

# Goguryeo Culture and Mural Paintings

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Mural paintings in ancient tombs reflect the past ages. They are a “testimony of history” containing pictures and ideas of those who lived in the past and show the culture of the day as it was. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the paintings without considering the history and culture of those days. Analysis of the formation and content of mural paintings in Goguryeo’s ancient tombs is interlocked with understanding the path that Goguryeo had traveled, i.e., its social and cultural processes.

Goguryeo history drew people’s attention in the 1990s. In particular, mural paintings in ancient tombs are emerging as a major subject of study due to their value as materials with abundant content. It is more encouraging that many treatises are being published with Goguryeo’s mural paintings as the subject. However, attempts have not been made to link the mural paintings in ancient tombs, which are the basis of funeral art, to the society and culture of the times (Jeon Ho-tae 1997b). Such an attempt must be made even if only in the sense of just presenting the data for “examination and discussion,” although there are still several areas which are hard to ascertain. This paper was prepared with this purpose in mind.

*Keywords: Mural paintings, Guryeo Culture, Na state, counties, prefectures.*

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## Goguryeo History and Culture

### 1. Culture of the Nation-Building Period

Before Gojoseon and Buyeo revealed themselves on the stage of history as representative nations of ancient northeast Asia, those who lived in Liaoning, Jilin,

and northern and middle parts of the Korean peninsular in a dispersed state were called Yae or Yemaek in history books.<sup>1</sup> And when the war for unification led by the Ch'in entered full force and the Chinese iron culture spread to neighboring regions and societies through the medium of migrants, inhabitants living in the upper and middle regions of the Amnok River, they began to establish an independent cultural tradition based on the iron culture they accepted. Soon, they were called "Guryeo," a name distinguished from others near Yemaek. It can be verified that the original Goguryeo society was established from the end of the third century BC (Ji Byeong-mok 1987).<sup>3</sup>

The Wei dynasty was founded in Gojoseon, and not only extended its power by subordinating countries such as Jinbeon and Imdun but also tried to include the area around the middle region of the Amnok River; the political powers of Guryeo resisted by uniting with more superior groups. In 108 BC, the Guryeo society was freed from its worry about an invasion from Gojoseon due to the fall of Gojoseon, but Guryeo's state of Na near the Amnok River came under the influence of Han China's *gun* (counties) and *hyeon* (prefectures) as its Hyeondogun was established in the area around the middle stream of the Amnok River with Goguryeo *hyeon* as its head.<sup>4</sup> Han culture flowed into Guryeo society, and some of Nas' leaders used the Han's court dress, clothes and headband, and vessels received through Hyeondogun as symbols of ruling power.<sup>5</sup>

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1. It was mentioned in "Sigunrampyeon" of *Yeossichunchu*, "Hyeongno yeoljeon" (Biography of Shungnu) in *Sagi* (Historical Records), Vol. 110.
  2. The name of "Guryeo" appears in "Dongokjeo" (Documents of East Okjeo) of "Dongijeon" (Biography of Eastern Peoples) in *Samgukji* (The Chinese History of the Three Dynasties) book 30; "Dongokjeo" (Documents of East Okjeo) of "Dongi yeoljeon" (Biography of Eastern Peoples) in *Huhanseo* (The History of Later Han Dynasty China) book 85 for the first time. See Yeo Ho-Kyu 1997 for the emerging process of Guryeo society becoming distinguishable from Yemaek society.
  3. Ji Byung-mok understood that the first Goguryeo society was established in the early second century BC.
  4. "Seonamiyango joseonjeon" (Biography of Southwest Peoples, Two Wo & Joseon) 65 in *Hanseo* (The Chinese History of Early Han Dynasty) book 95, Joseon; Hyeontogungyo (A Study of Hyeontogun), a Geography book in *Hanseo* (The Chinese History of the Early Han Dynasty).
  5. Such a phenomenon is also found in the ruling classes' attitude of the three small Han countries in the middle and southern part of the Korean peninsular (*Samgukji* (The Chinese History of the Three Dynasties) book 30, "Ohwanseonbi dongijeon" (Biography of Ohwan, Shenbei & East Peoples) 30, in *Weiseo* (History of Chinese Wei Dynasty) 30, Documents of Han).

Han's Hyeondogun relocated its place of rule towards the Soja River as it could not endure Guryeo society's active resistance anymore.<sup>6</sup> Then, there were fierce battles fought against the Na in the area around Amnok River's middle stream and its tributary in order to become a political power, at least to the level of a small country like the Na kingdom. Reorganized as the Sono tribe while the Goguryeo kingdom placed itself on a firm basis, Songyang (kingdom) [Biryu (kingdom)] was the first political power that reached at the level above Na (kingdom) among the Na around the Biryu River.<sup>7</sup> When the Jumong group acquired the position of Jolbon's ruling power, Songyang kingdom, with subordinating Na around the Biryu River area, was recognized as a representative power of Guryeo society in the Amnok River's middle stream area as well as the Biryu River area among some other "Na" and allied bodies of "Na" around the Amnok River's middle stream area. In other words, in the late first century BC, the Jumong group from East Buyeo challenged Songyang, which had been the strong in the area for a good period.

