

Paekche-Yamato Exchanges in the Early Sixth Century: The Bilateral Relationship

Chizuko T. Allen

Among many levels of historical exchanges between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands, official governmental relations occupied a significant place. Scholars agree that the kingdom of Paekche (c. 57-660) based in central and southwestern Korea enjoyed amicable relationship with Yamato, the fledgling kingdom of the Japanese islands. Some point to the general principle that Paekche offered advanced cultural items, institutions, and technologies to Yamato in return for Yamato's supply of military aid (Farris 1996). This paper takes a closer look at the relationship between the two kingdoms in the early decades of the sixth century to see if this hypothesis applied.

The early sixth century was a time of renewal for both Paekche and Yamato ruled by capable rulers, Muryōng (r. 501-523) and Keitai (r. 507-531) respectively. They reactivated a close bilateral relationship and passed it on to their successors, particularly King Song (r. 523-553) of Paekche and King Kinmei (r. 534-571) of Yamato. To better understand the reciprocity of the two kingdoms, first, we take a look at the uniqueness seen in the backgrounds and accession of Muryōng and Keitai respectively. Second, we examine their actual exchanges and shed light on their diplomatic policies and strategies in the context of their effort to strengthen and extend their control in their respective domains. Finally, the relationship must be placed in the context of the rapidly changing political landscape of the Korean peninsula in the sixth century and beyond.

The *Samguk sagi*, compiled by the twelfth-century Koryō official Kim Pusik, gives extensive accounts on Silla, but gives scanty coverage of Paekche events and makes no reference to its contact with Yamato for over two centuries until the mid seventh century. By contrast, the *Nihon shoki*, compiled in early-eighth-century Japan, is full of many but biased accounts of exchanges between the two kingdoms especially from the sixth century. A critical use of the *Nihon shoki* accounts, supplemented by archaeological findings, is indispensable in understanding the politics between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands in early times. Information from the *Samguk yusa*, a collection of historical tales and legends by the monk Iryōn in the thirteenth century, as we shall see, proves to provide an important key in understanding Muryōng's background.

The Background

The *Samguk sagi* reports that Muryōng, or Sama, as he was originally called, was born as the second son of the twenty-fourth Paekche ruler Tongšōng (r. 479-500), and succeeded his father to the throne in 501. Although the *Samguk sagi* notes Muryōng's numerous military confrontations with Koguryō as well as his diplomatic missions to Liang China in 512 and 521, it makes no reference to his life before his accession. The *Nihon shoki*, by contrast, gives an account revealing unusual circumstances surrounding his birth. It argues, in short, that he was King Kaero (r. 455-475)'s biological son, but at the same time was considered Kaero's younger brother Konji's son. According to this account, Kaero dispatched Konji to King Yūryaku's (r. 457-479) court in Yamato for an extended stay, hoping to strengthen Paekche's alliance with Yamato. Before the departure, Kaero matched his pregnant consort to his brother, but instructed that her child, if born on the way to Yamato, should be sent back to Paekche immediately. A boy was born when their ship anchored at a small island off northern Kyushu, and he was named Shima (Kor: Sama), the word for an "island" in Japanese. He later became King Muryōng (*Nihon*

shoki 2003, Yūryaku 5, 2:108-110). Although an unusual story, his birth year of 561, assigned by this account, proved correct. In 1971, when his undisturbed tomb was unearthed in Kongju, South Ch'ungch'ōng province, a stone engraving that mention the king's death at the age of sixty-two in 523 was found (So 2001, 13).

