

*State Formation in Korea: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives.*  
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It is difficult to find good introductory books on the prehistory and proto-history of Korea in English. There are several reasons for this. First, Korean archaeologists have little interest in writing or even translating their works for the readers of the western world. Second, for western archaeologists and historians, it seems to be a difficult, if not almost impossible task to grasp the detailed discursive culture-historical approaches in Korean archaeology and proto-history, which are based upon typology and chronology. Finally, the views of Korean archaeologists all too often are dismissed by non-Koreans scholars because of their nationalism.

Thus, Gina Barnes' s *State Formation in Korea* is a masterpiece for while we, as archaeologists, have waited for a long time. Professor Barnes, after obtaining her Ph.D. degree at University of Michigan with the dissertation entitled "Yayoi-Kofun Settlement Archaeology in the Nara Basin, Japan," has taught East Asian archaeology at Universities of Cambridge and Durham, and carried engaged in extensive fieldwork in Japan, China, and Korea. Based upon her fieldwork, she has published many important papers and monographs on archaeology and ancient history of China, Japan and Korea. She has also published monographs dealing with the appearance and the growth of civilizations of China, Japan and Korea in comparative perspective (1993 *China, Korea and Japan: the Rise of Civilization in East Asia* (London: Thames & Hudson); reprinted in paperback with the title, 1999 *The Rise of Civilization in East Asia: Archaeology of China, Korea and Japan*).

Gina Barnes' s *State Formation in Korea* consists of papers on Korean archaeology and proto-history originally written between 1983 and 2000. The book consists of eight chapters and each chapter includes a number of illustrations, tables and maps as well as good and detailed references including major and critical works of Korean archaeologists. After a wonderful foreword by Colin Renfrew, the former Disney Professor of Department of Archaeology, Cambridge University, chapter one reviews the research history of state formation in Korea with a critical examination of the concepts applied and used to interpret the process (e.g. tribe, tribal state and tribe leagues) and introduces a brief history of Chosŏn, Chin, Koguryŏ, Samhan, Paekche, Kaya, Silla, all of which are supposedly early states in Korea, and the Chinese commanderies (including Lelang). In this chapter, she provides a succinct but well summarized history of each "polity," ranging from a rather traditional perspective to a relatively new approach based upon the so-called new evolutionism or anthropological archaeology, represented by such concepts as chiefdom and state.

In the same context, chapter two examines existing views of cultural development of pre-state of Korea (focusing on the Bronze Age and the Iron Age) from an archaeological perspective. In particular, she criticizes many problems inherent to the existing archaeological inference in Korea (i.e. periodization such as the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Kimhae Period), the temporal overlap of the material cultures of each period, and the indifference to or ambiguity in social roles ascribed to the material culture of those periods. She also points out quite rightly that an archaeological hypothesis of the growth of powerful social elements reflected in burials does not necessarily and automatically indicate the formation of state.

Chapter three introduces one of the most controversial disputes in Korean archaeology, the relationship between Wajil pottery and stoneware pottery. As is already known, Wajil pottery has been the object of a great deal of attention by Korean archaeologists during the 1980s and 1990s. Whether the Wajil pottery would represent the Proto-Three Kingdoms period (or Kimhae period) dated to approximately 0-300 CE and stoneware pottery would be manufactured after this period, or stoneware pottery would

appear even in the Proto-Kingdom period, has been likely to be considered not only a problem of pottery chronology and typology, but closely related to the state formation process and foreign exchange system with regard to pottery manufacturing technology and social elite system. Barnes introduces the various opinions and critically reviews those complicated and sensitive perspectives with the practical work on the kiln structure and manufacturing technology of earthen and stoneware pottery in relation with Chinese pottery manufacturing technology, carried out and shown in the chapter four. She carefully and tentatively tends to support the revisionists' point of view that accepts the representative role of Wajil pottery in the proto-Three Kingdoms period.

