Proto-Parallels between Early Korea, Thailand and Cambodia

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Abstract

This article explores parallel discourses of state formation and transitions to early history between two distinct regions of Asia: Mainland Southeast Asia with a focus on Thailand and Cambodia, and southeastern Korea. Across these regions it compares the archaeology and interpretative discourse of material cultures formative to the following early entities: Dvāravatī (central Thailand), Pre-Angkor (Cambodia and northeast Thailand), and Silla and Kaya (Korea). It argues that for both regions the period of the fourth to fifth centuries can be treated as one in which the cultures were at a proto-state level of complexity. This period is characterized by the dovetailing of two trajectories: continuity from preceding periods, and incipient state-level developments. Calibrating Korean scholarship, this article correlates the 'Proto-Three Kingdoms' period used in archaeology to the former, and current discourse of 'incipient statehood' (*ch'ogi kukka*) to the latter. For Pre-Angkor and Silla, the archaeology can additionally be correlated to proto-historical elites evinced from earliest epigraphy and other proto-historiographical sources (transmitted accounts). Based on these parallels, this article contends that the political geography of the cultures can be defined as 'semi-protected regions' and that their synchronized trajectories to early state and charter-hood provide a case for a trans-Asian proto-historical period.

Keywords: proto-state, proto-history, state formation, Dvāravatī, Pre-Angkor, Silla, Kaya, early Korea, early Thailand, early Cambodia

1. Introduction

At the turn of the sixth century CE (500s) at least three distinct cultures located in two separate regions of Asia are regarded to have been arriving to a level of social complexity commensurate to early statehood, and to have transitioned from prehistory to their early historical eras. The two regions that this article places in comparative dialogue are: 1) the interconnected zones of central Thailand and Cambodia, and 2) southeastern Korea.

By the sixth century, in central Thailand there was emerging a culture associated with a polity known as Dvāravatī that was centered on the Chao Phraya basin. To its east, connecting to the lower Mekong system there formed political configurations constituting the Pre-Angkor culture of early inland Cambodia that also extended onto the Khorat Plateau, northeastern Thailand. Around the same time, the southeast of Korea, a region known as Yŏngnam, witnessed an accelerated political consolidation of the existing culture (variously named Saro, or early Silla) giving rise to the Silla 新羅 state centered on the modern city of Kyŏngju (Gyeongju), then named Soraboĺ 徐羅伐 or Kŭmsŏng 金城. To its south, occupying the delta and inland region west of the Naktong River, flourished an overlapping succession or conglomerate of smaller polities collectively known as Kaya 伽倻.

While both regions are understood to have witnessed the transition to early statehood in the sixth century, the nature(s) of statehood and of *the trajectories preceding* are currently conceptualized differently. For central Thailand and Cambodia, scholars today question whether the historical Dvāravatī culture of the sixth to eleventh centuries was a single state or itself a conglomerate of multiple centers (Mudar, 1999; Revire, 2016, p.396; Skilling, 2018, p.81). While Pre-Angkor had at least one historical center, at Īśānapura (modern Sambor Prei Kuk, Kampong Thom Province), the fuller spatial extent associated with the culture was not consolidated until subsequent centuries when a new center emerged at Angkor heralding the Angkorean period. In both cases (Dvāravatī and Pre-Angkor), lack of textual attestation prior to the sixth century has led to their formative trajectories being characterized as transitions from prehistory. Recent scholarship elucidates these trajectories – a discourse with which we are concerned – but with the nature of early statehood or, at the very least, historical 'polityhood,' arrived at itself a question, both the start and end points remain hazy and (positively) reliant on archaeological interpretation. For southeastern Korea, Silla and to a lesser extent Kaya are typically conceptualized in stronger terms of statehood than Dvāravatī or Pre-Angkor currently are. This owes to several factors: their arising on a peninsula that had already seen the formation

of complex polities (early states and the Chinese commanderies) across the north and central west; to sources and East Asian tradition employing a reifying language of statehood; and to Silla and Kaya later projecting their own foundations to the first centuries BCE and CE, respectively (McBride, 2020; Tikhonov, 2014). Consequently, rather than emerging in the sixth century from a preceding prehistory, scholars elaborate their trajectories as incremental stages of earlier historical developments and regional peer-polity interactions.

