



A Review of the Songguk-ri Site

Introduction

The Songguk-ri site, located in Chochon-myeon, Buyeo-gun, became known to the academic world when a stone cist tomb with a Bipa-shaped bronze dagger was excavated in 1974 (Kim and Ahn 1975). Full-scale excavations began in 1975, which quickly confirmed the importance of the site and marked a breakthrough in Bronze Age research on the Korean peninsula. Following excavations of the Songguk-ri site, a number of other sites showing similar cultural traits were excavated, and the “Songguk-ri type” was discerned (Lee 1988, 67-72) and established as a cultural type (Ahn 1992), and it was revealed that sedentary agriculture formed the basis of the culture (Lee 2000a, 8).

Looking in more detail, the most characteristic features are the Songguk-ri-type dwelling with an oval pit in the center (Yi 1992) and Songguk-ri-type burials (Kim 2001), consisting of stone cist tombs, stone-capped pit tombs, and jar burials. Triangular stone reaping blades (Choi 1985, 25-30; Kim 1985, 27-34), developed alongside the rise of rice paddy farming; stone grooved adzes with a sloping blade and rectangular cross section (Ro 2001, 5-6); pouch-shaped red burnished pottery with a rounded, flat base (Ha 1992, 34); and Songguk-ri-style pottery, which is characterized by a bulging body and short, everted rim (H. Lee 1993, 115), are among its representative artifacts.

A number of characteristic features and artifacts have been identified at the Songguk-ri site, the importance of which go far beyond simply being the first reported examples of each type. This paper was written to discuss the age and chronology and characteristics of the Songguk-ri site based on excavation and research results and to further highlight its academic significance and value. To this end, the progress of excavations and surrounding sites are briefly reviewed

* This paper modifies and supplements previously published articles (Son 2007, 2021) with updated data.

below, and my own thoughts on the age, chronology, and nature of the site based on data from recent excavations are summarized. Finally, the article will conclude by discussing the academic significance and value of the site.

Excavation History and Surrounding Sites

As of last year, 26 full-scale excavations of the Songguk-ri site have been carried out since 1975 by the National Museum of Korea, Gongju National Museum, Buyeo National Museum, and the Archaeology Center of Korea National University of Cultural Heritage. Table 1 provides a brief summary of the details of each annual excavation. The total survey area is approximately 1,737,000 m², but based on excavation reports, it is estimated that the actual area excavated amounts to approximately 450,000 m². Of this, an area of 535,107 m² was designated as a historic site in 1976, and 535,746 m² was confirmed and announced as a protected cultural property zone in 2004 (Figure 1).

Bronze Age features are mainly concentrated on the southern part of a hill extending in a north-south direction. In particular, the greatest concentration of features is located on the southwest hill (Zones 49-58), covering an area of about 200,000 m². Of course, in the northern part of the survey area, one jar coffin tomb and one layer containing Mumun pottery were discovered, but the results of surveys and excavations suggest that the majority of features are concentrated on the southern part of the site. In addition to this concentration of features, a dwelling, a jar coffin tomb, and a cultural layer were found in Zones 15-18, a cultural layer was found in Zone 40, and a jar coffin tomb has also been discovered in Zone 43.

Nearby sites include the tombs at Namsan-ri located north of the survey area (Ahn and Lee 1990; Kim et al. 2001; Youn 1987), the dolmens at Sanjik-ri located to the south (Buyeo National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage 1993), and the Chopyeong-ri site where polished stone daggers have been excavated (Chungnam National University Museum 1998, 206). Among these, the stone cist tombs, stone-capped pit tombs, and jar coffin tombs of the Namsan-ri tomb group are thought to be of a similar age as the Songguk-ri site, and based on the presence or absence of Bipa-shaped bronze daggers, it has been suggested that the Songguk-ri tomb group represents elite tombs, whereas the Namsan-ri tomb group may have been a cemetery for commoners (Kim 1994,

