



***Defenders and Conquerors: The Rhetoric of Royal Power in Korean Inscriptions from the Fifth to Seventh Centuries***

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**Abstract**

This article compares the rhetoric of three inscriptions from the Three Kingdoms period of Korea: the Gwanggaeto inscription, which was carved in 414 on the tomb stele of King Gwanggaeto of Goguryeo; the inscriptions on the monument stones raised between 550 and 568 to record the tours of King Jinheung of Silla; and the King Munmu inscription on the funerary stele of King Munmu of Silla, which was completed in 682. Notably, although all three monarchs were successful warriors, only the Gwanggaeto inscription is characterized by the martial rhetoric of conquest, while the two Silla examples employ the cautious rhetoric of peacemaking. The author analyzes this difference by understanding the inscriptions as situated speech acts, and he suggests that these inscriptions should be understood within the particular political circumstances in which they were situated. Whereas the Gwanggaeto inscription was produced by a powerful Goguryeo acting within a Northeast Asia in which no one state could claim dominance, the Silla inscriptions were produced by a Silla Kingdom that had to struggle first against established Korean rivals and then against an enormously powerful Tang empire.

**Reading Inscriptions**

On the ninth month of 414 CE, a large stele adorned with an inscription praising the great works of King Gwanggaeto<sup>1</sup> (r. 391–412) was raised near the Goguryeo capital of Hwando-seong.<sup>2</sup> King Gwanggaeto had pursued a vigorous program of war and conquest from his ascent to the throne at eighteen years of age to his death at thirty-nine, such that he tripled Goguryeo's territorial reach. King Jangsu (r. 413–491), who commissioned the stele, continued his father's campaign of conquest by expanding Goguryeo's territory to the south, responding successfully to the changing situation to the north and expanding royal power. During the hundred years in which these two kings ruled Goguryeo, they divided control of Northeast Asia with the steppe dynasty of the Northern Wei (386–534).

Goguryeo fell in 668, only 250 years after the raising of the Gwanggaeto stele. Silla, which had both received military aid and suffered political interference from Goguryeo

during the reigns of Gwanggaeto and Jangsu, had become a leading power. Silla allied with the Tang to overthrow first Baekje (660), and then, eight years later, an internally divided Goguryeo. Shortly after, Silla's King Munmu (r. 661–681) attacked and defeated the Tang army. The Tang's attempt to occupy the former territory of Silla, Baekje, and Goguryeo failed on account of Silla resistance, such that the Tang was forced, in 676, to move the Protectorate General to Pacify the East from the former Goguryeo capital of Pyeongyang to the Liaodong Peninsula. This did not, however, eliminate the tensions between the two kingdoms. The Tang court continued to plot revenge on Silla, while to Silla's rear, Japan—which had once sent a large-scale, if ultimately unsuccessful, naval expedition to support the Baekje revivalist army—was an additional worry. King Munmu died in 681, with the glory of his victory clouded by postwar disorder. The next year his son, King Sinmun (r. 681–692), raised a stele to him in the Silla capital of Gyeongju.

In this article I will attempt a rhetorical analysis of the ways in which the two inscriptions describe monarchical power and foreign relations.<sup>3</sup> In order to link both inscriptions to the broader historical context, I will also investigate the four monument stones raised by King Jinheung (r. 540–576) to commemorate his tours through newly conquered territory. My methodological approach is to look at the two inscriptions as situated speech acts. My choice of this method is partly a reflection of my dissatisfaction with the ways in which many historians have read these inscriptions, and also of my criticism of standard rhetorical analysis. That is to say, my analysis arises from my concern that the otherwise very different historical and rhetorical analyses of these inscriptions are alike in falling into an epistemologically dangerous tendency to sharply distinguish the historical from the rhetorical.

To borrow a phrase from J.L. Austin, “the issuance of the utterance is the performing of the action” (Austin 1976, 6). Phrases such as “I take this woman to be my lawfully wedded wife” or “I shall punish those rebels” are not “utterances which are either true or false,” but “performative utterances” (Austin 1976, 4–11). Most texts combine “truth statements” with performative utterances, causing the performance of the language to pass beyond truth and falsehood and into the sphere of action.

Modern historians have generally treated these inscriptions as documentary sources and have thus read them primarily to identify the truth and falsehood they contain. Of course, these historians are aware of the danger of bias or inaccuracies in their texts, and so they try to establish the evidence present in these texts by taking proper account of bias. In this, these

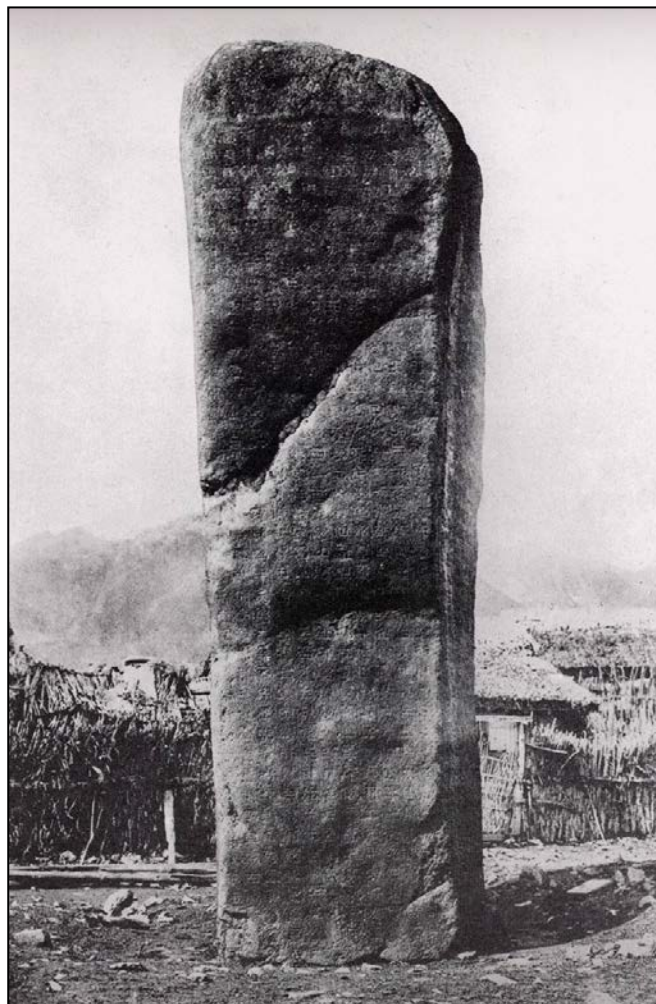
historians have shown much praiseworthy methodological precision. However, we must also remember that the exaggerations, bias, and concealments in the texts are not the enemies of historical truth but are part of historical truth. Language never becomes completely transparent, even when it seems to be at its most truthful. Language analyzes and describes a situation with a set number of sentences, and these sentences—colored with purpose, structured by such grammatical categories as subject, object, and verb, and composed of words that lack stable referents—cast the web of meaning around the event. In this manner, language intervenes into the situation to form the world itself, including both the addresser and addressee of the utterances.

The traditional notion of rhetoric as the “art of persuasion and communication” implies the preexistence of meaning. The linguistic turn within the humanities has forced scholars—myself included—to reconsider this definition, although I would not go so far as to reduce history to language and language alone. In this essay I take as my starting point Richard Rorty’s claim (1989, 5) that “where there are no sentences there is no truth.” I would like to avoid, in other words, the unfortunate tendency of some scholars to read texts by treating rhetoric merely as decoration and packaging added to semantic truth. Rhetoric possesses its own truth, because the speaking subject, within the complex circumstances in which he or she is situated, creates his or her own semantic structure, by bringing some elements to the center, pushing other elements to the margins, and excluding other elements completely. Critical rhetorical studies takes notice of this process and emphasizes the need to take full account of both the active and opaque aspects of language and rhetoric (Angus and Langsdorf 1993; Brummett 2006). Rhetoric must not be read as packaging surrounding meaning, but as an essential part of the meaning of the text.

### **The King Gwanggaeto Stele**

Until the ninth century, inscribed steles were not generally required in Korean burial customs, not even in the case of the graves of monarchs and aristocrats. Only under very special circumstances would an inscribed stele be placed in a position open to general observation.<sup>4</sup> The Gwanggaeto stele (figure 1) is at once the first of its kind in Korean history and a rare case of a surviving pre-ninth-century stele.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1: The Gwanggaeto Stele. Image used with permission from South Korea's National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (<http://www.nrich.go.kr/eng/>). As with the other images from the Research Institute used in this article, it may also be found via the Research Institute's on-line database of inscriptions (<http://gsm.nricp.go.kr>).



King Jangsu's decision to raise this stele must be situated, ultimately, in Gwanggaeto's successful campaign of conquest and territorial expansion. However, conquest on its own does not explain the rhetoric and images presented in the inscription. The steles of conquerors frequently summarize their wars of conquest, assert that these wars were propelled by a just cause, and predict that their newly established order will last forever. The claim of legitimacy that plays such a central role in these narratives is not, of course, immanent in the events themselves, but it is an interpretation of these events and a product of discourse. A "just war" is created in retrospect through the selection and rearrangement of earlier political and military events.<sup>6</sup> Rhetoric is the strategic action that combines both this

vision of justice and the act of narrative. The inscription on the Gwanggaeto stele binds these two elements to establish a regional hegemonic order centered on Goguryeo.

Researchers, for the most part, divide the Gwanggaeto stele inscription into three major sections. The first section is the preface, which begins with a recounting of the myth of King Chumo (or Jumong),<sup>7</sup> the first king of Goguryeo, and then briefly discusses the life of King Gwanggaeto. The second section is the body of the text, and it provides a chronological narrative of the wars of conquest. The third section describes the place of origin of the people charged with caring for the stele, as well as the regulations governing these people.<sup>8</sup> My analysis is concerned with the first two sections.