Given these differences, is comparison between the two regions possible? I premise two arguments that bring them closer together. First, prior to the sixth century, the 'statist' conceptualization for southeastern Korea may itself be being overstated and rather reflects reification of transmitted tradition. Source criticism combined with archaeology does not evidence Silla or Kaya as state-level entities until the fifth to sixth centuries, while the northern states and commanderies that were active on the peninsula never occupied the southeast. Conversely, the absence of historical coverage for early Thailand and Cambodia does not equal the absence of early polities. Such polities are inferred from the archaeology and may have been of a similar order of social complexity to polities of southern Korea then at pre-state stages. Second, the respective discourses of archaeological interpretation current for each region themselves employ common terminologies of state formation. Even allowing that the qualitative nature(s) of statehood and of the preceding trajectories may have differed between the individual cultures and regions, we can draw comparative insights at a higher order analytic level between the frameworks and metalanguage categories used to discuss them. This allows us to place the regions and scholarship in constructive dialogue.

I take as inspiration the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*' special issue, "Transitions from late prehistory to early historical periods in mainland Southeast Asia, *c.* Early to mid-first millennium CE." As a Koreanist with an expanding interest in mainland Southeast Asia, I have read these articles from a comparative perspective to early Korea equally intrigued by the parallels, analogies and differences. To establish a comparative framework, this current article draws from Murphy's "The case for proto-Dvāravatī," and Heng's "Transition to the Pre-Angkorian period." From Murphy I adopt working definitions of the proto-state, and separately identify in his analysis two temporal trajectories characteristic of proto-state periods: i) continuities from preceding periods (for Dvāravatī from prehistory), ii) and incipient state-level developments. Heng discusses 'proto-historical elites' and provides an analytical model that combines material chronologies with textual (principally epigraphic) evidence. Heng's approach bridges well to the circumstance of southeastern Korea, where archaeology intersects to a still greater degree with textual sources attesting early elites. I bring these and the wider

Anglophone literature on early Thailand and Cambodia into dialogue with Korean language analysis of southeastern Korea. Consequently, more space is given to elaborating Korea than Thailand and Cambodia.

This article is structured around two contributions. First, I disambiguate the terminology of proto-states and proto-history as has been loosely used in current discourse. I identify three distinct if overlapping 'proto-' notions: 1) the proto-state as a stage of state formation determined through archaeology; 2) proto-history as a circumstance of textual representation for a given region or polity; and 3) the proto-historical period as a more universal period bridging prehistory and the current historical era. A key insight and further premise for comparison is that across the two regions these three definitions broadly align.

In the second part I compare and contrast the interpretative discourses of the three cultures with the focus for Korea placed on Silla. I contend comparisons to be instructive for both regions. For Thailand and Cambodia, Korea constitutes a similarly sized region with its own current practices of archaeology rich in under-explored parallels and difference. Their elaboration can help us calibrate and qualify convergences and divergences between both the actual cultures and their corresponding interpretative discourses. For Korea, discourses of early mainland Southeast Asia are liberating for their foregrounding of archaeology (precisely due to the absence of transmitted history), and their stronger global-history/archaeology framing. They consequently offer fresh perspectives on long studied topics, such as state formation. For both, the case of proto-states and elaboration of proto-histories presented below provides an opportunity for thinking through our interpretative language and explanatory models.

2. Dvāravatī, Pre-Angkor, Silla and Kaya

Dvāravatī is principally identified with a material culture characterized by Buddhist sculpture and religious monuments and dated between the sixth and eleventh centuries (Murphy, 2016). A pre-Tai entity, Dvāravatī was lost from later historiographical memory. It was effectively rediscovered in the 1920s when the Sanskrit name of Dvāravatī was identified in Tang period Chinese sources recording a Duoluobodi 陀羅缽地 or Duheloubodi 杜和羅缽底 to have been located in a region corresponding to modern central Thailand. This led to the name being matched to the monuments and archaeology then being investigated throughout central Thailand and exemplified at major (now 'Dvāravatī') sites, such as Nakhon Pathom, U Thong and Si Thep. The name was since confirmed in local epigraphy. Inscribed medallions and the Wat Chantheuk inscription (sixth century) all attest the title 'Lord of Dvāravatī'

(Skilling, 2018); however, they provide no further historical information. The only such detail comes from a Khmer stele (K.1198/Ka.18, 1014) that records the final defeat of Dvāravatī in 1011 (Wongsathit et al., 2018, p.139). Consequently, it is the material culture and characteristic moated sites that have remained the dominant signification of what 'Dvāravatī' was. In the twentieth century scholars conceptualized Dvāravatī as having been a single state, its sudden appearance and Indic cosmopolitan cultural aspect being taken as evidence for formation under long-distance Indic influence (Clarke, 2018, 27). Today, however, scholarship foregrounding archaeology stresses autonomous development and local adoption of Indic culture, while further contending the Dvāravatī cultural area to have comprised multiple centers, that some scholars reason to have been separate polities.