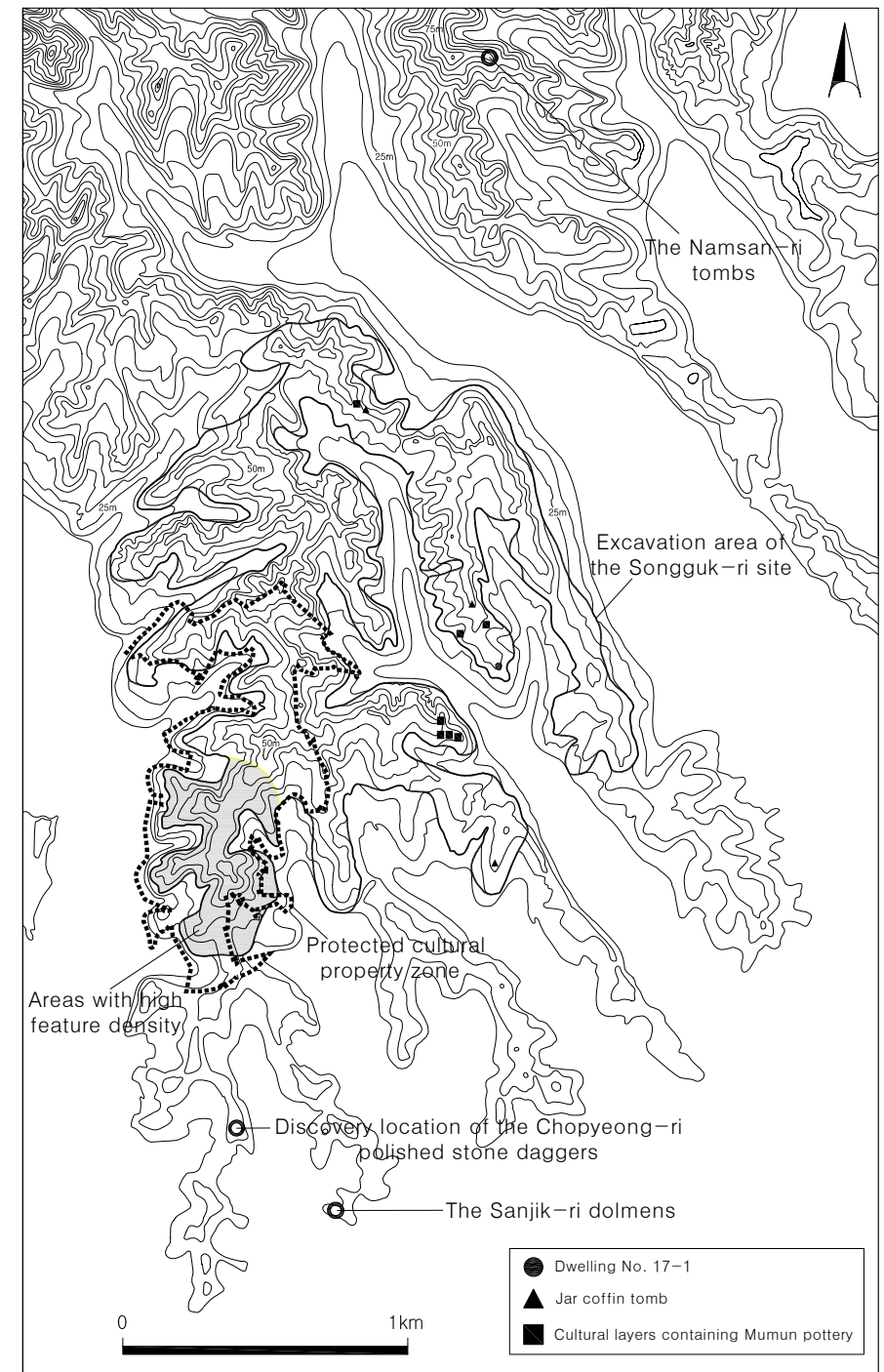


Figure 1. The Songguk-ri Site and Surrounding Sites

184).

However, the tombs at Namsan-ri are located about 3 km away from the cluster of features where the tombs at Songguk-ri are located, and several hills and valleys separate the two sites, which makes explanations based on differences of status within the same settlement seem less plausible. Rather, because the tombs at Sanjik-ri to the south of the site are located at a relatively close distance of about 1.2 km and are visible from the settlement at Songguk-ri, it may be possible to infer an active relationship between the two sites. In the case of the Chopyeong-ri polished stone dagger site, a detailed excavation has not been conducted, but a relationship of a similar context is generally accepted.

Table 1. Excavation Results of Bronze Age Features at the Songguk-ri Site

Excavation number	Institution	Date	Excavation area	Identified features	Report references
		74. 4. 19	Zone 53	1 stone cist tomb	Kim and Ahn 1975
		75	Zone 53	1 jar coffin tomb	Ahn 1980
1	National Museum of Korea	75. 9. 25~12. 25	Agricultural land expansion zone	2 rectangular pit dwellings, 10 circular pit dwellings, 1 oval pit dwelling, 3 storage pits, 1 pit feature, 1 burnt feature, 2 jar coffin tombs	Kang et al. 1979
2		76. 4. 6~4. 17	Zones 43 and 59	1 burnt feature, 1 jar coffin tomb	
3		77. 11. 15~11. 26	Zones 17, 53, and 54	2 rectangular pit dwellings, 1 circular pit dwelling	
4		78. 5. 2~5. 18	Zone 54	2 rectangular pit dwellings, 1 pit feature	Ji et al. 1986
5		85. 9. 23~10. 19	Zone 54	1 square pit dwelling, 1 rectangular pit dwelling, 1 pit feature	
6		86. 10. 10~11. 2	Zone 54	1 square pit dwelling, 4 rectangular pit dwellings, 1 pit feature	
7		87. 10. 12~11. 7	Zone 54	2 square pit dwellings, 4 rectangular pit dwellings	
					National Museum of Korea 1987

8	Gongju National Museum	91. 3. 10~3. 20	Valley location near site	No features identified	Kim 1993, 1998
9		92. 3. 20~3. 28	Zone 54	timber palisade postholes	
10		92. 4. 27~6. 23 93. 2. 8~4. 8	Zones 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, and 57	18 square-type pit dwellings (17 unexcavated), 5 circular pit dwellings (3 unexcavated), timber palisade postholes, abatis depressions, 2 ditch features, artificial plane surface, 3 stone cist tombs (1 unexcavated), 6 pit tombs (1 unexcavated), 2 jar coffin tombs	
11	Buyeo National Museum	97. 3. 6~6. 12	Zones 54 and 55	1 square pit dwelling, 3 rectangular pit dwellings, 1 long rectangular pit dwelling (partially excavated), 2 circular pit dwellings, 2 pit features, timber palisade postholes	Buyeo National Museum 2000
12	Archaeology Center of Korea National University of Cultural Heritage	08. 4. 7~11. 19	Zones 53 and 54	2 square pit dwellings, 6 rectangular pit dwellings, 1 long rectangular pit dwelling, 11 circular pit dwellings, 2 oval pit dwellings, 3 storage pits, 6 pit features, 1 burnt feature, 8 raised buildings, 5 fence depressions, 1 drainage feature, 1 pit tomb	Kim et al. 2011
13		09. 8. 25~12. 22			

