

The Architectural and Cultural Significance of Goguryeo Tombs: A Comprehensive Examination and Future Directions

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Abstract

The emergence and development of the Goguryeo civilization in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula have had a significant impact on the region's cultural history. This paper delves into the architectural legacy of the Goguryeo civilization, a significant cultural force in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula for approximately 700 years. Focusing on the ancient tombs of Goguryeo, which go beyond mere burial grounds and serve as subterranean structures resembling contemporary residences, this paper examines their occurrence, structure, and distribution. Through an evaluation of previous research, the paper aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Goguryeo's advanced technology and architectural achievements. Furthermore, it proposes a novel approach involving the analysis of architectural drawings and pillars within the tombs to enhance knowledge of Goguryeo's construction chronology and unravel the secrets of these remarkable structures.

Keyword : Goguryeo, Tomb culture, Mural tombs, Research achievements

1. Introductions

The emergence and development of the Goguryeo civilization in northeastern China in 37 B.C., followed by its subsequent relocation to the northern region of the Korean Peninsula, and its eventual downfall at the hands of the Silla and Tang allied forces in 668, constitute a significant epoch in the cultural history of Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula. Spanning approximately 700 years, Goguryeo played a pivotal role in the region, engaging in extensive interactions with ancient Chinese states. Notably, Goguryeo's cultural achievements and architectural prowess surpassed those of its contemporaries, Baekje and Silla. Its advanced architectural techniques and distinctive style even influenced the architectural development of Baekje and Silla in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. Firstly, the ancient tombs of Goguryeo, which served as subterranean structures mirroring residential dwellings, demonstrate the civilization's technological capabilities. The incorporation of stone chambers, murals depicting daily life, and diverse developments in appearance and inner structure highlight Goguryeo's architectural achievements. In contrast, Baekje and Silla did not exhibit the same

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level of architectural sophistication in their tombs. Second, Goguryeo's cultural influence extended beyond its own borders. The architectural development of Baekje and Silla in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula was influenced by Goguryeo's advanced techniques and distinctive style. Third, Goguryeo's prominence and role in the region's history further emphasize its cultural achievements. Its extensive interactions with ancient Chinese states and its architectural prowess, surpassing those of Baekje and Silla, highlight Goguryeo's cultural significance and historical legacy.

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the ancient tombs of Goguryeo, revealing that these tombs served not merely as burial grounds but also as subterranean structures mirroring the residential dwellings of the era. These tombs bear testimony to the advanced technological capabilities of Goguryeo. Therefore, this paper aims to consolidate existing research on Goguryeo's architectural accomplishments by examining the extant ancient tombs located in China and the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, this study seeks to evaluate the achievements and limitations of previous research endeavors in order to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Goguryeo's advanced technology and architectural legacy.

2. Ancient Goguryeo tombs : occurrence and sturcture

2.1 Occurrence of ancient Goguryeo tombs

The ancient Goguryeo tombs, which are found across a wide geographic area encompassing the northeastern regions of China (including Liaoning Province and Jilin Province) and the north-central part of the Korean Peninsula, exhibit distinct characteristics [1]. In the initial stages, mural tombs were constructed in China, influenced by the expanding central regions of the country. However, as the capital of Goguryeo shifted to Pyeongyang, the construction of mural tombs became predominantly concentrated in the Pyeongyang region. This shift resulted in the emergence of a unique ancient tomb culture in Goguryeo that diverged from the central districts of China [1].

The original form of the memorial service preceding burial was the stone mound tomb. Initially, large stones were placed near rivers, serving as platforms for placing the deceased, which were then covered with additional stones. This form evolved into a square pyramid style, constructed with broken stones at the base of mountains, away from riversides. Over time, stone chambers were incorporated into the tombs, lightly covered with soil on the exterior [2]. The occurrence of soil mound tombs in Goguryeo is somewhat uncertain. These tombs are typically found in hilly districts with picturesque views, facing expansive fields and leaning against mountains. Soil mound tombs often form groups, ranging from a

minimum of 3 to 4 tombs to as many as 100 tombs.

