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Culture Contact and Culture Change: The Korean Peninsula and Its Relations with the Han Dynasty Commandery of Lelang

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# Culture contact and culture change: the Korean peninsula and its relations with the Han Dynasty commandery of Lelang

Hyung Il Pai

## Introduction

The Han dynasty lasted from around the second century BC to the second century AD and was China's first major empire. Equivalent in importance to the Roman Empire in the West, it laid the foundations of Chinese civilizations to come, in terms of government, state organization, and military apparatus. It was also the first to expand its borders beyond Central China into Central Asia, Tibet, Vietnam, and the Korean peninsula. Military outposts or commanderies were set up in all these regions to administer local government.

Probably the most controversial topic in Korean archaeology and history today concerns the Han Lelang\* commanderies that were established in the Korean peninsula during the Han dynasty in 108 BC and lasted for four hundred years. Despite much archaeological, historical, and inscriptional evidence to the contrary, North Korean scholars (Ch'ŏe 1977) and South Korean historians, most prominently led by Yun Nae-hyŏn, continue to deny the existence of the Lelang commandery in the Korean peninsula (Yun 1986). To dismiss such a notion as the extreme interpretations of 'ultra-nationalists' would be easy, were it not for the fact that their theories have caught wide media attention in the Republic of Korea.

In the traditional view, the importance of Lelang in Korean history was seen in its role as the common enemy, at the time when Korea first experienced colonial rule (Yi and Yi 1983). According to Yi Pyŏng-do, the foremost Korean ancient historian, 'such a humiliating experience fired patriotic zeal, bringing on tribal unity and a conscious alliance which were inevitable reactions against foreign intrusion' (Yi 1981: 94). Thus, the Han

\* All romanizations follow the Pinyin System in the case of names of Chinese commanderies and concretely identifiable Han Chinese entities such as counties, states, institutions, peoples, customs, artifacts, etc. All Korean authors and names related to the Korean peninsula, including place names, dynasties, historical personages, etc. are transcribed in the McCune-Reischauer system. Names of authors in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese are kept in their original order of pronunciation in both text and bibliography; hence, last names are listed first. In addition, due to the nature of Korean names, where many authors can have identical first initials, all Korean names are given in full when first appearing in the text.

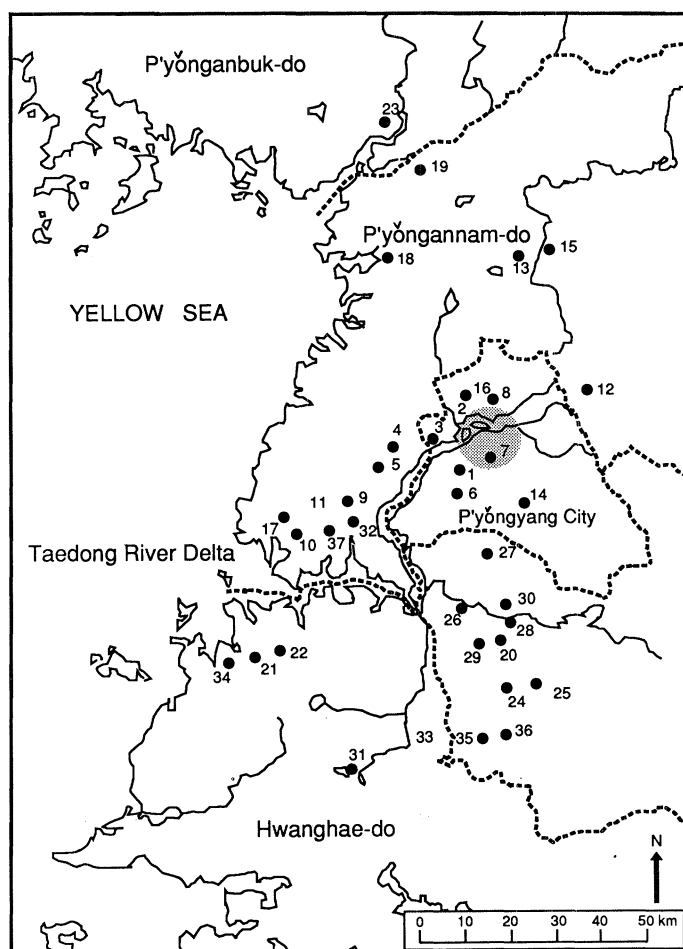


Figure 1 Han Lelang sites around P'yongyang. Dashed lines: boundaries of present-day provinces and of P'yongyang City; numbered dots: known sites of the Han period; stippled area: concentration of burials in and around T'osongni fortress (see Figure 2 for an enlargement of this area).

dynasty is usually portrayed as an imperialistic power exploiting native labor and resources (Son 1980). It was in this manner that the archaeological remains and Lelang history were used to propagate nationalist goals and positions.