14	Archaeology Center of Korea National University of Cultural Heritage	10. 9. 28~11. 30 11. 4. 4~ 9. 30	Zones 50, 54, and 55	3 square-type pit dwellings (unexcavated), 10 square pit dwellings, 10 rectangular pit dwellings, 1 long rectangular pit dwelling (re-excavated), 1 circular pit dwelling, 25 pit features (1 partially excavated), 4 timber postholes, 4 fence depressions, 3 posthole clusters	Kim et al, 2013
15		12. 6. 11~10. 24	Zone 50	3 rectangular pit dwellings, 17 pit features, 7 timber postholes, 6 fence depressions, 2 posthole rows, 1 posthole cluster	Kim et al, 2014
16		13. 11. 26~14. 1. 22	Zone 57	4 square pit dwellings, 2 rectangular pit dwellings, 6 pit features, 2 timber postholes	Kim et al, 2016
17		14. 4. 17~6. 10			
18		14. 8. 27~11. 24	Zone 50	1 square pit dwelling, 3 rectangular pit dwellings, 1 long rectangular pit dwelling, 1 circular pit dwelling, 3 timber postholes, 1 drainage feature	Kim et al, 2017
19		15. 4. 3~5. 31			
20		15. 7. 17~9. 11			
21		16. 10. 26~12. 20	Zone 52	2 circular pit dwellings, 18 pit features, 2 burnt features, 1 raised building, 5 fence depressions, 2 posthole rows, 6 small posthole rows, 1 posthole cluster	Kim et al, 2019
22		17. 8. 14~12. 20		3 circular pit dwellings	Kim et al, 2020
23		18. 6. 27~12. 17		1 circular pit dwelling, 3 pit features	

24	Archaeology Center of Korea National University of Cultural Heritage	19. 10. 21~12. 26	Zones 53 and 54	9 circular pit dwellings, 18 pit features, 2 raised buildings, 1 drainage feature, 1 unidentified feature	Kim et al, 2021
25		20. 4. 28~8. 24	Zone 53	3 circular pit dwellings, 3 pit features, 3 burnt features, 1 drainage feature, 2 unidentified features, 1 jar coffin tomb	Archaeology Center of Korea National University of Cultural Heritage 2020
26		21. 11. 8~12. 24	Zone 56	4 circular pit dwellings, 2 pit features, 1 raised building, 2 posthole clusters	Archaeology Center of Korea National University of Cultural Heritage 2021

Age and Characteristics

At the Songguk-ri site, 121 dwelling units (excluding those unexcavated), 6 storage pits, 104 pit features, 8 burnt features, 3 large raised building features, 9 raised building features, 16 timber postholes, 20 fence depressions, 10 posthole rows, 7 posthole clusters, 4 drainage features, 3 unidentified features, 4 stone cist tombs (including 1 unexcavated), 7 pit tombs (including 1 unexcavated), and 7 jar coffin tombs were excavated (Figure 2). Among these, dwelling units can be further divided into 22 square, 43 rectangular, 3 long rectangular, 50 circular, and 3 oval pit dwellings according to their planar shape. These can be broadly divided into 68 quadrilateral and 53 round-shaped pit dwellings. The former are mainly located on the flat area in the center of the village, while the latter are distributed on the hilly slopes below.

In earlier excavations, stratigraphically overlapping features were very rare, but since 2000, more extensive full-scale excavations have identified numerous overlapping features. Some of these overlapping features have provided a basis for recognizing construction sequences at the site, with 1 example each of the sequences: “large scale raised building → circular pit dwelling,” “square pit dwelling → rectangular pit dwelling,” “rectangular pit dwelling → circular pit dwelling,” “long rectangular pit dwelling → circular pit dwelling,” 9 examples