Just as our ability to remember depends on our ability to forget, so the matters included in the inscription rise upon all the many other issues deliberately left out. When reading this inscription one must make careful consideration of the many issues that are left unmentioned. The reasons certain issues are ignored range from their perceived unimportance to deliberate concealment of uncomfortable facts. Ultimately, to understand what is included, it is vital to make note of what has been forgotten. It is especially informative that the inscription abridges the lineage of Goguryeo kings by briefly mentioning the first three kings and then skipping 350 years of history before recommencing the narrative with King Gwanggaeto. Below I quote the entire preface of the inscription:

Of old, when our First Ancestor King Chumo laid the foundations of the state, [the king] came forth from Northern Buyeo. He was the son of the Celestial Emperor (天帝), and his mother was the daughter of the Earl of the River (河伯). He broke the eggshell and descended to earth. From birth he was endowed with sagely [puissance].<sup>9</sup> [The following five characters are illegible.] He ordered his entourage to set out and tour to the south. His route went by way of Buyeo's Great Eomni River. The king said, "I am King Chumo, son of August Heaven and of the daughter of Earl of the River. Weave together the bulrushes for me and cause the turtles to float to the surface." And no sooner had he spoken than bushes were woven together, and the turtles floated to the surface. Thereupon he crossed the river. Upon the mountain west of Holbon in the Biryu Valley he built up fortifications and established his capital. When the king lost pleasure in his hereditary position, Heaven<sup>10</sup> sent the yellow dragon to come down and meet the king. Thereupon the king stepped onto the dragon's head and ascended to heaven from the hill east of Holbon.

His heir apparent, King Yuryu, received King Chumo's testamentary command and conducted his government in accordance with the Way. Great King Juryu later succeeded to the rule and the throne was handed

[eventually] on to the seventeenth in succession, Gukkangsang Gwanggaetogyeong pyeongan hotae-wang (國岡上廣開土境平安好太王),<sup>11</sup> who ascended to the throne at eighteen and received the title “Great King Yeongnak.” His gracious beneficence blended with that of August Heaven; and with his majestic military virtue he encompassed the four seas. He drove out [the ungoverned rabble], thus bringing tranquility to his rule. His people flourished in a wealthy state, and the five grains ripened abundantly. But Imperial Heaven was pitiless and King Gwanggaeto left this world on his thirty-ninth year. In the twenty-ninth day of the ninth month of the *gabin* year his body was moved to this tumulus, whereupon we erected this stele, with an inscription recording his glorious exploits to make them manifest to later generations. Its words are as follows:<sup>12</sup> [end of preface]

Figure 2: Picture of a huntsman, from the south-wall of the tomb of a Goguryeo official. The tomb is found in present-day Deokheung-ri in North Korea and includes an inscription dated to 408 CE. Image used with permission from the Northeast Asian History Foundation ([www.historyfoundation.or.kr](http://www.historyfoundation.or.kr)).



King Gwanggaeto’s father and grandfather are not mentioned; rather, the first three Goguryeo kings are mentioned, and then the narrative moves directly to Gwanggaeto’s era. This is not because his immediate ancestors were of dubious legitimacy or associated with insalubrious activities. His grandfather, King Gogugwon (r. 331–371), fought long and hard against the Former Yan dynasty (337–370) and various steppe powers for control of Liaodong; later, when he turned his attention to Baekje, he fell in battle. King Gogugwon’s son, King Sosurim (r. 371–384), encouraged Buddhism, established the first Confucian

college, and promulgated a system of administrative law. When King Sosurim died without an heir, his younger brother, King Gogugyang (r. 384–391), ascended to the throne and maintained Goguryeo's power against the Later Yan (384–409) to the north and Baekje to the south.

Figure 3: Picture of the Blue Dragon, one of the Four Directional Animals, from the Gangseo Great Tomb, a seventh-century Goguryeo tomb in North Korea. Image used with permission from the Northeast Asian History Foundation ([www.historyfoundation.or.kr](http://www.historyfoundation.or.kr)).



The reason that the inscription does not include the perfectly respectable immediate ancestors of King Gwanggaeto—both king of warriors and warrior king—was that the sacred origins of the Goguryeo monarchy were far more important. Especially important was the myth of King Chumo, whose story made up more than half of the preface. This myth established that the Goguryeo kings had celestial origins, and that the power of the monarchy derived from their descent from both Heaven and the Water God. The war of conquest unleashed by King Gwanggaeto, and the ruling order established by these wars, were both justified by Heaven's will.

Additionally, the myth of King Chumo is strangely abbreviated, with the main episodes being given sacred significance.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, the original myth is complicated, and it could not have been included easily within the limited space available on a stele inscription.<sup>14</sup> Yet the myth told on the inscription is not merely simplified but actually contains new details. An interesting example may be found in the description of King Chumo's crossing of the river. Other than the inscription, the oldest versions of the Chumo myth (which presumably originated between the second and fourth centuries) are those found in the *Old History of the Three Kingdoms (Gu Samguksa)* and in the "Account of Goguryeo" in the *History of the Wei*. Both describe the story of Chumo's river crossing as follows:

[Jumong grew up in East Buyeo despite persecution]. The princes and aristocrats of East Buyeo were threatened by his incredible skill and wanted to kill him. Jumong discovered this and so fled south with a few followers. While travelling south he encountered a huge river. His enemies were in hot pursuit behind him. Then Jumong gave a great shout: "I am the grandson (or son) of Heaven and the maternal grandchild of the Earl of the River. I have come here fleeing from danger, so please build a bridge." Then he struck the river with an arrow, and the fish and tortoises rose up so that Chumo's party could cross. When the pursuing soldiers arrived, the bridge suddenly disappeared, and those who were already on the bridge fell into the water and drowned.

As can be seen from this story, the original version of Chumo's river crossing is characterized by the tension between the dire straits in which the hero is placed and the arrival of supernatural help in the nick of time. The King Gwanggaeto inscription replaces this tension with the story of a monarch revealing his supernatural ability at leisure while on royal tour. As is suggested by the phrase "He ordered his entourage to set out on tour" (命駕巡幸), in the inscription King Chumo is already in possession of monarchical authority before he arrives in Goguryeo, and so he can demand that his ministers prepare him for a tour of his territory. No enemies in hot pursuit appear in this version. Travelling at ease, when Chumo reaches the river, he reveals his supernatural power by announcing himself to the Celestial Emperor and the Earl of the River and demanding a bridge. The key point of the account in the inscription is to reveal in King Chumo a puissance that brooked no resistance from either humans or the natural world.

This transformation is also visible in the very beginning of the preface. The statement that King Chumo's mother was the daughter of the Earl of the River, and that he is descended

from Heaven, is in no way different from the original myth. However, the statement that he “broke the eggshell and descended to the earth” does not agree with the narrative sequence in the original myth. If we follow the sequence of the inscription, then Chumo’s mother, the daughter of the Earl of the River, married the Celestial Emperor in Heaven and gave birth to an egg, whereupon Chumo himself broke out of the egg and descended to the earth. This contrasts with the version found in the *Old History of the Three Kingdoms*, which I summarize as follows:

The kingdom of Buyeo was moved, at the demands of the Emperor of Heaven, to the East, and became East Buyeo. The previous territory of North Buyeo was ruled by Haemosu, the son of the Emperor of Heaven. In the morning he ruled his kingdom, and in the evening he returned to Heaven.

Three daughters of the Earl of the River (the Water God) would come to the side of the river and play, and they caught the eye of Haemosu. The three girls hid in the water. Haemosu, with a lash of his whip, made a copper castle and set a table with wine. The three sisters came in and drank themselves drunk, whereupon Haemosu appeared and blocked their path. The three girls ran away, but Haemosu was able to catch the youngest one, Yuhwa. When the Earl of the River expressed great anger and spoke against Haemosu, Haemosu and Yuhwa together went into the river to seek out the Earl’s castle.

Within the castle, Haemosu successfully defeated the Earl of the River in six supernatural competitions. The Earl of the River accepted Haemosu as his son-in-law but worried that he might abandon his daughter. Thus, at the wedding feast, the Earl of the River gave Haemosu intoxicating wine. Then, when Haemosu was in a deep state of drunkenness, the Earl of the River placed his daughter together with Haemosu in a leather bag set in a dragon chariot rising up to Heaven. However, before the dragon chariot could leave the water, Haemosu woke up, broke out of the leather bag, and flew up to Heaven on his own. Angry and disappointed, the Earl of the River exiled Yuhwa to the terrestrial world. King Geumwa of East Buyeo discovered Yuhwa, took her home and confined her in a closet in the castle. Sunlight was nevertheless able to reach her, and she became pregnant, finally giving birth to an egg. King Geumwa considered this strange and abandoned the egg in the stable, but the birds and animals protected it. The king gave the egg to the mother to care for, and then she broke the egg and a baby boy was born. The boy was called Jumong.

The Gwanggaeto inscription leaves out all the information about the conflict between Haemosu and the Earl of the River, and about the expulsion of Yuhwa. Nor does it make any

mention of the threats received by Chumo when he was in King Geumwa's castle, or of Chumo's later hardship. The King Chumo in the inscription was born in Heaven to gods, descended to North Buyeo, and became the ancestor of a sacred monarchy.

The remainder of the inscription describes King Gwanggaeto as the most glorious heir of sacred monarchy. During his reign, "the kingdom was strong, the people populous and five grains were plentiful and ripe" (國富民殷, 五穀豐熟). These few brief words reveal the pride and satisfaction of the Goguryeo royal house. The source of this prosperity is described concretely in the body of the inscription.

Before investigating the body, it is necessary to consider the particular narrative form used. Interestingly, this section takes the form of an "annals" as used by dynastic historians, beginning with Sima Qian (ca. 145 BCE–86 BCE). Additionally, the inscription uses the "era name" system first developed by Han Wudi (r. 141 BCE–87 BCE). For instance, at the beginning of the body of the inscription, we are told that "in Yeongnak 5, *eulmi*, the Biryeo did not [next two characters illegible], so the king led the army himself to attack them." Many scholars have pointed out that such a narrative form reveals that the Goguryeo monarchs believed themselves to be the equals of the Chinese emperors (Bak [1964] 2007; Noh Taedon 1999; Yang Gi-seok 1983, 178). Yet that, on its own, does not exhaust the importance of the annalistic form. Consider, for instance, the following summary of the sequence of events described in the body of the inscription:

Yeongnak 5. The King led the soldiers himself to punish the Biryeo (Khitan), and he then looked about the nearby region.

Yeongnak 6. The King set out himself to punish Baekje, and Baekje submitted to the king.

Yeongnak 8: He sent out his military to conquer the Sushen and the Tugu.

Yeongnak 9: He supported Silla against the threats of Baekje and the Wa.

Yeongnak 10: He sent 50,000 armored soldiers and cavalry with which he defeated the Wa army and saved Silla.

Yeongnak 14: He destroyed completely the Wa who had invaded Daebang.

Yeongnak 17: He sent out 50,000 armored soldiers and cavalry and destroyed the enemy.<sup>15</sup>

Yeongnak 20: East Buyeo refused to pay tribute, so the king set out himself and punished them.

