

War and Ritual in Ancient Korea: *From the Bronze Age to the Three Kingdoms Era*

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, the discovery of Korean Bronze Age village remains has resulted in close attention to the relationship between agrarian settlements and primitive wars. The characteristics of primitive wars during the Bronze Age, which featured stones as the main weapon of choice, differed from those of the wars by ancient states conducted with iron weapons. The features of such primitive wars that used stones as their weapon may be ascertained from the tradition passed down to the modern era known as seokjeon (stone battle). The kings of ancient states can be perceived as having been newly established supreme rulers that emerged when heads of primitive societies. The war, determined by the king of ancient state, was a sort of ideological political ritual, not the simple physical expression of social conflicts. A pertinent example in ancient Korea of war being conducted as a state ritual led by the royal power occurred during the reign of King Jinheung of Silla (540-576). Such wars featured moralistic, ritual, and religious overtones to the nobles as well as the people. More precisely, they were sacred wars meant to protect the state. These wars were implemented as religious rituals designed to protect the royal power and the state.

Keywords: war, ritual, wooden palisade, ditch surrounding settlement (*hwanho*), stone battle (*seokjeon*), Hwarangdo, King Jinheung

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Introduction

Broadly speaking, studies of classical history, both total history and the history of war, undertaken since the nineteenth century have dealt with war from the standpoint of political history. The origin of this perception of war as an extension of policy can be traced back to *Vom Kriege* (On War) by Karl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), a Prussian military historian. While Clausewitz identified politics as one of the three elements of war, ensuing generations of politicians, who applied his theories in a strategic political manner, placed greater emphasis on the political nature of war (Howard 1984, 27-44).

Meanwhile, the proponents of the new social science-based approach to history that became popular during the mid-twentieth century argued that war should not be addressed from the standpoint of political history but rather from that of social history. The social history of war was a methodological approach to the foundation and structure of society at the time, and involved the comprehensive study of various social themes associated with war such as social status and economic structures.¹

However, the emergence of the postmodern era that lasted until the final period of the twentieth century saw the social history approach challenged by the so-called “new cultural history.” This new cultural history refers to a trend in the discipline in which the individuality of culture, or rather the social decision-making aspect of culture, is emphasized. This new approach also focuses on the interactive relationship between culture and matter, a relationship which is likened to a Moebius Strip (Hunt 1989). Meanwhile, the materialistic viewpoint of social history, which perceives material elements as the basis for politics or culture, has been rejected.

For example, in the “new cultural history” the focus when delineating social classes should not be on whether a group possesses tools of production but rather whether they possess a specific aware-

1. For more on a social history approach to ancient war, refer to Garlan (1975).

ness of their social status or certain cultural experiences that have been subjectively formed during one's life process. In other words, the reason why the bourgeois belong to the bourgeoisie is not because they possess tools of production, but rather because they boast a unique lifestyle or awareness that has been created through the development of their unique perception of the world (Darnton 1984).

New cultural history is also called historical anthropology because it revolves around the introduction of anthropological methodologies to the study of history (Van Dülmen 2000). As such, when war is analyzed from this new anthropological standpoint, ancient wars can be seen as having been closely related not only to the infrastructure of a society but also to aspects of superstructures such as ideology, religion, norms, ritual, and cognition (Ferguson 1999, 389-427).

While the traditional studies of history in the nineteenth century emphasized the political nature of war and the new history of the twentieth century emphasized socioeconomic aspects, the perspective of new cultural history developed during the late twentieth century focused on the cultural elements of war. To this end, this study seeks to examine the mutual relationship between ancient war and royal authority from the cultural, rather than the widely accepted sociohistorical standpoint. Through such an exercise, I attempt to highlight the characteristics of the state rituals of ancient war. In ancient states, war could not be carried out based solely on a political decision by members of the ruling class such as the king and aristocrats. Rather, the successful implementation of war required the establishment of a moralistic logic that could be applied to the ruled classes. This means that ancient wars could not be separated from rituals, and thus inevitably took on the characteristics of national rituals. This can be regarded as the cultural aspect of the wars fought by ancient states.

Origins of War: Emergence of the Earliest Villages in Korea

The question of whether the primitive societies that existed before the advent of civilization were peaceful or humans have in fact engaged in war from the prehistoric era has been hotly debated within the field of anthropology (Otterbein 1999, 794-805). In the classic position portraying the “pacified past that featured the peaceful savage,” war, when it did emerge amongst tribes, was a ritualistic and game-like affair. However, identifying the characteristics of war in the primitive age as ritualistic or game-like can be an oversimplification of the primitive warfare (Keeley 1996, 32-39). Although ritual was an important element of ancient wars, the close relationship between ritual and war is a uniform phenomenon which can be found in not only primitive societies but also civilized ones.²

Wars have long been a part of human history from ancient to modern times. Why have humans repeatedly engaged in wars throughout history? Heated debates have been waged about whether such conflagrations have been caused by man’s aggressive instincts or inevitable denouncements found in man’s surroundings. Are wars the result of human instinct or are they part of mankind’s quest for survival? This question is closely related to the standpoint from which one views war, namely that of the offender or the defender. Researchers who focus on human instinct effectively take the position of the attacker and see the rationale for violence as being rooted in the tenets of biology. Conversely, those who see war as an inevitable choice regard it as a unique feature of human society that separates us from the animal world and focus on the aspect of self-defense.