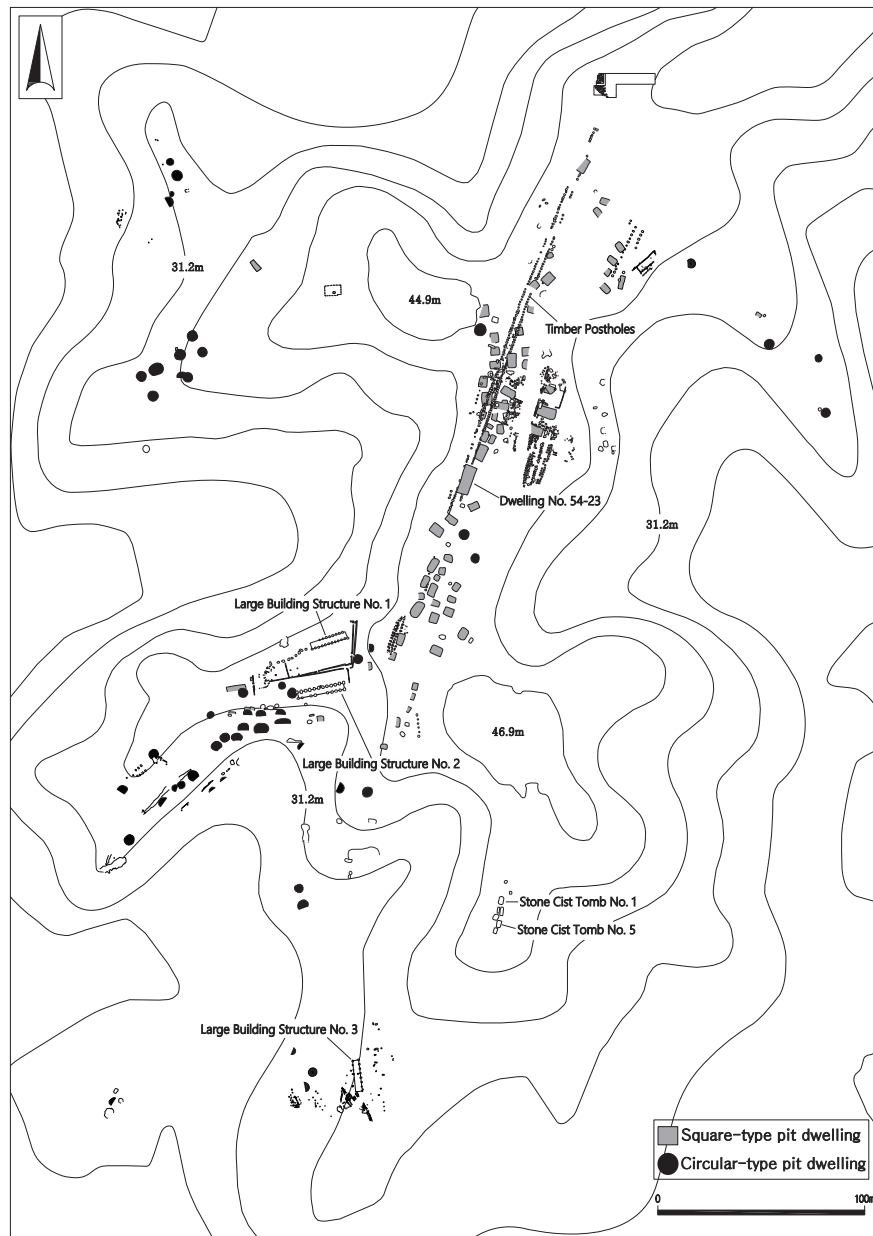


Figure 2. Plan of Bronze Age Features at the Songguk-ri Site

of “square-type pit dwelling → timber postholes,” and 6 examples of “timber postholes → square-type pit dwelling.” Aside from these, rectangular Dwelling 53-A was reported to have been constructed before the addition of the artificial

plane surface (Kim 1993, 102), but currently there is not enough clear evidence to determine the chronological sequence of its construction.

Age and Chronology

Regarding the age and chronology of the Songguk-ri site, I have earlier suggested that the entire village be included in a single archaeological stage based on the regularity of the spacing between dwellings and their arrangement and the fact that only a few cases of overlapping features have been identified (Son 2010, 49). However, as described above, additional excavations have identified the overlapping distribution of square-type dwellings and wooden columns on the site, so subdividing the site’s occupation into different phases is unavoidable. The occupation span has sometimes been divided into five phases based on the results of this excavation (Lee 2014, 63-67), but clear evidence has not been put forward to support this scheme.

What is more apparent is the change from the first phase—in which square-type dwellings and large raised buildings were constructed—to the second phase, in which timber postholes are found on the artificial plane surface and circular pit dwellings were constructed on the hillslope. In addition, although square-type dwellings constructed after timber postholes have been identified, the intentional placement of these dwellings to avoid overlap with existing dwellings suggests that rather than assigning them to different phases, it is highly likely that they coexisted. In the second phase, the overlapping of timber postholes and square-type dwellings is thought to be the result of the frequent construction and abandonment of both features. In the end, it is possible to discern a change from “square-type → round-type + square-type” in terms of types of dwellings.

Discussions regarding the chronological relationships of different dwelling types have existed since the early days. Most acknowledge that there are differences in excavated artifacts according to dwelling type, and based on these, they infer temporal differences between dwellings. First, Ahn Jaeho (1992, 12) proposed that square pit dwellings were constructed later than circular dwellings based on the ratio of pottery with everted rims, but on the other hand, Song Manyoung (1995, 74-91) suggested that dwellings changed from “small square → large rectangular → circular” based on changes in stone reaping blades, flask-type pottery, and burnished jars. Ahn Jaeho (1996, 72) presented a response,

and Shoda Shinya (2007, 38) argued for a similar trend of change to that proposed by Ahn Jaeho, based on differences in pottery form and overlapping features from other sites.

The existence of diverse opinions on establishing chronological relationships based on excavated artifacts indicates that there is not such a clear difference in artifacts. However, this does not necessarily suggest the occupation of the settlement was not long. This is because, when considering suggestions to raise the *terminus ante quem* based on absolute dating values (H. Lee 2006, 252) or lower the *terminus post quem* in an attempt to fill a gap in the existing chronology (Kim 2009, 53; Lee 2010, 52), the fact that no significant change in artifacts is observed over a long period of time should be considered one of the unique characteristics of the Songguk-ri type.

Of course, there are some examples of artifacts that are confirmed to have different ages. Among artifacts from the early period, pottery with a folded rim with short diagonal lines recovered from Stone Cist Tomb No. 5 provides a representative example. However, if one considers the overall arrangement of the tomb group, it is difficult to assign this feature to an early phase. Pedestaled dishes and black burnished pottery, which fall into the late phase, are excavated from circular dwellings, which is consistent with the fact that circular dwellings appear relatively late. However, because examples of artifacts associated with the pottery with clay band rim stage discovered in Songguk-ri style dwellings are steadily increasing (Yi 2005, 16), there is no need to push back the age of the site.

In this case, how can a specific date be inferred? This can be estimated through radiocarbon dating, and a total of 44 samples have been measured so far (Figure 3). Most of the date measurements are concentrated between 800 and 400 BCE, which correspond to the radiocarbon date range in which other sites associated with the Songguk-ri culture are concentrated as well as the flattened region of the calibration curve (Kim 2003, 35). Therefore, it is difficult to determine chronological relationships between features on the site through radiocarbon dates alone. In any case, even if it is assumed that the period of occupation of the settlement was not as short as described above, it seems difficult to stretch the occupation span much beyond this 400-year period.