Thus, the *Nihon shoki*'s records on Muryōng makes a sharp contrast with the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa*'s records that he was the son of Tongsōng, who in turn was Konji's son. Furthermore, the *Nihon shoki* notes that Munju, Kaero's immediate successor, was his younger brother just as Konji was, while the *Samguk yusa* and the *Samguk sagi* record that both Munju and Konji were Kaero's sons. The fraternal links recounted by the *Nihon shoki* turn out to be more reliable than the paternal line of successions delineated by the Korean sources. Through cross-referencing to the Chinese annals recording Chinese titles conferred to Munju and Konji, both Korean and Japanese scholars have concluded that Munju and Konji were Kaero's younger brothers, rather than sons (Yi Ki-dong 1996, 157-160; Kasai Wajin 2000, 217-218). The *Nihon shoki* drew heavily on old Paekche sources, still available in the early eighth century. In sum, Korean and Japanese scholars now suspect that Muryōng was the son of either Kaero or Konji (So 2001, 15; O 2004, 257)

The *Nihon shoki* provides no information concerning Muryōng's life between his birth in 461 and his accession in 501. For the enigmatic forty years of his life, the legend of Sōdong recounted in the *Samguk yusa* gives an important clue. In his brief introduction, Iryōn notes that an old record attributed this legend to King Mugang but at the same time rejects it as a mistake on the ground that Paekche had no king with this name. Iryōn comments that the legend concerned King Mu (r. 600-640), Paekche's marshal emperor. The Korean historian Yi Pyōng-do pointed out decades ago that the name Mugang in fact had referred to Muryōng because the Chinese characters k(g)ang and ryōng were synonyms (Yi 1976, 536). Thus, we must take a look at the legend of Sōdong, a man who was born in poverty but rose to the throne thanks to his wit, luck, and character. Sōdong, or a "wild potato boy," had no father because his mother was impregnated by a dragon living in a nearby pond. He was so poor that he dug wild potatoes in the fields and sold them. Hearing of a beautiful Silla princess, he traveled to Kyōngju, the capital of Silla, and managed to get her out of the palace and court her. Upon returning to Paekche, he showed her many gold nuggets that he had previously encountered but ignored in the fields. Sōdong sent gold to the Silla king and earned his approval to marry the princess. Because Sōdong was generous and princely, the people of Paekche raised him to the throne. The royal couple later built a magnificent temple called Mirūksa, inspired by the images of Maitreya Buddha that they saw (*Samguk yusa* 1972, 142-144).

Yi Pyōngdo thought that even though the legend had originally referred to Muryōng much of its content concerned Tongsōng, who ruled prior to Muryōng and was the only Paekche king known to have married a woman sent from the Silla court (*Samguk sagi* 1996, Tongsōng 15, 2:73). Tongsōng's original name was Mudae or Maje according to the *Samguk sagi*, and Marta, according to the *Nihon shoki*, thus corresponding to Ma-dong ("potato boy"), the suspected original pronunciation for Sōdong. Yi also thought that the building of the Mirūksa temple had been initiated by Tongsōng but probably completed by Muryōng (Yi 1976, 131-150).

O Kye-hwa has pointed out that Sōdong's background reflects Muryōng's birth better than any other Paekche monarch's. Just as Sōdong had no father, Muryōng probably had no father to look after him as he belonged to neither Kaero nor Konji. He probably was sent back to Paekche as a young child and raised by his mother, or a nurse, away from the palace. His distance from the royal palace explains his survival of Koguryō's destruction of Hansōng, Paekche's original capital, and massacre of King Kaero and his family as well as abduction of eight thousand Paekche people as prisoners in 475. His marginalization in the royal family is demonstrated by the fact that he rose to the throne only after his uncle Munju and his two cousins Samgūn, Munju's son, and Tongsōng. During their reigns, Muryōng probably had no rank or title as he is never mentioned in *Samguk sagi* prior to 501 although other royal princes and their titles

are mentioned. If he grew up in an unprivileged household, he may have turned him to Buddhism, as O suspects, and become a compassionate man. In contrast to Tongsōng's indifference to his people, the *Samguk sagi* depicts Muryōng as a virtuous king who opened the state granary to the starving people at the time of famine (*Samguk sagi* 1996, Muryōng 6, 2:77). Therefore, the basic storyline of the legend may have grown out of Muryōng's life while it incorporated his immediate predecessor Tongsōng name and marriage. Although Muryōng had the lineage required for the Paekche throne, his succession was unconventional.

