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The ins and the outs: Foodways, feasts, and social differentiation in the Baekje Kingdom, Korea

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ABSTRACT

This article compares pottery assemblages from Pungnap Toseong (PT) and 16 adjacent settlements in order to understand the status-related foodways in the Hanseong phase (18 BCE–CE 475) of the Baekje Kingdom in Korea. PT is an earthen-walled site that may have been the first capital town of Baekje. Its residents were arguably of higher status than those of other settlements and, as with other complex societies, are likely to have used food and food-related activities for reinforcing, maintaining, and transforming social relations. The intersite comparison reveals that PT contains more ceramic wares than any other site, especially more storing and serving vessels; abundant storing vessels suggest surplus production mobilized toward the center, while abundant serving vessels are, along with zooarchaeological remains, indicative of rituals and feasts. Researchers have argued that Baekje's elites differentiated themselves from those of lower rank by consuming luxurious foods. This study adds another dimension to the previous discussion by showing that regardless of food quality, the people of PT had a large amount of stored foods and occasionally consumed foods in commensal contexts in order to maintain their social alliances and reinforce the hierarchy.

1. Introduction

This article compares pottery inventories to investigate foodways and the articulation and maintenance of social differentiation during the Hanseong phase (18 BCE–CE 475) of the Baekje Kingdom in Korea. The focus of the study is Pungnap Toseong (PT), which may have been the first capital town of Baekje, and pottery assemblages from 16 adjacent sites will be considered in comparison. Foodways, a web of behaviors related to the procurement, distribution, storage, presentation and consumption of food, have been a central research topic in anthropology (Counihan and Van Esterik, 2013; Gosden and Hather, 1999; Hastorf, 2008; Wiessner and Schiefenhövel, 1996). More than mere nutrition and nourishment, food and food-related activities are intrinsically social and symbolic (Gumerman, 1997; Mintz, 1985; Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993; Palmer and Van der Veen, 2002). What is acceptable as food is culturally determined and is subject to change depending on social contexts. Choosing what and how to eat expresses the social status, identity, gender, and religion, as well as personal memories and experiences, of the eaters. Foods may create social bonds and unity, while simultaneously naturalizing unequal social relations.

The current study examines how foods and foodways were associated with hierarchical social relationships in the context of an emergent state. Foods are articulated with social hierarchy in a number of ways. Elites may consume high-quality and luxurious foods that symbolize their wealth and power. Food items in hierarchical societies are rarely distributed equally among people, and the variation in food distribution reflects and reproduces the social positions of different groups and individuals (Gumerman, 1997). In Asian societies, rice and meat are commonly considered to have been costly foods that only people with economic and political power could afford, and a wide range of foods have been deemed luxurious in other social settings (Ervynck et al., 2003; Hayden, 2003; Hunter-Anderson et al., 1995). The distinction between elites' and commoners' foods is far from permanent, however, because a food's status may change in relation to changes in social circumstances. Many food items such as coffee, chocolate, spices

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and sugar emerged as luxurious and exotic foods that were only affordable by subsets of populations, but they eventually became less costly and mundane through leveling processes (Bakels and Jacomet, 2003; Van der Veen, 2003). Elites consume special foods as a means of expressing social status, but the effectiveness of particular foods as a status symbol is diminished as the foods become more widely available.

Social relationships are reflected not only in the consumption of specific foods but also in the practices involved in their procurement, storage, preparation, and presentation. It is common to observe that crops in hierarchical societies are produced and managed under the supervision of elites. Foods in such social societies are mass stored, and elites' ability to control the stored foods is important in maintaining hierarchical social relations (Gumerman, 1997; Wesson, 1999). Food preparation and serving are also structured toward defining and reproducing social relations. Cooking often requires specialist labor, and elites commonly rely on foods prepared by others, including people outside of their households or villages (Welch and Scarry, 1995). Although low-ranking residents are likely to prepare their own foods, the division of labor may still exist within a household depending on age and gender (Gumerman, 1997; Hastorf, 1991). Foods in hierarchical societies are repeatedly consumed in communal settings to construct social relations of equality, harmony, and solidarity and to promote and legitimize status differences. Feasting requires special cuisines and elaborate table manners as means to overtly display social status (Bray, 2003; Hastorf, 2008; Pavao-Zuckerman and Loren, 2012). In short, it is not simply the specific types of foodstuffs per se but more broadly the foodways that matter in understanding the social dimensions of foods in hierarchical societies.