In chapter five, the author tackles important archaeological evidence supposedly related to state formation in Korea, that is to say, iron armory production and its political significance. In order to do this, she broadly examines the iron armory discovered in Yŏngnam province (the southern part of the Korean Peninsula) and looks into the relationship with the Yamato of Japan. She criticizes the hypothesis raised by Korean archaeologists that the social stratification of high- and low- status is observed in the warrior' s tombs in Kaya, and points out the small sample size and considerable variations in burial assemblages as the inherent problems to that hypothesis. Barnes notes decentralized manufacture and use of armory in local political systems as implicated in the historical documents, which is contrasted with the well organized and centralized manufacture of armory in the Yamato government.

In addition, she criticizes the old argument that the Yamato type armories discovered in Korea were a good case in point to prove the Mimana hypothesis, that they were manufactured under the military control of the Kaya region by the Yamato. Instead, she introduces the opinion raised by both Korean and Japanese archaeologists against that hypothesis. First, the Yamato style armories discovered in Korea, though they were manufactured in Japan, are not supportive of the Mimana hypothesis because they were manufactured at the late 5<sup>th</sup> century CE (by contrast, the Mimana hypothesis would be dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE). Second, their numbers are so few among the local armory types to support the military occupation suggested

by the Mimana hypothesis. Third, it is acceptable that the Yamato type armory were buried in the burials of political subordinates rather than of the ruling class in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

Chapter six introduces and examines the functions of walled sites within the context of the state systems of the Three Kingdoms period. Originally the walled sites dated to the Proto-Three Kingdoms period have been viewed as decisive evidence to prove the existence of the (political) capital and thus to support the appearance of "the state" by Korean archaeologists and historians. Barnes raises a critique of this view by arguing that walled sites served as economic and administrative centers and sub-centers in the Three Kingdoms period, but without data on elite female residence and actual palace architecture, it is difficult to determine whether some of these were polity "capitals."

Chapters seven and eight review the general historiography of the developmental processes of Kaya and Silla based on historical literature and archaeological data in a succinct but sophisticated way. In particular, Barnes synthesizes the archaeological data available to her with historical literature and attempts to reconstruct the historical process of the growth of Kaya and Silla with careful attention to the existing views of Korean archaeologists and historians.

It is true that Barnes' work is an important and priceless contribution to the western readers who are interested in the prehistory and proto history of Korea, as well as to Korean readers. Many aspects distinguish her work from the few other attempts to introduce or study the pre- and proto-history of Korea outside Korea. First and foremost, she makes a great effort to deal with the vast extent of archaeological and historical data related to her subject. The data introduced and used to support her argument in her book are obtained from her ceaseless fieldwork and personal interviews with many archaeologists in Korea as well as her own readings of excavation reports and historical documents. As a result, she successfully incorporates the recent research made by Korean archaeologists and historians into her work.

Secondly, Barnes explores the very complicated archaeological and historical agenda related to state formation with a careful consideration of the local and historical contexts. Rather than just imposing the archaeological

and anthropological frameworks developed in the western academics onto the Korean data, she attempts to grasp the logical strength and weakness of the inferences drawn by Korean scholars, as well as the potential that the data might have. Her own critique is also based upon the full examination of the arguments by Korean scholars. I believe that this is a huge difference between her work and other published books.

Thirdly, as an expert on Japanese archaeology and with a broad knowledge of Chinese archaeology, Barnes considers Korean pre- and proto history within the East Asian context. As generally accepted, a broad political and economic network existed between China, Japan and Korea in this period. Therefore, without proper consideration of that network, it is sometimes not possible to understand the very complicated archaeological and historical phenomena which occurred between the three regions. Her expertise on Japanese and Chinese archaeology makes it possible to compare and emboss the pre- and proto history of Korea with and from other two regions.

In spite of her huge contribution as such, there still exist some problems in her approach. Although she does not lay out her theoretical framework explicitly, her argument can basically be summarized as follows. First, the concepts (e.g. tribe, tribal state, tribe leagues, and even chiefdom and state) applied to the state formation in Korea by Korean scholars are not clearly defined and thus ambiguously or even incorrectly applied. Second, the state formation in southern Korea was mainly influenced by the Chinese commanderies (e.g. Lelang) and thus only after the downfall or retreat of the Chinese commanderies was it possible to establish a state in the genuine sense. Third, such fact is supported by the appearance of mounded burials and stoneware pottery since the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. Therefore, any archaeological evidence which supposedly supports the existence of the early state in the Proto-Three Kingdom periods, such as the walled sites, individual inhumation burials with various prestige items and even iron armoury in Kaya, could not be accepted as that of state formation.