Jumong and his followers were stronger than other political powers of various scales in Guryeo society, including Songyang, in the fields of archery, horse riding, ability of selecting good horses and training them, and organizing ability as a warrior group. The Jumong group became a representative of the Goguryeo people's political power in Jolbon and throughout the nation in a relatively short time because it entered indigenous Guryeo society to the south of Buyeo with a comparatively superior army organizing ability and agricultural technique. By its appearance and activity, Guryeo society took the form of a kingdom, namely, Goguryeo.

According to documents, Goguryeo as a nation was built in 37 BC. However, as seen above, Goguryeo as a political entity had been distinguished before the Ch'in and Han of China. From the end of the first century BC to the end of the first century AD, it had grown as a new power in Manchuria and on the Korean peninsula, overpowering Buyeo's long history and power and with-

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6. Because the Gun office was not newly built, although it was relocated, each of them is called the second Hyeondogun and the third Hyeondogun etc. See Yi Byung-do 1930 for an early study on "Hyeondogun."

7. Songyang can be read as Songna and Songno, then Sona and Sono (Yi Byung-do 1956, "Goguryeo gukhogo" in *Seoul daenonmunjip* (Seoul National University Dissertation Collection) 3, (1976 re-contained, *Hangukgodaesayeongu* (Old Korean History Study), Bakyongsu).

out the pressure of Han's *gun* and *hyeon*. At that time, Goguryeo increased its power, controlling not only the existing Yemaek people but also various neighboring small powers commonly called non-Yemaek people.<sup>8</sup>

Goguryeo culture in the nation-building stage from Dongmyeong the Great, Jumong, and to King Taejo had developed centering around the Biryu River which flowed surrounding its first capital Jolbon and the Amnok River's middle reaches where the next capital, Gungnae Castle, was stationed. Goguryeo's first task until the former half of the second century AD was to secure its independent territory by eliminating various *gun* and *hyeon* left by Han China in the middle and northern part of the Korean peninsula. For this reason, Han culture could not help being accepted by Goguryeo to a certain extent because its most frequent object of contact was Han's *gun* and *hyeon*. Therefore, it is consistently related to this stream of history that Goguryeo culture unfolded based on its indigenous tradition with Hwanrun and Jian as central places.

## 2. National Growth and Cultural Expansion

From the late second century to the early fourth century AD, Goguryeo united neighboring small groups, and furthermore, it extinguished Chinese *gun* and *hyeon* groups that left and barely kept their existence in southern Manchuria and the middle and northern part of the Korean peninsula such as Hyeonto and Rorang.<sup>9</sup> This could be an emerging period for Goguryeo as a central power in the area. King Chadae's effort to reorganize national power with the king at the center though it ended in failure, was also made supported by Goguryeo's national growth.<sup>10</sup>

With territorial expansion in full scale from the late second century AD, Goguryeo contacted more heterogeneous and various societies and made them its territory. This means other societies became a part of Goguryeo culture, and thus, means it came to have more abundant substance.

The examples of societies included as a new territory of Goguryeo while maintaining their own cultural characteristics were the Buyeo Castle area in the

8. Yeo Ho-Kyu, 1996, "Amnokgang jungryu yueokeseoui goguryeoui gukga hyeongseong," *Yeoksawa hyeonsil* 21.

9. See Yim Go-hwan 1995 and Kim Mi-gyeong 1996 for the recently organized material.

10. See Geum Gyeong-suk 1995; Kim Hyun-suk 1996; Yeo Ho-Kyu 1997 for the recent study on Goguryeo's changing process of political and social structure in this period.

northwest where North Buyeo was, the Chaek Castle area in the west where North Okjeo and East Buyeo were, the East Sea area in the southeast where East Okjeo and Dongye ruled, the Daedong river area in the south where Rorang was located, and some parts of the Liaodong region in the west where Liaodong-gun and Hyeontogun were. Buyeo's indigenous culture had developed in the Buyeo Castle area of the northwest, and East Buyeo culture was added to the mixture of Okjeo culture and Malgal tribe culture in the Chaek Castle area in the east. Han culture was added to Ye culture in the East Sea area, and the Daedong river around Pyeongyang was a center of Rorang culture established by Gojoseon culture's mixture with Han culture. The Liaodong region was an in-between area of many cultures that Goguryeo, China, and northern nomadic forces had severely fought for. Therefore, it is thought that Goguryeo territorialized various cultures.

It is still not clear what kind of relationship was made between these cultures controlled by Goguryeo for about two hundred years and indigenous Goguryeo culture which was formed centering on Hwanrun and Jian. But considering the history and cultural development of Pyeongyang and the Liaodong region even before they were included in Goguryeo, it is highly likely that their cultures maintained relative originality against indigenous Goguryeo culture for certain amount of time. It seems that the cultures of the Buyeo Castle area, the Chaek Castle area and the East Sea area were incorporated in the influence of Goguryeo culture comparatively quickly although their substance has not yet been clarified.

