Article

The Introduction of a Formal Garden as a Sign of the Diffusion of Geomancy (P'ungsu) to the Korean Peninsula*

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The Review of Korean Studies Volume 18 Number 1 (June 2015): 181-193

Introduction

The impact of geomancy (p'ungsu in Korean, fengshui in Chinese 風水) on Korean culture and landscape is persistently significant throughout Korean history. Often the art of geomancy played the key role in the selection of sites for graves, temples, and settlements including cities and villages. However, geomancy is not of Korean origin, rather the practice began in China. The basic geomantic principles of choosing an auspicious site by observing its surrounding landscape (especially landforms) and its facing direction are closely related to the ideal conditions of cave dwelling sites in the Loess Plateau 黃土高原, North China (Yoon 2006a, 15-32). The geomantic principles applied on the Korean Peninsula were derived from the Chinese classical geomantic textbooks.

There are differing views on the beginning of the practices of geomancy in Korea. Some argue that geomancy is of Korean origin. However, much credible evidence supports the view that the art of geomancy is of Chinese origin and that it arrived on the Korean Peninsula in a fully developed form, although the time of its introduction remains uncertain. Based on my earlier research published elsewhere, this paper aims to argue that the initial appearance of the exemplary Chinese style garden in Korea is a sign of the diffusion of geomancy from China to the Korean Peninsula.

The view that geomancy is indigenous to Korea is known as "chasaeng p'ungsu" 自生風水.[1] This view is not well supported by any credible evidence, because all key and popular geomantic textbooks used in Korea are from China and the basic principles of geomancy, especially those of landforms, closely reflect the environmental conditions in the Loess Plateau. Clearly, it previously appeared that geomancy was developed as an integral part of ancient Chinese culture, which was then diffused to Korea, much in the same way as Confucian

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* This paper is based on and incorporates parts of my recent papers written in Korean on the introduction of geomancy into Korea. My recently published works on the subject are: "P'ungsuchirisolui Hanbandowa Ilbonyŏldo chŏnpa'e taehan pikyokochal" 풍수지리설의 한반도와 일본열도 전파에 대한 비교고찰 [A Comparative Approach on the Diffusion of Geomancy to Korea and Japan]; *The Culture of Fengshui in Korea*; "P'ungsuchirisolui Hanbando chonpa'e taehan yongu'eso sekaji koryohal jom" 풍수지리설의 한반도 전파에 대한 연구에서 세가지 고려할 점 [The Three Important Points to Be Considered in the Study of the Diffusion of Geomancy (P'ungsu) into the Korean Peninsula]; "Han'guk Kodaesa T'amgu" 한국고대사 탐구 [A Study on Ancient Korean History].

1. An important scholar representing this view is Choi Changjo. For further details, see Choi 1997.

doctrines and its classical works had been distributed.

Some people may want to interpret that the Tan'gun 檀君 myth (the story of founding Korea by the mythical ancestor) contains a certain geomantic idea,[2] but I refute such a view on the grounds that it does not suggest or refer to any geomantic terms of favourable sites or geomantic criteria for an auspicious site. However, the legend relating to choosing the capital city site by King Surowang (ca. 42-199), the first king of Karakguk (a confederated state in the South-eastern part of the Korean Peninsula), is much more geomantic in its nature. According to the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdom* (*Samgukyusa* 三國遺事), the king went to a place called Shindapp'yŏng 新畓坪 to examine the site's worthiness as the Capital City and commented that it was a suitable site, because its landscape (mountains and watercourses) were beautiful and unusually shaped (Ilyon 1969, 279-80). Although no geomantic terms are found in the king's comment during his field inspection, his comment on the landscape of the site is somewhat geomantic, for he gave attention to the shape of the surrounding landforms as geomancers do when they examine a settlement site. A legend from early Korean history containing more geomantic nuance is the story of T'arhae 脫解 during his childhood before becoming the 4th King (57-80) of the Silla dynasty (Ilyon 1969, 120). In the story, T'arhae cheated a man known as Hogong 瓠公 to occupy a house site that is shaped like crescent. The crescent shaped land is a geomantically auspicious site as its three sides are surrounded by hills (namely white tiger, the Main Mountain and azure dragon). These early Korean myths and legends are recorded as written documents only in the 13th century, although they are likely to already have existed as oral tradition long before their conversion into written records.