Lastly, I would like to briefly review the relationship between square-type dwellings and circular-type dwellings, which are generally accepted as sequential markers. Opinions have already been published regarding these types

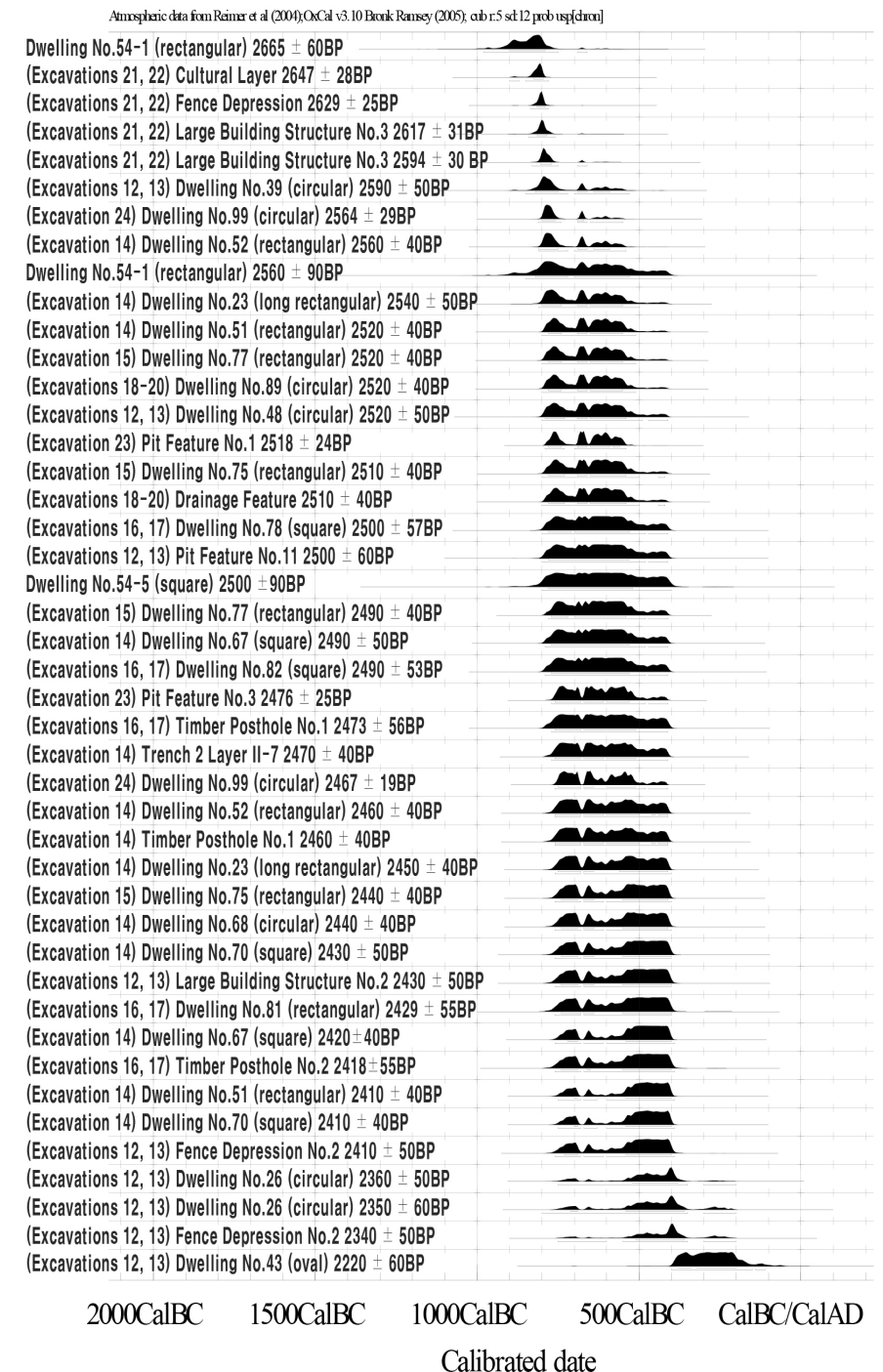


Figure 3. Results of Radiocarbon Date Measurements

as reflecting differences in construction groups (Kim 1996, 47) or differences in function (Oh 1997, 171). Since evidence of the latter cannot be found in terms of artifacts, it might be supposed that the difference in the timing of the appearance of the two dwelling types was related to group differences. However, it is difficult to agree with the recently raised claim that the two groups repeatedly occupied the same area (Yi 2018, 51) in view of the regularity of the arrangement of dwellings overall.

In other words, following the occupation of the square-type housing group, which began with the construction of the first artificial plane surface, the circular-type group appeared, and the artificial plane surface was used as a space for a row of timber columns. However, there is a possibility that the existing dwelling type was partially recognized and that both were built simultaneously. At this time, the principle of constructing square dwellings on flat areas on top of the hill and round dwellings on the slopes may have become a norm. Considering the overall layout of the features, it is clear that there was no gap in the period of occupation throughout this process. Even if earlier features were abandoned, these were recognized, and new features were built to avoid them as much as possible, however considering the fact that many diverse features have been identified together and the long-term continuous role of the settlement as a central place (Shoda 2007, 165), the total occupation span of the settlement would not have been short.

Characteristics

Among the most striking characteristics of the Songguk-ri site is the artificial plane surface, the construction of large buildings, and the installation of large timber posts. These features epitomize the Songguk-ri site and have rarely been identified at other sites. First, the artificial plane surface was constructed by excavating part of the slope and compacting it with clay, then cutting soil from the top and depositing it to flatten the space below to expand usable space at the site. Because this was a large-scale civil engineering project that required a considerable amount of labor, it is possible to imagine a social system led by influential individuals or powerful groups that made it possible to mobilize such a labor force.

