje sensed growing tensions between Goguryeo and Sui. Here again, as having done to the Wei court 121 years prior, Baekje offered to the Sui that it would be a guide when the Chinese empire undertook military expeditions to Goguryeo. However, what the envoy of Baekje received from Sui was only warm hospitality, as had happened during King Gaero's reign. The Sui emperor turned down Baekje's offer by saying that although he had ordered his generals to attack Goguryeo due to their insolence toward the Celestial Empire, the Goguryeo king humbly begged the emperor's pardon. Later, Goguryeo, upon hearing about Baekje's approach to Sui, "had a grudge against Baekje" and attacked the latter's border.²⁸ Baekje's swift and agile diplomacy was fruitless; it made Goguryeo a second enemy, in addition to Silla, in the Three Kingdoms' relations at a critical moment when Silla's power was growing annually after its acquisition of the Han basin.

The real test of Baekje's policy over Sui-Goguryeo conflicts came fourteen years later. In 612, the Sui emperor Yangdi, proclaiming his imperial edict of the "Eastern Expedition," invaded Goguryeo. The *Samguk sagi* mentioned that both Baekje and Silla had requested that Sui attack Goguryeo. In 608, King Jinpyeong of Silla ordered Monk Wongwang to draft a letter requesting Sui troops for a joint action against Goguryeo because the latter had habitually invaded Silla's border areas; and in 611 Silla again asked Sui's expedition, a plea that was accepted by Emperor Yangdi. Baekje sent an envoy in 607 for this mission, which was also approved by the Sui emperor. After repelling the Sui troops, Goguryeo complained that Silla, by way of taking advantage of the Goguryeo-Sui warfare, had snatched 500 *ri* of the Goguryeo

28. See the record of the 45th year of King Wideok in "Baekje bongi" 5, in volume 27 of *Samguk sagi*.

territory. Baekje sent envoys to Sui for consultation on a joint military operation as well as to collect information about the Sui's schedule of expeditions. However, on hearing that the Sui army crossed the Liao river to invade Goguryeo, Baekje did not take any measure for the purpose of the concerted military expedition, and instead only reinforced its troops along the northern border. "In fact," it is commented by *Samguk sagi*, "Baekje had two minds."²⁹

From a short-term perspective, Baekje was clever in its handling of such a grave incident that might have been disastrous to its survival, and was successful in the sense that, unlike in 598, it did not incur the wrath of Goguryeo. From a long-term perspective, however, Sui and its successor Tang began to view the attitude of Silla and Baekje toward China in line with "reliable Silla versus untrustworthy Baekje" when the Three Kingdoms were entangled with diplomatic warfare from the 640s onward. More importantly, Baekje did not realize the fact that Goguryeo's military strength had been the primary concern for the Sui and Tang as it had posed threats to the security of China's northeastern border. This implies that China's policy toward the three Korean kingdoms was decided more by its relations with Goguryeo than by Baekje's approach to China.

When the Tang invaded Goguryeo in 645, a similar situation was reproduced as far as the other two kingdoms' relations with China were concerned. After Silla's seizure of the Hangang river basin, Goguryeo and Baekje jointly attacked the borders of Silla, which in turn begged the Tang dynasty to intervene on its behalf. While the Tang could not afford to pay attention to the northeastern border largely due to the pacification of Tujue in the northwest, its emperor Taizong persuaded Goguryeo and Baekje on several occasions to stop their attacks on Silla. Soon after the Tang had settled the Tujue question, however, it took steps for a military expedition to Goguryeo in

29. See the records of the 30th and 33rd years of King Jinpyeong in "Silla bongi" 4, in volume 4 of *Samguk sagi*; the record of the 13th year of Queen Seondeok in "Silla bongi" 5, in volume 5 of *Samguk sagi*; and the records of the 45th year of King Wideok and the 13th year of King Mu in "Baekje bongi" 5, in volume 27 of *Samguk sagi*.