This hybrid narrative combines myth and history and merges the sacred narratives of the people with the then-recent campaign of conquest. The inscription breaks up the narrative of Gwanggaeto's military success into a series of discrete entries in chronological order.

Through this structure, it brings together events that were removed from each other in time and space into a series of events listed sequentially in the unadorned narrative of traditional dynastic annals. The disparate events seem to be cold, hard, and unimpeachable historical facts. Yet, by splitting up the events and arranging them chronologically, Gwanggaeto's authority as a conqueror is united semantically with the sacred nature of his ancestor King Chumo.

The eight entries concerning war in the main body of the inscription describe the conflicts as events in which Gwanggaeto was both the undoubted victor and the protector of a divinely ordained order. The text is characterized not by flowery phrasing but by a plain historical narrative shaped through the subtle use of hierarchical language. For instance, consider the references to Baekje and the Wa (倭; "Japanese"). Terms referring to Baekje and the Wa each appear eight times in those parts of the inscription that can be deciphered. Baekje is referred to four times as Baekchan (百殘), and four times as just "chan." References to the Wa include two references to the Wa raiders (Waegu 倭寇), and one reference to the Wa brigands (Waejeok 倭賊), both cases implying extreme contempt for the Wa. It is hardly surprising that an exterior force such as the Wa brigands would be referred to as mere criminals and plunderers. The reference to Baekje with the character *chan* (殘; Chinese *can*; "crippler") needs greater explanation. The ruling classes of both Goguryeo and Baekje claimed descent from the Buyeo Kingdom of northern Manchuria, and so had long had a sense of shared kinship. However, beginning in the fourth century, they had increasingly come into conflict with each other, leaving scars that could not easily be eliminated. Baekje had become Goguryeo's enemy to the south by the time King Gwanggaeto's grandfather, King Kogugwon, died in battle against Baekje in 371. Reference to Baekje as *chan* or "crippers" rhetorically transforms this military conflict into a moral one. As Lee Do-hack (2006, 221–223) has pointed out, this use of the character may be traced to the Warring States Confucian philosopher Mencius (fl. late fourth century BCE): "He who mutilates benevolence is a mutilator, who cripples rightness is a crippler" (賊仁者謂之賊, 賊義者謂之殘) (trans. Lau 2003, 23).

The inscription, by describing Baekje as a "crippler of rightness," makes Goguryeo a representative of rightness. Following the same pattern, the term used for the Wa brigands—Waejeok—includes the same character *jeok* (賊) present in the above passage from Mencius,

where it is translated by Lau as “mutilator.” Thus Baekje is structured as a violator of rightness, and the Wa are structured as violators of benevolence, with both becoming collective forces of immorality. Mencius, in the same passage quoted above, claims that a monarch who damages benevolence and rightness will lose legitimacy and even become deserving of removal. The logic of this inscription suggests that Goguryeo’s attack on the “cripplers” and “mutilators” was a matter of moral necessity for a defender of benevolence and rightness.<sup>16</sup>

The inscription uses the terms “king” (*wang*) and “great king” (*taewang*) exclusively for the Goguryeo monarch. By contrast, it refers to the Silla ruler with the term *maegeum* (寐錦) (presumably a phonetic representation of the native Silla term),<sup>17</sup> and the Baekje monarch merely as “ruler” (*ju* 主), or even as “ruler of the cripplers” (*chanju* 殘主). Otherwise, the conquered people of Manchuria were referred to simply by their tribal names or place names. The Goguryeo army, moreover, was distinguished from enemy armies with terms such as “official army” (*gwan-gun* 官軍) or “King’s Standard” (*wangdang* 王幢). The term “official army” is generally used in contrast to rebel armies or armies raised by private subjects without court approval, and is thus a term understood within the context of a single state. The “King’s Standard,” a term for a king’s army, has a similar meaning. Thus, even in its description of Goguryeo’s military interaction with surrounding peoples, the inscription uses language that implies that the surrounding peoples were already part of a broader political order structured around the Goguryeo monarch.

As many historians have already mentioned, the inscription makes no mention of Goguryeo’s interaction with the Later Yan (384–409) and Northern Wei (386–534). The king of the Later Yan, Murong Sheng, was offered tribute and submission from Goguryeo in 399 (Gwanggaeto 9), but, angered at what he saw as the arrogance and improper etiquette of the Goguryeo envoys, he led an army of thirty thousand men against Goguryeo. The inscription makes no mention of this event beyond stating, in the entry for Yeongnak 5, that King Gwanggaeto had punished a group of Khitan and then toured regions in the vicinity (Yeo 2005, 26–48).

The Northern Wei, established by the Tuoba clan of the Xianbei, grew to strength during the so-called “Five Barbarians and Sixteen Kingdoms” period and established a powerful monarchy, such that by the early fifth century it had conquered a territory extending from Huabei to Inner Mongolia (Lewis 2009, 54–85). Goguryeo could not but see the

Northern Wei as a considerable threat, yet the Northern Wei could also not easily conquer Goguryeo. The territories of both kingdoms were seriously exposed to each other's attacks, so both avoided open conflict with each other. This state of affairs continued under King Jangsu as well.

Although the inscription loudly proclaims of King Gwanggaeto that “his majestic military virtue encompassed the four seas” (武威振被四海), it shows considerable consciousness of this difficult geopolitical situation. Goguryeo had chosen to set its boundary roughly at the Liao River and thus to establish a generally peaceful coexistence with the Northern Wei. The inscription, in turn, left the region west of the Liao River outside of the sacred realm of the Goguryeo monarchy. Terms such as *cheonha* (Chinese: *tianxia* 天下; literally “all under heaven”) and *sahae* (Chinese: *sihai* 四海; literally “the four seas”), both of which can be translated as “the (whole) world,” are used with great frequency in Literary Sinitic texts, yet in many ways these are floating signifiers that change their precise geographic significance according to the era and political circumstances during which they are used. The inscription's rhetoric makes full use of their floating nature, using them to reconcile its claim that the king was of divine ancestry and ruled the entire world with the more practical concerns of the actual possible area in which conquest was conceivable.<sup>18</sup> Thus the term *sahae*, while suggesting the whole world, actually refers, in this inscription, to the area of Goguryeo hegemony in Manchuria and the Korean peninsula.

The inscription declares that King Gwanggaeto's “gracious beneficence blended with that of August Heaven,” asserting in flowery language that King Gwanggaeto's military activity was not a series of oppressive attacks on neighboring tribes but the establishment of a just order. This ideology of a just order was not merely a matter of decorative language. The descriptions of the wars within the inscription make it clear that Goguryeo regularly demanded that surrounding peoples submit to the Goguryeo monarchy and serve as loyal subjects of the Goguryeo king to whom they were to provide both tribute and military assistance. The only people outside of the Goguryeo order mentioned in the inscription are the Wa, of whom the inscription says: “the Wa raiders were utterly defeated, with countless numbers of them slaughtered” (倭寇潰敗, 斬煞無數). Goguryeo maintained this hierarchy primarily through military force. At the same time, like other successful conquerors, the Goguryeo monarchy of the early fifth century recognized that, in addition to military force, it needed to maintain an identity and narrative of legitimacy sufficient to support its pretensions

to dominance.<sup>19</sup> Such a narrative also provided the discursive structure necessary to enable the submission of newly conquered subjects.<sup>20</sup>

It is useful to consider here Park Kyung-cheol's insight that the territorial expansion of Goguryeo was simultaneously a process of bringing more territories under its control and of heightening the hierarchical differentiation between center and periphery within the territory under its control (2003; 2005). Goguryeo originated in the middle-Yalu region, from which it expanded following a successive period of conquest over surrounding peoples. By the end of King Gwanggaeto's reign, Goguryeo's boundaries had expanded to the Liao River to the northwest, the Songhua River to the north, the Tumen River Valley to the northeast, and the Daedong River region to the south.<sup>21</sup> This expansion inevitably increased the level of contact with surrounding peoples. Of course, groups with diverse social and political characteristics were brought under Goguryeo control, and as the royal territory grew, so did the population of Goguryeo's subjects and even the reach of Goguryeo's ruling center. Thus, the growth of Goguryeo to include outer territories meant that the social differentiation of Goguryeo society advanced both in breadth and depth (Park Kyung-cheol 2003; 2005).<sup>22</sup>

The Gwanggaeto inscription is an attempt to justify the international tensions and the domestic social differentiation caused by military conquest. The inscription pursues this end by establishing the sacred origins of the Goguryeo monarchy, and the glory of Gwanggaeto's campaign of conquest, in a form that could reach across the ages. The deliberately plain language used in this inscription is structured to establish hierarchical power relations, and thus is a rhetorical manifestation of monarchical rule.

### **King Jinheung's Monument Stones**

Goguryeo's hegemony was not fundamentally challenged during the remainder of King Jangsu's long fifth-century reign. However, by the second half of the fifth century there were already signs that Goguryeo's dominance was eroding. This is visible in the Goguryeo stele at Jungwon (中原高句麗碑), which records the agreement, between Goguryeo nobles and generals on the one hand and the Silla monarch and officials on the other, concerning a problem that had developed between the two states around 450 (figure 4).<sup>23</sup> The stele inscription, which was written from the Goguryeo perspective, continues to use a rhetoric of hegemony and hierarchy similar to that used in the Gwanggaeto inscription. Interestingly, however, it describes the relationship between Goguryeo and Silla as that of "older brother–

younger brother,” which is considerably weaker than the expressions found in the Gwanggaeto inscription. Goguryeo’s rhetoric seemingly needed to be adapted to changing realities.

Figure 4: The Jungwon Goguryeo Stele, in Chungju, Chungcheong Province, South Korea, view from the front. Use of this image is by the kind permission of South Korea’s National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (<http://www.nrich.go.kr/eng/>).



Soon an alliance between Baekje and Silla against Goguryeo was pursued with a vigor that rendered such minor rhetorical manipulation insufficient. The beginning of this alliance was heralded when Silla’s King Nulji (r. 417–458) decided in 455 to send troops to assist Baekje in an attack on Goguryeo. In 475 Silla responded positively to Baekje’s request for troops during a Goguryeo assault on Baekje’s capital, but the Silla army arrived too late to prevent either the fall of Baekje’s capital, Hanseong, or the capture and execution of Baekje’s

King Gaero (r. 455–475). Baekje's King Dongseong (r. 479–501) took the daughter of a Silla aristocrat as his queen, linking the two kingdoms through ties of blood. In 494, the year after the marriage, Baekje sent military support to Silla in a conflict with Goguryeo, while the year after that the Silla army relieved Baekje's Chiyang Fortress when it was besieged by Goguryeo forces.