Studies of Lelang were initiated around the time of the First World War by Japanese researchers, when Han sites and burials were identified in and around the current capital of North Korea at P'yongyang (Fig. 1), and continued with the excavations that started in the 1930s (CSTF 1927). The ulterior motives of territorial claims by the Japanese Governor-General's Office of Korea over the Korean peninsula and Manchuria made Japanese Lelang scholarship controversial from its very inception. Consequently, prominent Japanese historians and archaeologists, such as Ikeuchi (1930, 1941) and Komai (1965) have interpreted Han Lelang culture in Korea as a purely Han Chinese phenomenon, ignoring many native variants and forms.

Whatever the nationalities or political leanings of Lelang scholars, they have continued to find it difficult to pursue an objective approach to this period. It is also important to realize that the events related to the Lelang occupation of Korea span a critical time period

Table 1 Korean chronology and pottery sequence (adapted from Kim 1986).

Date	North-west	South-west	South-east	Pottery sequence	Periodization
8000					PALEOLITHIC
5000			Tongsam-dong I		MESOLITHIC
4000			Tongsam-dong II		INITIAL
3000					EARLY
2000					MIDDLE
1000		Hūnnam-ni	Tongsam-dong III		LATE
300		Karak-dong		Top-shaped pottery	BRONZE AGE
100		Kōejōng-dong	Kimhae I	Black pottery	EARLY IRON AGE
BC	Lelang	Sinch'ang-ni			
AD			Kimhae II	P'ungnab-ni pottery I	PROTO-THREE KINGDOM
300	Commandery			Wajil	
	Koguryō	P'ungnab-ni pottery II	Kaya	Koguryō Paekche Silla	THREE KINGDOM
668					

between prehistory and history in Korea (Table 1). This paper focuses mainly on archaeological evidence, as well as on the earliest ethnohistoric data, which dates to the third century AD. The records indicate that at that time there was active trade, tribute, and diplomatic ties between the Han Lelang commandery and surrounding native groups; this exchange is represented archaeologically in the remains of official Han seals, weapons, and luxury goods found in non-Han native graves.

**Two culture-systems: Han Lelang culture and non-Han native culture**

The methodological approach adopted in this study differs from previous Korean and Japanese scholarship by putting aside simplistic theories of conquests, colonizations, or cultural domination of one civilization by another that was more advanced. By focusing on issues of acculturation, and of culture contact and change, this analysis aims to show that native individuals played an active role in initiating exchange for their own benefit and,

contrary to past interpretations, were not merely a passive, exploited and oppressed peasantry.

The concept of acculturation is generally accredited to American anthropologists (Beals 1953: 621), and was defined by Redfield et al. (1936) as follows: 'acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups'. Factors involved in the study of acculturation include the two culture-systems involved; the nature of acculturation (i.e. the type of contact situation); the course followed by the acculturation process, and the levels it reaches; measurements of acculturation; and the eventual results of the process.

In the present study, the two culture-systems were first defined by taking the 'direct historical approach' – that is, by working from the known contemporaneous Chinese documents of the *Shiji* (Watson 1968) that describes the circumstances of contact when Han Wudi invaded in 108 BC and set up a commandery system, with its main seat in Lelang. According to the *Shiji*, the Lelang region was occupied before the Han military settlement by the state of Kochosŏn, which was supposedly ruled by a descendant of General Wiman (ibid.: 258–9). Wiman had arrived with followers about ninety years before (around 195 BC), after a failed coup in the Warring State of Yan; in 194 BC, he was recognized as a 'foreign vassal' and his role seems to have been that of a 'middle-man', similar to the charismatic nomad leaders such as Maodun of the Xiongnu and Tanshihuai of the Xianbi empire. These tribal leaders became powerful men by negotiating favourable agreements with Chinese dynasties, and hence monopolizing trade and diplomacy (Barfield 1989). Wiman is also mentioned as blocking Han trade among the southern non-Han native groups. Thus, during the second century BC, there were at least three entities in the Korean peninsula: (1) Kochosŏn in Wanggŏm (P'yŏngyang); (2) chiefs from various other tribal groups in the vicinity of Kochosŏn; and (3) Chinbŏn and Imdun to the south.