In the study of the early history of geomancy in Korea, the story of the migration of a legendary Chinese sage, Qizhi (Kija 箕子 in Korean) to Korea is significant. According to an early Chinese source, Qizhi fled to Chosŏn (Korea 朝鮮) around 1050 BC in response to the then newly installed Chinese regime (Fu 1937, 59). The sage supposedly brought Chinese culture with him to Korea, and when he became a Korean king, he taught his people about morality, farming, and weaving. It is important to consider that this story may not be entirely based on historical facts. It is possible that Qizhi did not come

2. For an example of such interpretations, see Pak 1975, 13.

to Korea, or that he did not even exist. However, the story may signify an important historical reality: the arrival of some Chinese immigrants with a more sophisticated ancient Chinese culture compared to that of the Korean people. Some Chinese at that time would have immigrated to the Korean Peninsula for various socio-political reasons, especially with their more advanced cultural ideas and technology. The Chinese geomancy was perhaps introduced to the Korean Peninsula through these early waves of Chinese immigrants. Its introduction could have occurred at a similar time as the introduction of the ancient Chinese culture such as Confucianism and Daoism.

Geomancy is likely to have been practised in Korea since the early stages of its history, perhaps even predating the Three Kingdoms Period 三國時代 (57 BC-668 AD). However, no concrete historical evidence exists to support this view, for the first written record known to date on the use of geomancy in Korea is *The Stele Inscription of Sungboksa Buddhist Temple* 崇福寺 碑文 written by Choi Chiwŏn 崔致遠 (857-?) on an event associated with the practice of geomancy in 798. According to the inscription, when King Wŏnsŏng 元聖王 of the Silla dynasty died, his tomb was made at the site of the Buddhist temple called Koksa 鵠寺 after forcefully removing the existing temple buildings (Lee 1994, 7-8; Yoon 2006a, 39). The tomb was built despite resistance from the Buddhist temple side. The Stele inscription also briefly hints at the beneficial influence of descendants from an ancestor's grave in an auspicious site and even mentions the famous ancient Chinese geomancer Qingwuzhi 青烏子 or Master Azure-crow. This Stele inscription is still regarded as the first written record on the practice of geomancy in Korea. This Stele inscription reporting a conflict over an auspicious site suggests that the belief in and the practice of geomancy in Korea was already so well established by 798 that the ruling royal families forcefully took over an auspicious temple site for constructing a royal tomb. If the belief in geomancy was as intense as shown by the events leading up to the year 798, then it is plausible that geomancy arrived in Korea many years before this date. In search for evidence of the introduction of geomancy in the Korean Peninsula, we need to give special attention to the first appearance of the Chinese style garden in Korea, for their designs appear to reflect the earliest known applications of geomantic principles.

Geomancy and Gardens

The art of house geomancy and the practice of garden design share one common goal of creating an ideal environment for human habitation. Geomancy aims to find an auspicious site and build a suitable structure upon it. It is an act of creating an ideal environment for living. Gardens aim to reorganise the natural environment into the way people see most pleasing. A garden is more than a collection and display of beautiful plants and trees. It represents a human endeavour to create an ideal environment for the human habitat. Gardens are reorganisations of nature in a way that humans perceive as most ideal (beautiful). A house garden is an outcome of the reorganisation of the land and the vegetation surrounding a house according to what its residents (or garden designers) thought most ideal. The design of gardens can also be seen as an act of creating an ideal environment for living. Japanese and Chinese garden manuals reflect the application of geomantic principles in arranging ground, creating ponds, and planting trees.

