

Tombs as Landscapes of Authority: A Study of Hierarchical Significance and Artifactual Evidence in the Jisan-dong Tomb Group of Daegaya

Tae-Geun Park^{1*}

Abstract

In the study of Daegaya, tombs are a very important element. The hierarchy of tombs and excavated artifacts are cited as evidence for the development of Gaya as an ancient state. This study analyzed the critical role of tombs within the context of Daegaya, particularly emphasizing their hierarchical significance and the artifacts unearthed from these sites as evidence for the evolution of Gaya into an ancient state. For this, this study examined the location of tombs with the focus on the Jisan-dong tomb group, a large group of tombs consisting of 704 tombs with a large number of artifacts such as golden caskets. It suggested that the role of tombs as humanistic landscapes rather than the form of tombs can reveal the fact that tombs are evidence of the authority of the ruling class and monuments that guarantee the legitimacy of their rule.

Keyword : Daegaya, Burial mound, Location selection, Highest rank

1. Introduction

Daegaya, a prominent polity during the Three Kingdoms period, thrived in the region of Goryeong in Gyeongbuk. Its origins can be traced back to the small state of Banroguk in Byunhan. Renowned for its robust ironware culture and extensive diplomatic relations, Daegaya has been the subject of scholarly debate regarding its classification as an ancient state [1]. While some scholars argue that the hierarchical structure of ancient tombs and the artifacts discovered within them provide evidence of Daegaya's transition into an ancient state [2][3], others contend that the implementation of a governmental system along with notions of centralization and district administration signify its evolution beyond a mere confederacy [4].

The study of ancient tombs within the context of Daegaya's history holds significant importance with various aspects such as understanding tombs as cultural landscapes, comparing tomb systems between Daegaya and Silla to infer regional hierarchies and political structures and exploring associated burial rites and customs. Research conducted in the 20th century has yielded insights into the selection and

¹ Kokdumuseum, Seoul [Curator]
e-mail: taegyeon1206@naver.com

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location of Daegaya's ancient tombs and shed light on the establishment of a distinct national identity through its ironware culture. In the 21st century, scholarly attention has increasingly turned towards analyzing burial accessories and tomb locations in order to gain a deeper understanding of regional hierarchies and the beliefs surrounding the afterlife especially in the context of Iron Age studies in north-west Europe [6]. This is part of a broader trend of expanding archaeological fieldwork since the 1980s. The findings from these studies have improved our understanding of mortuary practices during the Iron Age and may provide insights into other aspects of past societies such as population mobility, social structure and the persistence of ritual practices over time.

In regard with recent discoveries, the study aims to further investigate the crucial role of ancient tombs in shaping Daegaya's history with a particular focus on the selection of tomb locations centered around the Jisan-dong site where numerous significant artifacts have been unearthed. By examining the tombs' spatial arrangement and the artifacts discovered within them, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of Daegaya's socio-political dynamics and the cultural significance of its ancient tombs.

2. Archaeological Investigation of Tomb Locations and Artifacts

2.1 The role of ancient tomb as memorials

Memorials are constructed to honor and remember significant figures, events, stories and images. They possess a tangible presence that evokes remembrance through their size, existence and impact, allowing observers to gain glimpses into the past. Lee regarded ancient tombs and their placement as 'memorials' that convey the history of Gaya spanning several centuries [2]. The concept of a memorial first emerged during the Bronze Age in South Korea. As agrarian societies began to settle, there arose a need to assert ownership, leading to the construction of memorials. These memorials served to imbue meaning into territories and express the desire for group continuity. During this period, memorials took the form of dolmen-like structures combining stonework with tomb elements. However, these dolmen-like memorials disappeared during the Three Han States period, gradually replaced by tombs. Wooden coffin tombs gained prominence and evolved in form, eventually culminating in the appearance of large ancient tombs towards the end of the Three Han States period. Similar to dolmens, ancient tombs assumed a symbolic role in relation to ruling power to imply their utilization for this purpose. Thus, the presence of multiple tombs within an ancient tomb complex conferred legitimacy upon ruling power [7].