### 3. Development of Universal Culture Centering on Pyeongyang in the Absolute Monarchy Period

Goguryeo's territory spread greatly from the late fourth to the early sixth century AD. Its reached in its peak time in the fifth century reaching either side of Liao River in the west, the east stream of the Songhwa basin in the north, the southern end of the Maritime Province of Siberia in the east, and the whole of the middle part of the Korean peninsular in the south. With the expansion of territory, Goguryeo became supreme ruler of Northeast Asia, and moreover, emerged as one of the four powers that controlled the international order in East Asia. Securing its position based on a power balance with the Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties and Luran, Goguryeo ruled several regions throughout Manchuria and the Korean peninsular for more than a hundred years. It was the so-called establishment and development of the Goguryeo Empire (Noh Tae-

don 1999).

The major issues of various social and cultural streams in relation to Goguryeo's territorial expansion and its settlement as supreme ruler in Northeast Asia are reorganizing its ruling ideology, the relocation of the capital to Pyeongyang, and consistent negotiations with powers in East Asia such as Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties and Luran. The former two are closely related to Goguryeo's reorganization of various systems which began from the late fourth century.<sup>11</sup> And in due course, some outstanding phenomenon appeared: The acceptance of Buddhism as a birthplace of universal culture and a comprehensive body of universal concepts, the systemization of the Jumong myth and faith in it as a real history and a ruling ideology of the nation, and the emergence of Pyeongyang as the center of the Goguryeo Empire and culture (Jeon Ho-tae 1993b).

The content of the negotiations with Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties and Luran and their effects are also noteworthy: West Asian culture mixed well with that of Chinese culture in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, and non-Chinese foreign culture through Luran in Makbuk continuously filtered to Goguryeo. Therefore, it is quite interesting how Goguryeo allowed its own cultivated and refined culture to meet other cultures and how Goguryeo formed a new one; it was Goguryeo society's task to develop a Goguryeo-style universal culture at the international level, a so called pan-Goguryeo culture with Goguryeo characteristics and universality.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Competition between Northern Culture and Southern Culture in the Aristocratic Alliance Period

Between the middle sixth and the middle seventh century, Goguryeo encountered some changes in the international order such as the revival of Baekje, the growth of Shilla, the end of Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties period,

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11. See Yim Gi-hwan 2004 for a recent study on the process of establishing Goguryeo's political system in the fourth century through the sixth century.

12. Fifth century Goguryeo culture's substance was not revealed yet. However, it is certain that fifth century Goguryeo had a unique worldview supporting its power and created universal culture based on such. In addition, it is considered to be fine to call this "Pan-Goguryeo culture" if this culture proceeded to a level forming one cultural territory, though temporary and restricted while having a certain amount of influence on major areas in the power.

and appearance of united power in China and that united China's pressure on neighboring societies. It was up to how effectively Goguryeo coped with this new order, whether it could maintain its existing power and territory, and whether it could maintain its history, though in a limited frame as demanded by the new international environment. However, in this time of reorganization of the international order, Goguryeo fell into political and social confusion that finally brought about governance by an aristocratic alliance and decentralization. Accordingly, as internal power of the society's integration weakened, Goguryeo's influence over its neighbors such as Shilla rapidly decreased and the Goguryeo Empire finally collapsed (Noh Tae-don 1976).<sup>13</sup> A new order became necessary as the disintegrated established order among the Northeast Asian powers interlocked with a reorganization of the East Asian international order mainly led by Sui and T'ang Dynasty China. However, Goguryeo showed much interest in restoring the old order rather than leading the establishment of a new one. And the result was intervention in the Northeast regional order by the Sui and the T'ang Dynasties which rose at the center of East Asia, hard line countermeasures taken by Goguryeo, and its weakening and extinction caused by continuous confrontation and conflict with the Sui Dynasty and T'ang Dynasties.<sup>14</sup>

Since the mid-sixth century, major noticeable streams in relation to Goguryeo's social and cultural development are the division of political power on the issue of succession to the throne, governance by an aristocratic alliance as a result, decentralized management of the society as a base and result of aristocratic alliances, and continuous interchange with many Chinese dynasties from Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties to the Sui Dy and T'ang Dynasties.<sup>15</sup> And what are striking here are social and cultural consequences in this change of national order to the decentralized management of the society through the aristocratic alliances; such had characterized Goguryeo society since the mid-sixth century, formed together with the foreign policy of continuous interchange with many Chinese dynasties since the fifth century. According to the recent study, Goguryeo's governance by aristocratic alliances at that time contributed a lot to make the old capital Jian,

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13. Goguryeo's loss of Han River area straightforwardly shows its changed status in the Northeast Asia in this period.

14. See Yeo Ho-Kyu 2002 for the recent study related to the sixth and the seventh century Goguryeo's foreign policy.

15. See Yim Go-hwan 1992, Yun Seong-yong 1997, and Noh Tae-don 1999 for the organized material on the shifting process toward the aristocratic alliance politics in late Goguryeo.

which maintained a certain amount of importance in Goguryeo society even after the capital relocation, consolidate as a political and social center next to Pyeongyang (Yim Gi-hwan 1995). It is easily guessed how important the Jian-based aristocratic class in a central power was. And of course, such a political and social stream must have influenced many cultural trends as well.