Fifth-century military cooperation between Baekje and Silla was largely defensive. During the sixth century, however, the two countries began to cooperate on large military offensives against Goguryeo, thus challenging Goguryeo's hegemony from the south. In 551 a combined Silla and Baekje assault overthrew Goguryeo fortresses in the Han River basin; the result of this campaign was that Baekje received the lower Han and Silla the upper Han. But Baekje's joy at recovering the capital, which it had lost seventy-six years previously, was short lived. Two years later, in 553, Silla launched a surprise attack on the lower Han region, seizing that strategic location and vital center of agriculture and trade. Enraged by this betrayal, Baekje's King Seong (r. 523–554) launched an attack on Silla in 554, only to fall at the battle of Gwansan Fortress.

Silla's King Jinheung (r. 540–576) followed up his assault on the Han River basin by eliminating Baekje's influence on the Gaya confederacy on Silla's southwestern border. A period of sharp military pressure on the confederacy culminated, in 562, with Silla's complete absorption of Gaya. With both Gaya and the Han River basin under its control, Silla launched an offensive against Goguryeo, which, sometime before 568, gave Silla control over the Hamheung Plain. Because King Jinheung gained control of more land than any other Silla king before the mid-seventh century, he is often referred to as Silla's King Gwanggaeto. Most significant for this paper is the fact that he raised four monument stones—including one on Bukhan Mountain (555?), one in Changnyeong, one on the Maun Pass (568), and one on the Hwangcho Pass (568)—on which he recorded his tours of newly conquered territories. The inscriptions on these monumental stones are badly damaged, making analysis difficult. Nevertheless, with some difficulty one can make out the peculiarities of the language, the method by which the text establishes the recipient of its discourse, and the process by which it forms both royal power and the objects of royal power.

Surprisingly, King Jinheung makes very little use of the language of conquest in any of his four monument stones. This is unexpected from someone whose campaign of conquest can be compared to that of King Gwanggaeto. Indeed, except for a brief reference in the

Bukhan Mountain stone (figure 5), he makes very little reference to military activity at all. Just as was the case with Gwanggaeto, King Jinheung refers to himself in the inscription as “King of Kings” (Taewang 太王) and boasts the imperial privilege of his own era name. However, at no point does he describe himself as an armored warrior or even as a king of warriors. Rather, he styles himself as a virtuous monarch, wearing delicate robes and travelling at a slow pace as he seeks to alleviate the suffering of the people.

Figure 5: The Bukhan Mountain Memorial Stone, currently found in the National Museum of Korea. Use of this image is by the kind permission of South Korea’s National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (<http://www.nrich.go.kr/eng/>).



Nevertheless, King Jinheung does not assert in these monument stones that he is himself the supreme manifestation of morality, or that he has a monopoly on all virtue. Indeed, he frequently downplays his own role. For instance, in the Changnyeong monument stone, he describes how he came to the throne at a young age and passed all government responsibilities to his ministers, while in the Bukhan Mountain monument stone he describes

how he was “touring [new territory] so as to estimate popular morale and reduce popular hardship.” Among the still legible texts, the best passage for understanding the construction of meaning in the monument stones is the following, from the Maun Pass monument stone:

If the benevolent wind does not blow, the way of the world perverts truth. And if moral enlightenment is not set forth, evils will vie with one another. Therefore, it is an absolute duty of emperors and kings to cultivate themselves to the utmost and so bring peace to the common people. I, however, confronting destiny, inherited the foundation of our progenitor and succeeded to the throne. Laboring with great caution, I am fearful of going against the Way of Heaven. As I basked in Heaven’s favor, good fortunes were manifested, the spirits of Heaven and Earth responded, and every enterprise tallied with the norm. Hence, the four quarters entrusted their borders to us, and we gained extensively in territory and population. Neighboring countries pledged their trust, and envoys of peace were exchanged. As I engaged in my own investigation of the people, both old subjects and new, I discovered that there were those who were still beyond the reach of monarchical edification.

Thereupon, in the eighth month, autumn, of this year, *muja* [568], I have inspected the territory under my jurisdiction, inquired into popular feelings, and alleviated the hardship of my subjects. I intend to encourage by rewards the loyal and the trustworthy, the sincere and the talented, those who apprehend danger and those who fight with valor and serve with loyalty. They shall be rewarded with rank and title and honored for their loyal services.<sup>24</sup>

The above inscription describes Silla’s eighteen-year campaign of military conquest as “the four quarters entrusted their borders to us, and we gained extensively in territory and population” (四方託境, 廣獲民土), which is to say that it treats the campaign of conquest as if it were a series of voluntary submissions to Silla rule. This flourish of propaganda contains a kernel of truth. King Jinheung’s father, King Beopheung, had pacified the Geumgwan Gaya royalty of the Gaya confederacy by endowing them with high rank and allowing them to join the Silla aristocracy. Gim Mu-ryeok, the general who, in 553, took the Lower Han basin from Baekje, is a representative example of a member of the Gaya elite who became part of the Silla ruling stratum. In the Battle of Gwansan Fortress (554), Gim Mu-ryeok led the army that destroyed twenty-six thousand Baekje soldiers and killed even King Seong himself. Through this act of valor Gim Mu-ryeok gained entry into the Silla aristocracy.<sup>25</sup> The claim that Silla’s new territories and subjects had submitted voluntarily could thus be seen as a

rhetorical encouragement to Silla's new subjects to provide collegial cooperation and loyalty to their new state.

King Jinheung's monument stones emphasize not his skill as a conqueror but his virtuous kingly conduct, as well as his fear that he would be unable to achieve his high ideals. The ideal to be reached is placed very high, with the king not yet achieving that standard. The king does not monopolize benevolence and rightness (仁義), but merely works hard to achieve morality and correct governance.<sup>26</sup> The subtlety of this rhetoric may be seen in the passage that discusses the goodwill of nearby countries and the arrival of envoys. In this passage, King Jinheung hints that Silla was no longer a dangerous force in the process of expansion, and that neighboring countries knew this and were thus on good terms. As a result, the world was at peace and the rule of the monarch was secure. Thus, for Silla's new subjects, there was no choice but to accommodate themselves to the Silla order.

Moreover, in the monument stone, King Jinheung claims that he works tirelessly not only to provide security but also to make improvements to the lives of the people. He describes himself as laboring to care for both old and new subjects, to the extent that, fearing he had missed some of their needs, he travelled out to the frontiers. He is trying to show, in other words, that the purpose of his tours was not to reveal his monarchical glory, but to look after his subjects in an impoverished region. Indeed, he promises to provide bureaucratic positions and material support to all who were loyal and supportive of the monarchy. The rhetoric of the inscription does not emphasize the authority of the monarch and the submission of the new subjects, but it highlights the recompense that their talent and loyalty would receive from their loving ruler.

It is not helpful, I believe, to argue whether these statements are empty words or genuine manifestations of the ideals of Confucian kingly rule or the Buddhist wheel-turning king. Rhetoric and ideas may be configured in diverse ways within speech acts. The kings of ancient and medieval times differ only in degree from modern politicians in the manner in which they were attentive to the image that they presented to their subjects. They were by no means insensitive to the relationship between their monarchical image and their political actions. Moreover, Silla had become a centralized state much later than either Baekje or Goguryeo, and thus the people newly subject to King Jinheung's rule would have had an extensive collective memory of suffering plunder, conquest, and oppression. The king needed a political program suitable to these particular circumstances, and a rhetorical program that

either supported this program or strategically went beyond it. He achieved this by using the language of a sage ruler humble before perfect virtue or Buddhist dharma.<sup>27</sup>

### **The King Munmu Stele**

On the tenth day of the seventh month of 681 a huge fire burned in the Silla capital of Seorabeol. This was the funeral fire on which King Munmu, the greatest of Silla's heroes, supreme in both military and political matters, was cremated in the Buddhist manner. On the seventh month of the next year, his son, King Sinmun (r. 681–692), raised the King Munmu funerary stele.<sup>28</sup>

Building on the military achievements of King Muyeol, who destroyed Baekje, King Munmu destroyed Goguryeo in 668. In 676, after a bitter struggle, he successfully drove the Tang—Silla's erstwhile ally—out of the peninsula. It must have seemed obvious to his subjects that a funeral stele should be raised in his honor. However, the situation was not so simple, nor could people pay attention to only the domestic situations. During the last five years of King Munmu's reign, Silla had been thoroughly occupied with careful observation of Tang's strategic goals and attitudes concerning the Korean peninsula. Furthermore, the Japanese were concerned about the possibility of a joint Silla-Tang invasion, while Silla could not be certain of Japan's motives.<sup>29</sup> The *Old History of the Tang* reveals that Tang had not lost its interest in invading Silla, even in 678:

When Silla rebelled in the outer realms, Gaozong resolved to send an army to punish them. At that time Zheng Wenguan was at home sick, but he rushed out to address the emperor. "Tufan has attacked our frontiers and has stationed troops on our borders. By contrast, while Silla is disloyal, it has not invaded our territory. I worry that the people will not be able to bear the burden of one war on the east and another on the west. Please desist from this war, cultivate your virtue, and stabilize the lives of the common people." Gaozong did as suggested.<sup>30</sup>

The lull enjoyed by Silla during the last five years of King Munmu's reign came thanks to unrest in Inner Asia, especially in Tibet and among the Eastern Turks, which forced the Tang court to move its attention away from Silla (Beckwith 1987, 37–54; Grousset 1970, 103–110; Seo Young-kyo 2006; Twitchett 2000, 126–128). It was an uncertain lull that could end as soon as Tang's western frontiers became secure once more. This uncertainty continued through the early part of King Sinmun's reign.

The Silla monarchy itself was experiencing considerable domestic insecurity. Silla maintained domestic unity until it defeated Goguryeo in 668, but it was not able to maintain this unity during its wars against the Tang. As Noh Tae-don has argued, the long period of exchange between Silla and the Tang resulted in Silla aristocrats gaining a range of friends and connections in the Tang.<sup>31</sup> To many, the war against the Tang would have seemed excessively dangerous. It is also likely that, after such a long period of war, a number of aristocrats would have been attracted by the idea of reaching a reasonable compromise with the Tang. Indeed, a number of aristocrats opposed the war with the Tang and took a deliberately passive role, even in the midst of the conflict. There was also more active opposition. In 670 the leader of the army in Hanseong Prefecture communicated secretly with the Tang, while in 673 an official of sixth-office rank was killed by Silla forces on account of his attempts to lead a pro-Tang revolt (Noh Tae-don 1999, 258–261). During the five-year lull after the departure of Tang troops, there would have been considerable opportunity for political strife among Silla's aristocracy.