In 506, King Buretsu (r. 499-506), the last king from the main royal line, died without heir. According to the *Nihon shoki*, two powerful ministers from the Mononobe and Ōtomo clans searched for a rightful heir from remaining branch lines and found Keitai, or Ohodo (Ōdo), as he was called at the time, who was a fifth-generation descendant of King Ōjin from the early fifth century. It is apparent that he was not the only man remotely related to the previous kings as the *Nihon shoki* admits that the two ministers had considered another candidate prior to meeting Keitai. The key to his selection lies in the fact that he was the "only wise man among royal descendents." Keitai was a successful head of Mikuni, an area in Echizen, present-day Fukui Prefecture, away from Yamato, and he met the criteria for the search of a capable man who would restore Yamato's power and authority after Buretsu's negligence (*Nihon shoki* 2003, Keitai 1, 2:181-184).

One of the first things that Keitai did was to take Princess Teshiraka, King Buretsu's sister, as his queen although he already had wives and two grown sons. Scholars agree that the marriage to the royal princess gave him the legitimacy he needed as a man from an undistinguished branch line of the royal house (Kanda et al 1978, 181-182). Additionally, Teshiraka's two sisters married Keitai's two grown sons and strengthened the merger of his house to the main royal line. When he died twenty-four years later, these sons were able to succeed to the throne and rule briefly as Kings Ankan and Senka. Keitai and Teshiraka had a son, Kinmei (r. 535-571), who in turn succeeded to the throne and produced descendants who became generations of Yamato rulers (*Nihon shoki* 2003, Ankan, Senka, and Kinmei, 2:211-285).

Japanese scholars hypothesize Keitai's long-standing interest and knowledge in maritime activities particularly in the East Sea. His base in Mikuni was by Tsuruga Bay, which provided excellent natural harbors facing the East Sea. According to the *Nihon shoki*, he spent his first twenty years of his reign in temporary palaces along the Uji River, which easily linked to the East Sea via Lake Biwa and Tsuruga Bay. Furthermore, many terracotta cylinders with sailboat engravings were found as grave offerings near his tomb (Mori and Kadowaki 1995, 103). With his background in maritime activities, he naturally looked to close relations with peninsular states. Thus, both Keitai and Muryōng grew up in the peripheries of the respective royal houses and took the thrones as mature and capable men.

The Exchanges

According to the *Nihon shoki*, Paekche's relationship with the Japanese kingdom goes back to King Kūnch'ogo's first contact with the Yamato court via a Kaya state in the second half of the fourth century. King Kwanggaet'o's stele records Paekche and Yamato's joint military against Koguryō on the Korean peninsula a few decades later. It is known through both the *Samguk sagi* and the *Nihon shoki* accounts that King Chōnji (r. 405-419) spent several years in Yamato before his accession. During the reigns of Kaero and Yūryaku, the two kingdoms frequently exchanged envoys. As mentioned, Kaero sent his brother Konji to Yamato where he remained and raised five children. The *Nihon shoki* also mentions that the Yamato court "bestowed" on King Munju the new capital Ungjin when Hansōng fell to Koguryō in 475. This may indicate that the Yamato government sent forces to help Paekche's southward move to the Kūm River region, although no detail is given. The *Nihon shoki* adds that four year later when

Munju's son and successor Samgūn died, Yūryaku gave five hundred soldiers to Konji's son to facilitate his return and accession in Paekche. Marta became King Tongsōng. Paekche's cultural items and technologies naturally followed the Paekche delegates and royalty to Yamato.