Pre-Angkor designates a common material culture and period antecedent to the Angkor state (c.802–1431) (Lorrillard, 2014; Vickery, 1998). It is represented by local epigraphy and saw the first Khmer-style religious monuments constructed at the early center of modern Sambor Prei Kuk. Pre-Angkor also corresponds to the period of a polity named in Chinese sources as Zhenla 真臘; in public Cambodian history, such as museum displays and the UNESCO listing for Sambor Prei Kuk, Zhenla is used as an orthodox periodization but the name remains unattested in local epigraphy. The site of Sambor Prei Kuk is treated as having constituted a capital of Zhenla; however, the Pre-Angkor culture has a significantly wider distribution that extends north of the Dangrek Mountains onto the Khorat Plateau where it forms a contact zone with the Dvāravatī culture to the west (Heng, 2016; Higham, 2016). This spatial scopes anticipates the fuller central territory of the future Angkor state than Sambor Prei Kuk, or any smaller region that may have constituted Zhenla, alone.

Silla and Kaya, meanwhile, are polities attested in Chinese and Korean historical sources, peninsular epigraphy and modern archaeology. In orthodox Korean periodization, maintained as public history today, they are the two southeastern entities of the Korean 'Three Kingdoms Period' that witnessed peer-polity interactions (cultural exchange and rivalries) across the peninsula. The traditional dating of the Three Kingdoms Period is from the mid-first century BCE; however, South Korean archaeology dates it to the fourth century CE, while designating the preceding period a 'Proto-Three Kingdoms Period.'

Prior to c.300 CE the north of the peninsula was loosely governed by the Chinese commandery of Lelang 樂浪郡 (108 BCE–313 CE) centered at modern Pyongyang, while the southern half of the peninsula hosted a configuration of autochthonous polities collectively

referred to as the Samhan 三韓 (Three Han), that are recorded as having each themselves constituted a conglomerate of smaller 'statelets' (*soguk* 小國) (Byington, 2009; Byington, 2013). Silla and Kaya emerged out of two of the Samhan conglomerates, Chinhan 辰韓 and Pyŏnhan 弁韓, respectively. The Kaya polities developed as centers of iron production and entrepôts controlling maritime and riverine trade (Byington, 2012). However, during the mid-sixth century, they were overthrown and their territory largely absorbed by the rapidly consolidating Silla state. Silla's growth was autonomous but likely stimulated by interaction with the northern polity of Koguryŏ 高句麗, that achieved a zenith in the late fourth century (Yeo, 2016). After several centuries of peer-polity exchange and warfare, in the 660s Silla utilized a military alliance with Tang China to expand over remaining rival Three Kingdoms polities, Paekche 百濟 and Koguryŏ, before going on to govern the southern two thirds of the Korean peninsula until its own overthrow and dynastic transition in 935 CE. The latter period of 'Unified Silla' (668–935) is contemporary to Dvāravatī and the transition from Pre-Angkor to the Angkor state (McBride, 2010).

3. Proto-states, proto-history, and proto-historical periodization

In both regions of comparative interest, central Thailand and southern Korea, discourses of early state formation employ a terminology of 'proto-history' and 'proto-' states or polities. Within this 'proto' terminology, I argue we can distinguish three notions: 1) 'proto-states' as a level of social complexity one order below and prior to early statehood; 2) 'proto-history' as a period defined by the availability of written sources (textual representation) for the specific region; and 3) the 'proto-historical period' as a universal periodization. 'Proto-' has a literal meaning of 'original' or 'first,' but across these usages the denotative emphasis for the concept being modified (a given polity, textual representation, or periodization) is on 'incipience' (beginning) and a sense of transitional liminality (*inbetweenness*) to a fuller state of actuality. The three notions (the proto-state, proto-historiographical representation, and universal periodization), are at once interconnected yet distinct. I will discuss each below and then compare their usage and overlap in current archaeological and historiographical discourses for Thailand, Cambodia and Korea.

