

Prince Misahun: Silla against Wa in the Early Fifth Century

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The Background

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between Silla and Wa in the late fourth century and early fifth century with a special focus on the Silla prince Misahun's entry to and exit from Wa. Varied versions of the story of Misahun can be found in *Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms) and *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), Korea's historical works compiled in the twelfth century and thirteenth century respectively, as well as in *Nihon shoki* (History of Japan), a Japanese chronicle compiled in the early eighth century. The Korean works are known to contain historically accurate information drawn upon older sources available then. The *Nihon shoki* accounts of Japan's early relationship with the Korean peninsula also drew upon no-longer-extant Korean sources, especially of Paekche origin, although they contain embellishments and distortions reflecting ethnocentric views held by the Yamato court.

We are fortunate to have the Koguryo King Kwanggaet'o (r. 391–412)'s inscription, a memorial on the stele uncovered in modern Tung-kou on the Manchurian side of the mid-Yalu River in the second half of the nineteenth century. The inscription, written by Koguryo scribes when the stele was erected in 414, is a contemporaneous record that provides an accurate chronology of events on the Korean peninsula albeit some exaggeration (Hatada 1979: 10). Although the inscription makes no mention of Prince Misahun, it supplies information that serves as a general framework for understanding the relationship between Silla and Wa in the period under discussion. From the 1970s, Prof. Yi Chin-hui and other scholars advanced the view that the Japanese military personnel falsified parts of inscription to inflate the activities by the Wa-Japan. However, the

authenticity of the inscription was reassured by Prof. Wang Jianqun, who denied this allegation after conducting a close on-site examination by the mid-1980s. As for the reading of the inscription, this study will rely mainly on Prof. Kim Chong-hak's study.

Some scholars expressed their view that the Wa that appear in the above records was not the fledgling Yamato state. Prof. Sin Yong-sik, for instance, thought that the Wa in the *Samguk sagi* accounts was a group of Koreans who had lived along the southern coast of the peninsula and the northern part of Kyushu, Japan's southernmost island (Sin 1990: 288). Prof. Kinoshita Reijin, pointing out that there is no evidence that the Wa in the *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa* accounts before the seventh century meant the Yamato state, assumed that it was an area extended from the lower Naktong River, the southeastern coast of the peninsula, to the Tsushima islands. He conjectured that the incident of Misahun had taken place between Silla and this Wa based within the peninsula (Kinoshita 1993, 345-355). Prof. Hatada contended that the Wa of the *Samguk sagi* accounts and the Kwanggaet'o inscription were pirates from northern Kyushu who crossed the Korea Strait to kidnap people and steal property. His reasons include the seasonal nature of the attacks and absence of territorial acquisition by the Wa (Hatada 1979: 16-17).

Based on the following reasons, this paper takes the position that the Wa that surrounded the capital of Silla more than once and fought against the Koguryo forces originated from the nascent Yamato state. First, as the *Samguk sagi* and the Kwanggaet'o inscription mention clearly that the Wa crossed the sea to the Korean peninsula, they did not come from the peninsula. They came from either the Tsushima islands or the main islands of Japan. Second, the extent of the repeated invasions points to the fact that the Wa had a large number of organized troops equipped with armors and supplies. This eliminates the possibility that the Wa was a group of pirates. Also, this negates the possibility that the main Wa forces came from a less significant polity in the islands. Only the most powerful polity with abundant resources could repeatedly venture expeditions across the sea and battle against the mighty Koguryo armies.

Until recently, many historians argued that Yamato did not assume its hegemony over the Japanese islands until the sixth century and the regional powers in Kyushu or Izumo had autonomy till then. This view has been seriously challenged by the recent archaeological findings that distinctive keyhole-shaped tumuli and accompanying bronze mirrors spread from the Kinai region to the rest of the Japanese islands, including

Kyushu and Izumo, in the third century. This naturally points to the fact that northern Kyushu, on the one hand, lost its cultural and political leadership already in the third century. Yamato, on the other hand, secured its superior position to form a confederacy sometime in the fourth century (Tsude 1991). We can conclude that the Wa that initiated large-scale peninsular invasions came from the Yamato confederacy although the possibility remains that small-scale coastal attacks were made by regional pirates.