The difference between a war and a unilateral invasion is that the former involves a willingness to fight on the part of both offender and defender. Instances in which a defender shows no willingness to fight are examples of plunder rather than war. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly separate plunder from war: the latter occurs when a

2. For more bibliographies, refer to Park (2003, 54-61).

defender fights back against an attempt at plunder. In this sense, war can be defined as violent acts between communities that also involve psychological conflicts between the attacker and defender.

From 1952 to 1958, the discoveries of the fortress walls built circa 7,000 B.C. in the Jericho area of Jordan developed the understanding that war began during the New Stone Age, which saw the onset of sedentary agriculture (Brewer 1999, 5). Thus, the newly formed agrarian communities in temperate regions with easy access to water began to come into conflict with the existing hunting societies. For the hunters, who were accustomed to eating meat, the grains grown by the agrarian communities were not initially regarded to be of much value. However, the same could not be said for the agrarian societies' livestock or surplus agricultural products and food put into storage by the agrarian communities, which inevitably led to invasions by groups desiring to plunder these products. Additionally, the advent of agrarian communities' clearly demarcated spaces had the effect of creating spatial identities that revolved around settlements. The onset of the agrarian lifestyle strengthened these identities and provided opportunities to create spatial divisions that differed from those that existed in the previous environment. From this standpoint, the origin of war can be said to be closely related to the appearance of agrarian communities and their defensive facilities such as wooden palisades and ditches surrounding settlements (Matsugi 1998, 164).

Since the 1990s, the discovery of the remains of Korean Bronze Age villages and their defensive facilities such as wooden palisades and ditches surrounding settlements, those excavated from the Geomdan-ri site in Ulsan and the Songgok-ri site in Buyeo, has resulted in close attention to the relationship between agrarian settlements and defensive facilities.

In the case of adjacent Northeast China, man-made defensive ditches surrounding settlements had already begun to appear in dozens of places around 6,000 B.C., including the Xinglongwa site in Inner Mongolia (Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences 1985). The recent discovery of ditch-enclosed settle-

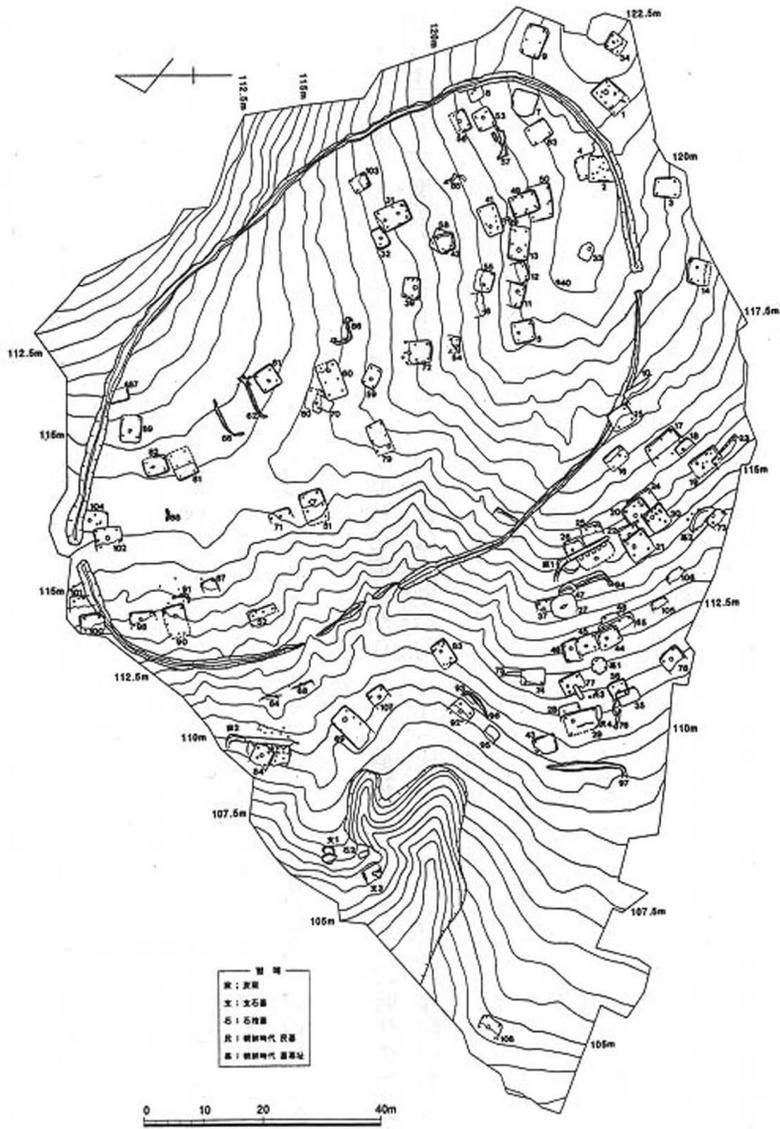


Figure 1. Ditch surrounding settlement of the Geomdan-ri site in Ulsan, Korea

ments (*hwanho*) built during the late New Stone Age in Korea at the Sangchon-ri site in Jinju, Gyeongsangnam-do province, lends support to the possibility that such defense-oriented *hwanho* were in fact built before the Bronze Age.