Proto-states. The notion of a 'proto-state' occurs in state formation discourse and is used to signify emergent or consolidating polities. It is the penultimate stage of social

complexity prior to statehood. State formation discourse was originally premised on a neoevolutionary framework that conceptualizes stages of social complexity based on the categorizations of 'bands, tribes, chiefdoms and states.' While the four-stage terminology is regarded today as overly prescriptive and reifying, 'chiefdom' remains in common usage. In this language, a 'proto-state' corresponds to a late-stage chiefdom transitioning to the earliest phase of a state. If treated as a developmental trajectory, the next stage is a first-generation state (Byington 2016). First-generation states are usually attested in sources thus aligning state formation with the transition from late prehistory to early historic periods.

In archaeological discourse, the notion of a 'state' is drawn from historical and heuristic (general) understanding, but it is also a specific (if much debated) concept that archaeologists seek to define through material evidence and theorization. 'Proto-states' are principally a concept born of this theorizing, and must similarly be determined through interpretation of material archaeology. In both cases, the terminology of 'state' and 'proto-state' can be used generically (in generalizing discussion of state formation), or subsituted for named entities. That is to say, we can talk about states, and we can talk about Silla or Koguryŏ that are attested in sources as having been states (*kuk* 國) in a broader common parlance sense, and for which there is archaeology evidencing them as having been state-level entities. We can similarly talk about 'proto-states' in general, or we can speak of a 'proto-Silla' or 'proto-Dvāravatī' used as labels denoting those entities when interpreted as being at a proto-state stage of development, that is, referring to their earliest or incipient phases prior to being archaeologically inferred states.

A 'proto-' period for a named polity could be dated to within the start of the period for which the polity is attested in sources, or to a period preceding attestation. In the latter case, the usage of the polity name is teleological as it effectively projects the name onto a preceding stage. This is less a fallacy (of teleology), however, than the intended function: from an archaeological perspective, first-generation states did not suddenly appear fully formed, but arose through a process. In this sense a named proto-state is a developmental stage in the trajectory of state formation for which the outcome is known and is thus a retrodiction.

Proto-historiographical representation. Moving from archaeological to historiographical definitions, 'proto-history' denotes a period between 'prehistory' and 'history' as defined by availability of sources. Prehistory for a given region is the period for which there are no known or surviving written sources at all. The historical period is the period from which we have written sources sufficient to reconstruct a chronology of political events

or that provide a snapshot of the place and culture. Proto-history describes the circumstance in which there is some written attestation of the period but that is highly limited whether in its level of detail or the reliability of basic facts conveyed.

There are three typical examples of proto-historical representation. First, when a polity or people are mentioned or described in externally authored sources written at a distance from the subject in question. Examples include the treatises on foreign peoples and polities in early Chinese histories, and early accounts by foreign traders or religious practitioners, such as Buddhist monks. Such mentions are important for providing contemporary attestation and any descriptive information they contain. However, foreign-authored accounts are typically limited in detail and suffer for their outsider perspective. Second, incipient local writing, usually in the form of earliest inscriptions. Surviving early inscriptions are important for providing contemporary self-representation but as they mark the start of extant epigraphy their limitations are in the number of inscriptions, and in their legibility, decipherability, length and detail, and the topical content.

Third, the earliest periods covered by later compiled histories, or oral tradition, transmitted within the region. In contrast to foreign-authored accounts, such 'autonomous' histories are important for the detail and local perspective they preserve but for the earliest period of representation they suffer for initial sparseness of data, distorted chronologies, and inclusion of mythology and later folk traditions compromising the reliability of basic facts. Most recorded histories of the first-generation states of a given region begin with foundation stories strongly colored by mythical or religious aspects much if not all of which will be later invention. These stories may either be treated as distinct from the proto-historical chronology to which they segue, or they may be judged to encode or interweave some proto-historical information themselves. The earlier the foundation story was created (and therefore the closer to the period it purports to portray), and the lower the ratio of supernatural to plausible content it contains, the higher the chance that the story may include some proto-historical memory.[1]

Although 'prehistory' and 'history' are originally defined by the availability of sources, for any given region the transition from prehistory to history has come to be conceptualized as a one-time shift into the 'historical era' in which we live. After this shift, any later periods for which there may be a paucity of sources are not referred to as reverting to prehistory (unless

[1] Foundation stories have historiographical value when interpreted as the political ideology of the period in which they were promulgated but they cannot be treated as reliable history or cultural belief for the period they purport to represent.

figuratively), but are simply periods and regions suffering for lack of sources. For any given region or national historiography, the circumstance of 'proto-historical' representation (through foreign sources, incipient epigraphy and transmitted history), then, also applies to a one time transitionary period between prehistoric and historical eras. The specific dating for the transition, and the relative duration of proto-historiographical representation are, however, determined by the historiographical circumstance of the region in question.