If various cultures created in Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties or the Sui and T'ang Dynasties, or passing through these dynasties had been imparted to Jian intensively as well as the capital Pyeongyang, and if the two regions had digested them with their own cultural tradition and standard, it might have brought different results because there was a difference between the two regions' cultural traditions and directions even before the fifth century, and there was also a difference between the trends of the noble class based in those places in the sixth century. In other words, the possibility was already prepared before the sixth century that Pyeongyang in the south and Jian in the north would functioned respectively as cultural centers with their own characteristics. In fact, Goguryeo's cultural center was divided into two, one in the north and the other in the south from the sixth century (Jeon Ho-tae 1997c.).

With this division, the popularity of a Taoist sector and the retreat of Buddhism, and a cohabitation policy of Taoism and Buddhism pursued by the aristocrats in power are noteworthy.<sup>16</sup> A rise of the Taoist sector has something to do with an ideological trend in Goguryeo society that proceeded before the sixth century. And the cohabitation policy should be regarded in direct connection with such a trend along with the political and social intention of those aristocrats in power who read the meaning of its other side. Our tasks for studying history are such matters as what kind of social repercussions were brought by such trends in religion and ideological policy and what results appeared. One example is if Buddhism, greatly influenced Goguryeo politically and socially as a national ideology in the fifth century, had shrunk,<sup>17</sup> what should be revealed from then on is whether its degree extended in many cultural directions. And the mural paintings in ancient tombs are one of the related materials that can be brought to the front of this task connected to Goguryeo history.<sup>18</sup>

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16. See Yi Nae-ok 1983 for the organized material on such a trend.

17. King Yeongryu the seventh year and the eight year of "Goguryeo bongi" (History of Goguryeo) in *Samguk sagi* (Historical Records of the Korean Three Kingdoms).

18. See Jeon Ho-tae 2004b for the distribution of Goguryeo's old mural tombs and the present situation of their mural paintings.



## Mural Paintings on Ancient Tombs and Culture

### 1. The First Period

The mural paintings of Goguryeo's ancient tombs are mainly found in a soil mound stone chamber tomb, and sometimes found in a stone mound tomb which has a similar stone chamber tomb. For example, although the Usanha Tomb no. 41 is a stone mound tomb, it is a tomb with paintings on the walls. Themes of ancient mural paintings in Goguryeo are everyday customs, decorated patterns, and four gods. Each subject is either drawn independently or mixed according to time and region. Therefore, it not only helps to understand the changes in Goguryeo society according to time and region and their main concept of an afterlife but also offers a chronological standard, by which the time when a tomb was made and its wall was painted could be presumed (Jeon Ho-tae 1997).

There are three periods in which judging when mural paintings on old tombs were made if considering tomb structure and the theme of mural paintings. In the first period, from the late third century to the early fifth century, everyday customs were usually drawn in several chambered tombs that had more than two rooms. Mural paintings in ancient tombs in this period were produced by the means of Fresco. In this method, usually lime is plastered on a wall, and then a rough sketch is made before the lime is dried, which is followed by coloring. A wall painting using Fresco has an effect of maintaining its first freshness and luminosity despite long periods of time as the oxidization of the colors and fading are less likely because the colors seep into the lime in the process of creating the painting.

In the second period, from the middle fifth century to early sixth century, everyday customs, decorative patterns, and four gods are painted either respectively or in a mixed way. Tempera was partly added to the established Fresco in this period. Tempera is a method where a painting is drawn after the lime has dried. A wall painting using this method has very high definition but is easily discolored by the oxidization of certain ingredients in the color; it rapidly fades (a phenomenon where layers of the color are separated from lime) if exposed to light and air for a long time or exposed to moisture. Especially in the case of walls painted in closed up spaces such as tombs, there is serious difficulty in preserving them as the physical and chemical stability is disturbed due to continuous changes in temperature and humidity that result from exposure to outside air.

Mural paintings made by Hwajangjibeop, a method of painting after covering a wall with lime such as Fresco and Tempera, generally cannot withstand

temperature and humidity changes. It has been confirmed that layers of lime have fallen off in a good many mural paintings on Goguryeo's ancient tomb built in the first and second period. This is because the walls or ceiling were painted with lime layers. The climate of Manchuria and the Korean peninsular has four very distinctive seasons with a large difference between them, making the lime layers prone to detach from the walls or ceiling. Although the inner environment in the tomb cell formed by the closure could maintain itself without much change, it is highly likely that the central part of the ceiling and the lower part of the wall near the bottom are weakened or fall off earlier than other parts due to condensation caused by the seasonal range. And if the tomb cell was opened and kept in such a state because of grave robbery, the possibility of preserving mural paintings in the tomb rapidly worsens as soils flow down and outside air enters. The situation of fading and falling lime layers cannot but worsen as time goes by. If all the lime layers fall off like the case of the Donamri mural tomb, and if pieces of mural paintings on the bottom fail to gathered up during investigations, a tomb that had mural paintings might even be recognized as one without any (Gwanya Jeong 1917; Lee Chang-eon 1988-2; Jeon Ho-tae 2004a).