In geomancy, there is a belief that vital energy flows into the house site through the soil from background mountain range, but the energy will not flow away when it meets water, for the energy cannot cross water in a stream or a pond. One of the most important geomancy classics, *Zangshu* 葬書, written by Guo Pu 郭璞 (276-324) of the Jin 晋 dynasty states: "The canon decrees that the (vital) energy scatters itself as it rides wind, and it stops and stays (in the place), as it meets water. That is why it is called fengshui 風水 which means wind and water, and refers to Chinese geomancy" (Guo 1875, 1). As shown in this classic, it has been a fundamental geomantic belief that the vital energy cannot flow across water in front of an auspicious site and thus it stays in the house site. That is why an auspicious site for a house or grave was normally at the foot hill with hilly ground at its rear and water in front of it. In order to guarantee the capture of vital energy in the auspicious site (house or grave site), they often prepared a pond (garden pond) in the front yard of a house (or in front of a grave in south China). When considering a site, a preferred direction in geomancy is normally the south and its front yard is naturally on the south side of a house. Seeing this as the general condition of an auspicious house site in geomancy, if a traditional Korean house (palace, a government house or a rich person's house) is facing the south and there has been prepared a garden pond in its front yard, such a house site arrangement strongly signifies the

influence of geomancy. On this ground of East Asian cultural context, I would like to suggest that an ancient Korean establishment of a garden with pond on the south (front) yard of a house can signify the practice of geomancy. I would now like to trace back to the time of the first appearance of a house garden with a pond in a front yard (south side) in Korea.

The First Garden in Korean History

During the Three Kingdoms period (57 BC-668 AD) all three kingdoms, Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla, appeared to have established gardens with ponds. Especially in the gardens that were established by Paekche palaces, which were clearly recorded in the *History of Three Kingdoms* (*Samguksagi* 三國史記). The earliest record on a palace garden with a pond is on the event in spring, 391 (the 7th year of the reign of King Chinsa 辰斯王), during which the palace rooms were renovated, the garden ponds were prepared, and garden hills were constructed where rare and beautiful animals and flowers were raised (Kim 1987, 45). The book also recorded that on the 35th year of the reign (635) of King Muwang 武王:

> During the Third Moon (March according to Lunar Calendar) on the southern side of palace a garden pond (lake) was constructed and irrigated water from 20 *ri* (5Km) away from it. On the four sides of pond the willows were planted and in the middle of the pond, an island was constructed. The Island was compared with Bangjang Mountain for Supernatural Sages (Pangjangsŏnsan 方丈仙山). (Kim 1987, 71)

The same book recorded that during the Eighth Moon (August according to Lunar Calendar) of King Muwang's 35th year reign a feast (party) was held for the King and his staff (officers) (Kim 1987, 45). It is also recorded that the King, along with his wife and concubines, went boating on the Great Pond 大池 in March, 639 (Kim 1987, 71). The great (garden) pond is likely to have been the so-called South Pond of the Palace (Kungnamji 宮南池). Historical records also show that at least one Paekche king had floated pleasure boats in the palace garden pond and had feasts (garden parties) at the garden pavilion called Manghaeru 望海樓, or the pavilion of looking out the Sea (ibid.). These records

suggest that the size of the palace garden was quite grand with a pleasure boat(s) in a big garden pond and garden pavilion(s). However, these historical records are not sufficient in order for us to understand the exact size and floor plan of the palace garden. Nevertheless, we have enough evidence to conjecture that the garden was probably influenced by geomancy, for the garden pond and garden hill (the island in the pond) was prepared in the south court (the front court) of the palace. In our effort to understand the characteristics of the ancient Paekche palace gardens, it is useful to consider the Japanese historical records concerning the introduction of the first palace garden from Korea. From the description of the first Japanese garden, we can conjecture the garden characteristics of Paekche palace, for the first Japanese palace garden designer was Rojakong 路子工, or Michiko no Takumi in Japanese, an immigrant from Paekche. According to the *Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to AD 697* (*Nihongi* 日本紀), the story of the first garden in Japan is as follows:

> This year a man emigrated from Paekche whose face and body were all flecked with white, being perhaps affected with white ringworm. People disliking his extraordinary appearance, wished to cast him away on an island in the sea. But this man said: "If you dislike my spotted skin, you should not breed horses or kine in this country which are spotted with white. Moreover, I have a small talent. I can make the figures of hills and mountains. If you kept me and made use of me, it would be to the advantage of the country. Why should you waste me by casting me away on an island of the sea?" Hereupon they gave ear to his words and did not cast him away. Accordingly he was made to draw the figures of Mount Sumi and of the Bridge of Wu in the Southern Court. The people of that time called him by the name of Michiko no Takumi, and he was also called Shikomaro. (Aston 1956, 144)