Despite this, there were no cases of open rebellion during the last five years of King Munmu's reign. King Munmu was a hero and skilled military leader who used his military successes to strengthen his political position. King Sinmun, his heir, may be presumed to have inherited much of his father's political authority. However, authority obtained through the actions and successes of the father would not be inherited automatically by the son. Moreover, in the case of King Sinmun, he inherited the uncertainty and disunion of his father's reign as well.

Perhaps because he was aware of this situation, King Munmu, before his death, left instructions to the crown prince to "take the throne before you have even finished my funeral" and also made the unprecedented request for cremation.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, only one month after the funeral, on the eighth day of the eighth month of 681, King Sinmun discovered a serious revolt being planned by a number of prominent aristocrats and led, shockingly, by his own father-in-law, Gim Heum-dol. King Sinmun, in the edict preserved in the *History of the Three Kingdoms* ("Silla Basic Annals," entry for the first year of King Sinmun), revealed that he had hunted down and punished "every last twig and leaf" of the rebels. He also punished people for failing to report on the planned uprising, and he forced the chief official in the military administration to commit suicide along with his son. The final case would seem to be an excessive punishment, but in general this deliberate brutality provided a strong warning to

nobles and high officials against future disloyalty. The King Munmu inscription was written in this uncertain political context. For this reason, it heavily emphasizes the legitimacy of the line extending from King Muyeol through King Munmu to King Sinmun, and uses considerable caution in describing the Silla-Tang relationship.

Significantly, this stele inscription, like the King Muyeol stele erected in 662, records the names of both author and calligrapher. Both the composition and calligraphy of the inscription on the King Muyeol stele are the work of King Munmu's younger brother, Gim In-mun, while the author of the King Munmu inscription is recorded as having the surname Gim (his given name is illegible),<sup>33</sup> and the calligrapher is recorded as being one Han Nullyu. Instead of anonymous officials writing and engraving the inscription and thus giving royal authority to the position of author, the texts were now being produced at royal command by a hierarchically ordered authorial collective.

Closely associated with this is the fact that the King Munmu inscription is written in "parallel prose" and otherwise reveals the high cultural level of the author. *Parallel prose* refers to essays made up of short, parallel, four- or five-character phrases artfully joining structure and meaning and linked together through refined similes. This style of writing was especially popular during the period of the North-South Dynasties and did not lose its importance until the mid-Tang. The author of the King Munmu inscription uses extravagant language to praise the actions of the Silla court and both King Muyeol and King Munmu. At the same time, the language itself suggests that Silla had become accustomed to Tang cultural models and had accepted Tang cultural hegemony. Whether this was King Sinmun's intention is unclear, but the highly cultivated language of the inscription suggests political rhetoric that both accommodated and was in rivalry with the Tang.

According to Lee Young-ho (1986), each line in the King Munmu inscription is fifty-two characters long, with twenty-eight lines on the front of the stele and twenty-two lines on the back. Based on these calculations, he concludes that, making due allowances for empty spaces on the original inscription, the inscription would have included about 2,540 characters. Of these, only 746 characters are still legible. In the vital section between lines 13 and 43, very few characters remain, making it hard to understand the content. However, the general substance of the inscription seems to be as follows:

Line 1: Title, name, and rank of author.  
 Lines 2–5: Eulogy for Silla, description of its natural environment, the origin of the Gim clan.  
 Lines 6–10: Eulogy of kings preceding King Muyeol (his fifteenth ancestor King Seonghan, followed by the monarchs between King Jinheung and King Jindeok).  
 Lines 11–21: The glory of King Muyeol, his diplomatic relationship with the Tang, his victorious war against Baekje.  
 Lines 22–31: The glory of King Munmu, his victorious war against Goguryeo, his unification of the territory, his death.  
 Lines 32–35: King Munmu’s specifications concerning his funeral and lamentations.  
 Lines 36–43: Eulogy of the virtue and wisdom of King Munmu.  
 Lines 44–49: Verse eulogy of King Munmu.  
 Line 50: The date of the raising of the stele, the name and bureaucratic title of the calligrapher.

As the above outline reveals, the description of the royal genealogy before King Munmu briefly mentions his fifteenth ancestor, King Seonghan,<sup>34</sup> and then jumps straight to the mid-sixth century to discuss the five monarchs from King Jinheung to Queen Jindeok. King Jinheung’s importance was presumably due to the fact that he expanded Silla’s territory to its largest extent before the mid-seventh century. Yet the inscription describes him as a bringer of peace, saying that he “brought an end to the signal fires in the fortifications, blocked the meddlers on the frontiers, and brought calm to over 10,000 li” (停烽罷候, 萬里澄氣). His successor, King Jinji, was driven from power after ruling for only four years, and yet because King Jinji was the grandfather of Gim Chunchu (who later ascended to the throne as King Muyeol), the inscription praises King Jinji in much the same way as the great conqueror King Jinpyeong. Following King Jinheung, all kings had been of hallowed-bone ancestry, which is to say that both their maternal and paternal lines had been equally royal. However, King Jinpyeong had no son, so after the reigns of his two daughters, Queen Seondeok and Queen Jindeok, the era of hallowed-bone monarchs came to an end. All later Silla monarchs, beginning with King Muyeol, were of true-bone lineage, which is to say that though they were of royal blood, they did not possess the purity of the earlier monarchs. The King Munmu inscription places such emphasis on the otherwise insignificant King Jinji because, as King Muyeol’s grandfather, King Jinji was the closest hallowed-bone ancestor of King Muyeol. Moreover, King Muyeol, as Gim Chunchu, had received the mentorship of, and provided political support to, both Queen Seondeok and Queen Jindeok. Notably, the inscription, by describing in detail the lives of five monarchs, emphasizes the legitimate

descent of King Muyeol; by introducing his descent with King Jinheung, it brings King Jinheung's wars of conquest and image as peacemaker into the narrative of events.

Another interesting aspect of the inscription is that its description of King Muyeol is slightly longer than ten lines. A stele had been raised for King Muyeol shortly before, in 662, making this narrative seem superfluous (figure 6). However, if one reads as far as the tenth line of the account of King Munmu, one can tell that the descriptions of King Muyeol and King Munmu form a single narrative from 640 to 668, which was the period of Silla's ultimately victorious war against first Baekje and then Goguryeo. The narrative of the inscription seemingly reflects King Sinmun's attempt to combine both of his ancestors' military achievements into one unified narrative in order to establish that his lineage had not only hallowed ancestry but also a brilliant history of conquest. Because this inscription was written at a point of tense uncertainty between the Tang and Silla, the narrative of King Muyeol was especially important. The primary audience expected for this testament consisted of Silla aristocrats and the Tang court.

Figure 6: The decorative capstone and tortoise base of the King Muyeol Stele. Image used with permission from South Korea's National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (<http://www.nrich.go.kr/eng/>).



The title of the inscription, the “Stele of the Tomb of King Munmu” (Munmu wangneung ji bi 文武王陵之碑), is also highly significant. It contrasts notably with the title of the King Muyeol stele, which is recorded in the decorative head of the stele preserved in the National Museum in Gyeongju as the “Stele of Great King Muyeol, the Great Ancestor”

(Taejong Muyeol daewang ji bi 太宗武列大王之碑). In other words, right up to the period after the destruction of Baekje, Silla monarchs were considered “Great Kings” (Daewang 大王).<sup>35</sup> By contrast, the King Munmu inscription not only does not use the title “king of kings,” according to Lee Young-ho, but the beginning of the inscription before the characters for “King Munmu” has the fifteen-character title and bureaucratic position that he received from the Tang.<sup>36</sup> This is the most obvious evidence that Silla had accommodated itself to the world order centered on the Tang emperor.

In the inscription’s discussion of the achievements of King Muyeol, the Tang emperor is respectfully referred to as “Taizong Wenwu, the sacred emperor of the Great Tang” (line 12), and in the next line we are told of Taizong’s death. The space in between likely included the discussion between Gim Chunchu and Taizong concerning a possible united attack on Baekje and Goguryeo. In the eighteenth line there is a mention of the title “Field-Adjutant and Commander-in-Chief for the Ungjin Circuit” (熊津道行軍大總管). As this was the title of the Tang commander, Su Dingfang, who was placed in charge of the campaign in Baekje, the next three lines likely discussed the Silla-Tang joint maneuvers against Baekje. While it is hard, on account of the shortage of legible characters, to identify exactly what is said about the history of King Munmu, it seems likely that it would have included a similar description of Tang-Silla cooperation in the war against Goguryeo.

However, there is absolutely no reference to the war between Silla and Tang that erupted after the fall of Goguryeo in 676. There might, of course, have been some reference in those sections that are now completely damaged. The description of the war with Goguryeo extends from line 26 to lines 28 and 29, and on line 30 there is a brief reference to “punishing the east and chastising the west”; this would seem to be a summary of King Munmu’s military exploits. From this it is clear that, even if the battle with the Tang was described, it would have been described very briefly indeed on line 29. Why does the inscription take more than a line to describe the meeting with Tang Taizong, but pass over an eight-year conflict so quickly? In this unequal framing one may see the rhetorical and political framing of Silla-Tang relations.

After Tang Gaozong (高宗; r. 649–683) destroyed Baekje, he tried to rule Baekje’s territory through the Ungjin Commandery,<sup>37</sup> and after 668 he placed Goguryeo’s old land under the Protectorate General to Pacify the East, which he established in Pyongyang. Furthermore, in 663, the Tang had established, in principle, that the Silla monarch should be

treated as the governor-general of the Great Commandery of Gyerim, thus placing not only Baekje and Goguryeo, but also Silla itself, under direct Tang administration. Silla endured this subordinate status until Goguryeo was defeated. Then, in 670, Silla allied with former subjects of Baekje and Goguryeo to attack the Tang. Silla justified this rejection of Tang rule through reference to the original agreement with Tang Taizong. In 671, Xue Rengui, then in charge of the Protectorate General to Pacify the East in Pyeongyang, sent a letter to Silla criticizing it for its resistance to the Tang. King Munmu, in his response, placed considerable emphasis on the agreements made previously with Tang Taizong.