The third period is from the middle sixth century to the middle seventh century, and four gods were actually the only theme in the one chamber tomb. Old tomb mural paintings in this period are mainly painted with Jobyukjibeop, a method of drawing on lime after trimming it of the wall and ceiling.<sup>19</sup> Mural paintings using this method give a vivid impression as if the characters and four gods in the paintings can still move as though alive. When using Jobyukjibeop, walls are painted as if stamping and pressing in lime with a wooden or bamboo brush after dipping in inorganic water-insoluble color which is mixed with a little glue, so actually, the colored layer and the ground layer become one as most pigments are stuck among particles of uneven lime (凹凸).<sup>20</sup> In addition, if a thin film layer of lime is formed, the possibility of preservation increases. For this

19. Some parts of the Anak tomb no. 3 in the first period were produced using Jobyukjibeop. See Yi Jongsang 2003 for the technique and tradition of Jobyukjibeop.

20. Invention of durable water-insoluble pigments is said to be closely related to the development of alchemy (Yi Jong-sang 2003). It is very suggestive that Goguryeo's alchemy was noticed by a Chinese Taoist Dohonggyeong and that many ascetics with medicine bowls are seen in the mural painting of the Ohoe tomb no.4, in relation to the appearance of durable pigments which made the application of Seokmyeonhwabeop possible in late old tomb murals. See Jeong Jae-seo 1996 for the discussion relate to Goguryeo's alchemy and existence of a Geumdan sect of Taoism.

reason, in spite of worsening preserving conditions, Jobyukjibeop mural paintings can endure comparatively longer than Hwajangjibeop mural paintings. In other words, even though faded of colors cannot be avoided, there is no colored layer like the form of Hwajangjibeop mural paintings, and Jobyukjibeop mural paintings with this lime film layer remain visible.

However, as clearly seen in the example of the Ohoe tomb no. 5 of Jian, it is also possible that a wall painting undergoes almost complete fading and disappearance in a comparatively short time, as outside air and people come and go inside the tomb cell. By doing so, it is biologically penetrated as well as oxidized and faded when the inner tomb cell is openly exposed to the carbon dioxide from breathing.

Pigments of the wall paintings were mixtures of mineral powders such as pine-soot Chinese ink, Seokcheong, Seokrok, Seokhwang, Goethite, white deer, Cinnabar, Hematite, Bleigotte, and glues that are easily blended with water due to high transparency and low stickiness. In other words, glues that can endure high humidity, such as moss glue made by boiled seaweed or animal glue (Yi Jong-sang 2003).<sup>21</sup> It is usual to see black, purple, yellow, blue and green frequently on a brown-tone ground that produces a soft and calm splendid feeling inside of the tomb. The brown color also most fits in with the basic purpose of the funeral, driving evil spirits and reviving. With such characteristics, a theme and structure of mural paintings on ancient tombs in each period are in consistent functional relations with Goguryeo's political, social and cultural changes in the concerned periods.<sup>22</sup> Let us consider more specifically.

As already mentioned, the first period of mural paintings on ancient tombs was the late third century through the early fifth century. The best choice for this period's theme was everyday customs. But for some mural paintings, the four gods or decorative patterns were chosen. While many tombs with everyday customs as their wall painting themes are multi-chamber tombs, the tombs with four gods and decorative patterns are generally single-chamber tombs. In the former case, many structures of the cell and details of the mural paintings represent or symbolize the deceased's house structure when alive. The inside of such a tomb feels like the interior of a house due to the drawing a frame of a wooden house,

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21. According to Yi Jong-sang, there is a possibility of using vegetable resin as glue for the Deokheung-li mural tomb.

22. See Jeon Ho-tae for the recent comprehensive organized materials about this.



**Picture 1.** Mural painting on the edge of the main chamber in the Gakjeo tomb: The pillar and dugong

place where everyday customs and patterns are decorated is either everyday space or horizontal after-death space, whereas the places where the four gods and 28 constellations are either universal space or vertical after-life space (Jeon Ho-tae 1997a).

Everyday customs were chosen in the hope that the deceased's memorable things and richness in his private life would be available again in his after-life. Consequently, scenes where a man sits alone, or with his wife served by male



**Picture 2.** Mural painting inside of the front room in the Deokheung-li tomb mural: The master of the tomb and his servants

and female servants, where he goes out surrounded by a big parade, where he runs and hunts in fields and mountains, and where he enjoys singing, dancing and playing frequently appear. Figures in the mural paintings are several times bigger or smaller according to his or her social position and class; hat, hair-style, patterns and color of the clothes, width and length of the sleeves are also depicted differently.