From the above record we can assume that the Korean immigrant built the first Japanese garden on the south court of the palace by preparing an arched bridge over a pond or a stream. The Bridge of Wu, or Ojakkyo 烏鵲橋 in Korean, was likely an arched bridge similar to the one that we often see in Japanese gardens. The above historical record does not inform us whether or not he indeed prepared a garden pond in the first Japanese palace garden. However, the fact that he made an arched bridge in the garden suggests that either he built a pond or at least he created a stream that he then placed a bridge over. Such

an example of garden design sounds quite geomantic for the two reasons that: firstly, the south court must be the front court, because the palace accordingly faced southward (an auspicious direction) position just as other palace buildings were located in China and Korea; secondly, a garden pond in the front of a house is also geomantic, primarily because it symbolises the capturing of vital energy in the house.

The figure of Mount Sumi in the Japanese historical record can be interpreted as Mount Sumeru, the mythic Buddhist Mountain, which is supposed to be in the centre of Buddhist cosmology. In geomancy, an auspicious site requires the background hills and an open flat front. However, a hill, called Ansan 案山 or Table Mountain, in the front at some distance from the auspicious site (e.g., palace) is needed to protect the site. Mount Sumi in the first Japanese palace garden would have functioned geomantically as the Table Mountain that protected the auspiciousness of the palace. The garden hill (Mount Sumi) was perhaps created as an island in the middle of the garden pond or somewhere further away from the pond and palace building. Whether it is an island or a garden hill further away from the pond, a hill in the front court is a table mountain in geomantic terms. This first Japanese garden was likely modelled after a Korean (Paekche) palace garden, for it was created by an immigrant garden designer, who had just arrived from the Paekche Kingdom in the Korean Peninsula. I conjecture that Rojagong (Michiko no Takumi) was one of the Paekche palace gardeners (or garden designers). Judging from the way he introduced himself as a garden designer, and also the fact that he was commissioned to build the first Japanese palace garden, he would have necessarily acquired the garden construction skills from the Paekche palace garden as a gardener or garden designer. It is unlikely that the commoners at that time had the ability and resources to build such formal gardens as described in the historical records. It is assumed that only sites such as the palace and the royal temple were likely to have had any gardens of sizeable scales with garden ponds. For these reasons I assume that the first Japanese garden designer, Rojagong, was most likely a palace gardener of the Paekche Kingdom before immigrating to Japan.

Rojagong might have created a garden stream instead of a garden pond and he would have then put the arched bridge over the stream, while he created a garden hill (Maount Sumi in the historical record) beyond the stream from the palace building. If this was indeed the case, such an arrangement would also

be very favourable geomantic conditions, for a palace with watercourse in front and a hill beyond the water resembles an auspicious site in a miniaturised form. Judging from the information from *Nihongi* that Rojagong put across an arched bridge, he most likely created a garden pond in the Southern Court, instead of a garden stream. However, he might even have created both, a pond and a stream, only to put the arched bridges over them. In any case, a creation of water features and a garden hill in the Southern Court of the palace forms such a geomantically suitable arrangement. Considering these historical records, the garden that Rojagong created appeared to reflect an application of geomantic principles and may in fact also reflect the proto type of the Paekche palace garden design, since he was from Paekche and most likely a palace gardener. If a garden reflecting an application of geomantic principles appeared in Japan by 612, such a garden would have existed in Korea (Paekche) some time before that date. In fact, already by 391, the *Samguksagi* had recorded the existence of the Paekche garden with a garden pond and a garden hill on which were raised extraordinary flowering plants and animals (Kim 1987, 36). Perhaps in light of this evidence, the Paekche palace garden might well have been the model for the first Japanese garden.