In *zhen'guan* 22 (648) my royal ancestor [King Muyeol, then Gim Chunchu] paid court to Taizong, visiting him in person and receiving the good grace of his edict. The emperor spoke as follows: "I am preparing to attack Goguryeo for no other reason but that Goguryeo, standing between Silla and our realms, is constantly attacking and insulting you, such that you do not have a moment's peace. I do not desire to possess new mountains, new rivers, or new territory. I have no shortage of wealth and people. Having pacified the two countries I will give all of Baekje's territory to the south of Pyeongyang to you so that you may keep it throughout the later ages." (*History of the Three Kingdoms*, "Silla Annals," entry for King Munmu 11)

Of course, Tang Taizong was engaged in royal dissimulation when he claimed that he was attacking Goguryeo to aid Silla. He himself led the army against Goguryeo in 645 only to be defeated and forced to retreat. In 647 and 648 he again sent armies against Goguryeo but was unable to achieve his ends. He welcomed Gim Chunchu precisely because Gim Chunchu's proposed Silla-Tang alliance had the potential to allow Tang to recover from the repeated defeats that it had suffered.<sup>38</sup>

It is thus easy to understand why King Munmu's inscription would treat Tang Taizong's statement as especially meaningful and would make specific reference to Tang Taizong's death. The inscription uses Tang Taizong's own rhetoric against the Tang empire. That is to say, the inscription both praises Taizong for having the magnanimity and grace to make a promise to Silla, and uses this promise to justify Silla's refusal to accept a Tang military and administrative presence on the Korean peninsula.

Figure 7: The King Munmu Stele, currently found in the Gyeongju National Museum. Image used with permission of South Korea's National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage (<http://www.nrich.go.kr/eng/>).



Silla did not abandon this program, even though King Munmu's original claim was simply ignored by the Tang. Notably, by justifying its military activity based on Tang Taizong's original promise, Silla made clear that it had no designs north of Pyeongyang and the Daedong River. Silla was stating that, if Tang accepted Silla's territorial claim, Silla would otherwise respect the "Tang world order," but if Tang refused Silla's demands, Silla would be forced to pursue a war with consequences uncertain to all, including the Tang.

In his letter to Xue, King Munmu made reference to the importance of Silla's support for the Tang, asserting especially that without Silla's logistical support the Tang would have been incapable of exerting military force over such long distances. In particular, he made mention of Liu Renyuan, who, as commander of the Ungjin Protectorate-General, depended heavily on relief provided by Silla during frequent sieges by the remnants of the Baekje military. In King Munmu's own words: "The 10,000 Tang soldiers were clothed and fed for four years by Silla; although the skin and bones of Liu Renyuan's soldiers may have been born in China, their flesh and blood were all fed by Silla." Military historians ascribe the failure of the invasions of Goguryeo under Sui Yangdi (r. 604–618) and Tang Taizong to the long and harsh Manchurian winter and the overextension of their supply lines (Graff 2002, 155–56). It is not clear if King Munmu's letter was referring to problems of this sort, but clearly the Tang court could not ignore the risks it faced in pursuing military dominance

without Silla support. By emphasizing Taizong's grand promise, the inscription attempts to imply a series of related concerns, and in essence, the rhetoric of the inscription advocates peace according to the status quo of the time.

It is important in this context to make particular reference to the presence at the beginning of the inscription of the title granted to the Silla monarch by the Tang. The title presented in the inscription is "Great Tang King of Lelang Commandery, Commander Unequaled in Honor and Grand Pillar of State" (大唐樂浪郡王開府儀同三司上柱國). In the above-quoted letter of 671, King Munmu stated his own title to be "Commander-in-Chief of Gyerim Prefecture, General-in-Chief of the Left Guard, Commander Unequaled in Honor and Grand Pillar of State" (鷄林州大都督左衛大將軍開府儀同三司上柱國). This title was granted to King Munmu in 663, when Silla, just like the recently conquered Baekje, was declared a centrally administered region of the Tang. Evidently, however, the title had been changed between the letter and the raising of the stele. In the letter, King Munmu confirmed his support for Tang imperial pretensions by using the degrading title that the Tang had imposed on him, even as he tried to convince the Tang to accept Silla independence within its own sphere. Indeed, at the time of the letter, Silla was engaged in an eight-year conflict to reject the subordinate position that it expressed in the letter.

The King Munmu inscription was produced within the broad continuity of this Tang-Silla conflict, except that at this point King Sinmun chose a position in between total militarized rejection of Tang authority and complete submission to the Tang imperium. He thus avoided the serious challenge to Tang authority implied by the term "Great King" (大王), and at the same time he dropped the implication of being merely a part of the Tang bureaucracy that was implied by the title "Commander-in-Chief of Gyerim Region." In this sense, the titles on the inscription represent King Sinmun's minimum conditions for political and military accord, both domestically and internationally. Tang, by abandoning claims to direct administration of Silla, could maintain its dominant position in the moral hierarchy without any further military risk, while the Silla monarchy, by abandoning its pretensions to the title "King of Kings," was able to achieve secure control of the region south of the Daedong River.

King Sinmun's decision to continue King Munmu's policy—as revealed in the inscription—was one of uncertain import both domestically and internationally. But as the heir of King Muyeol's lineage, he had little other choice. His true-bone lineage would have

lost all legitimacy the instant he conceded any of the military victories of his two ancestors King Muyeol and King Munmu. On the other hand, had Silla attempted to pursue an aggressive military line against the Tang, its exhausted military would have had to face not only the Tang armies but also domestic desertions and revolts. The inscription, although using seemingly apolitical language, takes and justifies a middle path between these two dangerous options.<sup>39</sup>

The inscription asserts that King Munmu was “supreme in all matters civil and military” (line 45: 允武允文), yet the description of King Munmu in general is less that of an aggressive military hero than that of a wise defender. The inscription declares him to be “loving to the people and generous to his inferiors, and incorruptible as a country gentleman”—in short, “a virtuous ruler such as appears only once in a hundred generations” (line 37: 百代之賢王). Just as King Jinheung’s monumental stone emphasized less his expansion of territory than his humble submission to humanity and righteousness, so King Munmu is described as a monarch ruling by virtue who sacrificed himself to achieve peace for Silla.

The King Munmu inscription also contains considerable commentary on King Munmu’s funeral. King Munmu, in the final testament that he issued shortly before his death, specified that his corpse be cremated. The final testament preserved in the *History of the Three Kingdoms* makes no reference to the treatment of the final remains, but the inscription is very specific: “They piled up the firewood and cremated him, then scattered the ashes of his body in the sea,” suggesting that the ashes were scattered off the coast near Gyeongju.

The inscription not only mentions the cremation and scattering of the ashes but also describes at some length the original stipulation concerning the funeral in King Munmu’s testament. It would seem that, in Silla, a very strong justification was needed for the cremation of a monarch. The testament of King Munmu included in the *History of Three Kingdoms* describes the most important stipulation as follows:

I have ruled during turbulent times and periods of war, have struck to the west and the north and expanded our territory, have punished rebels and encouraged the loyal, such that, in the end, we have pacified lands both far and near.... However, struggling against these turbulent times, I have fallen ill, and as I have directed all my energies to the governance of the realm, my illness has become even worse. In all ages, when life ends, only our reputations remain...though I fall now into the deep night, what regrets would I have?...

The heroes who once ruled the entire world in the end have become piles of dirt, upon which the children feeding straw to cattle may play and sing, and in which the foxes and rabbits may burrow. To waste resources on a funeral will result in nothing but the criticism of later historians, and though people are forced to labor in the building of the tomb this will not serve to bring any relief to my soul. I think quietly of this, and cannot prevent my feelings of pain and sadness, for such funerals are not what I desire. May I be cremated, as is true of the western lands, *outside of the palace ten days after my death.* (*History of the Three Kingdoms*, “Silla Annals,” entry for King Munmu 21)

The second paragraph in the above quotation is also present in the inscription.<sup>40</sup> This passage in the inscription is then followed on line 48 with a song that seems to confirm the Buddhist nature of King Munmu’s decision to be cremated: “Valuing the Way highly and considering his body little, respecting greatly the teachings of Buddha, they piled up the firewood for a funeral” (貴道賤身, 欽味釋典, 葬以積薪). However, there is space to doubt whether King Munmu’s decision was really determined by Buddhist motivations.<sup>41</sup>

Not only modern scholars find elements of King Munmu’s cremation hard to understand. During the Silla period, literary imagination had already entered to make order of the confusion caused by this extraordinary event, such that, shortly after King Munmu’s funeral, new facts and imagined instances were linked with his final testament. This resulted in a wide variety of stories, such that we can almost talk about a “King Munmu cycle.” The following story is an example:

The king died on the twenty-first year of his reign. The funeral was held, as he demanded in his final testament, on a big rock in the middle of the ocean. The king had frequently said to Dharma Master Jinui: “Upon my death, may I become a large dragon defending the state, such that I may receive the Buddhist dharma for defending the state.” The dharma master asked: “To be reborn as a dragon is equivalent to receiving the karmic retribution of being reborn as an animal. Why do you want that?” The king answered: “I have long hated earthly fame. Though I be reborn as an animal, such a transformation fits with my greater purpose.” (*History of the Three Kingdoms* 三國遺事, “Strange Events 奇異2,” entry for Munhowang Beommin 文虎王法敏)

To choose to be reborn as a dragon, even though a dragon is animal, so that one could defend both nation and the Buddhist dharma, is a decision to engage in Buddhist-inspired self-sacrifice. This story depends upon the doctrines of transmigration and causality, both

Buddhist doctrines that were widely understood by ordinary believers, who would thus have understood it to be an extraordinary act of self-sacrifice for a great king to abandon hope of rebirth on a superior stage.

Archaeological investigation of Silla tombs has revealed that Silla people, in common with other cultures that bury their dead, imagined that the state of the body in the tomb was closely related to the form of the person's existence in the world to come.<sup>42</sup> For the king in such a society to choose to be cremated was an exceptional event that needed explanation. The story of the king choosing cremation so as to be reborn as a dragon rationalized this unusual decision in an imaginative way, and in turn created the image of King Munmu as a self-sacrificing hero who abandoned the pleasures of the next life to be reborn as the East Sea dragon and protect Silla. Unlike King Chumo, who rode a dragon up to heaven, King Munmu chose to descend into the sea as the East Sea dragon, becoming a hero who continued to protect his kingdom after death.

Because of King Munmu's unusual funerary choice, the inscription could not engage exclusively in fulsome praise, but was forced to quote part of King Munmu's final, melancholy testament. Regardless of what King Munmu's actual decision had been, the limited quotation from his final testament left considerable space for the imaginative rationalizations of later narratives. Thanks to these new stories, King Munmu, whose "name," the authors of the inscription hope, "will last as long as Heaven and Earth" (line 49: 鴻名與天, 長兮地久), was remembered by the Silla people as their defender.