Much like wooden palisades, the *hwanho* built around settlements have been regarded as defensive facilities in existing studies. Recently, however, some scholars have suggested the possibility that *hwanho* were installed not only for defense but also for ritualistic purposes. In ancient China, *hwanho* were referred to as *huang*, which means man-made ditches surrounding *cheng*, walls surrounding a city. They were usually referred to together as *chenghuang*. The *chenghuang* in ancient China became a ritual space where the defense of a settlement was prayed for—a phenomenon that eventually resulted in the development of belief in *chenghuang* (protective deities). Similarly, ritual artifacts, such as red-slip potteries broken through ritual behavior, were also discovered at *hwanho* relics found in Korea. As such, the conclusion can be reached that *hwanho* in Korea, much like *cheng-huang* in China, not only had a defensive function, but also was an important aspect of rituals.

Data accumulated by the archaeological excavation conducted up to the present reveals that while *hwanho* were in place from the late New Stone Age, it was only from the Bronze Age onwards that villages with full-scale defensive functions combining *hwanho*, earthworks, and wooden palisades began to appear.

As mentioned above, it was only with the discovery of *hwanho* in village relics uncovered in Geomdan-ri, Ulsan, in 1990 that the existence of ancient Korean settlements with defensive facilities became known. The major axis of the discovered oval-shaped *hwanho* is 118 m and the minor axis 70 m. It has a total length of 298 m and the inside area is approximately 5,974 m². The depth of the *hwanho* ranges from about 20 to 110 cm, and its width at the broadest point is about 2 m.

The Songgok-ri site in Buyeo is a typical example of the settlements that feature the use of wooden palisades as defensive facilities during the Bronze Age. In total, some 430 m of wooden palisades

have been discovered at the Songgok-ri site. The wooden palisades, which were built around a large valley, are estimated to have been approximately 2.5 km in total circumference. It is also estimated that the area of the settlements enclosed by the wooden palisades totaled approximately 61 ha.

Among Bronze Age settlement relics, there are some instances in which both *hwanho* and wooden palisades were used to heighten defense. The Okbang site in Daepyeong-ri, Jinju, can be regarded as a representative example of this. A combination of two *hwanho* and wooden palisades was discovered at Okbang Relics Site No. 7. The *hwanho* were 75 m in length, 170-200 cm in width, and there was an interval of 250-350 cm between the two. A 12 m row of wooden palisades was built alongside the *hwanho* with intervals of about 1.5 m. The use of two sets of *hwanho* as well as a row of wooden palisades shows that three layers of defensive structures were installed around the settlements.

Further investigation also revealed that the defensive function of villages with *hwanho* and wooden palisades developed as the Bronze Age progressed. The fact that villages boasting defensive facilities such as *hwanho* and wooden palisades were a common sight from the Bronze Age onwards in Korea, a phenomenon that stands in contrast to the Four Great Ancient Civilizations, such as the ancient Chinese, Indus, Mesopotamian, and Oriental civilization, where defensive villages emerged in the New Stone Age, raises the possibility that war had begun in earnest during the Bronze rather than the New Stone Age in Korea.

War during the Korean Bronze Age: Stone Battles

We have seen in the previous section that war emerged in Korea from the Bronze Age onwards. That being said, one should not assume that bronze weapons were used in the battlefield. Although weapons such as bronze swords and battle axes have been excavated from Bronze Age sites, the majority of the bronze products discov-

ered in Korea up to the present were objects of ritual such as bronze mirrors and bells, which were meant to denote the authority of the ritual masters. Even the swords widely regarded as representative of bronze weapons were more often employed as symbols representing the power of chieftains than as weapons to be actually used in battle.

As such, the conclusion that the small number of bronze relics excavated from the tombs of ritual masters or chieftains constituted the main weapons used during Bronze Age wars cannot be substantiated. Anthropologists have in fact concluded that warriors of the civilized societies that developed ancient metallurgy continued to use stone weapons as their main form of weaponry prior to the widespread adoption of iron weapons (Keegan 1993, 143-173). Even during the Bronze Age, the majority of weapons used on the battlefield continued to be made of the same kind of stone and wood widely used since the Stone Age. It was not the bronze swords found in the tombs of ritual masters or chieftains but rather the stones uncovered in defensive facilities that served as the primary weapons of war in the Bronze Age.

Among polished stone tools, particularly in weaponry, close attention should be paid to stone daggers and arrowheads. Stone daggers are presumed to have various uses aside from weaponry such as within the household or as burial accessories and ritual tools. However, recent studies pointing out that signs of usage on most discovered stone daggers are rare surmise that stone daggers were utilized as ritual tools representing prestige, not as weapons (Lee 1997, 61).