People in the mural paintings of Pyeongyang's ancient tombs whose theme is everyday customs in the first period are usually depicted in Chinese-style clothes with wide sleeves, with either with a cross gusset or a right gusset. It might be because of the influence of Rorang, Chinese-style outer coffin

such as pillars and girders in a brown color on the edges of the cells and the upper part of the walls. This wooden house frame style is seen in old tombs with decorative patterns as a theme in the same period but not in the ones with four gods. It might be caused by different views toward the insides of the tombs when they chose between everyday customs or decorative patterns and the four gods. In other words, it must be supposed that the

tombs such as the Chaehyeop tomb in this region. On the other hand, figures in Jian's old tomb mural paintings are often drawn in Goguryeo style dotted clothes having a left gusset (Jeon Ho-tae 2000). It is unusual to see clothes without patterns having a cross gusset or a right gusset in the mural paintings of Pyeongyang's old tombs. The left gusset is one of distinctive features worn by nomadic peoples in inland Asia. Although Pyeongyang was developed in order to become Goguryeo's political, social, and cultural center over a fairly long time before the capital's relocation in 427, it might be guessed that Pyeongyang and Jian had kept their own characteristics, at least in cultural aspects. In other words, mural paintings on ancient tombs in this period show that Goguryeo culture established centered on Jian could not influence Pyeongyang.

## 2. The Second Period

The second period of mural paintings in old tombs is the middle fifth century through the early sixth century. There are many paintings from this period with coexisting themes of everyday customs and the four gods, or of everyday customs and decorative patterns as well as those with only decorative patterns. Paintings revealing everyday customs are found extremely rarely. Contrasting this, everyday customs and the four gods were chosen as common themes in Pyeongyang and Anak areas, whereas everyday customs and decorative patterns, or only decorating patterns, were used as themes in Hwanrun and Jian areas. As decorative patterns, a circle pattern, a '王' letter, and a lotus flower were often chosen. Some characters were described in a very refined way in old tomb mural paintings of this period, but mountains and trees were still expressed at the basic level. And also among decorative patterns, cloud and flames ones became simpler and simpler while lotus and honeysuckle ones



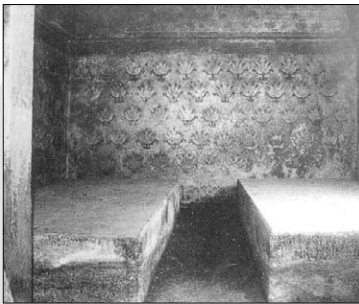
**Picture 3.** Mural painting of the inner main chamber in the Gakjeo tomb: Maid



**Picture 4.** Mural painting on the right of the front room in the Gamsin tomb: Maid



**Picture 5.** Part of the mural painting on the left of the main chamber in the Muyong tomb: Hills and waters



**Picture 6.** Mural painting of the main chamber in General Michanggu's tomb: A lotus flower



**Picture 7.** Mural painting on the inside of the main chamber in the Anak tomb no. 2: A flying angel

became more and more complicated and splendid. Also, the four gods and auspicious animals became more and more realistic in their own way due to refined painting techniques as time went by (Jeon Ho-tae 1993a).

Compared to the first period of mural paintings in old tombs, one of the outstanding changes in the second period is that in a large number of cases a lotus flower is painted as the central theme, and sometimes as the only theme. It is a well-known fact that a lotus flower pattern could symbolize either an East Asian emperor or Buddha and Paradise (Jeon Ho-tae 1990). The two cannot but be distinguished based on analysis and understanding of a wall painting's structure. However, considering the fact that Goguryeo made Buddhism a national ideology around the fifth century, a lotus flower pattern as a central or only theme should be understood as a symbol of Paradise in Buddhism, or an expression longing for a dead person's reaching Nirvana (Jeon Ho-tae 1989). Acceptance and spread of Buddhism led by a national power influenced recognition and expressions of the after-death shelter.

Another outstanding phenomenon is the development of a character expressing technique and the avoidance of a way in which the size of objects were differently expressed by their importance. Such a phenomenon is clearly shown in Jangcheon tomb no. 1 of Jian, and Ssangyeong tomb

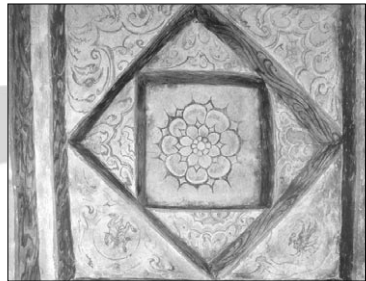
and Anak tomb no.1 of Pyeongyang and Anak areas; such is a product of Goguryeo's extensive foreign relations around the fifth century. In the course of emerging as a supreme ruler of the Northeast Asia, Goguryeo maintained con-

tact with Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties, a steppe nomadic country, Luran (in China), and various small and large countries in middle Asia. One of the results of this is acceptance of Buddhist culture and related various factors that thrived in these areas. It is possible that Goguryeo learned and accepted Buddhist ideological systems based on the idea of human equality and the Indian/Iranian painting style that attained a certain level in expressing poses and dealing curves. In fact, in the case of Jangcheon tomb no. 1, there is hardly no difference in the ratio of expression between Buddha and an offerer, and a flying angel and an angel playing an instrument show various poses and flexible and powerful movements that were not seen previously (Jeon Ho-tae 1993b). Such occurred as Goguryeo accepted and digested many western and eastern cultures due to their extensive foreign relations (Jeon Ho-tae 1999).