The Han invasion was prompted by the arrogance of Wiman's grandson Ugŏ, the king of Chosŏn, who had ordered the killing of a Han envoy on the borders of the Han empire. The irate Han Wudi, the Martial Emperor, in response then sent two expeditions: one with a force of five thousand across the gulf of Bohai, and another that marched out of the Liaodong peninsula. The first year resulted in series of mishaps, lost battles, and mis-communications among the Han generals. At this time, the capital of Chosŏn, Wanggŏm, was recorded as a well-fortified site that finally fell after a year of attacks, only because of internal treachery on the part of the ministers (Watson 1968: 259). Unfortunately, these historical narratives have not been confirmed archaeologically, since no evidence of fortresses that date to this period and that could have withstood a year of siege by Han armies has yet been found in this region. However, we can conclude that the nature of initial contact was a Han military outpost with soldiers, traders, and administrators.

The site of the Han commandery of Lelang (located on the southern bank of the Taedong river facing the present city of P'yŏngyang) was identified by Japanese excavations in the 1930s (Komai 1965) (Fig. 2). The evidence rests on clay seals and bricks, inscribed with the official Han titles 'Lelang Liguan' and 'Lelang Fugui' (Komai 1972), that were uncovered on a burnt foundation floor. The period of occupation, as estimated from

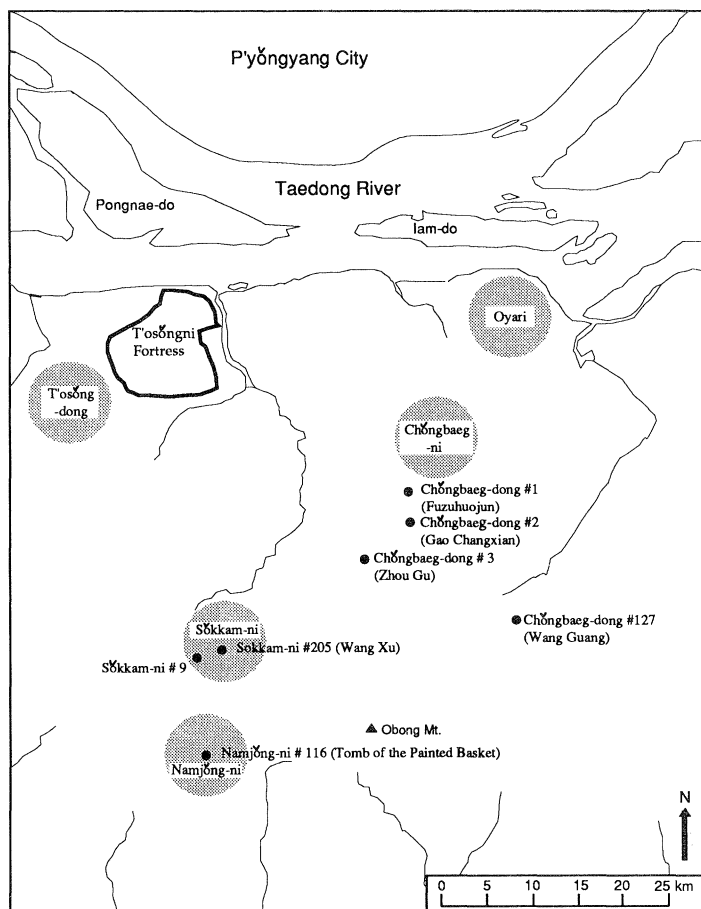


Figure 2 The Han commandery site of Lelang, showing T'osŏngni fortress and surrounding burial groups. Stippled circles show the locations of the main concentrations of burials in the Lelang area; dots indicate the most prominent excavated Han Lelang graves. The boundary of the modern T'osŏngni fortress follows the line of earth walls identified as belonging to the Han period.

a dated bronze vessel, coincides with the evidence of documents recording its existence in the first century BC (Komai 1965: 9; Kim 1975).