### **Comparison of the Inscriptions**

This article has compared the rhetoric used by the Goguryeo inscriptions of the fifth century and the Silla inscriptions of the sixth and seventh centuries, finding the former characterized by the militant rhetoric of conquest and the latter characterized by defensive and cautious wording. Considering that Silla's King Jinheung and King Munmu were as successful militarily as Goguryeo's King Gwanggaeto and King Jangsu, what accounts for the absence of such militaristic rhetoric in inscriptions lauding the acts of Silla monarchs?

One approach to this question might focus on the differences between the two societies. Goguryeo originated at the crossroads between agricultural, pastoral, and hunting societies and thus inherited the military culture of nomadic peoples. By contrast, Silla was a monarchy that emerged entirely within a settled, agricultural society. Yet there are serious

limits to explaining the differences via an ahistorical essentialism according to which Goguryeo is seen as outward-oriented and aggressive and Silla as inward-looking by nature.

Though we shouldn't dismiss cultural explanations out of hand, we do need to consider the very different geopolitical contexts of the fourth and seventh centuries. The various Goguryeo steles were raised between the fourth and sixth centuries, during a time in Chinese history that is referred to as the period of the "Five Barbarians and Sixteen Kingdoms" or as the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. It was an era during which there was no "China," in the sense of a hegemonic "middle kingdom." Indeed, during this period, the various kingdoms that ruled in China were deeply linked with other political and cultural spheres in Mongolia, Manchuria, and Inner Asia. Goguryeo developed within this fragmented Northeast Asia, becoming one hegemonic power among many during the fifth century, and it is this context that allowed the Gwanggaeto inscription to use the language of conquest. This rhetoric emerged from, and also justified, a reality in which Goguryeo could assert its control of a large territory and bring neighboring kingdoms under its domination. The solemn authority expressed in the Gwanggaeto inscription was rooted in the certainty that the hierarchical order established by King Gwanggaeto would last forever.

Silla developed slowly within this hierarchical order centered on Goguryeo, only coming into its own in the sixth century. During the fifth century Silla gradually freed itself from subservience to Goguryeo, its military protector. During the reign of King Jinheung Silla brought Gaya under its control and successfully manipulated its position between Goguryeo and Baekje to establish its control over a substantial territory. However, as may be seen in the inscription on King Jinheung's monument stone, Silla, in its communication with the population of its recently conquered territories, eschewed the rhetoric of the horse-riding conqueror for that of the virtuous monarch and protector. As the three Korean kingdoms grew and encompassed all the smaller frontier polities that had previously existed in the spaces between the larger territorial kingdoms, the rhetoric of virtuous and peace-bringing monarch was a vital technique for assimilating new territory and people. While Goguryeo organized hierarchy as if according to a series of concentric circles, with social status determined by distance from the royal center, Silla chose to settle its borders by simply dividing people into Silla subjects and outsiders. Presumably there was much exaggeration in the rhetoric of treating new subjects and old subjects identically. That being said, such rhetoric should be seen as an important declaration on the part of the Silla monarch not to treat the inhabitants of

newly conquered territories as objects of plunder or providers of tribute. To make this political message credible, King Jinheung employed the language of a sage king, humble in his extraordinary virtue and merciful to the people.

The rhetoric employed in the King Jinheung monument stone was inherited by the King Munmu stele inscription. Thus, as Silla and Tang struggled for control of the Korean peninsula, the two monarchies became linked together by an overlapping political dynamic. The Silla monarchy could not abandon its pose as guardian of the Korean peninsula, and so it pursued an accommodating diplomacy by which it submitted to Tang hegemony in exchange for Tang confirmation of Silla's prerogatives on the Korean peninsula. King Sinmun, who inherited the political tradition of King Muyeol and King Munmu, brooked no other compromise of the Silla monarchy's privileges either with foreign powers or with domestic enemies, but softened this harsh position through the lofty rhetoric of the King Munmu inscription. The Silla aristocracy, which had shown signs of wavering, seems to have submitted to the firm political steps taken by King Sinmun. At the same time, the Tang, fully occupied by campaigns against Tibet and the Tujue Turks, and suffering from domestic instability, was in no position to launch an attack against Silla, and was thus predisposed to accepting the cooperative rhetoric of the inscription.<sup>43</sup>

King Munmu's choice to be cremated in the Buddhist fashion resulted in him being represented as the protector of the kingdom. While it is not clear if King Munmu planned this in advance, the fact that cremation shortened the process of the funeral to a mere ten days meant that King Sinmun was able to devote his energies to the unstable domestic political scene, and was thus able to put down a large-scale rebellion a mere twenty-eight days after finishing the funeral. The self-sacrificing decision of a great king to be cremated and reborn as a dragon to protect the state became the source of new folk beliefs. Funerary practices are nearly always determined primarily by tradition and precedent in a specific cultural context; individuals rarely have much say in their own funerals. Unusually, King Munmu involved himself deeply in funerary process and was thus able to create a context that allowed for a nonstandard meaning for his own funeral. So extraordinary was King Munmu's political and rhetorical imagination that the myth and ritual that established him as a great protector of his people became a vital political resource for his son.

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*Notes*

1. Translator's note: The romanization of names and terms in this article follows Pinyin for Chinese, Hepburn for Japanese, and Revised Romanization ([www.korean.go.kr/eng/roman/roman.jsp](http://www.korean.go.kr/eng/roman/roman.jsp)) for Korean. An exception is made for the names of modern scholars, which are romanized according to the preference of the scholar whenever that preference can be determined. To avoid confusion, the Revised Romanization is also indicated parenthetically in the bibliography in those cases where the author's preferred romanization differs from the standard. For instance, the name of the author of this article, Kim Hung-gyu, would normally be romanized, according to strict application of Revised Romanization rules, as Gim Heung-gyu, but his preference is followed here. Otherwise, the confusing practice of leaving surnames even of historical figures in their common vernacular form is not followed here. Thus, Gim Chunchu, a Silla official who later became king, and who shares a surname with Kim Hun-gyu, is nevertheless romanized according to the strict rules.
2. Hwando-seong is in present-day Ji'an, in China's Jilin Province.
3. A stele was raised around 662 over the tomb of King Muyeol, the Silla king who destroyed Baekje. It will not be discussed here, however, because nothing remains of this stele other than the base, the decorative head, and a few other fragments.
4. According to Lee Keun-jik (2007, 224), even in the Silla, the kingdom that raised the largest number of funerary steles, the only people whose graves can be confirmed either through the inscriptions on the steles or through reference to later historical writings are King Muyeol, Gim Yusin, Gim In-mun, King Munmu, King Seondeok, and King Heungdeok.
5. The part of the stele that was above ground rose to a height of 6.39 meters, and its weight is calculated at 37 tons. A total of 1,775 Literary Sinitic characters were carved on all four sides of the stele, of which about 150 characters are completely illegible.
6. Examples of such inscriptions include one raised by Darius 1 (r. 336 BCE–330 BCE) of the Achaemenids as well as the inscription of Bilge Qaghan of the Orkhon Turks (Lincoln 2008, 223–229; Tekin 1968, 275–281).
7. “Chumo” (鄒牟) is recorded in most texts as “Jumong” (朱蒙). The two variant renderings presumably result from the difficulty of representing the Goguryeo language with Literary Sinitic. For clarity's sake, “Chumo” will be used except when a passage using “Jumong” is quoted directly.
8. Despite the many controversies concerning the reading and interpretation of the Gwanggaeto inscription, it is generally accepted that the goal of the inscription was to praise King Gwanggaeto's success and authority as a conqueror. For this reason, most see this final section as a supplement. Recently, Lee Sung-si (2008) has argued that the primary purposes of the Gwanggaeto inscription were to praise King Gwanggaeto for his success in establishing a proper funerary practice for later Goguryeo kings and to maintain proper funeral practices for later generations. From Lee's perspective, the final section is thus not supplementary but the central feature of the entire text and the preceding mythological and historical passages mere rhetorical flourishes. However, I have difficulty accepting this ingenious interpretation.
9. Although this character is nearly illegible, Shirasaki suggests the reading of *teok* (德 charisma; power; merit; virtue) on the basis of the visible presence of the radical 彳.
10. The reading “Heaven” (天) is suggested by Takeda (1989) and Shirasaki (2004, 103–104).
11. This is the full posthumous name for King Gwanggaeto.

12. The reading is based on the Han-guk godae sahoe yeon-guso (1992a) text, except where otherwise noted. The English translation follows that of Michael Rogers (Lee and de Bary 1997, 24–26), but makes alterations to fit the author’s preferred interpretation. Most of these changes involve small changes to sentence division and romanization, but there are a number of major changes. Thus, at the beginning of the first paragraph, where Rogers had the Daughter of the Earl of the River crack the egg, Kim Hung-gyu has King Chumo crack the egg himself. Near the end of the first paragraph, where Rogers had King Chumo “ritually” summon “the dragon to come down and ‘meet the king,’” Kim Hung-gyu has Heaven order the dragon to go down to meet the king. Also in the first paragraph, where Rogers has the Yellow Dragon take King Chumo on his back, Kim has King Chumo step onto the dragon’s head. Finally, Rogers does not, in contrast to Kim, include King Gwanggaeto’s full title.

13. There continues to be much dispute concerning the nature of the myth of King Chumo before the Gwanggaeto inscription. I argue elsewhere (Kim Hung-gyu 2011) that the closest to the pre-fourth-century version of the myth is that found in the account of the *Old History of the Three Kingdoms* as quoted by Yi Gyu-bo (1973, 1168–1241) in a note to his narrative poem, the *Lay of King Dongmyeong* (東明王篇). An English translation by John Duncan of the full text may be found in Seo (2000, 5–13). An earlier translation, by Richard Rutt, is also available. See Yi Kyu-bo (1973).

14. Currently the myth of King Chumo makes up 127 characters of the total inscription.

15. The text is now too obscure for the “enemy” to be identified with any certainty. Some argue that the enemy here is Baekje (Bak [1964] 2007, 241–243; Han-guk kodae sahoe yeon-guso 1998a, 28), while others believe the enemy to be the Later Yan.

16. Lee Do-hack (2006, 221–229) argues on the basis of this inscription that Confucian thought concerning benevolence and rightness had become influential within the Goguryeo court. This seems excessive. The inscription seems here to be rhetorically claiming a moral justification for Goguryeo’s assertion of royal control over other regions, and defining Goguryeo’s wars as battles between good and evil. On its own, the inscription does not reveal the presence of a developed ideology, such as Confucianism, that regulates the interaction of the self and the other.