The Story of Misahun

The outline of the story related by Samguk sagi can be summarized as follows:

King Silsong (r. 402–417) of Silla, in the first year of his reign opened an official relationship with Wa and subsequently sent Misahun, the third son of the late King Naemul (r. 356–402) to Wa as a pawn. King Silsong also sent Pokho, the second son of Naemul, to Koguryo when requested ten years later. The reason for Silsong's sending of Naemul's sons to the neighboring countries was to avenge his sojourn in Koguryo as a pawn (392–401) by the order of King Naemul.

As soon as King Nulchi (r. 417–458), the first son of Naemul, ascended to the throne, he sought for a man capable of bringing back his two brothers. Pak Chesang, sometimes called Momal, who was a descendant of an early Silla king and ruler of Sapryangju (present-day Yangsan city in Kyongnam), was recommended for his bravery and wisdom

Chesang first visited the king of Koguryo and eloquently persuaded him to let Prince Pokho return home. Chesang then sailed from Yulp'o (present-day Ulsan), a port south of the capital city Kyongju, on his mission to bring back Prince Misahun. When he saw the king of Wa, Chesang pretended that he fled from Silla as a traitor. The king believed him because he heard that Chesang's family members had been imprisoned in Silla.

The Wa hatched a plan to attack Silla with Misahun and Chesang serving as guides. When they all reached the Sando island in the middle of the sea en route to Silla, Chesang persuaded Misahun to flee by boat alone. The Wa soldiers did not know Misahun's departure till late on the next day because Chesang lied to them that his young master was resting in the room. By the time the soldiers began chasing him, Misahun had sailed out

of their reach. The angry king of Wa banished Chesang to the Mokto island, burned and beheaded him. Misahun safely returned to Silla in the second year of Nulchi' s reign. Nulchi was so delighted that he had Misahun marry Chesang' s second daughter (*Samguk sagi* 1996: 2: 768–771).

The story related by *Samguk yusa* are similar to the story by *Samguk sagi* in main points, including Misahun' s reluctance to leave Chesang behind in Wa, Chesang' s disguise as a traitor to Silla, his lie about the prince' s whereabouts, and his execution by fire ordered by the Wa king. Yet, the *Samguk yusa* account differs in terminology and chronology. Misahun' s name is recorded as Mihae, and Pokho as Pohae. Chesang' s family name is mentioned as Kim. And, it was King Naemul, the father, who sent a ten-year-old Mihae to Wa when it was requested in the thirty-sixth year of his reign (390). Pohae was sent to Koguryo by Nulchi in the third year of his reign (419). Both Mihae and Pohae returned home in 425, the ninth year of Nulchi' s reign. Silsong' s earlier return from Koguryo is never mentioned in *Samguk yusa*.

The following contents of the story are unique in the *Samguk yusa* account. Chesang did not see the king of Koguryo, but simply had Pohae escape and sail from Kosong (in modern Kangwondo) to return to Silla. Once in Wa, Chesang persuaded Misahun to flee by land on a misty morning, and the Wa soldier on horsebacks could not catch up with him. Afterwards, the Wa king repeatedly told Chesang to succumb to his authority in vain. When Misahun returned home safely, King Nulchi not only married him with Chesang' s daughter but gave Chesang' s wife a special title called “the great wife of the nation” (*Samguk yusa* 1995:84–92)