Other Han sites, predominantly graves, are distributed in a 25 km radius around, and to the south of, the Lelang fortress (CSTF 1927). Considering the evidence of burial goods (such as Han seals, jade and gold items, and lacquerware) that are unique to the Lelang district, we have designated this the 'core area' of Lelang interaction, where there was direct contact between the Han Chinese and non-Han natives. The number of burials and the quantity of Han goods decline with decreasing distance from the core area.

The only other concretely identified Han commandery is the site of Daifang at Tangt'osŏng. The estimated locations of other historically documented counties and commanderies of Han are seen to be associated with earlier tribal territorial divisions (Yi 1981: 100).

## **Measurement of acculturation and classification of cultures**

### *1 Han Lelang cultural assemblage*

The archaeological data were divided into Han Lelang and non-Han native cultural assemblages, classified by certain features and specific artifacts. It should be noted here that the P'yŏngyang remains have been labelled as 'Han Lelang culture', since they should rightly be distinguished from other archaeological remains of the Han empire. The so-called 'Han period art and culture' displays immense diversity in styles and materials – hardly surprisingly, for outposts of the Han were established as far south as the Dian culture in Yunnan province of south-east China, to the north and west in the Ordos Xiongnu territories, and to the east in the Korean peninsula. Although Loewe (Twitchett and Loewe 1986) and De Crespigny (1984) have claimed that the Han military system was uniform throughout the empire, at present there is insufficient comparative data from this wide region to delineate regional characteristics and variances. It would therefore be more accurate to call the P'yŏngyang remains as a 'Lelang' manifestation of Chinese Han culture.

We will concentrate here only on remains of Han burials in the P'yŏngyang region. The cultural classification was based on diagnostic items unique to each culture; labelled as 'cultural indices', they include burial forms, architecture, pottery, weapons, bronze mirrors, and lacquerware. Han burial forms can be divided into two broad categories: the multi-chambered wood burials and the stone- or brick-chambered burials. Architectural elements include Han eave- and roof-tiles, and inscribed hollow bricks. The pottery vessels are chiefly represented by Han stone-ware, in the form of jars, bowls, cauldrons, and tripods; glazed ware and funerary pottery models called *mingqi* are also present. The predominant types of bronzes found in burials are horse equipment, chariot parts, and weapons. The iron materials can be divided readily into weapons (e.g. swords, axes, arrowheads, and halberds) and agricultural tools (e.g. adzes, axes, and ploughs). Lacquerware specimens include winged-ear cups, toiletry boxes, coffins, tables and dining ware; among other precious ornaments are jade *bi*, jade stoppers, gold filigree belt-buckles, and silk hats and other items of clothing. Many Han coins have also been found. Gold, silver, bronze, and wood seals, inscribed with family names such as Wang, Han and Gao, have been linked to historical personages mentioned in Han dynasty records (Mikami 1966). Important Han religious items include finds of hundreds of bronze mirrors and divination boards.

The most widely disseminated of these Han goods consisted of iron weapons, agricultural tools, horse equipment, bronze chariot pieces and Han mirrors (Hayashi 1976). Hence, desirable Han materials included functional tools, as well as prestige and religious artifacts.

### *2 Non-Han native cultural assemblage*

At this period, the archaeology of the Korean peninsula is characterized by the dolmens and stone cist-graves found dotted throughout the area. The distinguishing burial goods found in them are the Korean slim daggers and their associated dagger sheaths, ornaments

and geometric fine-lined bronze mirrors; the representative pottery is *hwabunhyŏng* (flowerpot-shaped pottery) and red polished jars. Small villages of sedentary rice agriculturalists, living in semi-subterranean dwellings, were located on river terraces. Such archaeological data show no evidence whatsoever of significant social stratification either in burials or architecture (e.g. the remains of fortresses, walled towns, palaces etc.).

### **The course of acculturation: contact, conflict and adaptation**

In the course of acculturation with the Han dynasty commandery of Lelang, the Korean burial evidence reflects the historically documented events of contact, conflict, and adaptation. After the initial violent confrontation in 108 BC, it seems that the eastern border was peaceful enough to establish the same kind of commandery system as Han territories. The surrounding tribal kingdoms (*guo*) were probably treated with the same status as 'dependent states' or *shuguo* (Yu 1976). Though the Han government intervened in political and mercantile matters, the natives were generally allowed to lead their own way of life and kept their social customs. However, they were subject to Han corvée and taxes, while the local administration was left to tribal leaders.