Proto-history as a universal periodization. For any given region the chronology of a 'proto-state' stage of development (determined through archaeology), and a 'proto-historical' period (determined by textual representation) often align due to the innovation of writing being a common factor between them. Consolidated first-generation states are characterized by their ability and motivation to produce monumental inscriptions, maintain annals and compile autonomous state histories. The practice of state-sponsored writing therefore functions as one key indicator of a polity having reached early statehood.

Of course, writing can have been employed from pre-state periods for religious practice and trade. However, texts that a) record more historical detail, and b) are preserved through time – either through their being hewn in stone (as stelae), or transmitted as national histories – are those produced by a centralizing state. It is thus writing concerned with state identity and often the writing of a state's history in particular that is most indicative of early statehood (supporting archaeological definitions) while providing sufficiently descriptive detail to constitute early historical, rather than proto-historiographical, levels of textual representation thus causing the alignment between state development and historiographical representation.

The concommitant alignment of a proto-state stage and proto-historiographical representation contributes to the heuristic conceptualization of a 'proto-historical' period. State formation processes in a given region typically synchronize or occur in close succession through trans-regional spread of common technologies, including writing. As a result the 'proto-historical' periods also align within given regions. This is particularly the case for regions in which clusters of first-generation states arose as a process of 'secondary state formation,' in which they adopted technologies, writing systems and symbols of statecraft from preexisting states and cultures, namely China and India. 'Proto-history' is thus adopted as a periodization for the transition from prehistory to first-generation states; this overlaps with periods defined by proto-historiographic representation, but is understood as a more universal period, for the given region, than as tied to specific circumstance of individual polities.

In this usage, 'proto-history' and the qualifier, 'proto-historic,' can substitute with varying scope for the metal periods – Bronze and Iron Ages – of the Three Age periodization

system. In many regions, the Three Age periodization system is employed by convention but particularly the metal ages come under critique for the following broad reasons: inapplicability – not all regions have definable or sequential 'bronze' and 'iron' periods; reification of the period names – the premise of periods causes scholars to project top-down assumptions; and technological determinism – the introduction of metal technologies was not the direct or only trigger for increases in social complexity. Further, although the Three Age system is employed to denote a developmental trajectory, all stages (lithics, Bronze and Iron) are associated with notions of prehistory. This causes a break from subsequent historical era periodizations that employ the names of earliest attested polities or derivative periodizations. Even 'Late Iron Age,' that designates a period often overlapping with proto-historiographical representation, maintains stronger connotations of continuity within prehistory than to the historical era to which it conventionally segues. 'Proto-history' by contrast denotes the transition to history. While the Three Age system is principally a periodization employed in archaeology, the terminology of proto-history, and notion of a proto-historic period positively functions to bridge the disciplinary divide of archaeology and history.

4. Proto-history in early Thailand

The notion of a 'proto-historic' period is present in both Thai and foreign-authored scholarship of early Thailand and adjacent areas. The most focused discussion is Murphy (2016) that argues for a proto-Dvāravatī period and entity. Throughout this usage in discourses of early Thailand, the understanding of 'proto-history' is premised on the notion of a proto-state stage of development, rather than historiographical representation. Indeed, the circumstance for textual representation of Dvāravatī is such as for the entirety of even the 'historical' Dvāravatī period (sixth to eleventh centuries) to be one of proto-historiographical representation as no sources or inscriptions with substantive historical detail exist for the region while foreign authored sources also remain limited in detail. The Chinese histories, for example, do not carry a treatise. The conventional dates of Dvāravatī are treated as a historical period, but the evidence for this period combines proto-historiographical representation with archaeological and art-historical analysis of material culture. It is through the physical culture that Dvāravatī sites are interpreted as exhibiting qualities of a polity (or polities) of a level of development corresponding to an early historic state (or states). The earliest textual attestation of Dvāravatī dates to the seventh century, already inside the 'historical' Dvāravatī period that starts from the

sixth century, so any definition of a proto-historic period preceding the sixth century rests fully on state formation discourse and analytical interpretation of material evidence.[2]

Murphy (2016) provides us a review of art historical and archaeological discourse to make a convincing case for the preceding fourth to fifth centuries (300–400s) CE having constituted a proto-Dvāravatī period. Surveying the literature on key sites throughout central and northeastern Thailand, he argues for proto-Dvāravatī as a transitional period in a manner I characterize as comprising two temporal trajectories: 1) continuity of communities from preceding periods, and 2) incipient state-level developments. Explored now below, these two trajectories extend backwards and forwards in time, respectively, and dovetail across the proto-historic period.