In *Nihon shoki*, the story of Silla prince' s entry and exit is recounted under the records of Empress Jingu who ostensibly ruled as a regent to young Emperor Ojin late in the fourth century. According to the account, the Silla king Hasamukim surrendered to Empress Jingu' s invasion in the first year of her regency and subsequently sent Prince Mishikochi hatorikanki to Yamato. In the fifth year of her regency, Momari shichi and two other Silla envoys came to send tribute to the empress with an ulterior motive to retrieve Mishikochi hotsukan. Then the Silla prince asked the empress to be allowed to visit Silla on the grounds that his wife and children were held as slaves in his absence. The empress approved his request and had her general Katsuragi no Sotsuhiko accompany him and his entourage. Upon reaching the Tsushima islands, Momari shichi had Mishikochi escape by boat. He then put a straw doll under the prince' s bedding so Sotsuhiko' s men would not notice his disappearance. When

Sotsuhiko found out that the prince was gone, he threw Momari shichi and other envoys in a cage and burned them to death. Sotsuhiko immediately avenged Silla's treachery by attacking Yangsan with his boats anchored at Tataru. The hostages taken from this battle settled in villages in Yamato (*Nihon shoki* 1967: 346–347, *Nihongi* 1982: 241–242).

Clearly, the three versions of the story share important core elements. The names Misahun and Mihae are different recordings of the name of the same prince. Also the name Mishikochi (or Mishichi) that *Nihon shoki* uses must have originated from the same name (Ikeuchi 1947: 59–60). Both *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa* refer to the man who rescued the prince by the name Chesang. The different surnames attributed to him indicate that they were attached in later times (*Samguk sagi* 1996: 4 : 741). Even the name *Nihon shoki* refer to him by is very similar to Momal, his alternate name introduced in *Samguk sagi*. Besides the names of the main figures, the primary elements of the story demonstrate remarkable similarities. In all three versions, Chesang and Misahun initially won the trust of the Wa ruler by pretending that they were no longer loyal to Silla. Chesang had Misahun escape and pretended that nothing had happened. The angry Wa leader had Chesang burned to death.

What the three documents cannot agree on are the timing and length of Misahun's sojourn in Wa. The length varies from five years (*Nihon shoki*), sixteen years (*Samguk yusa*), to thirty-five years (*Samguk yusa*). As for the timing, it was either during the legendary Empress Jingu's reign sometime in the late fourth century (*Nihon shoki*), during King Silsong's reign (*Samguk sagi*), or from the last years of Naemul's reign to the early years of Nulchi's reign (*Samguk yusa*).

There are some obvious differences between the two Korean accounts and the *Nihon shoki* account. The Korean accounts give the names of the Silla kings, explain Misahun's brother's entry to and exit from Koguryo, and mention Chesang's wife and daughter as important figures while the *Nihon shoki* account does none of those. The former, however, do not mention names of the Wa rulers while the latter identifies Jingu and her general Sotsuhiko as key players. These differences naturally stem from the fact that the authors were much more knowledgeable and interested in their own countries than the others.

For instance, there was a reason why Chesang's wife and daughter were included in the Korean accounts. We know from the *Samguk sagi* accounts that Chesang's daughter married Misahun and had a

daughter who in turn married King Chabi (r. 458–479) and gave birth to King Soji (r. 479–500) (*Samguk sagi* 1996:2 :68). Thus Chabi's queen was not the daughter of a king although the three successive queens before Chabi's were the daughters of the previous kings. Perhaps royal blood became not as important for queens in the fifth century due to the increasing authority of Silla kings at the expense of that of queens (Nelson 1991: 105). At the same time, it is conceivable that the Chabi's queen secured her position thanks to the prominence of her father Misahun as well as her maternal grandfather Chesang. The marriage between Misahun and Chesang's daughter was a significance occurrence that affected the future royal succession.

Sotsuhiko's name is mentioned in four anecdotes in *Nihon shoki*, which are invariably about attacking peninsular states and bringing back prisoners of war. Japanese historians believe him to be a historical figure who was actively involved in Yamato's activities with peninsula during the late fourth century and early fifth century even though they often doubt about Empress Jingu's historicity (Inoue 1965: 55–60). If he indeed was such a historical figure, he could naturally be the one who was in charge of Misahun and avenged on Silla. He also may be “the Wa king” that the Korean accounts refer to.