17. *Maegeum* seems to be related to *maripgan* (麻立干), which is related to the Mongolian term *khan* and is thought to refer to political leaders who gained power through the uniting of disparate tribes. Silla did not begin using the Chinese political term *wang* (王), which is generally translated as “king” or “prince,” until King Beopheung (r. 514–540).

18. This may be profitably compared with the inscriptions raised near the Orkhon River in Inner Mongolia by the rulers of the second Turkic empire. The Bilge Qaghan inscription (735) emphasizes the oppressive violence of the *tabγač* (Tang or Chinese) people to argue for the unification of the Turks. Here Bilge Qaghan also claims to have received sacred power of rule from heaven (*tänri*), and asserts that the land in all four directions belongs to him and to the Turks, who he mobilizes for this campaign of conquest by turning China into an alien other. Hostility to China was, no doubt, based in part on the experience of the Turks, but the attacks on the Chinese in this narrative cannot be seen as a simple reflection of experience, for the world of the Turks was in many way brought into being by a semantic act. See Tekin (1968, 2008).

19. This ideology is also made manifest by the Moduru Tomb inscription in Ji’an City in China’s Jilin Province. Moduru was sent as an official under King Gwanggaeto to govern

North Buyeo and died in the early fifth century. His tomb inscription, like the Gwanggaeto inscription, reveals pride in the sacred origins of the Goguryeo monarchy.

20. Of course, another issue is whether or not this discourse was effective. Space does not allow this matter to be discussed in detail here, but analysis of Baekje's own myth of origin suggests that Baekje may have rejected Goguryeo's pretensions to rule. The first section of the "Baekje Annals" in the *History of the Three Kingdoms* describes Onjo, the first Baekje king, as leaving Jolbon Buyeo for the Han River region. As an aside, it describes Chumo (referred to, of course, as Jumong) as leaving North Buyeo to marry into the royal family of Jolbon Buyeo. Thus the Baekje account does not accept the divine origins asserted by the Goguryeo myth of origin.

21. Goguryeo expanded south under King Jangsu with the conquest, in 475, of the Baekje capital of Hanseong, which brought the Han River valley into Goguryeo control.

22. Kim Hyun-sook (2005, 242–269), however, argues that by the early fifth century Goguryeo had begun to think of conquered peoples as members of regions fully integrated into the Goguryeo state, such that members of these newly integrated regions were "subjects" (民) of the Goguryeo state who were equally deserving of protection by the Goguryeo monarchy as the people of the Goguryeo home region. I agree that there may well have been broad tendencies of this sort, but caution against accepting the rhetoric of "royal grace" (恩澤) at face value. For this reason, I place greater value on Park Kyung-cheol's argument that the speed of Goguryeo's expansion under King Gwanggaeto would have had complex implications that dwarfed any changing policies concerning the administration of subject populations.

23. This stele was found in 1979 near the center of the Korean peninsula in Jungwon County, North Chungcheong Province. Most scholars date this stele to about 450 CE (Lee Do-hack 2000; Lim 2000).

24. I consulted the original text published by the Han-guk godae sahoe yeon-guso (1992b, 86–88). The monument stones at Maun Pass stele and Hwangcho Pass were both erected in the same year, and contain nearly identical content, but in the latter case many characters have been eroded away. The English translation here roughly follows Peter Lee's translation (Lee and de Bary 1997, 19–20). Most of the changes are minor, but note that in the case of the second sentence of the first paragraph, where Lee has "emperors and kings establish[ing] their reign titles, cultivat[ing] themselves to the utmost and br[inging] peace to their subjects," Kim interprets these activities as the "absolute duty" of emperors and kings. In the last sentence of the first paragraph, Lee has the people say that "the transforming process of the Way extends outward and its favor pervades everywhere," but Kim does not treat this passage as a quotation placed in the mouth of the people; rather, he has the king investigate subjects old and new, and discover, in strong contrast to Lee's interpretation, that there were still people beyond the reach of the monarchical edification.

25. Seo-hyeon, Gim Mu-ryeok's son, rose to the rank of governor-general of Daeryang Prefecture under King Jinpyeong. It was Gim Mu-ryeok's grandson, Gim Yu-sin, who showed the greatest success, as he became the key general to lead the victorious wars against Baekje and Goguryeo under King Muyeol and King Munmu.

26. This contrasts with the monumental stones marking the tours of the first emperor of China, which describe him as a just conqueror possessed of absolute wisdom and charisma. See the "Annals" of Sima Qian's *Shiji*, especially the entries for the twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, thirty-first, and thirty-seventh years of Qin Shihuang.

27. I am not interested in the question of whether King Jinheung's rhetoric is closer to Confucianism or Buddhism. In fact, I would rather avoid choosing either one to the exclusion of the other. The inscription includes clearly Confucian references, such as the claim that kings and emperors must "cultivate themselves to the utmost and so bring peace to the common people" (修己以安百姓), which would seem to be a quotation from *Analects* 14:42. This has caused some scholars to argue for the significance of the Confucian Kingly Way in this inscription (Noh Yong-pil 1995, 134–141). However, King Jinheung constructed the Hwangnyong Temple as a royal temple, and also made extensive use of Buddhist symbolism, including those of the wheel-turning king and King Ashoka (Mohan 2004; Yang Jeong-seok 2004, 109–122). The idea of a king who declares himself incapable of achieving supreme virtue is not a monopoly of Confucianism but may also be found in such Buddhist texts as *The Sutra for Humane Kings* (Chinese: Renwangjing 仁王經) (Kim Young-tae 1967; Yi Giyeong 1975).
28. Because King Munmu was cremated, the term *tomb* is perhaps not entirely suitable yet will be used here, as the inscription itself begins with the title "The Stele of the Tomb of King Munmu." The text used here is the early-nineteenth-century rubbing sent to China by Joseon intellectuals and published in Liu Xihai's 1831 *Anthology of Korean Inscriptions*, with reference also to later rubbings and editions. The bottom right section of the stele is preserved in the Gyeongju National Museum. In 2010, part of the upper half of the stele was discovered, and it is currently being restored and deciphered. The results of this process are to be published in early 2012. That being said, because the new piece of the stele covers a section already contained in earlier rubbings, it is unlikely that anything new will be discovered other than, perhaps, the identification a few new characters.
29. The Japanese began worrying about a possible attack by the Tang-Silla alliance during the Tang-Silla assault on Goguryeo in 667, such that large defensive structures were raised in Tsushima and Kyushu (Inoue 1993, 210). At the same time, so concerned was Silla to keep tabs on the Japanese and maintain good relations that, on the ninth month of 668, the year of the Silla-Tang conquest of Pyeongyang, Silla dispatched Gim Dong-am as an envoy to Japan, sending another twenty-one diplomatic missions between then and 700 (Noh Tae-don 2009, 233–237, 279–287).
30. The *Old History of the Tang* 85, entry for the "Biography of Zhang Wen-guan" (張文瓘).
31. Because Silla had controlled the Han River area since 553, by the late seventh century Silla elites had enjoyed about 120 years of access to the Tang via sea-lanes over the Yellow Sea.
32. There are only eight cases of a royal cremation in the three kingdoms of Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla, with King Munmu being the first. The others were King Hyo-seong (r. 737–742), King Seon-deok (r. 780–785), King Won-seong (r. 785–798), Queen Jin-seong (r. 887–897), King Hyo-gon (r. 897–912), King Sin-deok (r. 912–917), and King Gyeongmyeong (917–924). See Lee Keun-jik (2007, 209).
33. However, his bureaucratic office, vice minister of the National Confucian College (國學少卿), is clearly visible. According to the *History of the Three Kingdoms*, the National Confucian College was established only in the sixth month of the second year of King Sinmun, making this individual the first official in charge of this new educational institution.
34. The identity of King Seonghan (星漢王) is uncertain. He is variously identified with the ancestor of the royal Gim clan known as Gim Alji (金闕智); with Gim Alji's son Se-

han(勢漢) (or Yeol-han熱漢); and with King Michu (r. 262–284), the first Gim to take the throne.

35. King Jinheung refers to himself as “Great King” (either Taewang 太王 or Daewang大王) on the monument stones at Pukhan Mountain, Hwangch’o Pass, and Maun Pass.

36. Lee Young-ho (1986).

37. The Ungjin Commandery was initially one of five commanderies established by the Tang to rule Baekje’s former territory immediately after the defeat of Baekje. However, by 664 it had expanded to encompass Baekje’s former territory in its entirety.

38. According to the *Old History of the Tang* (“Biographies” 149, the “Kingdom of Silla” 新羅國), Taizong gave Gim Chun-chu an effusive welcome, causing third-rank officials to feast the Silla envoys when it came time for them to return to Silla. It must thus have been a very satisfying meeting for Taizong.

39. Although this is not a major concern of this paper, it should be noted here that during the eleven years of King Sinmun’s reign significant steps were taken to expand centralized control over the Silla military with the establishment of the nine oath bannermen divisions (Guseodang 九誓幢). See Seo Young-Kyo (2000).

40. Lee Young-ho (1986) argues that the second paragraph of the final testament as included in the *History of the Three Kingdoms* was also inscribed verbatim on the King Munmu stele, with the exception of the words that I have placed in italics. He makes a strong case for why those characters would have been eliminated, and he is also able to show that the two versions otherwise match up with each other identically.

41. The thoughts expressed by King Munmu in the above final testament seem somewhat at odds with the usual Buddhist understanding of the birth-death cycle, such as those found in such key texts as the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* (大般涅槃經; “Sutra of the Great Decease”).

42. For instance, the Greaty Hwangnam Tomb in Gyeongju, which was excavated in 1974, contains two well-preserved outer chambers (kwak 櫛) that each contained the coffin and remains of one person, presumably a king and a queen. Archaeologists discovered a larger number of funerary goods, notably objects such as crowns made of gold and jade, belts, bracelets, and other ornaments that had been used to decorate the corpses of the deceased. The bodies of Silla monarchs, in other words, were expected to receive the same respect and honor in the next life as they had in this (Kim and Ahn 2003, 230–231).

43. The Tang’s fence-sitting on the matter of Silla’s pretensions to control over the Korean peninsula came to an end when it needed Silla’s help to deal with the tensions caused by the rise of a new kingdom of Baekje (698–926), which sought to control Goguryeo’s former territory. Thus, in 735, the Tang formally acknowledged Silla’s primacy in the region south of the Daedong River.

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