Aside from large-scale civil engineering works, the tomb with the bronze dagger has been pointed to as evidence of the existence of a powerful class (Choi

1991, 145). The discovery of a Bipa-shaped bronze dagger, a bronze adze, jade, a polished stone dagger, and a long, tanged arrow in Stone Cist Tomb No. 1 makes the status of the individual interred in the tomb clear (Figure 4). It is possible to view the entire tomb group as a cemetery for the ruling class, but it is difficult to agree with the view that differences in status existed within the same village based on comparisons with the tombs at the Namsan-ri site (Kim 1994, 184). Nearby sites that are assumed to be directly related to Songguk-ri include the Sanjik-ri dolmens, located at a distance of about 1.2 km from the tombs at Songguk-ri and are visible from the area (Son 2007, 55).

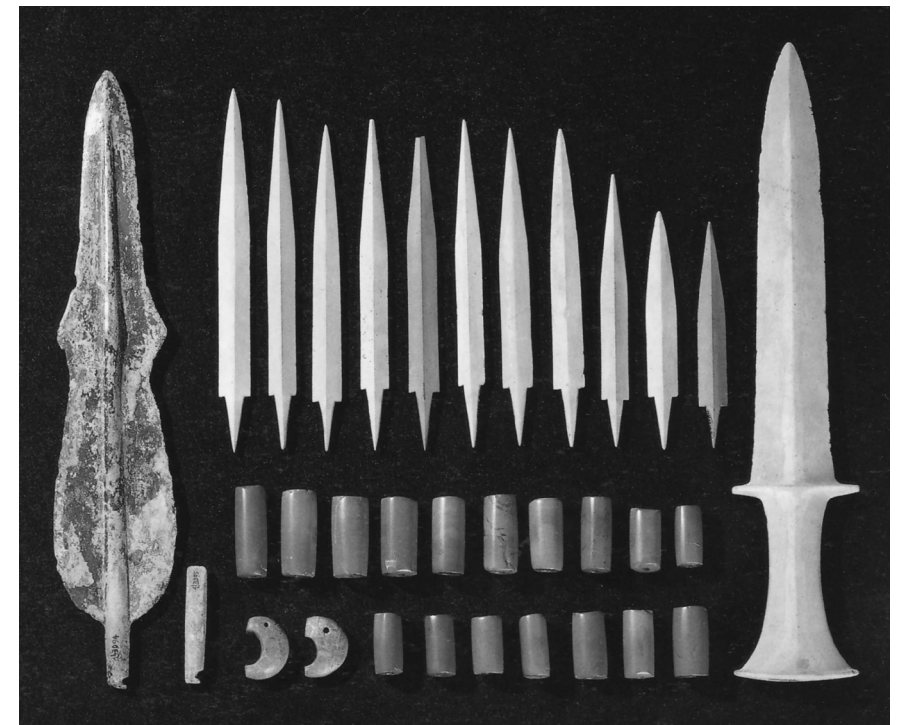


Figure 4. Artifacts Placed in Stone Cist Tomb No. 1
(National Museum of Korea and Gwangju National Museum 1992)

In other papers, I suggested that many elements of Stone Cist Tombs No. 1 and No. 5, including engravings on the capstone, the inclusion of stone filling behind the lining of the tomb, and the excavation of a Bipa-shaped bronze dagger and pottery with a folded rim and short diagonal lines, are similar to those of dolmen tombs (Son 2002, 18-19). Since these characteristics are rarely

seen in the Songguk-ri-type tombs at other sites, the elements of dolmens observed in the Songguk-ri tombs suggest a close relationship between the two tomb styles. At the same time, the fact that a number of circular pit dwellings were discovered during a survey of the entrance road to the Sanjik-ri dolmens (Chungnam Institute of History and Culture 2004) provides a further basis for acknowledging that these two sites may be a part of the same settlement range.

Meanwhile, the fact that Sanjik-ri Dolmen No. 1 is a go-table type dolmen and is located in a spot that overlooks a wide field may suggest that it can be seen as a space where ancestral rituals were performed by residents of the Songguk-ri site. With a large raised capstone and no evidence of a tomb beneath (Lee et al. 1988, 28) and its location providing a good view, it has been suggested that these dolmens may have served as altars (Lee and Ha 1989, 47). Such dolmens are thought to have had symbolic meanings, such as places of sacred gatherings, monuments marking graves, and boundaries that indicate territory, beyond functional use as a grave (Y. Lee 1993, 53).

In addition, the existence of powerful individuals can be inferred from dwellings and artifacts recovered from them. Dwelling No. 54-23 has an area of about 80 m², showing a marked difference compared to other dwellings at the site (Figure 5). A large number of artifacts were excavated within. Among these, the stone discoidal mace and jade were already assumed to be highly symbolic relics (Son 2008, 40-42). Aside from the artifacts, the location of the dwelling in the northwest of the plaza area shows a certain degree of independence and primacy. Its large scale, locational primacy, and the finding of prestige goods all translate to archaeological phenomena that indicate a dwelling occupied by a person of higher status (Kim 1997, 109).

As described above, it is possible to infer the existence of influential individuals or groups at the Songguk-ri site. These can be said to be individuals or groups who have more economic power based on intensive paddy farming. Although rice fields have yet to be identified at the Songguk-ri site, this is likely because excavations could not be conducted due to the objections of the land owner (Kim 1993, 11), and there is a great possibility that such features exist. Compared to the Gwanchang-ri site, where rice paddies from the Bronze Age were excavated, the ratio of agricultural tools at both sites is similar (Son 2003, 18), soil suitable for paddy farming is found at both (Yi 2001, 16), and topographically the Songguk-ri site provides a larger area of potentially arable land (Lee 2003, 127).