We can safely assume that the accounts of Misahun originated from the same historical incident of the Silla prince's entry to and flight from Wa as Professor Ikeuchi concluded many years ago (Ikeuchi 1947: 60). The fact that all the accounts share the same basic elements but varied details suggests that the incident was orally communicated for many years until it was recorded by different individuals at later times. In fact, the author of *Samguk sagi* adds at the end of the account that there existed a dance and music piece about the story, presumably originating from Nulchi's own performance. The loss of accuracy and inclusion of embellishments in the process of the oral communication explain the existence of discrepancies between the *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa* accounts. The elements common to both accounts may be deemed fairly reliable whereas the details seen in only one account cannot be.

The *Nihon shoki* account has distinct similarities particularly with the *Samguk sagi* account. They both relate that Misahun narrowly escaped from the Wa pursuit by boat from an island in the middle of the sea. They both depict the Wa's intent to invade Silla by using Misahun and Chesang as their guides. Sotsuhiko's attack of Yangsan, the town that *Samguk sagi* says was under Chesang's control, also reminds us of the many Wa

assaults after Misahun' s return related by *Samguk sagi*. Besides these similarities, the *Nihon shoki* s mention of Misahun' s titles derived from Silla titles and the correct name and title for Chesang suggests that the author had access to a Silla source that happened to be akin to the source the author of *Samguk sagi*, or its precursor, drew on (Mishina 1962: 82–83).

This is not to say that the *Nihon shoki* account was simply an adaptation from a Korean source.¹ The people of Yamato must have remembered and recorded Misahun' s departure because of its sensational nature. Their memory of the incident was probably linked to their memory of Sotsuhiko who was the most celebrated general involved in peninsular affairs. Japan' s indigenous records on Misahun' s arrival and exit were later reinforced by information provided by a Silla source.

The Kwanggaet' o Inscription

We now examine how the Kwanggaet' o inscription depicts the Silla–Wa relations in the period under discussion. According to its well-known passage, Paekche and Silla had long been subjects and tributary states to Koguryo, but from 391 on, the Wa came, crossing the sea, defeated, and made subjects of Paekche, _____, and Silla.² This says two things about the relations between the three states. First, until 391, Koguryo was suzerain of the two states. Second, after 391, the invasions by the Wa forces upset the relationships and subjugated Paekche, Silla, and others. Thus the inscription portrays the Wa as Koguryo' s enemy that posed a threat to the Koguryo' s hegemony on the Korean peninsula.

On the one hand, the statement that Paekche was a dependency to Koguryo probably reflects Koguryo' s biases. Paekche in fact struck into the Koguryo domain and killed its king Kogugwon in Pyongyang in 371. It concurrently initiated a tributary relation with the Eastern Chin state in the Yangtze River region (Best 1982: 486–487). We may interpret this portion of the passage to mean that Paekche did not create problems to Koguryo for a period until 391. On the other hand, the passage seems accurate in that Silla had been dependent on Koguryo. King Naemul had his envoy follow a Koguryo envoy to the Ch' in, one of China' s Northern Dynasties, in 381 (Yi 1976: 112). According to *Samguk sagi*, he also sent his successor Silsong to Koguryo as a pawn as we have seen. The passage reflects the reality of Silla' s relationship with Koguryo till 391.

As for the period after 391, we do not know of Wa attacks against Paekche. We do know, however, that the Wa forces invaded Silla

repeatedly both before and after 391. In 393 according to *Samguk sagi*'s chronology, the Wa soldiers surrounded Silla's capital for five days to King Naemul's dismay. Although the author ends the account by saying that Silla not preserved its fortifications but killed many Wa soldiers by ambushing them at the end, this battle undoubtedly dealt Silla a severe blow (*Samguk sagi* 1996:2 : 58–61). Again, the inscription makes a valid statement Silla's relation with the Wa.