In the second period of mural paintings in old tombs, there appears another trend in the way of expressing a theme. It is the so called, unification of style. In the example of a lotus flower, although the Jian and Pyeongyang styles had been clearly distinguished until the middle fifth century, a sort of blended style appeared near the end of the fifth century (Jeon Ho-tae 1990). In relation with the cultural trend in the late fifth century, it is also interesting that Goguryeo's own dotted clothes, those worn in Jian in particular, appear in the mural paintings in old tombs in Pyeongyang, replacing Chinese-style clothes, and that at the same



**Picture 8.** Mural painting of Goim inside the front room in the Jangcheon tomb no. 1: Worship in front of Buddha



**Picture 9.** Mural painting of Goim on the ceiling of the main chamber in Ssangyeong tomb: A lotus flower



**Picture 10.** The painting on the right wall of the main chamber in the Susanri tomb: A lady

time they show a more refined appearance. These trends show that the results of various Pyeongyang-based political, social, and cultural activities; the capital relocation was concretely reflected in the mural paintings on ancient tombs after half a century, in around the end of the fifth century.

Overall, regarding these aspects of change seen in the mural paintings in old tombs in this period, fifth century Goguryeo digested many foreign cultures in its own way, and furthermore, it succeeded in creating a Goguryeo-style universal culture, or pan-Goguryeo culture centering on Pyeongyang. Therefore, Goguryeo can be evaluated as a nation holding supreme power in the Northeast Asia not only politically and socially but also culturally. Then, did this Goguryeo-style universal culture, confirmed through the second period old tomb mural paintings, expand and develop in the next period?

### 3. The Third Period

The third period in the mural paintings in old tombs is the middle sixth century through the early seventh century. Four gods were often painted in this period in single chamber tombs that had only a main chamber, or coffin chamber. All tombs were built at the foot of a hill with a mountain at the back and a field in front facing the south. Representative third period tombs holding mural paintings in the Pyeongyang and Anak areas are Jinpari tomb no. 4, Naeri tomb no. 1, Gangseo great tomb, and Gangseo medium sized tomb etc., and the ones in the Jian area are Tonggusasin tomb, Ohoe tomb no. 5, and Ohoe tomb no. 4. The four gods in this period are actually the only subjects occupying the whole wall of the main chamber and are universal guardian deities protecting the world of the dead rather than simple deities symbolizing direction by embodying constellations in the sky (Jeon Ho-tae 1993a).

In the mural paintings of Pyeongyang's old tombs, four gods show a tendency to be described without expressions since the sixth century, when Jinpari tomb no. 1 and Jinpari no. 4 were produced, was under the strong influence of Chinese southern dynasty art. Meanwhile, in the mural paintings of Jian's old tombs, four gods were inclined to be expressed with a complicated and splendid background. The four gods themselves were expressed differently. While detailed descriptions were boldly omitted and a harmony of colors and an expression of movements were emphasized in Pyeongyang, a sharp contrast among colors and minute description of details were stressed in Jian (Jeon Ho-tae 1993a). Therefore, it can be observed that the two areas show a difference in expression although they both

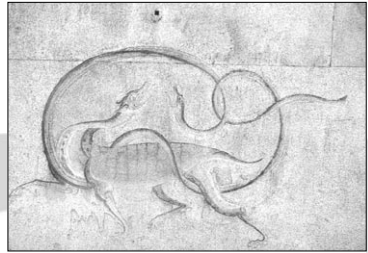


use the four gods as their subject. And the cultural climate and disposition between Pyeongyang and Jian are also recognized by such differences. Let us consider it more specifically.

In the mural paintings of Jian's old tombs in the third period, the four gods appear with a successively changing tortoise shell pattern that is splendidly framed with five-color bands, or with fast-moving clouds as their background on the wall of the main chamber. Many decorative patterns, fan-shape trees, the sun and the moon, constellations, the gods of the sun and moon, many deities of civilization, God and man, auspicious animals and so on are drawn in the Goim and on the ceiling of the main chamber. These subjects are under the influence of Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties in style, and the theme of structuring subjects is to be as immortal, more strictly speaking, a state where Buddhism's idea of transformation was added to the Taoist idea of becoming an immortal (Jeon Ho-tae 1997c). Meanwhile, in the mural paintings of Pyeongyang's old tombs that are chronologically classified as third period ones, four gods were described with fast-moving clouds in the background in the first half of the period, and later drawn on the wall without any background but with the sun and the moon, Gods and man, and auspicious animals on the Goim and on the ceiling. The subjects of mural paintings on Pyeongyang's old tombs were influenced by the Chinese Southern Dynasty in a relatively strong way in style until the middle of the



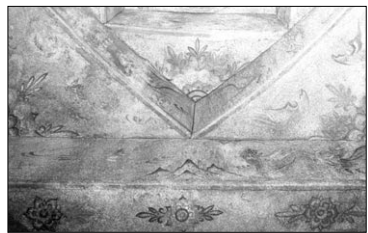
**Picture 11-1.** The painting on the inner wall of the main chamber in the Ohoe tomb no. 5



**Picture 11-2.** Hyeonmu, the painting on the inner wall of the main chamber in the Gangseo great tomb



**Picture 12.** The mural painting of Goim on the ceiling in the Ohoe tomb no. 4



**Picture 13.** The mural painting of Goim on the ceiling in the Gangseo great tomb

sixth century but they consistently were freed from its direct influence after then. The theme of structuring subjects was the idea of transformation in the Buddhist Paradise in the first half, then became a mixture of the idea of the Buddhist Paradise and the idea of Taoist Paradise in the second half (Jeon Ho-tae 1997c). The two regions are clearly distinguished both in style and in structuring subjects after the middle of the sixth century. Then, what meaning does such a difference in two area's old tomb mural paintings give?