Baekje was an ancient kingdom with hereditary social status, a bureaucratic system of government, and an agricultural economy based on diverse crops (Barnes, 2001, 2015; Best, 2006). At the apex of the hierarchical ladder were the king and royal family, followed by aristocrats, commoners and people of the lowest class (Yang, 1995). The wealth and power of those in high social positions were expressed in the construction of large tombs and monuments, as well as in the use of prestige goods such as glazed porcelains, gilt bronze artifacts, and decorative swords (Kwon, 2008a). Previous archaeological research on the Baekje society focused on these prestige goods and highlighted their roles in legitimizing the rule of the central government over peripheral regions (Lee, 2005). Pottery has rarely been featured in the discussion other than in debating chronology (Choi, 2008). This study, in contrast, focuses on pottery as a means to unravel the interplay of social status and food-related behaviors. Given the formalization of hierarchical social orders in Baekje, it appears legitimate to expect that foodways varied across different social statuses and that differences would be reflected in ceramic wares. This study compares the pottery assemblages of PT and 16 neighboring sites in order to investigate this issue.

2. Baekje Kingdom and Pungnap Toseong

The history of Baekje (18 BCE–CE 660) is divided into three subperiods based on the location of its capital: Hanseong (18 BCE–CE 475), Ungjin (475–538), or Sabi (538–660). The historical text of *Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms) compiled by Kim Busik in 1145 documents that Baekje was founded at the current city of Seoul in 18 BCE, and archaeological records show that this area was a center of a full-fledged ancient kingdom by ca. CE 250 (Park, 2013). PT, the locus of this study (Fig. 1), was fortuitously discovered in 1925 when heavy flooding exposed the southern wall of the site and led to the discovery of two bronze kettles and a few potsherds (Kim, 2001). The site was partially excavated

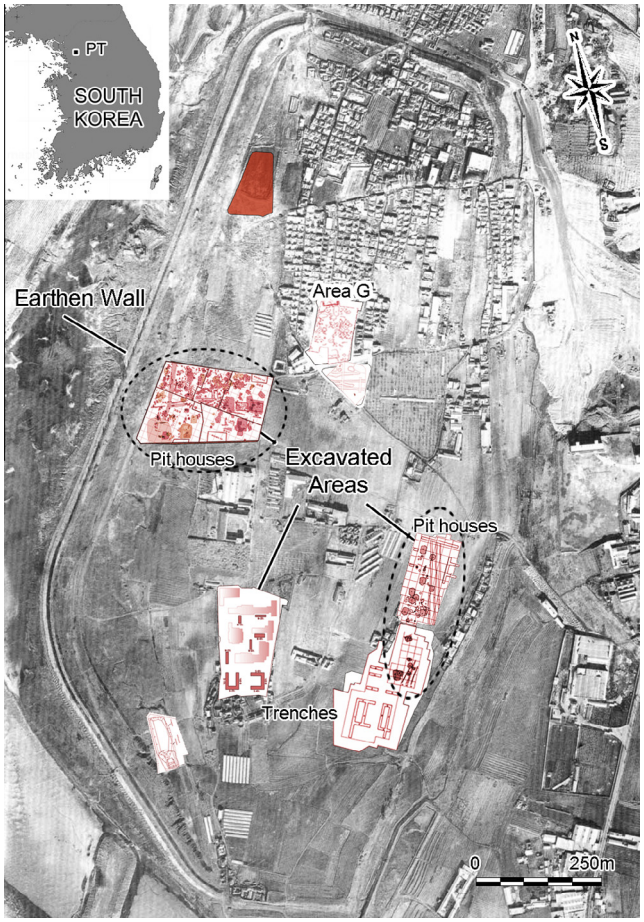

Fig. 1. Aerial view of PT in 1972 and the excavated areas. Dashed circles indicate concentrations of pit houses at the eastern and western sides of the site. Photo edited by Luke Kim.

in 1963 and subsequently designated a national historical site. Over three decades later, the excavation recommenced in 1996 and continued almost annually until 2010 (National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, 2013).

Debate continues among local researchers with regard to the earliest construction date of the earthen wall and whether PT was indeed the first capital town of Baekje, recorded in *Samguk sagi* as *Hanam Wirye Seong* (Kim, 2001; Park, 2003, 2013; Shin, 2002). Although various opinions exist within and outside academia, most archaeologists agree that PT was the capital of Baekje during the Hanseong period (Kim, 2001; Lee, 2009). Provided that this view is correct, PT was the center of the kingdom until 475, when Baekje was attacked by Goguryeo (37 BCE–CE 668) and moved its capital to Gongju, 135 km south of Seoul.

The pottery assemblages to be compared come from 16 Baekje-period sites located within 50 km of PT (Fig. 2). The sites were excavated between 1991 and 2011, mostly as part of rescue excavation projects. All of these sites contain multiple pit houses ranging in number from 3 to 85 (Table 1). A "pit house" refers to a building whose construction involved digging a few centimeters into the ground and making a leveled floor. The presence of a Baekje pit house is indicated by a circular, rectangular, or polygonal dugout hollow in the ground and the traces of postholes along the wall. Because the upper structures are not intact, the overall shapes of the houses are not clearly known. Wooden pillars were certainly erected to support the roof, and the roof could have been straw-thatched or roof-tiled. Admittedly, pit houses were not the only building type in Baekje and some buildings were constructed