The inscription goes on to state that Koguryo punished Paekche in 396. Koguryo deployed its fleet, captured fifty Paekche towns and approached its capital in 396; the Paekche king surrendered and pledged to be a subject to the Koguryo king. This seems to correspond with the *Samguk sagi* accounts of Paekche's defeat to Koguryo in 395. The inscription then goes on to relate that in 399 Paekche broke this pledge and allied itself with Wa again. In the same year, Silla was struck by a major Wa invasion (assisted by Paekche); the Silla king pledged to be a subject to the Koguryo king as he desperately needed military assistance. In response to this plea, Koguryo deployed its great army and defeated the Wa forces in the Silla domain in 400. Four years later, when the Wa soldiers invaded further north in present-day Kyonggi and Hwanghae provinces, the Koguryo forces counterattacked and killed many of them. Again, in 407, the Koguryo army dealt the Wa a decisive blow. These battles between Koguryo and Wa are not mentioned in *Samguk sagi*, *Samguk yusa*, or *Nihon shoki*.

We learn from the above information how frequently Silla shifted its stance in foreign relations at that time. First, until 391, Silla was subservient to Koguryo. Sometime after that year, it came under the influence of Wa, due to the latter's attacks. It then chose to surrender to Koguryo in 399 and sent tribute in the following year. The Koguryo forces clashed with the Wa forces and overwhelmed them in Silla and elsewhere on the peninsula in 400, 404, and 407. Thus, Silla succumbed to Wa for a while between 391 and 399 although it was under Koguryo's suzerainty before and after.³ By contrast, Paekche submitted itself to Koguryo only between 396 and 399. It otherwise cooperated with the Wa and fought against the Koguryo–Silla alliance after 399.

We now return to the subject of Misahun's entry to and exit from Wa. The reason for his dispatch to the Wa is not clearly explained in *Samguk sagi* or *Samguk yusa*. The former simply mentions the opening of an official relationship while the latter relates that the Wa king requested a Silla prince as evidence of goodwill. Looking at the sequence of events

provided by the Kwanggaet' inscription, we realize that Silla was dominated by the Wa for a short period between 391 and 399, but not before or after. Unless armistice and certain conditions were agreed upon, there was no need for Silla to send its prince to the belligerent Wa. The period between 391 and 399 is the only time befitting for the dispatch of Misahun.

Misahun' s travel to Wa could not have taken place in 390, the year when *Samguk yusa* says it did, because Silla was still under Koguryo' s influence and was trying to ward off the Wa assaults then. It also could not have happened in 402, the year when *Samguk sagi* says it did, because Silla by then reverted back to Koguryo' s suzerainty. Shortly after Misahun' s arrival in the Wa, Silla changed its allegiance to Koguryo and the Silla–Wa relationship turned sour. Misahun had no choice but to remain there as a hostage for many years as the Wa rulers had no intention of releasing him. This was the very reason why it took Nulchi' s zeal and Chesang' s scheme to retrieve him. The Wa, however, regarded this as a treachery.

Silla probably sent pawns to Koguryo when it was under the latter' s influence before 391. Again, it was compelled to send there Prince Pokho as a pawn after its return to Koguryo' s dominion in 399. In-between, it sent Misahun to the Wa. Thus, the order of the Silla pawns shown in *Samguk sagi*, i.e., Silsong to Koguryo, Misahun to Wa, and finally Pokho to Koguryo, coincides with its shifts in foreign relations delineated by the inscription.

Silla versus Wa

As seen in the above, Silla succumbed to the Wa' s military pressure for a brief period shortly prior to the fifth century. As Silla was under Koguryo' s influence before and after this time, this period represented a deviation from the norm.