By adaptation, I refer to the various ways in which attempts were made to reduce or stabilize conflict. Tributary gifts, for example, were symbols of political submission on the part of the native chiefs. In return, the Han government gave them official Han titles, silk, gold and grain, which were then redistributed to their followers out in the villages. In the Korean peninsula, documents record that local items – including iron ore, fish and other sea products, as well as slaves – were sent as tribute by the surrounding states (Chŏn 1982). In return, they were given seals, titles, official garb, and hats. Besides these peaceful types of transactions, however, the history of the Han commanderies in Korea is also spotted with incidents of raids and invasions, such as those by Koguryŏ and Puyŏ against the commanderies of Xuantu and Lelang.

### **Levels of acculturation**

Although the exact states and levels of acculturation are difficult to measure historically from the scant surviving documents, this paper proposes a preliminary model of acculturation based on the mortuary remains. The most diagnostic Han artifacts were undoubtedly seals, gold, jade ornaments and bronze mirrors, of types never before found in the Korean peninsula. These items not only measure acculturation, but can also serve as markers of social differentiation. In this analysis, we assume that the greater the quantity of valuable Han burial items, the higher the social and economic position of the dead individual within the Han empire.

A classification of the various typical burial forms and goods corresponding to historically recognized individuals/social groupings was also devised. These assemblages reflect different levels of Han acculturation and assimilation too, most graves being found



Table 2 Model of acculturation (adapted from Quimby and Spoehr 1957).

I. <i>Artifact modifications</i>	<i>Native reaction</i>	<i>Material examples</i>
<i>A. Han types modified or not modified by natives</i>		
1. Han forms not changed (have native counterparts)	Substitutive (low degree of acculturation)	Personal ornaments: earrings, glass beads, bracelets
2. Han forms not changed (do not have native counterparts)	Additive (higher degree of acculturation)	Lacquerware, iron nails, weapons, chariot parts, seals, coins
3. Native-made forms copying Han forms (do not have native counterparts)	Additive (high degree of acculturation)	Ceramic tiles and bricks, native-made chariot parts, 'z'-bronzes
4. Han forms decorated in native manner	Acceptance (highest degree of acculturation)	Imitation Han mirrors
5. Han materials and techniques, but native-made forms	Acceptance (highest degree of acculturation)	Wheel-made pottery, glazed pottery, silk weaving
<i>B. Native types modified by Han contact</i>		
1. Han materials replace native materials (no new skills involved)	(low degree of acculturation)	Bronze vessels
2. Han materials replace native materials (new skills involved)	(higher degree of acculturation)	Iron ploughs, axes, fish-hooks
3. Native forms decorated in Han manner	(high degree of acculturation)	Han-designed pottery
II. <i>Burial modifications</i>	<i>Native reaction</i>	<i>Material examples</i>
1. Native forms not modified	Additive (low degree of acculturation)	Urn burials, earth pit burials
2. Native forms modified by Han forms	(low degree of acculturation)	Stone piled burials, stone chamber burials, earth pit + eave-tiles, earth pit + wood coffin
3. Han forms not modified	(higher degree of acculturation)	Brick chamber, wood chamber
4. Han forms modified by natives	(higher degree of acculturation)	Painted tombs and chambers

with a mixture of cultural indices: Han, non-Han native, and Han Lelang. The number of such cultural indices was used as a measure of the relative 'Han-ness' of each grave.

The model of acculturation presented in Table 2 provides the basis for evaluating indications of Han acculturation, ranging from total acceptance, through various

modifications and imitations, to simple adaptation of material technology and design. They were predicted to follow a logical sequence:

- (i) Initially, native forms are simply supplemented by, or substituted with, Han objects (e.g. glass beads and ornaments), indicating imitation of form;
- (ii) Han materials requiring new skills and technology (e.g. ploughs of iron replacing those in native materials) are adopted, indicating acceptance of technology;
- (iii) Han materials and techniques appear, but in native forms (e.g. glazed and wheelmade pottery), indicating adaptation of technology;
- (iv) Native forms are decorated in imitation of Han styles (e.g. bronze mirrors), indicating emulation;
- (v) Finally, modifications in burial architecture (e.g. Table 2: II.2–4) indicate the highest degree of acceptance, including form and function, as well as socio-religious ideals.

The evidence shows that technological and material aspects are the most susceptible to change. But the emphasis here is on the acculturation process as gradual and one to which native groups responded in terms of their own cultural background, substituting the new for the old within the framework of their own socio-economic and subsistence systems.

