Development of Baekje Burial Practices and Dynamics of the Baekje Dynasty

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This article aims to trace the dynamics of the Baekje Dynasty by analyzing tombs in the kingdom. The analysis consists of two steps: (1) verifying the transition of burial practices through the reclassification of tombs in the territory and (2) identifying the tombs of kings and royal families and tracing their development. The burial practices of Baekje are broadly classified into two types: (1) local burial practices, which were derived from wooden-coffin tombs and developed in various ways depending on the region or group they belonged to; and (2) foreign burial practices, including cairns and tiled tombs inspired from Koguryo and Chinese dynasties. These local and foreign burial practices of Baekje developed in three stages: (1) diversification; (2) convergence and stratification; and (3) uniformization. Throughout this process, the ruling class (kings and royal families) tried to differentiate their tombs from others, mainly by adopting foreign burial practices, but some royal tombs assimilated with those of the lower classes, which implies the instability of the Baekje Dynasty. Based on these changes in the vertical relationship between the royal and other tombs, this article explains the dynamics of the Baekje Dynasty in the following six stages: infancy, development, decline, revival, transition, and ripening stages. The Baekje Dynasty did not always maintain absolute control over its territory. It was rather unstable, sometimes isolated and sometimes forgotten. Moreover, the diversity of tombs in the territory suggests the existence of independent regional powers, which also exemplifies how unstable the Baekje Dynasty was. The adoption of foreign burial practices is considered as an example to highlight the will and effort of the Baekje Dynasty to establish and maintain its dominance in the territory while competing and cooperating with regional powers. Thus, a comparison of the development of burial practices and the written history of Baekje can enable us to explore the historical context of the rise and decline of the Dynasty though it is important to refrain from overemphasizing the written sources.

Key words: Baekje, wooden coffin tomb, stone chamber tomb, cairn, tiled tomb