Classifying and Chronicling Dragon Design Openwork Products from Ancient Tomb Artifacts

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We can read aspects of the degeneration of dragon designs from various attributes of dragon design openwork products from ancient tomb artifacts, including the collapse of foot components in openwork design, the expression of detail using the Keribori line-engraving technique, and so on. Accordingly, while taking leading research as a reference point, we presented a series of I to III models, taking foot composition as the main criterion. Since a single-system understanding of the dragon design transition is not sufficient, we next established three small groups from the diversity of dragons – the parallel foreleg group, asymmetrical foreleg group, and snaking tail group – to suggest a proposal for the relative chronology of periods I through III. Then, through a consideration of associated burial accessories such as harnesses, iron arrowheads and unglazed earthenware, for which relative chronology had already been established to some extent, we inspected the validity of the relative chronology of dragon design openwork products. Furthermore, we searched for ancestor figures for the small groups in the Sanyan region, mainly in Liaoning Province, China.

Finally, through this consideration of relative chronology proposals, we identified the following points: (1) while it is difficult to specify the production areas of individual materials, it is possible to establish a model series straddling the north-east of China, the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands; (2) the genealogy of dragon design openwork products follows the relationship between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands, centering around the Sanyan region, the Goguryeo region, and the region eastward of Nakdong River; (3) introduction to the Japanese islands (bringing in products and importing artisans for manufacture) required constant exchanges with the Korean peninsula, centering around the region eastward of Nakdong River.

Key words: dragon design openwork products, classification and chronicling, typology, Tumulus period, Japan-Korea relations