Clearly, Japan practised the art of geomancy by 7th century. According to the *Nihonshoki* 日本書紀, during the 10th Moon of 602, Kwallŭk 觀勒, a Buddhist monk from Paekche, brought books relating to calendar, astrology, geomancy (*chiri* 地理), and divination to the Japanese palace (Yoshio 2006, 4). At that time, some 3 to 4 Japanese scholars learned about those books from the Korean monk. And in 612, Japan created the first palace garden reflecting geomantic principles by a Korean immigrant. In addition to these records regarding the introduction of geomancy to Japan, there is a clear Japanese record that the then Japanese government officers examined the newly proposed capital site, Nara basin, by applying geomantic principles on the 15th Day of the Second Moon (February), in 708.

The *Sequel to the Nihongi* (*Shoku Nihongi* 續日本紀) recorded the incident, citing that "the land of Nara is suitable for the new capital to build, because the land is in accordance with the four guardians (azure dragon, white tiger, black worrier, and red bird—the protective hills on the four directions of an auspicious site) and three sides are sheltered by mountains (hills)" (Aoki 1989-2000, 1; qtd. in Nobuyoshi 1998, 19). The *Shoku Nihongi's* statement clearly demonstrated that geomantic terms and principles were applied when the

Japanese court inspected the newly proposed capital site. Based on these records, we can assume that geomancy was practised by the ruling class in Japan some time before the 7th century. Korea must, therefore, have practised geomancy sometime before that time, for the Koreans introduced the art of geomancy to Japan.

Conclusion

The art of geomancy and of garden design share one common goal of creating an ideal place (landscape) for human dwelling. The principles of garden design used in Ancient Korea and Japan reflect the influence of geomancy (fengshui). In East Asia, both the art of garden design and that of geomancy originated from China and were seemingly diffused to the Korean Peninsula, and thereafter introduced to the Japanese Archipelago. *Nihongi*, a key historical record of Japan documented that the first garden was created by a Korean immigrant in 612. This first Japanese garden appeared to reflect the influence of geomantic principles by having a garden pond and a garden hill (probably an island in the pond) on the Southern (front) Court. This first Japanese garden built by a Korean may well be a sign of the introduction of geomancy in Japan. Therefore, it can be said that in the Korean Peninsula such a type of garden necessarily existed some time before the first Japanese garden. Here I suggest that the Paekche palace garden, which was created in 391, during the 7th year of King Chinsa's reign 辰斯王, was the proto model of the first Japanese garden created by a Korean immigrant. Based on these discussions, one can argue that the first appearance of gardens reflecting geomantic principles signifies the introduction of geomancy into the Korean Peninsula. This paper argues that the diffusion of geomancy to the Korean Peninsula can be traced back as far as the year 391, with the first written record of the appearance of the palace garden in the Paekche Kingdom.

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Abstract

Geomancy (p'ungsu in Korean and fengshui in Chinese) is the ancient Chinese art of landscape evaluation when choosing auspicious sites for houses, public buildings, settlements, and graves. The art of geomancy seemed to have originated from the Loess Plateau, North China and its well-developed form was introduced to Korea with an early wave of the cultural diffusion from China before or during the Three Kingdom's Period. This paper proposes that the appearance of formal gardens (Chinese gardens with ponds) is a sign of the diffusion of geomancy to the Korean Peninsula. This argument is based on the following two points: firstly, both geomancy and the art of creating gardens share the same purpose of creating an ideal environment for humans. A garden is more than a collection and display of beautiful plants and trees. It represents a human endeavour to create an ideal environment for human habitation. Gardens are reorganisations of nature in a way that humans see as most ideal (beautiful). The art of geomancy is also an attempt to choose a most auspicious site and to create an ideal residence or grave on it. Secondly, Chinese garden art and geomancy share similar views on the quality of water: a pond or a watercourse should be in front of a house, not behind the house. This classical Chinese garden principle is an application of the geomantic idea that vital energy travels through soil, but stops when the energy meets water, for it cannot cross through the water. The ancient art of garden making incorporates much of these geomantic principles. Therefore, I suggest that the appearance of palace gardens in Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla during The Three Kingdoms Period is a sign of the diffusion of geomancy to the Korean Peninsula.

Keywords: geomancy (p'ungsu or fengshui), garden, garden pond, vital energy, Paekche, Korea

Submission: 2014. 10. 4. Referee/Revision: 2015. 1. 3. Confirm: 2015. 4. 28.