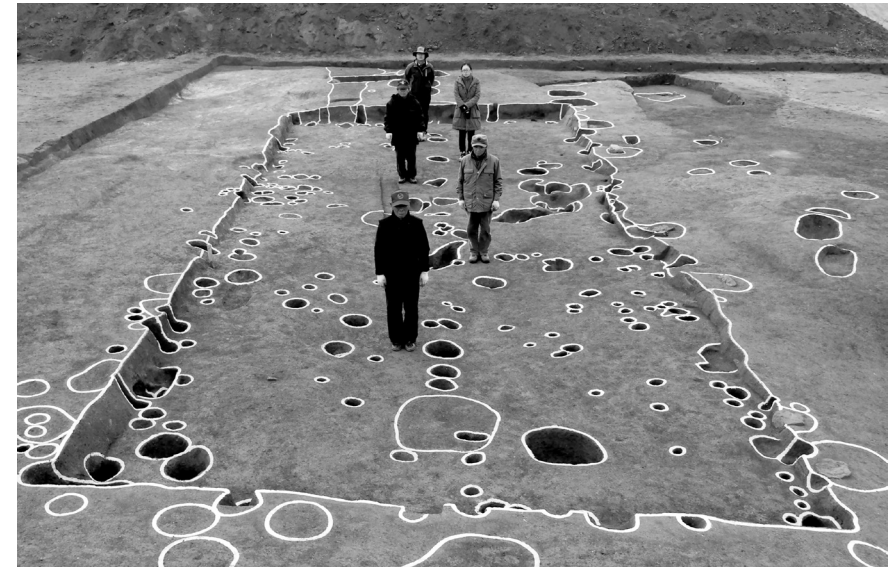


Figure 5. Dwelling No. 54-23 (Kim et al. 2013)

These interpretations are further supported by rice and millet remains recovered from dwellings and pit features at the Songguk-ri site. In particular, the discovery of foxtail millet indicates that not only paddy farming but also cultivation using fields still existed as a major means of securing livelihoods at this stage. And with regards to the function of the large raised buildings surrounded by fences, it has been interpreted variously as a simple above-ground warehouse (Song 2014, 34), a space where storage and farming ceremonies were performed at the same time (Chong 2009, 71), and a location that emphasized ceremonial activities (Ahn 2019, 109; Kim 2014, 14). However, whatever view one takes, it does not change the fact that agriculture was important at the Songguk-ri site.

Meanwhile, I previously interpreted the timber postholes, another characteristic feature of the Songguk-ri site (Figure 6), as a palisade and considered it as evidence of preparation for conflict (Son 2011, 16). However, results from subsequent excavations have demanded an alternative interpretation, as the timber postholes did not enclose the residential group but instead crossed through the center of the site in a straight line. To date, the most convincing interpretation sees the timber posts as forming a ritualistic linear wall

structure (Lee 2019, 47). The maximum length is estimated to be about 200 m, and it is highly likely that it was built over several episodes and that a large-scale labor force was also required.

As further evidence of war, the majority of burnt dwellings were square in plan, and it has even been suggested that these reflect disputes with groups associated with circular pit dwellings (Kim 1994, 186). The excessively high rate of destruction of dwellings by fire suggests unexpected fires, perhaps arson (Song 1995, 95), but some have been skeptical of using these as evidence of conflict (Ahn 2020, 45). On the other hand, considering that 6 of the 9 dwelling units showing the sequence “square-type dwelling → timber posthole” were destroyed by fire, one might also entertain the possibility that existing dwellings were intentionally burnt in order to erect the timber columns.

The above can be summarized as follows. At the Songguk-ri site, economic power secured through intensive paddy farming and increased production likely led to the appearance of influential individuals or groups. They built their authority by managing large raised buildings and actively intervening in food procurement and distribution to residents (Kim 2020, 17) and strengthened their collective dominance by seizing ritual rights to large buildings, timber columns, and dolmens (S. Lee 2006, 134). In addition, large-scale labor force mobilization, implied by the construction of the artificial plane surface and timber column rows, is a characteristic of a group-oriented chiefdom society (S. Kim 2006, 64).

In addition, it is thought that the residents of the Songguk-ri site maintained a stable life to a certain extent, which can be inferred from the expansion of the site. In other words, the pattern of placing circular dwellings on hillslopes and the installation of timber columns on the artificial plane surface indicates the expansion of residential and ceremonial space, which implies that the population of the village gradually increased. The persistence of the village occupied for a long duration without gaps suggests a peaceful atmosphere at the time, despite potential differences between the square and circular dwelling groups. Along with these internal changes, the Songguk-ri site would have developed into a central village located at the apex of other sites as it formed various relationships with surrounding villages.



Figure 6. Timber Postholes (Kim et al. 2013)

Conclusion: Academic Significance and Value

Above, the age and chronology and unique characteristics of the Songguk-ri site, based on the results of excavations carried out thus far, were discussed. In concluding, I would like to end this article by briefly mentioning the academic significance and value of the Songguk-ri site. Broadly speaking, I will divide this discussion into three categories: the significance of excavations and resulting reports of the Songguk-ri site, the value of the data provided through the discovery of a complete Bronze Age settlement, and the possibility of research development in terms of future areas to be excavated.

First of all, the excavation and reporting of the Songguk-ri site is academically significant in that it represents the first example of a site providing the basic data to establish the Songguk-ri type and the Songguk-ri culture mentioned in the introduction. Due to this very reason, the name of the site is used to refer to Songguk-ri-type pottery and the Songguk-ri-type stone dagger (Cho 1989), Songguk-ri-type dwellings (Yi 1992), Songguk-ri-type cemeteries (Kim 2001), Songguk-ri-type villages, and Songguk-ri-type village landscapes (Lee 2003). In addition, the first mold for bronze production with a clear excavation context, a Bipa-shaped bronze dagger found in the same context as a stone dagger, the stone dagger with a handle, flask-shaped red burnished pottery, stone sickles, and other items were also first discovered at the Songguk-ri site (Lee 2018, 41-42).