Recent research on the ancient tombs of early Goguryeo has primarily focused on the Amnok River basin, centered around Jipan, and the Daedong River basin, centered around Pyeongyang. Notably, studies on ancient tombs of early Goguryeo are predominantly concentrated in and around the Daedong River region, particularly Pyeongyang [3].

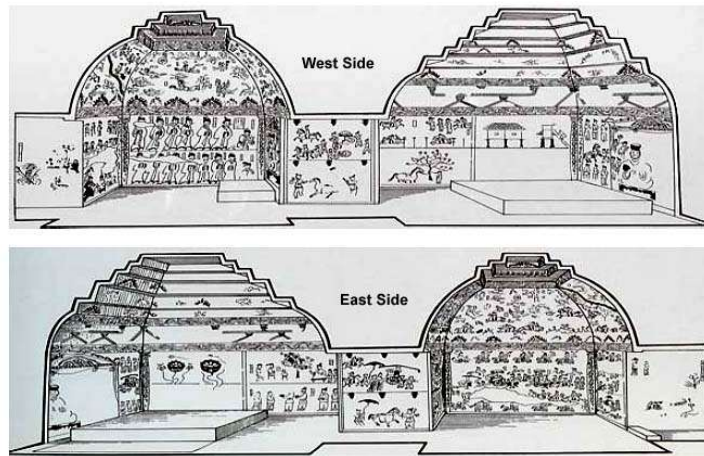
2.2 Structure of ancient Goguryeo tombs

Ancient Goguryeo tombs can be primarily classified into two types : stone mound tombs and soil mound tombs. Stone mound tombs can be further divided into stone coffin mound tombs and stone chamber mound tombs. Stone coffin mound tombs, found in Tonggu within the Jipan region, signify the central power of Goguryeo and are distinct from the graves in the northeastern part of China. Stone chamber mound tombs were constructed during a period of institutional adjustments under powerful royal authority. When the capital of Goguryeo was relocated to Pyeongyang, stone chamber soil mound tombs became the main form of memorial service for the ruling classes. Consequently, the ancient tombs of Goguryeo underwent changes in their form alongside the transformations in Goguryeo itself [4].

Soil mound tombs are predominantly located in the Jipan and Pyeongyang regions. They can be further divided into stone chamber soil mound tombs and stone chamber soil mound mural tombs. Both stone mound tombs and soil mound tombs exhibit diverse developments in their appearance and inner structure, particularly in the part where the corpse is entombed. The method of entombment shifted from suhyulsik to hoenghyulsik in stone mound tombs, while in soil mound tombs, hoenghyulsiksukil was predominantly used. Some stone chamber soil mound tombs feature murals that depict the daily life of the Goguryeo people on the walls and ceilings of the stone chambers.

The burial chambers in the ancient Goguryeo tombs consist of the hyunsil (where the corpse is entombed), the junsil (where rituals are performed), and the yeondo or myodo, which connect the interior chambers to the outside space. As shown in [Fig. 1], the number of burial chambers serves as an important basis for understanding the changes and developments in the structure of soil mound tombs. Burial chambers are classified as single chamber tombs or plural chamber tombs, depending on whether a junsil is present [2]. The plane of the burial chambers can be categorized as square, rectangular, or lateral rectangular. The direction in which the burial chambers face can be classified as facing west, facing southwest, or facing south. Depending on the location of the burial chambers, the ancient Goguryeo tombs can be further classified as basement, semi-basement, or ground tombs. The technique of ceiling construction is a significant characteristic of the ancient Goguryeo tombs, and

examples include flat ceilings, prop ceilings, vault ceilings, fold ceilings, mixed ceilings, and more.