Continuity from preceding periods. In the case of proto-Dvāravatī the principal evidence of continuity from preceding periods derives from evidence for site occupation of major Dvāravatī sites beginning significantly earlier than the sixth century. At Nakhon Pathom, evidence of occupation begins from the third century (Murphy 2016:385), and at U Thong, from the first century CE (386), while the sites of Phromtin Tai and Kheedkhin exhibit continuity from the Bronze (undated) and Iron Ages (c.500 BCE), respectively (Murphy 2016:388–9). Another feature of these sites that continues into early Dvāravatī period is their autonomy from one another (Murphy 2016:382–3). It is the continuance of this circumstance that causes some scholars to regard early Dvāravatī as having been comprised of multiple autonomous centers.

This evidence of continuity from preceding periods dispells any lingering notions of first-generation state formation being a sudden result of external (colonizing) forces, or of large-scale migrations. It indicates state formation to have been a gradual process that was effected by preestablished communities and enables agency to be attributed to those communities in the choices they made concerning adoption of technologies and social integration. Such continuity need not imply primordial nativism. The preestablished communities, conjectured to have been Mon groups, may have arrived themselves through earlier dispersal, though would have intermixed or coexisted rather than replaced preexisting (prehistoric) communities. Earlier contact with Indic culture and trade with the Mekong Delta polity of Funan provided stimuli to cultural and economic changes. Such preexisting circumstances were less incipient to state formation, than providing the foundation. They did not fix a path to statehood or mark a moment of accelerated trajectories.

[2] This contrasts to southern Korea where the proto-period matches proto-historiographical representation.

Incipient state development. Evidence for incipient state-level developments occurring prior to the sixth century is comprised of tangible archaeology, and inferences of process. The tangible evidence are features of Dvāravatī culture whose trajectories predate the sixth century and are visible in the material record. This includes the construction of large moated enclosures, that are a defining feature of major Dvāravatī sites, and early Dvāravatī-type pottery. Processes for which there is no material evidence but that can be inferred through the fact of their subsequent appearance includes: the adoption of writing, the spread of Buddhist and Brahmanic religious beliefs, and the development of a Dvāravatī artistic style of sculpture. Inscriptions, religious monuments and sculpture do not occur in the material record until the sixth to seventh centuries but then begin to appear near "fully-fledged." Rather than interpret this suddenness as evidence for cultural or demic colonization (as was the impulse of European scholars), Murphy reasons there to have been a period in which these practices and ideas were initially adopted but not yet visible in the material record. During this period early religious architecture and carving would have been rendered in wood and has therefore not survived. We can infer a similar point for writing, that would have used organic media such as palm leaves.

5. Parallel transitions in inland Cambodia and northeastern Thailand

Geographically adjacent to Murphy's proto-Dvāravatī is Heng's discussion of early interior Cambodia and the Lower Mekong region that focuses on the transition to the Pre-Angkorian period and employs its own terminology of proto-history. In terms of historiographical representation, similar to Dvāravatī, it is the Pre-Angkorian period that has proto-historiographical representation, while the period of state formation prior to Pre-Angkor lacks contemporary attestation. In contrast to Dvāravatī, the polity name of Zhenla attested in Chinese sources has yet to be corroborated in local epigraphy; this is one reason not to refer to a Zhenla period, and therefore not to speak of 'proto-Zhenla.' However, the early epigraphic record of the region, that begins in the seventh century, thereafter provides more historical detail for Pre-Angkor than is available for Dvāravatī.

The level of polity integration across this region clearly varied but appears to have remained at pre- and proto-state stages of complexity. Nevertheless, as a periodization and substitute for speaking of a Zhenla period, 'Pre-Angkor' is regarded as the first historical period of the region. Any 'proto-historic' period therefore designates a transitionary period immediately prior to Pre-Angkor. Heng does not explicitly argue for a 'proto-Pre-Angkor' but does refer to a "transition period" that he dates to the fourth and fifth centuries. This dating notably matches the chronology of Murphy's proto-Dvāravatī, thus supporting the notion of a

common proto-historical period, at least for central Mainland Southeast Asia. However, Heng's lexical usage of 'proto,' and his evidence and focus for describing a transition all differ from Murphy.