### **Cultural groupings**

Material from within the core area of the Lelang grave distribution can be divided into the following five groups, on the basis of burials and artifact assemblages:

*Group I* comprises an all-Han assemblage, and can be regarded as the remains of actual Han officials, such as generals and administrators.

*Group II* is made up of an assemblage that is exclusively Han, except for a single non-Han native item, in the shape of pottery of *hwabunhyŏng* type. This group could possibly represent the powerful, local ruling families that Mikami (1966) once defined as the ‘Han resident gentry’; additional evidence for such a view comes from the appearance of names such as Wang, Gao, and Han on seals and inscriptions.

*Group III* is represented by a mixture of cultural indices, both non-Han native and Han Lelang. Earth pit burials within Han-type wooden coffins contain the Korean slim dagger, *hwabunhyŏng* pottery and native bronze weapons, alongside Han bronze mirrors, iron weapons, and cross-bow mechanisms. The most diagnostic element found associated with this grave-type was a Han silver seal, inscribed ‘Fuzuhuojun’ (i.e. the prince of Pujo Yegun); the individual in whose grave this item was buried could be considered as a ‘sinicized inner barbarian’ or a ‘frontier-guarding barbarian’, who was recognized as a Han vassal by giving up political autonomy voluntarily for favored trade and military status (Yn 1967).

*Group IV* is defined by non-Han native earth pit burials, containing chariot parts, iron weapons, and agricultural equipment. These graves have produced no Han seals, but their occupants were sometimes buried with imitation Han mirrors. They probably represent members of local-level village élites who were receiving Han goods distributed by Group III individuals.

*Group V*, finally, is an assemblage composed of simple urn burials, usually without any grave goods (although a few have been found with some Han glass beads). They should be considered as the graves of commoners living in and around commandery borders.

### **Conclusion: the Lelang Interaction Sphere in Korean prehistory**

I would suggest that social and regional differentiation in the Korean peninsula were not possible without initial Han contact and the impact of increasing demand for Han prestige goods and weapons. Before the Lelang period, regional differences find expression only in terms of minor variation in pottery styles, and the fairly uniform settlement data too seem to imply socially egalitarian villages. In contrast, third-century texts of the *Weizhi*, some three hundred years after initial Han contact, reveal the existence of various *guo* (or tribal kingdoms; we should not refer to them as states), such as Puyŏ, Koguryŏ, Okchŏ, Eastern Ye and Samhan. They are recorded as having distinctively different social organizations, subsistence systems, customs, and rituals.

Of these, Koguryŏ situated in Manchuria (in present-day Jian), was militarily the most powerful: its prowess can be seen in depictions of mounted warriors on painted tomb murals. The Paekche kingdom, in the south-west, along the Han, Kŭm, and Yŏngsan rivers, is also supposed to have its antecedents in the former Samhan societies of Chinhan, Pyŏnhan, and Mahan. In the south-east of Korea, there were the Silla and the Kaya nations; their archaeological remains represent the epitome of Korean Kobun culture – that is, burial mounds full of gold jewellery and artifacts imported from China and Central Asia. The P'yŏngyang area as a Han commandery officially fell in 313 AD when Koguryŏ attacked. Later, Koguryŏ moved its capital to the P'yŏngyang region, so as to facilitate their southern expansion, and from that time on the archaeological remains there change over to Koguryŏ-type tombs and monuments.

From the archaeological evidence, this P'yŏngyang area is readily recognized as the core zone of cultural interaction and exchange with Han culture. The lively nature of Lelang trade activities is also seen, for instance, in the documented journeys undertaken by the Wa people of the Japanese islands, who sailed up the Taedong to trade at Lelang (which they mistook for Loyang, the capital of Han, because of its wealth and prosperity). Kim Wŏ-lyong, the foremost Korean archaeologist, once amusingly referred to the Lelang commandery as the ancient equivalent of a modern-day US army PX store, to which all the surrounding natives, dressed in their best finery, were eager to go and pay tribute, in exchange for coveted goods like silk, gold, and iron. He also stated that the most important Lelang innovations were gold craftsmanship, iron metallurgy, and rice agriculture (Kim 1983). Rice production, certainly, was promoted by iron agricultural tools such as ploughs, and the southern state of Pyŏnjin is recorded as the main supplier of iron ore to Lelang and the Japanese islands. Unfortunately, no iron foundries of this period have been found, although it is nonetheless assumed that iron was made in the Lelang commandery; metallurgical analysis of Korean iron products has also revealed that iron technology was adopted from the Han (Yun 1983).