[Fig. 1] Diagram of Tomb Interior, Deokheung-ri, 408 A.D. Tae'an City, North Korea

[Table 1] Structure of Goguryeo tombs

Material		Number of burial chambers	Technique of ceiling construction	
Stone mound tomb	Stone coffin mound tomb	Single chamber tomb	Flat ceiling	
			Fold ceiling	
			Vault ceiling	
	Stone chamber mound tomb	Plural chamber tomb	Prop ceiling	Octagonal prop ceiling
Triangle prop ceiling				
Soil mound tomb	Stone chamber soil mound tomb			Multi chamber tomb
		Octagonal & triangle prop		
	Vault & triangle prop			
	Vault & parallel prop			
	Stone chamber soil mound mural tomb	Triangle & parallel prop		
	Vault & parallel & triangle prop			

As shown in [Table 1], it provides information on the materials used in the construction of different types of tombs, such as stone mound tombs, stone coffin mound tombs, stone chamber mound tombs, soil mound tombs, and stone chamber soil mound mural tombs. It also includes details on the number of burial chambers present in each type of tomb, ranging from single chamber tombs to plural chamber

tombs. Additionally, it illustrates the techniques employed in the ceiling construction of these tombs. This includes the use of flat ceilings, fold ceilings, vault ceilings, prop ceilings, octagonal prop ceilings, triangle prop ceilings, parallel prop ceilings, mixed ceilings (combining different techniques), and other variations. By presenting these structural elements, a comprehensive overview of the diverse architectural features found in Goguryeo tombs shows the intricate designs and construction techniques employed by the ancient civilization.

2.3 Distribution of ancient Goguryeo tombs

The distribution of ancient Goguryeo tombs extends over a wide geographic area, encompassing both northeastern regions of China, such as Liaoning Province and Jilin Province, and the north-central part of the Korean Peninsula. These tombs exhibit distinct characteristics that reflect the cultural and geographical influences of the respective regions. The ancient Goguryeo tombs situated in Jipan are located at the foothills, facing the Amnok River. In total, there are 24 ancient Goguryeo tombs, comprising two stone mound tombs and twenty-two soil mound tombs. The majority of ancient Goguryeo tombs in the vicinity of the Daedong River region are concentrated in close proximity to Pyeongyang. Notably, ancient tomb murals are predominantly distributed in Hwanghaenamdo. A total of fifty-four ancient tombs have been confirmed near Pyeongyang, with an additional ten ancient tombs discovered in Hwanghaenamdo [5]. Understanding the distribution of ancient Goguryeo tombs provides valuable insights into the cultural and historical landscape of the civilization. It highlights the regional variations in tomb construction and the influence of Goguryeo's geographical and cultural context on the development of tomb architecture.

3. Studies on ancient tombs of Goguryeo

The designation of the mountain fortress and ancient tombs of Goguryeo, situated in northeastern China, along with the ancient tombs in the Daedong River basin of North Korea, as UNESCO World Heritage sites during the 28th general meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July 2004 held in Suzhou, China, has sparked a heightened interest in Goguryeo studies within the Korean academic community. Of particular significance is the Northeast Project undertaken by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which has further contributed to the growing scholarly attention devoted to Goguryeo.

3.1 Studies on types and structures of ancient tombs of Goguryeo

Extensive research has been conducted in the field of archaeology to explore the diverse types and structures of ancient tombs in Goguryeo [6][7][8], resulting in the establishment of a comprehensive chronicle detailing the construction of these tombs. The fields of art history and archaeology have played pivotal roles in advancing our understanding of early Goguryeo tombs, making significant contributions to the body of knowledge in this area. However, it is worth noting that differing perspectives exist regarding the chronological sequencing of ancient Goguryeo tomb construction. In light of this, this paper contends that relying solely on the construction chronicle established by the fields of art history and archaeology may benefit from further refinement. As a suggestion for advancing research in this domain, the paper proposes a new approach that involves examining architectural drawings and the pillars discovered within the ancient Goguryeo tombs, which may shed new light on the construction chronology and enhance our understanding of these remarkable structures.

Currently, studies focusing on Goguryeo construction during the Goguryeo period, particularly those conducted by South Korea, have been relatively inadequate compared to the extensive research carried out in North Korea. This discrepancy can be attributed to the predominance of Goguryeo remains located in North Korea and the northeastern part of China. Furthermore, the initiation of the Northeast Project by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2002 [9] has imposed significant limitations on Korean scholars, impeding their access to the Goguryeo remains situated in China and exacerbating the challenges associated with studying Goguryeo construction during that period.