2.2 Daegaya's ancient tombs in Goryeong's Jisangdong area

The ancient tombs located in Jisandong, Goryeong, are ancient mounds that epitomize the legacy of Gaya. A meticulous surface survey revealed the distribution of a total of 704 soil mound tombs along a ridge to the south of Goryeong, branching out towards Eupnae in the east and extending to a hill south of Deokgokjae, traversed by the national road connecting Geochang and Goadong. This distribution spans a length of 2.4 kilometers and a width of 1 kilometer. Prominent large-sized tombs are positioned atop the ridges and at the ends of branches while numerous medium-sized tombs dot the ridge stretching towards Eupnae. Small-sized tombs and stone coffin tombs are found throughout the ancient tomb area, including the vicinity of medium and large-sized tombs. Collectively, these large and small ancient tombs constitute the ancient tombs of Jisandong [3]. The ancient tombs in Jisandong, Goryeong, hold significant historical and cultural importance as they are the largest ancient tombs within the Gaya region during the Three Kingdoms period. They offer insights into the afterlife beliefs (gyese) of the ruling class and serve as a cultural heritage that showcases the growth and development of Daegaya, a powerful political entity [1].

Archaeological evidence including ancient mounds and tombs provides valuable insights into the societal status of Daegaya. When examining the ancient tombs of Daegaya, particularly those in Jisandong, Goryeong, several key observations emerge. These tombs were strategically situated atop ridges to offer commanding views of the surrounding plains and rivers with mountain fortresses serving as a protective backdrop. Large-sized tombs boasted soil mound diameters of 20 meters or more, while medium-sized tombs ranged from 10 to 15 meters in diameter. The burial chamber of the deceased occupant was centrally located within the graveyard with subsidiary receptacles for coffins or burial items positioned near the main stone chamber. The surrounding graveyard was adorned with round or oval stones to form a thin and elongated rectangle with a length-to-width ratio of 5:1. Daegaya's ancient tombs are characterized by distinctive Daegaya-style earthenware and the burial of prestige goods. These ancient tombs can be categorized into three grades based on the size and status of the excavated relics as shown in [Table 1].

[Table 1] Classification based on the size of Daegaya tombs and excavated relics

Grade I	Burial mound diameter of 20 meters or more, main chamber + chamber for jewelry and personal belongings of the deceased + receptacle of a coffin for burial of the living with the dead (10 or more prestige goods, official hat).
Grade II	Burial mound diameter of 15-20 meters, main chamber + receptacle of a coffin for burial of the living with the dead (1-5 prestige goods, official hat).
Grade III	Burial mound diameter of 10 meters or less, stone coffin (prestige goods).

2.3 Selection of tomb locations as a means of expressing authority

The central ancient tombs within each state of the Gaya region were strategically positioned on ridges that extended from the central basin of Youngnam towards the plains. Moreover, these locations were often fortified by mountain fortresses with the ridges of primary mountains overlooking Daegayaeup, the Goryeong plain and the Hoicheon river. Consequently, the ancient tombs in Jisandong have been assumed to represent central ancient tombs within the Gaya confederacy [5]. The association between the Goryeonggun region and Daegaya has been corroborated by literary sources and the excavated relics from this region surpass those found in other ancient tombs within the Gaya region [6]. In Goryeonggun, the burial mounds within the ancient tombs are arranged in a manner that prioritizes large-sized tombs to occupy the central ridges of mountains that serve as backdrops to small territories while medium-sized tombs are positioned on secondary ridges [5].