Hence, the most important so-called 'traits of civilization', such as iron technology, writing, gold craftsmanship, and intensive rice agriculture, were derived from Han Lelang

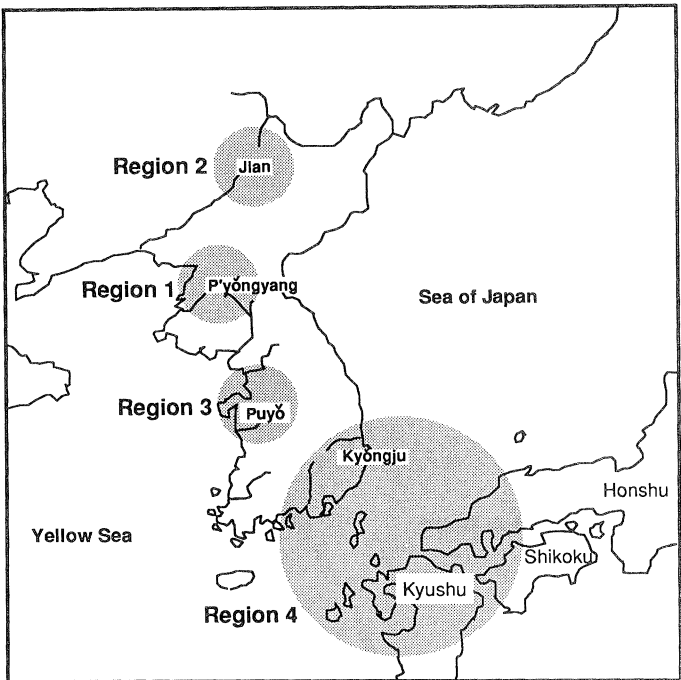


Figure 3 The four regions of the Lelang Interaction Sphere (stippled). The present-day locations of Jian, P'yŏngyang, Puyŏ and Kyŏngju are the centres of the archaeological sites of Koguryŏ, Han Lelang, Paekche and Silla, respectively.

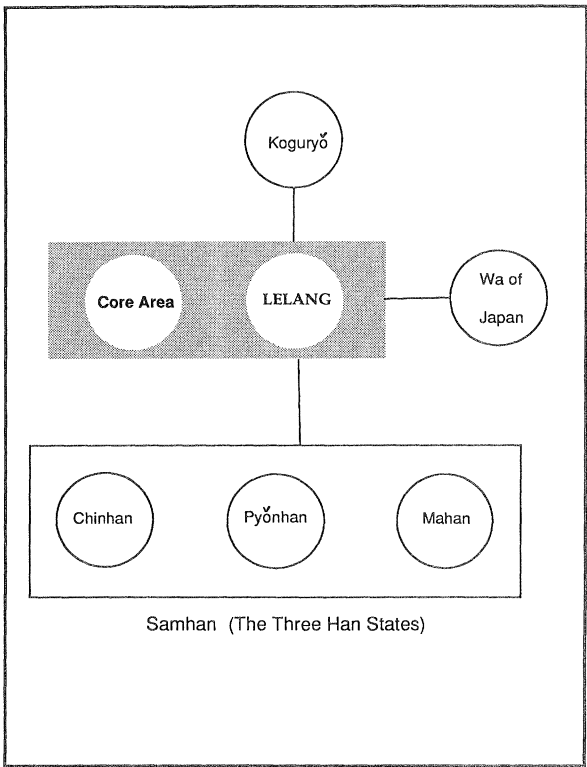
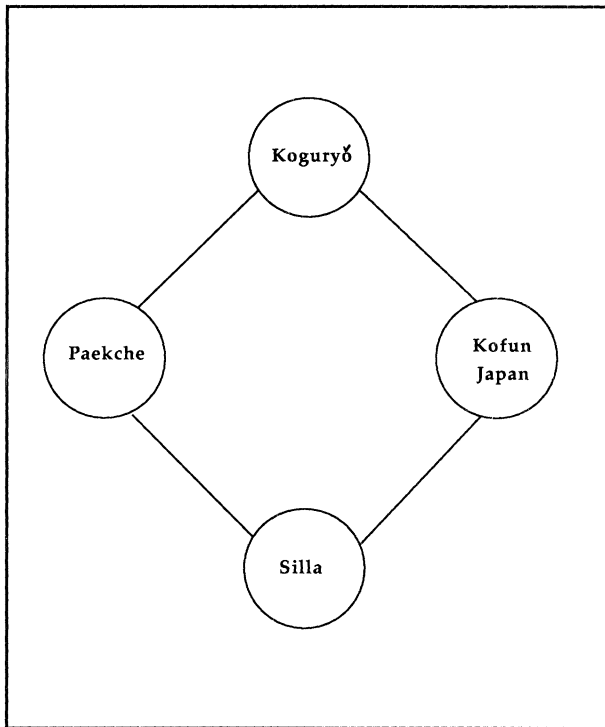