Murphy uses 'proto' to refer to an entity and period *of* the fourth and fifth centuries. By contrast, Heng employs 'proto' in the adjectival term 'proto-historical' and uses it to designate 'elites' and 'sites.' In Heng's usage, "proto-historical elites" and "proto-historical sites" designate those entities that were in existence *prior* to the fourth century. These he argues to have then transitioned to Pre-Angkorian elites and sites during the fourth to fifth centuries. If we analogize to Murphy's temporal trajectories, they constitute the trajectory of continuity from preceding communities.

To evince these elites and sites, Heng employs Pre-Angkorian epigraphy, and archaeology, respectively. Pre-Angkorian inscriptions attest two titles, *poñ* and *mratāñ*, used by local elites alongside the paramount Indic title of *-varman*. While *-varman* and *mratāñ* continued to be used into the Angkorian period, *poñ* disappears. Vickery has interpreted *poñ* to have been a hereditary title transmitted matrilineally, and that may correspond to the title recorded in the third-century Chinese *Sanguozhi* 三國志 account of Funan as *fan* 范. Based on this evidence, Heng understands *poñ* and *mratāñ* to be the Khmer titles used by proto-historical elites from prior to the fourth century. Sanskrit *-varman* is first attested for Funan ruler Jayavarman (c.470–514 CE) from the later fifth century, while it first occurs in the middle Mekong region (corresponding to Pre-Angkorian Zhenla) referring to kings Bhavavarman I (c.550–600 CE) and Citrasena-Mahendravarman (c.600–616 CE) from the later sixth century.[3]

Heng's insight is that Pre-Angkorean inscriptions attesting "*poñ-mratāñ* elites" and *-varman* "kings" that begin from the seventh century occur at sites exhibiting material continuity from preceding periods. This allows him to postulate: 1) the *poñ-mratāñ* elites as representing continuation of the preceding (inferred) 'proto-historical elites'; and 2) the higher order *-varman* kings, who adopted Indianized titles, to have emerged from and consolidated power over this same elite during the sixth century (their identities being posthumously attested from the early seventh century). Heng further correlates the transition from proto-historical to Pre-Angkorian elites and sites to the pottery record that comprises distinct phases of pottery characterized by gradual transitions between them.

[3] This corresponds to the date from which Silla rulers adopt title of *wang*.

Continuity of sites exhibits gradual consolidation. Some but not all proto-historical sites that may have constituted their own centers become Pre-Angkorian centers, while some but not all Pre-Angkorian sites evolve into Angkorian centers. Heng uses the term 'absorption' to describe the process of consolidation through which some former centers were amalgamated under larger centers forming integrated nexuses (Heng, 2016, p.496). While the thrust of Heng's focus is on 'continuities from preceding periods,' the consolidation of sites and adoption of the *-varman* title speak to forward trajectories of 'incipient state development.' They are further supported by construction of religious monuments (Brahmanic temples), and the appearance of ritual *kendi* vessels among the pottery record.

6. Proto-history in southern Korea

In South Korean discourse, two currently used terms intersect with the notions of a proto-historic period or proto-state stage of development: the 'Proto-Three Kingdoms' period; and a terminology of 'incipient states' (*ch'ogi kukka* 初期國家). 'Proto-Three Kingdoms' was initially coined in the 1960s to address problems of periodization, namely the tension between the traditional first-century BCE foundation dates of the Three Kingdoms Period polities – maintained today as public history – and the absence of corresponding archaeology until the fourth century. Proto-Three Kingdoms is particularly applicable to southern Korea where it accounts for the third-century Samhan conglomerates, out of which Paekche, Silla and Kaya only subsequently emerged. Less favoured by historians, many of whom still privilege the traditional chronology, it has staying power in archaeology where it is used to label a distinct stage of material culture that bridges the preceding Iron Age and subsequent Three Kingdoms cultures. In this material aspect, Proto-Three Kingdoms aligns with state-formative trajectories, indicating a stage preceding condolidated statehood. However, the first-century BCE starting date (sometimes pushed back to the third century BCE) is derived from historiography associated with northern Korea and southern Manchuria (Chŏng, 2015). For southern Korea it is too deep a periodization to indicate usefully the latter stages of proto-state development, alone.