Despite his close ties to Yūryaku, Tongsōng as a Paekche ruler failed to keep in touch with the Yamato court. The fact that Yūryaku had no heir and his former rival's sons succeeded to the throne may have turned Tongsōng away from seeking Yamato's alliance. In fact, the *Nihon shoki* gives a brief account concerning a discord between Paekche and Kaya incited by a man from Yamato. It says that in the last year of King Kenzo's reign (485-487), two Kaya men killed a Paekche general and occupied a key southern peninsular location to blockade Paekche's transport of grains. Enraged, King Tongsōng dispatched his troops and eventually killed three hundred Kaya men while the man from Yamato returned home (*Nihon shoki*, Kenzo 3, 2:162-163). Although some scholars argue that the incident was an expression of in-fighting among Paekche strongmen, it appears that a bloody battle was fought between Paekche and Kaya over key locations at this time (Kim T'ae-sik 1993, 113). Yamato sided with Kaya and thus infuriated Tongsōng at this time. Paekche and Yamato were close allies in the last decades of the fifth century.

Yamato's distrust of Paekche is confirmed by the incident of 503, as related in the *Nihon shoki*. Muryōng sent his envoy to Yamato in that year, but Buretsu (r. 498-506) gave a cold reception and detained the envoy with the excuse that no official communication had been made between the two kingdoms for many years. In the next year, Muryōng sent a man from his royal family named Saa with gifts and a letter apologizing about the low rank of the first envoy. The *Nihon shoki* adds that Saa stayed in Yamato and eventually fathered a son named Pōpsa, and his descendants formed well-known clan in Japan (*Nihon shoki*, Buretsu 7, 2:178).

Muryōng's goodwill was reciprocated soon after Keitai ascended to the throne. In 509, according to the *Nihon shoki*, Keitai returned Paekche migrants and their descendants living in "Mimana," or presumably Korea, to Paekche. Three years later, he sent to the Paekche court his official and forty excellent horses from northern Kyushu. Clearly, Muryōng found his perfect partner in Keitai (*Nihon shoki*, Keitai 3 and 6, 2:187).

The details of Paekche gifts to Yamato are not clear except that Mononobe received clothes, bolts of silk, and iron axes when he was escorted to the Paekche capital from a southern island after being attacked by Kaya forces (*Nihon shoki*, Keitai 10, 2:194). Yet, clearly, Yamato valued Paekche's human resources most. In 513 Muryōng sent a scholar of the Five Chinese Classics, Tan Yang-i along with two generals. Three years later, another scholar Ko An-mu was dispatched to replace Tan (*Nihon shoki*, Keitai 7 and 10, 2:190-194). After Muryōng, his son and successor Sōng continued sending learned men regularly (*Nihon shoki*, Kinmei 15, 2:262). They naturally brought various books and drawings with them.

The scholars of the Five Classics are the prime example of Paekche's advanced culture and technologies that Yamato coveted. Paekche sent two official missions to the Liang (502-557) court in southern China and received books and other gifts, as recorded in the *Samguk sagi* (*Samguk sagi*, Muryōng 21, 2:78) and the Chinese annals. In addition, Paekche had other channels to tap into the rich Chinese culture, as represented by the monk Palchōng's sojourn and study in Liang China (Best 2006, 137). Southern Chinese techniques and styles employed in Muryōng's tomb also suggest work done by a large group of Chinese artisans (Yoshii 2001b). Paekche not only embraced the Chinese script, learning, and statecraft but adapted them to its own culture and needs by this time. Muryōng apparently had Chinese scholars that he retained for his government and was able to release some of them for Yamato. These scholars were knowledgeable not only in classical literature, history, and Confucianism but in political affairs and administrative methods. We can conjecture that they taught many subjects to Keitai, his sons, and his officials (Kitō 1994, 258).