645. During these years, Baekje had sent tributary missions to the Tang almost once a year but refrained from conveying any specific message with regard to Baekje's role in the Tang's impending campaign against Goguryeo. Instead, in 643, Baekje entered a friendly relationship with Goguryeo and tried to recover its lost territory of the Hangang basin. Although Baekje withdrew its troops upon hearing the news that Silla's envoy was on the way to the Tang, King Uija of Baekje attacked and took seven fortresses from Silla in 645, while the latter mobilized troops in order to help the Tang's campaign to Goguryeo.³⁰

In such circumstances, in which Silla could not find an ally in its Three Kingdoms' relations, Silla's choice was a total reliance on the Tang. In her letter to the Tang emperor, Silla Queen Seondeok wrote that "the fate of our country is at the mercy of your great country," and later sent 30,000 troops to the Goguryeo border to help Tang's campaign against this Korean kingdom. Nothing was mentioned about what role Silla played in 645 when Tang's invading army was finally repelled by Goguryeo. (Silla's role in the 668 campaign was recorded in detail.) What is known in this respect was that, as previously mentioned, Baekje made best use of this opportunity, attacking Silla and taking over a dozen fortresses; and in 655, five years before its collapse, Baekje, in concert with Goguryeo, again snatched thirty fortresses from Silla.³¹

Conclusion

This chain of events shows that Baekje was not destroyed by its weakness in military acumen but by its failures in diplomatic warfare with Silla. However, it did not fail in sending tributary missions to China

30. See the records of the 3rd and 5th years of King Uija in "Baekje bongi" 6, in volume 28 of *Samguk sagi*.

31. See the records of the 12th and 14th years of Queen Seondeok in "Silla bongi" 5, in volume 5 of *Samguk sagi*; and the record of the 15th year of King Uija in "Baekje bongi" 6, in volume 28 of *Samguk sagi*.

during its last years. Where it failed was in its misunderstanding of the changing nature of the Tang's foreign policy priorities. Goguryeo had been a thorn in the side of the Tang China by posing security threats to its northeastern border and by creating possibly, though not realized, a more serious magnitude of threat by its alliance with Tujue, the northwestern barbarians. After the pacification of the northwestern region, however, the Tang was unable to rid itself of these security worries by its first military campaign to Goguryeo in 645. After its domestic political confusion was settled with the rise of Empress Wu Zetian in the Tang court in 655, the Tang reviewed its Korean policy from a broader perspective. The conclusion was to launch an attack on Goguryeo from both flanks. Silla was Tang's natural choice, as its contribution to the Tang's previous campaign had been greater, while Baekje had been on Goguryeo's side, hindering Silla in its cooperation with the Tang. This decision on the part of the Tang foretold the demise of Baekje.

"Prudence" is one of the key words in political realism. According to H. Morgenthau, political realism considers a rational foreign policy to be a good foreign policy, one that minimizes risks and maximizes benefits and that complies both with the moral precept of prudence and the political requirement of success (Morgenthau 1973, 8). E. H. Carr adds that the basic concepts of realism are prudence, conservatism, empiricism, suspicion of idealistic principles, and respect for the lessons of history (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff 1981, 5). The prudent politician must prepare for some device by which his country can escape from any possible danger. Baekje's diplomatic maneuvers were swift, agile, clever, and thus seemingly prudent; but it was slow in perceiving and understanding foreign policy orientations of its possible partner in China, indulged in its safe security environment that separated itself from China by the sea, and above all was too long in self-interest but too short in sacrifice, which seems quite natural in IR. But when it came to diplomatic competition with Silla, it led to defeat by its rival on the peninsula.

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GLOSSARY

<i>damno</i>	擔魯	<i>Nihon shoki</i> (J.)	日本書紀
<i>goma</i>	固麻	<i>Samguk sagi</i>	三國史記
<i>gun</i>	郡	<i>Songshu</i> (Ch.)	宋書
Gyeona	犬牙	Sui (Ch.)	隋
Hwandoseong	丸都城	Tang (Ch.)	唐
<i>hyeon</i>	縣	Tujue (Ch.)	突厥
Imna Ilbonbu	任那日本府	Wanggeom	王儉
<i>Liangshu</i> (Ch.)	梁書	Wei (Ch.)	魏
Lelang (Ch.)	樂浪	Wu Zetian (Ch.)	武則天
Mimana Nihonbu (J.)	▶ Imna Ilbonbu	Yan (Ch.)	燕
Mundi (Ch.)	文帝	Yangdi (Ch.)	煬帝
Murong Sheng (Ch.)	慕容盛	Youzhou (Ch.)	幽州
<i>Nanqishu</i> (Ch.)	南齊書		

(Ch.: Chinese; J.: Japanese)