Earlier studies indicated that wars were frequent in the Bronze Age based on a classification of variance in the shapes of stone arrowheads, weapons, and hunting tools (Hwang 1965, 19). However, recent studies present analyses that these differences in shape were associated with changes in time and place of hunting. As a result, it can be deduced that stone arrowheads were utilized more frequently as hunting tools, rather than weapons (Choi 1982, 291).

The utility of stone arrowheads should be explained with regard to the spatial contexts from which they were excavated. If stone arrowheads were excavated from a ditch surrounding settlements or

wooden palisades, it is safe to assume them as weapons whereas it is more appropriate to regard them as hunting tools when they are excavated from the remains of villages without any fortification (Son 2006, 155). Accordingly, whether defensive fortifications were present at the sites of remains is important in determining being or not of Bronze Age wars.

The determining factor of the intensity of war is not the materials from which the weapons are made but rather the will of the person wielding the weapon. It is still possible to kill someone with a wooden spear or a stone axe rather than a weapon made of sharp metal as long as the desire to kill is present. Although it cannot be denied that the material from which weapons are made can greatly influence the outcome of a war, the intensity of such conflicts is fully dependent on human will. The decision to engage in a war of total annihilation or a war with the intension to leave room for coexistence depended on the will of the people who fought the war, not on the materials from which their weapons were made. The main goal of ancient wars was not to kill the enemy but rather to capture the enemy in order to sacrifice them in ritual ceremonies or use them as slaves for the production of food: this highlights the effectiveness of stone weapons in attempting to achieve less fatal results (Brewer 1999).

The characteristics of primitive wars in the Bronze Age, featuring stones as the main weapon of choice, differed from those of the wars of ancient states fought with iron weapons. However, the presence of showy metal weapons attracting attention has obscured the value of stone weapons not only in historical records but also in archaeological research. It is thus difficult to recover the features of primitive wars based on only the weapons of historical records and archaeological reports. However, the practical weapons of primitive wars can be indirectly derived based on aspects of intangible folk culture and described from different culture-historical sources.

The features of such primitive wars that used stone weapons may be described from the tradition passed down to the modern era, known as *seokjeon* (stone battle). In *seokjeon*, participants are divided into two groups who must then throw stones at each other. This

tradition was also referred to as *pyeonjeon* or *byeonjeon* (*pyeonssaum* or *pyeonssam* in native Korean) which means a grouped battle. The *seokjeon* custom was a ubiquitous custom in Northeast Asia, also being prevalent in China and Japan. *Seokjeon* originated from the primitive war strategy of throwing stones. During the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties, it became an annual event that was used as a part of military training, and also a tradition amongst the general public (Son 1981, 151-171).

For the general public, *seokjeon* involved two groups of villagers throwing stones at each other across a stream or river as part of a contest that eventually developed into physical confrontations. It can be regarded as having been the most military-oriented folk game ever

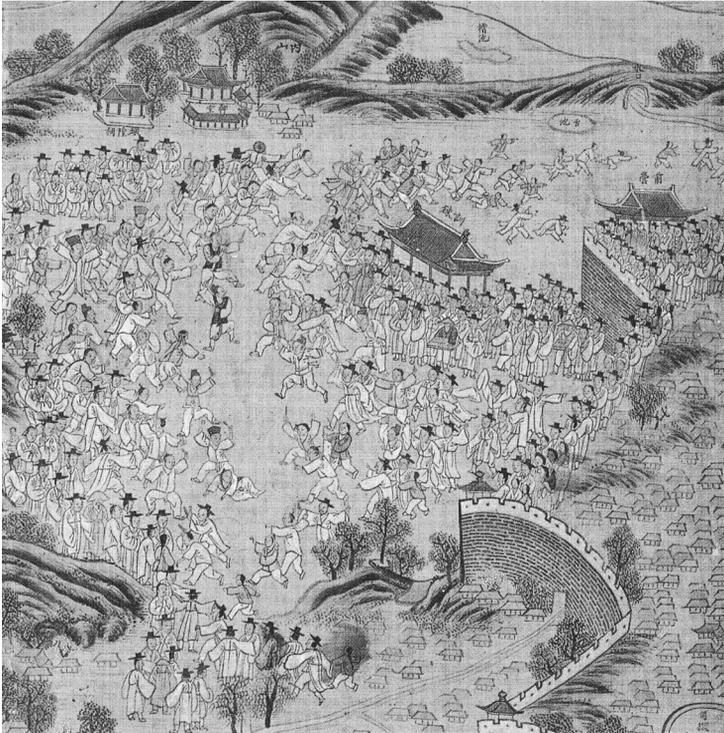


Figure 2. *Seokjeon* scene of *Pyeongyangdo* housed in Seoul National University Museum

played in Korea. *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam* (Newly Verified Survey of the Geography of Korea) reveals that *seokjeon* was carried out as a national event in places such as Andong, Gimhae, Gyeongju, and more. However, the most wide-scale and intense *seokjeon* were conducted in the Pyongyang area. King Yeongjo raised the *seokjeon* held in the Pyongyang area as a salient example of the danger of *seokjeon*. For this part, Choe Nam-seon identified Pyongyang as “the village of *seokjeon*” in the section titled “Customs” of his book, *Joseon sangsik* (Information on Joseon). The *Pyeongyangdo* currently housed in the Seoul National University Museum depicting a *seokjeon* in Pyongyang shows two groups of participants as well as spectators alongside a mountain ridge.