The difference between chiefdom and state is very controversial even within neo-evolutionism and processual archaeology as its archaeological application. Furthermore, there are so many different conceptualization and variations in 'state' itself. For example, in addition to the concept of "state"

that Barnes signifies in her work and is generally recognized in the ancient history, there are also attempts to conceptualize the state in a different way, which is distinguished from chiefdom (i.e. pristine state, the first state, etc.). As far as I know, the concept applied to (Ko) Chosŏn, the early phase of Three Kingdoms and various *guo* 國 in relation to state formation, does not mean the state literally but pristine state or the first state, except for Wiman Chosŏn. Therefore, this problem is not due to misinterpretation or incorrect application of the concept, but originates from the vagueness or different uses of the concept itself. In the case that this assumption can be justifiable, her criticism on the concept itself can be questioned.

It cannot be denied that the Chinese commanderies (in particular Lelang) exerted strong influence on other polities surrounding them in the Korean Peninsula. Although there is a misstatement of historical fact in her work (i.e. she mentioned that Lelang occupied the southern part of the Korean Peninsula), it is generally accepted that political and ideological relationship between Lelang and other polities must have been critical to the growth of those polities. Nevertheless, it needs to be considered that there were already developed polities (which can be named as state) such as Wiman and the early Koguryŏ before the establishment of the Chinese commanderies in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. More importantly, the small polities described as *guo* in historical documents, could have taken advantage of foreign relationship with Lelang and even mainland China actively for the purpose of the expansion and strengthening of the power of the ruling class. Moreover, the relationship with Lelang was not an one-sided center and periphery relationship, but very changeable according to the political situation. In other words, the relationship with Lelang would influence the growth of political power of the *guo*, but the growth would be possible not because of one-sided but because of very changeable relationship including conflict and even war. This indicates that state formation in southern Korea needs to be interpreted from the perspective of indigenous polities rather than emphasizing the role of the Chinese commanderies.

The appearance of mounded burials and stoneware potteries are certainly important changes in material culture that are observed with the growth and the expansion of Silla or even Koguryŏ as an ancient "state."

However, it needs to be also suggested why these changes in material culture are so important and related to the appearance of the state in the context of Korea. There are two reasons for this. First of all, the appearance of mound-  
ed burials is archaeological evidence to prove the formation and existence of ancient state in Japan. If her inference is based upon the case in Japan, she would be faced with self-contradiction because contrary to her argument that Kaya failed to form an ancient state, Kaya would seem to be at the level of state in view of a number of the mounded burial found in that region. Secondly, it becomes evident that any universal law or general principle can not exist or be drawn in archaeological inference. In other words, it is very doubtful that the relationship between the appearance of mounded burial and stoneware potteries in Japan could also be the case in Korea without any consideration of indigenous context. Rather, it seems important to interpret the state formation process in an indigenous context and the active role of tumuli and even stoneware pottery in such a context.

In spite of these “trivial” problems in her work, I believe that the most profound question is raised in her so-called processual approach towards state formation. As already discussed in European archaeology, the processual approach related to state formation is no longer plausible because of its theoretical simplicity and naivety. The material culture including mortuary practice is not a simple reflection of social hierarchy, and the other “recipe” to prove the existence of state or chiefdom is not universally applied to other contexts because the power execution is much more complicated than previously expected. Rather the overemphasis on the state formation would distance us from the interpretation of the various potentials inherent to material culture (i.e. gender, landscape, identity, body, etc).

I strongly believe that this problem is not merely her own, but one for all of us as Korean archaeologists. In a sense, it is true that the main research frameworks maintained by Korean archaeologists and historians so far, namely culture- historical and processual approach, are not reflective and sophisticated enough. Moreover, the main concern of Korean archaeologists is likely to be stuck with the obsolete subjects such as state formation. Thus, our immediate task is to explore the material culture in a new and different perspective.