However, overemphasizing “first discoveries” underestimates the true value of the Songguk-ri site. Of course, this does not discount the scholarly importance of these discoveries, but “first” examples are only meaningful in the sense that they were discovered first. Fate demands that the significance of new archaeological data will always dwindle with the discovery of even newer archaeological data. In fact, although there are not many examples, there are other sites that are thought to have been developed villages larger than the Songguk-ri site with a similar age and characteristics. Since the academic value and potential of the Songguk-ri site goes beyond first finds, the characteristics unique to the site that cannot be found at other sites should be emphasized.

In any case, following excavations of the Songguk-ri site, the Middle Bronze Age was established based on pottery excavated at the site (Fujiguchi 1986, 155). In emphasizing the rapid change observed in the overall culture, this same stage is also sometimes referred to as the Late Period (Lee 2000b, 5-6).

This period sees the most dramatic change observed throughout the Bronze Age, and climate change (Kim 2019, 45), population growth (Kim 2003, 49), agricultural intensification (Kim 2005, 87), the development of social stratification (Bae 2007, 169), and many other diverse environmental, social, and cultural causes have been proposed both individually and in combination to explain these changes.

Regarding the emergence of the Songguk-ri type, two arguments have been proposed: a theory of indigenous origins (Ahn 1992; J. Kim 2006; Song 2004) and a theory of exogenous origins (Ahn 2019; H. Lee 2002; Woo 2002). These perspectives have yet to be narrowed down any further (Song 2015, 66). However, because inferring origins by emphasizing specific archaeological evidence often results in a meaningless and wasteful debate, it is necessary to comprehensively look at the overall archaeological context of the region presumed to be the place of origin, along with detailed analyses of related features and artifacts (Son 2015, 31).

Second, it is important to note the value of the data the site provides as a complete, large-scale settlement. Of course, there are many unexcavated parts of the designated cultural property protection area, and there is a good possibility that the total scope of the actual settlement will be expanded even further. However, it has been possible to observe the magnificence of this large-scale settlement even through the areas that have been excavated so far, and it is expected that additional excavations will provide a more complete picture of the settlement. By contrast, most other large-scale Bronze Age sites identified thus far have been excavated in the context of rescue excavations and the extent of these excavations has been limited by development plans.

Many parts of the Daepyeong-ri site in Jinju (S. Lee 2002, 144), sometimes referred to as “the Bronze Age city,” have been left unexcavated. In the case of the Jungdo-dong site in Chuncheon (Jeong 2020), which is thought to be the largest settlement site, a full excavation was conducted, but features from the Early to the Late Bronze Age are mixed, and the actual density of features at any given time would have been relatively low. On the other hand, the Songguk-ri site provides ideal data for examining settlement structure and processes of change within a specific stage because its occupation span does not extend beyond the Middle Bronze Age.

The third and final value of the Songguk-ri site can be found in its potential for research development. There are still many unexcavated parts of

the Songguk-ri site. Because it is a given that excavation will result in destruction of the site, archaeologists should strive to secure the maximum amount of information with minimal damage during excavations. To achieve this goal, new excavation techniques using the latest equipment and various ICT technologies are being developed and applied today. As excavation techniques are further developed, it is clear that a greater quantity and diversity of information will be obtained from areas that will be excavated in the future.

In previous excavations, timber postholes, which were interpreted as forming a palisade for defense, turned out to be postholes for very large-scale buildings and wooden columns, and phases were subdivided by examining the stratigraphic relationship between dwellings and timber postholes. These discoveries were only possible due to the development of “full-coverage” excavation techniques. As a site preserved as a protected cultural property, the Songguk-ri site is the only Bronze Age site undergoing active academic research excavations and thus provides the promise that there will be more research developments in the future. In my opinion, this is the greatest academic value of the Songguk-ri site that makes it incomparable with other sites.

Considering this, continuing excavations at the Songguk-ri site year after year may be truthfully doing more harm than good. It has been a clear achievement to be able to understand more about the Songguk-ri site through excavations after 2000, but it is possible that many important materials that are not known today have been lost due to limitations in excavation technologies. There are many scientific analyses that can only be performed at the time of excavation. Considering the speed of the development of these analytical methods and the likelihood that new analytical methods will be advanced, it is clear that later excavations will enable the acquisition of more archaeological information.

However, the proposal to nominate the Songguk-ri site as a world heritage site (Yi 2021) and its usefulness will ensure that excavations will continue at pace into the future. If this is the case, more carefully planned excavations must be conducted, unlike in the past. For this, first of all, a trial excavation survey to determine the overall scope of the site and the approximate distribution of features should be conducted. Excavations with a clear purpose should be carried out according to a precise plan established based on results, and it is preferable to avoid approaches that simply excavate each area sequentially, as this may cause more destruction as described above.

Based on current research and excavation results, I have presented my own opinion on the academic significance and value of the Songguk-ri site. As mentioned above, a significant number of diverse features have been discovered at the Songguk-ri site. In addition, features and artifacts with characteristics that have not been observed at other sites have been discovered, making the Songguk-ri site both unique and valuable from many perspectives. Accordingly, a considerable amount of quantitative and qualitative research on the site has already been accumulated, but since there are still many areas that have not been excavated, it can be said that the potential for future research development is even more significant. It is hoped that further research will be spurred on through carefully planned excavations and detailed analyses in the future.

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Joonho SON (shonne@hanmail.net)

Korea University

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