In addition and fortunately for researchers, the *seokjeon* held in Pyongyang during the final period of the Great Han Empire were described by some visiting foreigners. Because casualties often emerged during *seokjeon*, such folk contests were perceived as very peculiar by foreigners who visited Korea during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of whom left behind their impressions on these events. The following texts are excerpts from these foreigner records:

Although Pyongyang has a reputation for being dangerous because of the fact that its people are fond of fighting and throwing stones, I never encountered any hostility in the city. Every year, a *sökchön* (stone-fighting) contest pitting people from the downtown area against those from the outlying areas is carried out over a period of three days. This violent contest is conducted with the permission and knowledge of the relevant government officials. The occurrence of casualties during this contest is regarded as being inevitable, and the government does not seem to be much concerned about such outcomes. For example, my interpreter Kim was hit in the head by rocks so hard that he had to stay in bed for two months. A huge dented scar is still visible on his skull (Carles 1888).

The number of participants in *sökchön* contests is proportionate to the size of village. The largest stone fighting (*sökchön*) contest that

I witnessed involved 800-1000 people from one village. However, such contests are even organized in villages with a population of as little as 10 people. Young men start throwing stones at one another in the early afternoon, and continue to do so until evening. Once adults arrive at the field, the stone fighting becomes more severe. The stone throwing stops when the sun sets. The participants use their hands, stones propelled using ropes made of straw, and cudgels as weapons. These cudgels are short and hard, and can kill a person with one blow (Gilmore 1892).

Gilmore's account shows that cudgels were also used in *seokjeon* as well as stones to hit the enemy on the head. On some occasions, such blows would result in serious injuries and even death. Therefore, one can surmise that a warlike atmosphere surrounded *seokjeon*. H. B. Hulbert, an American educator living in Korea in the final period of the Great Han Empire, estimated that the origins of *seokjeon* could be traced back to the reign of King U of the Goryeo dynasty (Hulbert 1906). However, there was actually an earlier reference made to *seokjeon* in the Goguryeo section of the *Suishu* (Book of Sui) (Soda 1997, 208):

Every year, people gather at Peishui (Daedonggang river) to participate in a national festival. This festival, as well as the contest that is held after its conclusion, is attended by the king, who is decked out in regal decorative feathers and travels in a palanquin. Once the festival has ended, the king throws his royal garment into the river, thereby signaling to the people that the time has come to form two teams. The two sides then proceed to throw stones and chase after each other amidst a cacophony of noises. This process is repeated on two or three occasions before the event is considered to be complete.³

This entry from the *Suishu* proves that the *seokjeon* custom was already being carried out as part of state festivals involving the direct

3. *Suishu*, vol. 81.

participation of the king of Goguryeo during the Three Kingdoms era. Goguryeo's state festival was separated into two parts: various jovial events took place in the first half of the gathering, and a *seokjeon* contest was organized for the second half of the festival. Some scholars have argued that the first half of this state ceremony actually consisted of an agricultural ritual in which wishes were made for a bountiful harvest and health, and that the *seokjeon*, conducted during the second half, was a shamanistic event meant to predict the harvest for the upcoming year (Kim 2003, 149). This approach identifies *seokjeon* as a religious and shamanistic ritual designed to predict how fortuitous the upcoming year would be based on the magical power of the stones to drive away calamity and disease.

However, this entry from the *Suishu* should not be regarded as absolute proof of the origins of *seokjeon*. The fact that the *seokjeon* in the sixth-seventh centuries in Goguryeo had already developed into a state event in which the king ritually participated greatly reduces the likelihood that this was the original form of *seokjeon*. As evidenced by the observations of westerners during the final period of the Great Han Empire, *seokjeon* contests were similar to war in that they produced numerous casualties. To this end, the argument that the origins of such warlike fighting is inherently related to religious and shamanistic objectives can be regarded as based on an overly excessive analysis of only ritualistic functions of *seokjeon*.

In addition to its ritualistic function, *seokjeon* also had a practical military function. The military aspect of *seokjeon* is evidenced by the fact that King Taejong of the Joseon dynasty, after his abdication, regarded *seokjeon* as a military art rather than as a mere game.⁴ According to historical records, *seokjeon* was used on the actual battlefield during the Joseon era.⁵ Instances of soldiers specializing in the stone-throwing arrayed on the actual battlefield, or military units that specialized in the throwing of stones called *seoktudang*, *seoktugun*, and *cheokseokgun*, are found respectively in works such as

4. *Sejongillok*, 5th lunar month, 3rd year of King Sejong's reign.