A recent study suggests the adherence to these patterns in the location selection of the Jisandong tombs [8]. As shown in [Fig. 1], the Goryeong region is widely recognized as a basin with Goryeongup situated at its center. To the west of the central part of Goryeong lies a mountainous area that is open to a river flowing from north to south while the eastern part also features mountainous terrain. The field is formed by the Daegachun river flowing between the eastern and western mountainous areas and it extends along the west coast of Daegachun. This location with the west coast falling under the center provides ample living space for various human groups. Taking this living zone as the focal point, the area where large graves are found is a low mountainous region with Kwaebin-ri at its center and a slope to the east of Jusan mountain in the west. However, from the perspective of the central part of Goryeong, the Kwaebin-ri area lacks the necessary conditions to offer a wide view of the central part of Goryeong, resulting in a narrower area. Therefore, the slope to the east of Jusan mountain provides an overlooking view of the central part of Goryeong based on the concept of gyese and allows for the construction of numerous graves. Thus it seems to be the location where large tombs

were established.



[Fig. 1] The whole area of Daegaya-eup, looking down in front of the 45th Jisan-dong ancient tombs

The choice to construct large tombs in central locations that overlook towns and villages can be traced back to the afterlife ideology which posits that the deceased continue to lead a similar life even after death. This design aimed to reinforce the authority of individuals from the highest ranks and allowed them to govern their domains even in the afterlife. Such a selection of location was commonly observed throughout the allied Gaya confederacy including Daegaya as shown in [Fig. 2].



[Fig. 2] The whole area of Daegaya-eup, looking down in front of the 45th Jisan-dong ancient tombs

3. Discussion

The selection of tomb locations as a means of expressing authority can be understood through several perspectives. In terms of visibility and dominance, the positioning of tombs particularly large or elaborate ones in prominent locations such as atop ridges or hills and make them highly visible to the surrounding community. This visibility serves as a constant reminder of the deceased's power and status. The presence of these tombs within the everyday landscape can reinforce social hierarchies and underline

the authority of the ruling class or elites. By placing a tomb in a particular location, it can act as a marker to claim ownership or control over the surrounding land. This can be seen as a form of authority, staking a claim to territory. And taking social and cultural significance, constructing a tomb often requires substantial resources such as labor, materials and land. The ability to command these resources for a burial site can demonstrate the power and authority of an individual or family. Last but not least, ancestors are revered and seen as sources of authority and legitimacy. Exploring the practice of 'burial of the living with the dead' and its connection to the ruling class's power in relation to ancient tombs would provide valuable insights. The practice of 'burial of the living with the dead,' also known as 'retainer sacrifice' or 'human sacrifice in funerary contexts,' has been observed in many ancient cultures worldwide. It typically involves the ritual killing of servants, attendants or wives who are then buried alongside the deceased person with a high-status individual or ruler. This custom is often interpreted as a demonstration of the power and authority of the ruling class. By placing tombs in prominent locations, the living can maintain a physical and symbolic connection with these ancestors, thereby upholding their authority [9].

Furthermore, contemporary perceptions of the status and power associated with the large tombs constructed in highly visible locations underscore their significance. These ancient tombs constructed in important sites over successive generations symbolize absolute authority and perpetuity. Moreover, they served as a means to foster public acceptance and recognition of the earnestness of the ruling class.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the ancient tombs of Daegaya, highlighting their significance as cultural landscapes that reflect the social status of the ruling class and the expression of authority through the selection of tomb locations. The argument that the strategic positioning of burial sites overlooking towns and villages symbolizes the enduring power of rulers in the afterlife aligns with the afterlife concept prevalent among the allied Gaya states. The physical presence of towns, plains, rivers and mountain fortresses surrounding the tombs further reinforces the perception of authority associated with these locations.

The enduring presence of central ancient tombs in prominent positions serves as a tangible testament to the legitimacy and authority of the ruling class. This study has underscored the role of ancient tombs as not only physical structures but also as meaningful memorials that validate the legitimacy of reign and perpetuate the memory of the ruling class. However, certain aspects remain unexplored and present

opportunities for further research. A more comprehensive examination of the afterlife concept and its influence on the formation of ancient tombs would enhance our understanding of their significance. Further studies will be expected to investigate the correlation between the grant of legitimacy to the ruling class and the development of Daegaya from a small country to an ancient state in relation to the creation of ancient tombs.

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