The first possible explanation is Goguryeo-style universal culture's loss of momentum in the sixth century that can be inferred through mural paintings on ancient tombs at the end of the fifth century. In other words, the first half of the sixth century could be assumed as a period when the driving force of Pyeongyang as the only central power weakened while Jian was recovering its power to what it was before the capital relocation. In fact, it is because Goguryeo's division into two political and social centers had influenced cultural trends that the two areas' mural paintings had not a little difference in style and subjects whereas they shared their theme of four gods after the middle sixth century. As the aristocratic alliance unfolded, Jian acquired the status of a central force by being close to Pyeongyang politically and socially. Through undergoing this process, it is natural that Goguryeo-style universal culture not only lost any possibility for expanding and developing but also gradually reduced its ground for existence.

Next, it is also possible that Buddhism, an ideological premise of Goguryeo-style universal culture's realization, was losing its former ground and belief in Taoism replaced it, whose effects might have influenced the two cultural centers of Goguryeo in a very different way. It is difficult to understand the phenomenon whereby Buddhist subjects were regarded much less importantly compared to before, and that related subjects became the main stream while expressions of the idea of immortality was revealed in the Jian area. The reduced influence of Buddhism around the middle sixth century could be also guessed at by the Buddhist monk Heryang's account in exile.<sup>23</sup> It is no wonder that if a certain religion's ground is weakened in a society the related faith and religious activities will be influenced. In this sense, people's focus of interest moved from a new life in Buddhist Paradise to being an immortal in Taoist Paradise, and as such, a

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23. See Biography of Geochilbu of the "Series of Biography" in *Samguk sagi* (Historical Records of the Korean Three Kingdoms) and Jeon Ho-tae 1997a.

change in perception was reflected in the paintings in ancient tombs.

Interest in becoming an immortal in Taoist Paradise is found in old tomb mural paintings from the fifth century. And it was heightened anew while undergoing changes in the political and social situation in the early sixth century. It might be caused by the fact that Buddhism lost its former ground considerably amidst the process of aristocratic alliance politics as it grew in a close connection with royal authority, and the fact that major aristocrats took interest in the idea of a Taoist Paradise to live in as an immortal, and also the popularity of the mixed idea of Taoism and Buddhism in Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties (Jeon Ho-tae 1997c). But, in this course, the cultural response between Pyeongyang and Jian showed a difference. This difference results from their different positions. While Pyeongyang emerged as the only center of Goguryeo and established Goguryeo-style universal culture after the relocation of the capital, Jian was placed as the second center of Goguryeo and had to receive Pyeongyang-centered influence.

Under the new situation of the early sixth century, the cultural product cannot but be different if there was a change, in which belief in Taoist immortality, both restoring in one sense and foreign in the other, gained rapid influence over Jian culture; the ability of digesting foreign culture was weakened relatively fast there, whereas the influence of Buddhism was weakened slowly in Pyeongyang and the ability of digesting foreign culture and self-embodying it remained there for a certain time. Mural paintings in ancient tombs made in this period can be seen as tangible evidence of such cultural change. In the third period of mural paintings in ancient tombs, two cultural centers coexisted and competed with each other in Goguryeo society, one located in the south and the other in the north.

## Conclusion

Mural paintings in ancient tombs are a genre of funeral art which was imported in the course of Goguryeo's political and social expansion and development. An acceptance of the new genre is one of the results of Goguryeo expanding its territory toward the east and the west, thereby accessing more refined and various cultures.

Even though such did not arise from Goguryeo itself, mural paintings in old tombs grew one genre of Goguryeo culture in a dynamic and independent cultural soil of its own. In particular, fifth century Goguryeo opened a passage for

constant social and cultural exchange with the outside world whereas it established its own realm distinguishable from Chinese Northern and Southern Dynasties and inland Asia in many political and social aspects. Accordingly, Not only could Goguryeo society prevent itself from a situation where its cultural soil became barren by the continuous inflow of new cultural factors, but also it could develop its culture as Pan-Goguryeo culture having both originality and universality. Old mural paintings at this time with power and refinement dexterously joined together have created historical material that clearly reveals fifth century Goguryeo society's unfolding and developing process.

However, with the middle of the sixth century as a climax, Goguryeo's unique realm shows signs of collapse as political and social looseness and division in the Goguryeo society appeared. The foundation of Goguryeo-style universal culture became narrower as social and cultural exchange between natural Goguryeo and the outside world lost its universality. The structure and way of expression in the mural paintings in ancient tombs that divided the north and south which yet coexisted in this period vividly convey the direction and content that Goguryeo society and culture had after the middle of the sixth century. Again, it is confirmed that a developing process of funeral art called mural paintings in ancient tombs is directly related to the society's cultural trends of the times.

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