The outcome of their learning from the Paekche scholars surface prominently in Keitai's oldest son Ankan's short reign (534-535). The *Nihon shoki* recounts that Ankan placed scores of

miyake, locations of direct control, in regions ranging from present-day Kumamoto in central Kyushu to Gunma in eastern Honshu, and had officials collect taxes from respective areas. The next ruler, Keitai's second son Senka (r. 536-539) established a grain transport and storage system to and around Tsukushi, northern Kyushu, the gateway to and from the Korean states (*Nihon shoki*, Ankan 2, 2:217; Senka 1, 2:221). Yamato's direct control system over strategic locations and transportation of rice can be the immediate outcome of the instruction that Ankan and Senka received from the Paekche scholars.

The Reciprocity

If the relationship was mutual, what did Yamato offer to Paekche in return for the valuable gift of knowledge? Yamato probably gave more gifts to Paekche than the *Nihon shoki* admits. Archaeologists have pointed out that timber from Kōyamaki (*sciadopitys verticillata*), a tough tree indigenous and available only in Japanese mountains, was clearly used for building coffins for Paekche royalty and aristocrats. Muryōng's tomb had his and his queen's coffins preserved well enough to show their unique Paekche design built with large panels from seven Kōyamaki trees presumably several hundred years old. This means that Paekche artisans maintained a supply of Japanese timber readily available for their work (O 2004, 260; Yoshii 2001).

The Japanese islands probably supplied other perishable materials to the peninsula, such as grain, horses, and cloth (Farris 1996, 14). In fact, Paekche may have procured these items directly from regional powers in Japan. Gilt-bronze crowns and shoes fashioned in Paekche styles were unearthed from several large tombs in Japanese regions scattered from central Kyushu to Chiba just east of Tokyo. These regional lords probably exchanged goods with Paekche and consequently were awarded Paekche-style crowns and shoes in the fifth and sixth centuries (So 2001, 109-122).

Nevertheless, such commonplace commodities did not match the priceless gifts from Paekche. Then, what was Yamato able to offer? The key to answering to this question lies in Paekche's "request" for certain places in southern Korea, including "upper" Tari, "lower" Tari, P'ada, and Muro in 512 as well as Kimun and Tasa (or Taesa) in either 513 or 530. It is said that Yamato agreed and gave these places to Paekche (*Nihon shoki*, Keitai 6, 7, and 23, 2:187-198).

In the past, Japanese scholars used these *Nihon shoki* accounts to support their argument that the Yamato state had controlled parts of the Kaya states in southern Korea. Some contended that Yamato's peninsular territories had encompassed present-day South Chōlla and South Kyōngsang Provinces based on their analysis of the locations that Keitia had yielded to Muryōng (Suematsu 1949). Today, few scholars subscribe to this view.

Yamato's "granting" of the peninsular locations to Paekche should be understood in the context of the historical affinity between Yamato and Kaya as well as the intensifying rivalry between Kaya and Paekche. The Kaya states located along the Naktong River faced northern Kyushu across the Korea strait and thus were more accessible to Japan than any other Korean states. The residents of the Japanese islands had interacted with those in Kaya and its predecessor from prehistoric times. The Kaya states provided iron, metallurgy, and other technologies to their island neighbors in exchange for perishable goods and labor in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries (Azuma 1995, 108; Nishitani 1995, 159). Yamato's official relations with the Kaya states, particularly with Kūmgwan Kaya in present-day Kimhae, appear in the *Nihon shoki* under the reign of the legendary king Sujin, earlier than those with any other Korean state (*Nihon shoki*, Sujin 65, 1:198).

The Kaya states were friendly with Paekche and mediated its contact with Yamato. The King Kwanggaet'o's stele refers to Kaya's military alliance with Paekche and Wa, probably Yamato, against Koguryō's southward aggressions in the early fifth century. After Kūmgwan