Notably, publications such as *Ancient Tomb Mural* by the International Council on Monuments and Sites Korea (ICOMOS-Korea) and the *Research Report on the Preservation of Goguryeo's Mural Tombs* by South Korea and North Korea by the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and the Korean Historian Council have attempted to address the issue. In addition, broadcast media has played a crucial role in illuminating the scattered Goguryeo remains in China, aiming to navigate the complexities arising from the Northeast Project of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. However, it is important to acknowledge that this project, holding national significance for both Korea and China beyond the realm of academic discourse, has intensified conflicts between the two countries, further hindering the search for a resolution to this intricate matter [10].

Nevertheless, the Northeast Project of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has served as a catalyst in generating interest in Goguryeo among Koreans and within the Korean academic community. The Korean scholarly community is diligently engaged in investigating and elucidating the original

culture fostered by Goguryeo through cultural exchanges with China. Concurrently, they are actively pursuing studies to address the multifaceted challenges posed by the Northeast Project of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, aiming to foster productive resolutions to this complex issue.

3.2 Studies on the distribution of ancient tombs of Goguryeo

Studies on the distribution of ancient tombs in Goguryeo have yielded varying perspectives and arguments among scholars. Different viewpoints regarding the distribution have been presented by researchers. In 1997, Yeonghun Ju from North Korea, in the Study on the Chronicle of Mural Tombs of Goguryeo, asserted that a total of forty-four mural tombs exist, with thirteen located in Jipian, China, and thirty-one in Pyeongyang, Pyeongannamdo, and Hwanghaedo in North Korea. In 2004, Suho Son, in the Study on Ancient Tombs of Goguryeo, proposed the presence of eighty-one mural tombs, with twenty-one in Japan, China, one in Hwanin, twenty-three in Pyeongyang, twenty in Nampo, thirteen in Pyeongannamdo, and eleven in Hwanghaedo. During the 1980s, Wonryong Kim from South Korea, based on findings in North Korea and China, argued in Korean Mural Tomb that there are a total of fifty mural tombs, with thirteen in Japan, China, and thirty-seven in North Korea. The South Korean academic community generally referred to the findings of the North Korean academic community. In 2004, Hotae Jun proposed in the World of Tomb Mural of Goguryeo that there are a total of one hundred and six tomb murals, with thirty in Japan, China, and seventy-six in North Korea, indicating a doubling of the number of ancient tombs of Goguryeo. In 2008, Junbok Lee in China, in the Study on Tomb Mural of Goguryeo argued for a total of one hundred and fifteen tomb murals, with thirty-eight in Japan, China, and seventy-seven in North Korea. It is worth noting that the estimation of the number of ancient tombs and tomb murals is anticipated to increase as further archaeological excavations take place. Consequently, it becomes imperative to conduct studies on the yet-to-be-unearthed ancient tombs and tomb murals of Goguryeo, considering the expected growth in their numbers.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the ancient tombs of Goguryeo possess substantial cultural and architectural significance, offering invaluable insights into the unique characteristics and way of life of the Goguryeo civilization. These tombs have played a pivotal role in deepening our understanding of Goguryeo, as they exhibit distinct forms and structures that deviate from the prevailing Chinese cultural norms. The study of ancient Goguryeo tombs has predominantly been conducted within the realms of art history and

archaeology, with particular attention given to tomb murals. Furthermore, extensive research has been undertaken to investigate the various architectural types and structures of these tombs. However, the recent study of Goguryeo's construction has encountered challenges due to restrictions placed on Korean scholars' access to Goguryeo remains in China, attributable to the Northeast Project initiated by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. To establish a robust foundation for Goguryeo studies, it is imperative to foster international exchange and collaboration with neighboring countries. The findings of this paper are expected to provide valuable data for future research endeavors on the ancient tombs of Goguryeo, taking into account both the achievements made and the limitations encountered.

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