5. *Sinjeung dongguk yeoji seungnam*, vol. 32.

Samguk sagi (Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms), *Goryeosa* (History of Goryeo), and *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Annals of the Joseon Dynasty). Such aspects of *seokjeon* make it evident that the origins of such contests clearly had military objectives.

The military origins of *seokjeon* are more clearly spelled out in the following entry from *Samguk sagi*, which conveys the early stages of the Three Kingdoms era (early first century):

The arrival of Japanese marauders along the coast aboard 100 military ships forced the government to dispatch some of its elite soldiers from the *six-bu* (sections) to stop them. Believing that Silla's defenses had been greatly weakened by this relocation of military units, Lelang decided to launch a sudden attack on Geumseong (Capital of Silla). However, the falling of a meteor shower into their camp at night so scared the enemy that it decided to withdraw. The enemy made 20 sets of *seoktae* (stone mounds) while they were staying along the banks of the Alcheongang river. Upon arriving at the banks of the Alcheongang river from the east area of Mt. Toham, a detachment of some 1,000 soldiers from the *six-bu* encountered the stone mounds that had been built by the enemy. Believing that the enemy force was a large one, the soldiers decided not to pursue them any further.⁶

The *seoktae* referred to above were stone mounds. Such stone mounds were used as indicators of the scale of a military force. In the early first century, the use of iron weapons was not yet widespread, meaning that stones were used as the primary weapons of war. As such, *seoktae* served as armories or military bases in times of war.

Many of the stone mounds that have been uncovered to date, structures that have by and large been ignored in archeological studies because of the difficulties associated with identifying their precise characteristics, should in fact be classified as *seoktae* relics of a military nature. An archaeological example can be found at the late New Stone Age Sangchon-ri site in Jinju, where stone mounds surrounded

6. "Silla bongi," in vol. 1 of *Samguk sagi*, 11th year of Namhae Chachau's reign.

by *hwanho* were discovered. The fact that these stone mounds were located in direct relation to *hwanho* lends support to the conclusion that these structures represented a defensive facility used for *seokjeon* in the prehistoric era.

Furthermore, it is also necessary to reconsider the characteristics of *seonang*, stone mounds for tutelary deities closely associated with *seokjeon* in the prehistoric era and especially the Bronze Age, when war originated between the earliest villages in Korea. National studies on folklore have made it quite evident that stone mounds per se were one of the most important elements of *seonang*.

A *seonang* consists of a *sinsu* (divine tree) and an altar made of stone mounds called *nuseokdan*, or of a *sinsu* and *dangjip* (shrine for village deity). These structures were generally located at the entrance of a village, on the side of mountain paths, or at the foot of mountains. This type of folk belief was widespread, and reached every corner of Korea until modern times. The fact that these *seonang* were made of stone mounds and that they were located at the entrance of villages or in other strategic points has led some scholars to advance the theory that the *seonang* were defensive facilities akin to military bases or armories for *seokjeon* (Shin 1982).

It can be concluded that the customs of *seokjeon* and *seonang* originated amidst prehistoric wars, in particular the wars of the Bronze Age when stones were the main weapons (Park 2006). In addition, the fact that *seokjeon* and *seonang* also had ritual characteristics seems to indicate that the wars waged during the Bronze Age were rooted in communal village rituals.

War as State Ritual in the Three Kingdoms Era

Rituals and politics are widely perceived as separate at the state level. However, the separation of rituals and politics did not mean that the king abandoned his authority over rituals. Rather, the right to conduct rituals was strongly associated with the supreme power of the king in the ancient states of Northeast Asia where the notion of the

heavenly mandate was prevalent. State rituals were either conducted by the king himself or by a close relative acting on his behalf. As relinquishing control over rituals, which represented the moral basis of royal power, was equivalent to renouncing the legitimacy of royal authority, it was only natural for ancient kings to attempt to increase their control over such rituals.

However, the main difference between the kings of ancient states and the chieftains of primitive societies stems from the fact that the former could exercise a monopoly over rituals and war, especially war. The birth of the king figure in ancient Northeast Asia is believed to have emerged amidst the context described in the chapter “Dang-bing” in *Lushi chunqiu* (Master Lu’s Spring and Autumn Annals), compiled during the late Warring States Period of China. According to the *Lushi chunqiu*, the progression from war to emergence of chief or head (*zhang*), king (*jun*), and finally Son of Heaven (*tianzi*) makes it evident that the concept of the king originated from war. While the *zhang* (chief or head) who emerged victorious in war was a military commander, the *jun* which developed from *zhang* was perceived as a king of ancient states (Li 1997, 239-241). The connection between the notions of king and war is also evidenced by the origins of 王 (*wang*), the Chinese character for “king.” Although there have been many different interpretations of the etymology of 王, the most widely accepted theory has been that it originated from the shape of the battle axe that symbolized military command in the Bronze Age (Shirakawa 1984, 62).