How was it possible for the Wa, the nascent Yamato polity, to make peninsular attacks powerful enough to make Silla capitulate even temporarily? One contributing factor is its long-standing alliance with Paekche. Although the Kwanggaet' o inscription mentions that Paekche was a dependency to Koguryo, Paekche in fact was Koguryo' s rival before 391 as already mentioned. By 391, it had apparently chosen to ally itself with Wa. Although not mentioned in the inscription, both *Samguk sagi* and *Nihon shoki* relate that Paekche sent its prince Chonji to Wa in 397,

who remained there until his father's death in 405. The two kingdoms were in such good terms that the Wa king (Ojin in *Nihon shoki*) provided Chonji with a hundred soldiers and encouraged him to go and take the throne (*Samguk sagi* 1996:2:451–2, Aston 1982: 257–263). This is in sharp contrast to Misahun who had no choice but to flee home. In addition, the inscription indicates that Paekche and the Wa were apparently allied with the Kaya states located in the strategic Naktong River basins when they fought against Koguryo in 404 (Kim 1990: 299). In short, the Wa received assistance from Paekche and the Kaya state when it overwhelmed Silla and challenged Koguryo.

Paekche submitted to Koguryo's military might briefly from 396, but it reverted back to its alliance with Wa in 399 as seen in the above. Paekche's momentary surrender to Koguryo and its usual alliance with Wa is once again in sharp contrast with Silla's brief submission to Wa and its normal dependency to Koguryo in this period. The relationship between Paekche and Wa–Yamato can be explained well by the formula of quid pro quo. Paekche provided Wa with iron, precious metals, new knowledge and technology while it received Wa's military aid in the war in return (Farris 1996, 16–17). Thus the primary purpose of Paekche's pawns in Wa was to ensure the latter's military assistance as Paekche desperately needed reinforcement troops to fight off the Koguryo forces (Na 1996: 6). The amicable relationship between the two continued until the fall of Paekche in the seventh century.

This formula, however, does not represent the Silla–Wa relationship. The Wa forces almost constantly harassed Silla's coastal areas to snatch people and goods from early on. The Japanese motive is illustrated well by Empress Jingu's decision for Yamato to invade Silla in search of precious metals and other advanced goods (Aston 1982: 221, *Nihon shoki* 1967: 320). The relationship between the two was never mutual, but was always one-sided, based on Wa's needs. When the Wa military pressure became unbearable, Silla temporarily conceded to the Wa demands and sent Misahun along with coveted goods. Once that pressure was removed by Koguryo's intervention, Silla had no reason to humble itself before the Wa.

Some scholars maintained that Silla employed a two-pronged policy toward Koguryo and Yamato, appeasing both sides at the same time (Hirano 1977: 59, Farris 1998: 115). We know that this was not the case. The misinterpretation is partially due to *Samguk sagi*'s chronology that marked the 402 for Misahun's entry to Wa, when Silla had already come under Koguryo's influence. Silla basically remained under Koguryo's

power from the late fourth century through 433, when it entered an alliance with Paekche. It came under Wa' s dominion only briefly between 391 and 399, when it had minimal contact with Koguryo. With limited power and resources, Silla had no choice but to keep adjusting its position in accordance with the changing circumstances.

We know that Silla steadily grew in strength from the fifth century on. After leaving Koguryo' s influence and allying itself with Paekche, Silla absorbed Kaya states in the sixth century, and eventually defeated Paekche and Koguryo with T' ang China' s assistance in the seventh century. The rescue of Misahun from the Wa should be understood as one of the first distinct signs for Silla' s assertion for autonomy in its early history.

Notes

¹ Kinoshita argued that the *Nihon shoki* account of Misahun was solely drawn upon a Silla source as it had nothing to do with the Yamato state. This of course is based on his view that the Wa was not Yamato but was a state primarily in southern Korea (Kinoshita 93: 354).

² Alternative readings of this passage proposed by Korean and Japanese scholars do not fit in the syntax or the context. The underline represents two missing characters. According to Kim Chong-hak' s reading of this passage, the Wa came from 391 on, not necessarily in 391. The citation of other passages is also based on his reading (Kim 1990: 295-303).

³ Takeda succinctly explained such changes in Silla' s position, with an emphasis on the king' s initial surrender to Koguryo as a step taken before assuming a tributary status (Takeda 78: 77-78).

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