Figure 4 The first stage of the Lelang Interaction Sphere (c. second century BC to the third century AD). Circles represent the main tribal entities in the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands that interacted with the Han dynasty commandery of Lelang between the second century BC and third century AD. Mahan, Chinhan and Pyŏnhan are grouped together, since the third-century AD Chinese texts of the *Weizhi* always refer to them collectively as the 'Samhan' (meaning the three Han *guo*). The stippled area is intended to emphasize that the most intense trade and diplomatic interaction took place between the Han dynasty commandery of Lelang and 'middle-men' (tribal chiefs), in the core area in and around modern-day P'yŏngyang City.



*Figure 5* The second stage of the Lelang Interaction Sphere (c. third to seventh centuries AD). Circles represent the Three Kingdoms (Koguryō, Paekche, Silla) of the Korean peninsula, which interacted with the Kofun of the Japanese islands.

culture. Such widespread distribution of ideas and technology would not have been possible without the élite distribution network of seals, bronze mirrors, and luxury Han goods which stimulated the initial exchange network. Once this network was established in the core areas of Lelang, around the turn of the first millennium BC/AD, it quickly spread to all other parts of Korea and into southern-western Japan (Fig. 3), forming the 'Lelang Interaction Sphere' (Fig. 4) in Korean prehistory (Pai 1989). Without this phase, the second stage of the interaction sphere (Fig. 5) among the mounded tomb states would not have been possible. Extensive trade and diplomatic activities were heightened and reinforced by competition and warfare with Yamato Japan and the three kingdoms of Koguryō, Paekche and Silla. These states shared common features in palatial architecture, in the spread of Buddhism and associated sculpture, as well as in gold artwork and jewellery. Alliances were forged and broken between Silla and Paekche. The three peninsular kingdoms had a final showdown in a fight for hegemony in the Korean peninsula in the late seventh century AD.

Such competition and emulation in the rise and fall of overlapping dynasties in contiguous regions was proposed by Chang (1986) for Bronze Age China, among the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties; by Renfrew and Cherry (1986) for the European pre-Classical civilizations of the Mediterranean; and by Wells (1980) for Central Europe and its contacts with the more advanced Classical world of Greece and Rome; Barnes (1986) has also presented similar mechanisms at work among the early Japanese and Korean states. The archaeology of early Korea fits well within this general framework: it is not problematic, at least, to accept both that there existed indigenous regional traditions and that a more

advanced Han Chinese civilization helped inspire them to evolve towards a complex regional society. Such a theoretical view can help reconcile the nationalistic views of contemporary Korean scholars with pre-war Japanese colonial interpretations of Han Lelang's position in Korean prehistory, because it emphasizes both the uniqueness and the continuity of the features of Korean native traditions. At the same time, it presents a systematic approach to the problem of interpreting external cultural influences from China and Japan inside Korea, without having to resort to 'imperialistic' arguments involving migrations, conquests or colonizations (Ledyard 1975).

vii.91

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## Abstract

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### **Culture contact and culture change: the Korean peninsula and its relations with the Han Dynasty commandery of Lelang**

The most controversial topic in Korean archaeology and history today concerns the Han Lelang commanderies that were established in the Korean peninsula during the Han dynasty in 108 BC and lasted for 400 years. Despite the many archaeological, historical, and inscriptional evidences to the contrary, North Korean archaeologists and the South Korean historian Yun Nae-hyon continue to deny the existence of the commandery Lelang in the Korean peninsula. This work adopts a different approach from previous Japanese or Korean scholarship on Lelang studies by focusing on issues of acculturation and culture change. The analysis rests mainly on archaeological evidence, in addition to the earliest ethnohistoric data which date to the third century AD.