Kings were newly established supreme rulers that emerged when heads of primitive societies, whose authority originated from war, secured exclusive military and ritual rights for themselves at the state level. As such, the kings of ancient states can be regarded as having been endowed with a sense of sacredness and moral authority through rituals, and peremptory power further strengthened through wars.

War, as determined by kings of ancient states, was a sort of ideological and political ritual rather than a simple physical expression of social conflict. The rulers of the Zhou dynasty in ancient China

implemented various rituals that were designed to maintain their authority to command the military in times of war (Yates 1999, 9-25). While war was a violent political ritual whose occurrence was determined by kings, its actual implementation was an ideological military action that was imposed on the members of the society. A pertinent example of war being conducted as a state ritual led by the royal power in ancient Korea occurred during the reign (540-576) of King Jinheung of Silla. The status of war as a state ritual is clearly evidenced by the role of Hwarangdo during the reign of King Jinheung.⁷

Hwarangdo of Silla was a warrior group that had as its primary goal the protection of royal power. However, it also had a religious nature as its members served as celebrants who conducted national rituals. The religious character of Hwarangdo is evidenced by the fact that it was closely related to Buddhism's Maitreya belief (Yi 1980). The generals and soldiers of Hwarangdo were educated on Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. They were also trained based on five ethical principles. Hwarangdo was simultaneously a moralistic religious group and a warrior group.

The warfare implemented by Hwarangdo was regarded not only as a military action but also as a sacred mission in the form of a moralistic and religious ritual undertaken for the state. That Hwarangdo was composed of aristocracy and that the public highly respected them clearly prove that they were regarded as aristocratic warriors and divine members of society at a national level. King Jinheung effectively institutionalized the national ritualization of war through Hwarangdo.

The image of the moralistic warrior of Hwarangdo was further ritualized in the records of Sadaham⁸ and Gwanjang.⁹ King Jinheung institutionalized war as a national ritual conducted through Hwarangdo to protect the royal power. Additionally, the Jinheung-

7. "Silla bongi," in vol. 4 of *Samguk sagi*, 37th year of King Jinheung's reign.

8. "Sadaham," in vol. 44 of *Samguk sagi*.

9. "Gwanjang," in vol. 47 of *Samguk sagi*.

wang Sunsubi¹⁰ and the Cheokgyeongbi (Monument in Commemoration of Territory Incorporation), both erected by King Jinheung of Silla, can be regarded as monuments erected to memorialize the termination of wars. King Jinheung developed the upper reaches of the Namhangang river beyond the Sobaek mountain range and erected Danyang Jeokseongbi (Stone Stele in Jeokseong Fortress Site in Danyang) in 551. Circa 555, he erected Bukhansanbi after conquering the lower reaches of the Hangang river, and in 561, he built Changnyeongbi (Monument at Changnyeong) in the lower reaches of the Nakdonggang river. He also set up the Hwangchoryeongbi (Monument at Hwangchoryeong Pass) and Maunnyeongbi (Monument at Maunnyeong Pass) in 568 after having conquered the northern east coast region. These monuments were the results of the wars conducted by King Jinheung. The sociopolitical status of King Jinheung's assistants as described in the inscriptions found in these monuments makes it evident that large scale state rituals were conducted to commemorate these wars of conquest.

King Jinheung's conquests in the mid-sixth century provided Silla, increasingly pressed by Goguryeo and Baekje, with an opportunity to expand its territory and decisively grasp the upper hand in the Three Kingdoms' competition. This in turn paved the way for Silla's path to unification.

Meanwhile, in addition to waging wars, King Jinheung also actively promoted Buddhism as the new state ideology. Although Buddhism was officially accepted as the national religion during the reign of King Beopheung, it was only from the reign of King Jinheung onwards that Buddhism fully played a role as the national ideology. King Jinheung was the one who built Heungnyongsa temple, the first Buddhist temple in Silla, and allowed people to become Buddhist monks in 544. In 569, he established the biggest temple in Silla, Hwangnyongsa temple, after a construction period of 17 years. In

10. The four monument stones, Jinheungwang Sunsubi, were erected at Bukhansan, Changnyeong, Hwangchoryeong, and Maunnyeong to commemorate King Jinheung's border inspection of newly acquired territories.

572, King Jinheung administrated a Buddhist ritual for seven days to console the spirits of the soldiers who died during the wars of conquest. He even became a Buddhist monk in the final stages of his life. Through his conquests and the observance of such Buddhist temples and rituals, King Jinheung was able to create a national consensus about war.