Kaya weakened, Tae Kaya in present-day Koryŏng by the upper Naktong River assumed leadership among the Kaya states and expanded westward to avoid confrontation with Silla. This strategy worked when Paekche was based in the Han River basin. After its defeat to Koguryŏ and move to Ungjin in 475, Paekche, for its own survival, began stretching its territory southward and eastward all the way to Sobaek Mountains and beyond. Paekche first tightened its control over the Yŏngsan River valley in the southwestern corner of the peninsula, occupied by semi-independent communities. The settlements in the Yŏngsan River region had their unique culture apart from Paekche culture, as demonstrated by their giant jar coffins, but mediated Paekche's interaction with the Japanese islands (Yoshii 2004, Yi Hyŏn-hye 2000). Tongsŏng's military expedition to present-day Kwangju and subjugation of the surrounding area are recorded by the *Samguk sagi* (*Samguk sagi*, Tongsŏng 20, 2:73). Paekche's next target was the Sŏmjŏn River valley where Tae Kaya had recently extended its influence.

Muryŏng pushed eastward to the Sŏmjŏn River region facing Sobaek Mountains while Kaya desperately fought to retain the area. In 512, he reportedly asked Keitai for the control over upper Tari, lower Tari, P'ada, and Muro, and Keitai agreed. Although scholars are in disagreement, we can assume that these places were located near the Sŏmjŏn River in the context of subsequent disputes (Kim Chŏng-hak 1981, 168). Next, Muryŏng targeted Kimun and Tasa, present-day Namwŏn and Hadong in the middle and lower stream of the Sŏmjŏn River. The *Nihon shoki* repeats its account of Tae Kaya's desperate fight against Paekche at Tasa as an incident in Keitai's seventh to ninth years as well as twenty-third year. While this redundancy probably stems from the use of different sources with conflicting chronology (Kasai 2000, 78-79), it points to the intensity of the dispute over this strategic location. Both Paekche and Kaya envoys requested Tasa, as a harbor indispensable for their travel to the Japanese islands (*Nihon shoki*, Keitai 23, 197-198). The Sŏmjŏn River served as the only outlet to the Korea Strait, when discounting the Naktong River now under Silla's increasing (Kim T'aesik 1993, 134-136). The control of Tasa at the mouth of the river would facilitate river transportation to and from the inland as well as access to the Korea strait.

At this point in time, Keitai was forced to choose between Paekche and Kaya. On the one hand, Kaya was a long-time ally and benefactor as well as kin to many in Yamato. However, Yamato was able to produce its own iron by this time, and thus its dependency on Kaya was diminishing rapidly (Azuma 1995, 107). Paekche, on the other hand, was the rising sun in the eyes of Keitai. He was well aware of its recent territorial consolidation, cultural advances, and close ties with southern China. At this critical juncture, Keitai made a decision to side with Paekche at the expense of Kaya.

Yamato at this time did not send military aid to enforce Paekche's occupation of Tasa although Kaya reacted with military aggressions and cruelty in the region. Yamato did nothing to suppress Kaya as seen in Keitai's envoy Mononobe's near escape from the Kaya forces in Tasa, recorded in the *Nihon shoki* (*Nihon shoki*, Keitai 9-10, 2:194). Unlike the Yamato rulers of the fifth century, Keitai did not send missions to the Chinese court, nor did he involve himself in the military strife in the Korean peninsula. His urgent need to restore Yamato's grasp over corners of the Japanese islands culminated when the Iwai clan of northern Kyushu waged war against the Yamato government in 527-528 (*Nihon shoki*, Keitai 21-22, 2:195-197).

In conclusion, Muryŏng, in his territorial expansion, obtained no military aid from Keitai. Still, Yamato's recognition of Paekche's extension to the region previously affiliated with Kaya was critically important, given the long-standing affinity between Yamato and Kaya. Yamato's choice of Paekche over Kaya paved the way for Kaya's isolation and incremental surrender to Silla in the decades to follow. Until its demise in the seventh century, Paekche's alliance with Yamato continued to grow and eventually elicited military aid from Yamato. As it was Muryŏng who initiated the renewal of the bilateral relationship, his name was most frequently cited as an ancestral figure by later Paekche migrants living in Japan (Van Goethem 2007).

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