In 659, two young soldiers named Jangchunnang and Parang appeared to King Muyeol of Silla in a dream and said, “We offered our lives for the state in a former battle and now are only pale ghosts, but we still wish to defend the country and join army faithfully. . . . We beg you to give us a small force.” The King was deeply moved by their patriotic spirit even in death, and therefore ordered a memorial ritual to be held with Buddhist sermons, and erected Jangu temple in the memory of their gallant souls.¹¹

As mentioned above, the fact that Hwarangdo, Buddhism, and other memorial rituals for the dead soldiers were closely related to war proves the fact that wars in the age of the Three Kingdoms featured moralistic, ritual, and religious overtones for nobles as well as the common people: more precisely, these wars were implemented as religious rituals to protect the state and its royalty. The kings of Silla were thus able to establish a balanced and consistent royal power by securing military power and moralistic authority through wars and Buddhist rituals.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the wars conducted by ancient states stemmed from policies designed to ensure the welfare of the state and the interests of the ruling class. However, war cannot be carried out based solely on a political decision made by the ruling class such as the king and aristocrats. The successful implementation of war requires the

11. “Jangchunnang-parang,” in “Gii” 1, in vol. 1 of *Samguk yusa*; “Silla bongi,” in vol. 5 of *Samguk sagi*, 6th year of King Taejong-Muyeol’s reign.

establishment of a moralistic logic that can be applied to all social classes. This can be construed as the main reason why national religious rituals were conducted in times of war, and why the main actors involved in such wars were depicted as possessing attributes of religious warriors. Ancient wars could not be separated from ritual, and thus inevitably took on characteristics of national rituals. From the Bronze Age to the ancient states, the ritual characteristics of war have been uniformitarian in nature.

The power of the ancient kings consisted of a moral authority rooted in ritual ceremonies and a coercive power based on the ability to command war (Chang 1983, 35). Unlike the previous chiefs of primitive societies (ritual priest or military leader), the king of ancient state was a supreme ruler who had a monopoly on both ritual and military authority. Shortly, the separation of ritual and military rights within a society characterizes the pre-state stage: conversely, the unilateral control over these two by the king's one-person dictatorship is a key identifying factor of the state.

The key to royal power in the ancient states thus rested on ritual and war. "All important national affairs revolve around ritual and war," a passage taken from *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, Chinese ancient historical source, shows that rites and war were the two most important matters within the ancient states.¹² This inherent relationship between war and ritual is also prevalent throughout Korean ancient history.

As seen in the excerpt from *Sanguozhi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms), "Whenever a war breaks out, the state conducts a ritual to the heavens,"¹³ it was the custom in Buyeo to conduct a ritual to the heavens whenever a war broke out, which involved predicting the fortune of the state using a cow's hoof. Buyeo's augury customs based on the use of animals were similar to the Oracle Bone Divination System of China's Yin dynasty. The discovery of oracle bones in relic sites throughout Korea reveals that this combination of war, ritual, and oracle bone divination was not limited to Buyeo. Oracle

12. *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, 3rd lunar month, 13th year of Lord Cheng's reign.

13. "Fuyu" (Buyeo), in the chapter of "Dongyi," in vol. 30 of *Sanguozhi*.

bone divination was a ritualistic aspect of culture closely related to war in all of the ancient Korean states.

The reason why ancient wars had ritualistic characteristics can be traced back to the dualistic natures of ritual and war. If ritual had only produced an internal alliance among its communities or war had solely facilitated the establishment of a one-commander system, the two elements would have been difficult to reconcile. However, both ritual and war can be regarded as combining association and monopoly. Ritual not only established an alliance within the community, but also created and preserved hierarchical order. War not only served to maintain the power of a ruler, but also to consolidate the unity of a community's members (Park 2003, 54-61).

Finally, although the power of kings in the ancient states originated from the exclusive power to control war, the method in which wars were implemented was not determined in a unilateral or arbitrary manner. War of ancient state was a national ritual that involved an alliance between the ruling and the ruled, and based on a cooperative consensus on war.

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GLOSSARY

Bukhansanbi	北漢山碑	Lelang (Ch.)	樂浪
<i>byeonjeon</i>	邊戰	<i>Lushi chungju</i>	呂氏春秋
Changnyeongbi	昌寧碑	(Ch.)	
<i>cheng</i> (Ch.)	城	Maunnyeongbi	摩雲嶺碑
<i>chenghuang</i> (Ch.)	城隍	<i>nuseokdan</i>	累石壇
Cheokgyeongbi	拓境碑	Peishui (Ch.)	淇水
<i>cheokseokgun</i>	擲石軍	<i>pyeonjeon</i>	便戰
<i>Chunqiu zuozhuan</i> (Ch.)	春秋左傳	<i>Pyeongyangdo</i>	平壤圖
Dangbing (Ch.)	蕩兵	<i>Sanguozhi</i> (Ch.)	三國志
<i>dangjip</i>	당집	<i>seokjeon</i>	石戰
Danyang Jeokseongbi	丹陽赤城碑	<i>seoktae</i>	石堆
<i>huang</i> (Ch.)	隍	<i>seoktudang</i>	石投幢
Hwangchoryeongbi	黃草嶺碑	<i>seoktugun</i>	石投軍
<i>hwanho</i>	環濠	<i>seonang</i>	서낭
Hwarangdo	花郎徒	<i>sinsu</i>	神樹
Jinheungwang Sunsubi	眞興王巡狩碑	<i>Suishu</i> (Ch.)	隋書
<i>Joseon sangsik</i>	朝鮮常識	<i>Xinglongwa</i> (Ch.)	興隆注
<i>jun</i> (Ch.)	君	<i>zhang</i> (Ch.)	長

(Ch.: Chinese)