State formation has been a long-standing concern of Korean archaeological discourse and a plethora of terms for pre- and early states have been used. Among them, the 'incipient state' has closest correspondence in current usage to indicate a stage of complexity penultimate to fuller 'early statehood' (*kodae kukka* 古代國家). Pak Taejae, for example, identifies the larger Samhan period entities, principally those that in name evolve into the Three Kingdoms

polities, as corresponding to 'incipient states' (Pak, 2013, p.20). Kim Taehwan, meanwhile, distinguishes incipient states from the preceding stage of chiefdoms. Echoing Murphy's proto-state, he designates incipient states as polities exhibiting new mechanisms and capacities of rulership, both material and ideational, as their distinguishing feature (Kim, 2023, p.70). From the perspective of the transition to statehood, I submit that 'Proto-Three Kingdoms' corresponds to trajectories of the preceding pre-fourth century period, while the 'incipient state' speaks to trajectories of state development.

Proto-historiographic representation. The Korean Peninsula has an extended period of proto-historiographic representation. This comprises treatment within Chinese sources, transmitted Korean history, and earliest epigraphy. The earlier period of coverage for which these sources are less detailed or reliable than for later periods, and further, that do not fully match one another, renders their representation proto-historiographic. Nevertheless, the level of detail provided in contemporary Chinese sources and transmitted Korean history is significantly more than is available for early Thailand or Cambodia.

In Chinese sources, proto-historiographic representation of southeastern Korea effectively begins with the third-century CE account of the Samhan entities of Chinhan and Pyŏnhan, today understood to have been the precursors of Silla and the Kaya confederation, respectively. Kaya and Silla are first accorded their own treatises in the *Nanqishu* 南齊書 (compiled 537, covering 497–502, as Kara 加羅) and *Liangshu* 梁書 (compiled 636, covering 502–556), respectively. For transmitted history, the chronology and content of the Silla annals of the *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (Korea's earliest exant history, compiled 1145), begins from the orthodox foundation date corresponding to 57 BCE but becomes more reliable and detailed only from its coverage of the fifth to sixth centuries onwards (ending 935). Given the fact that *Sanguozhi* attests the Samhan during the mid-third century, the historical details reconstructable from the *Samguk sagi* early entries, from 57 BCE onwards, likely pertain in historical reality to the late third and fourth centuries with other entries demonstrably dating later (Best, 2016).

Turning to epigraphy, meanwhile, the earliest attestation of Silla and Kaya (as Imna Kara 任那加羅) in stone occurs on the Koguryŏ Kwanggaet'o Stele erected 414, the relevant section of which describes warfare between the peninsular polities in the late fourth century. Silla epigraphy begins a century later at the start of the sixth century. Discussed below, Silla steles contain details of administrative organization that can be inferred to have pertained from

at least the latter fifth century and possibly earlier. For Kaya, only one inscription is extant with limited detail. Taken together, proto-historiographic representation provides coverage for the southeast of the peninsula from the mid-third through to the start of the sixth century. The archaeology of the southeast supports a similar time frame as a period of proto-state stage of development.

Archaeology. For the period in question, the archaeology of modern Kyŏngju (the political center of Silla) and the southeast largely consists of elite burials. Few settlement sites have been investigated, so settlements are instead inferred from the location of cemeteries. Relative chronologies and periodization take tomb morphologies and burial goods, in particular pottery, as their index. In chronological order the sequence of tomb types comprises: 1) wood-coffin and wood-chamber tombs; 2) new style of wood-chamber tombs; 3) partitioned wood-chamber tombs with a sub-chamber for burial goods; 4) stone-piled wood-chamber tomb mounds ranging from large to massive, and 5) smaller stone-chamber tombs with horizontal entrances.[4] These tomb types occur throughout the southeast but from the appearance of new style wood-chamber tombs through to stone-piled tombs, at each stage the highest order tombs occur at the Wŏlsŏngbuk cemetery site, central Kyŏngju. The pottery sequence comprises: 1) archaic *wajil* (瓦質 lit. "tile quality") greyware, 2) new style *wajil*, and 3) a harder (porcelain-like) bluish greyware.

The broadest conventional periodization of archaeology matches *wajil* pottery and the first two to three phases of tomb types (by the numbering above) to a 'Proto-Three Kingdoms Period,' beginning in the first century BCE and (for the emergent Silla and Kaya polities) continuing to the early-to-mid-fourth century CE. The appearance of stone-piled tombs and change to hard pottery from the mid-fourth century then marks the beginning in the southeast of 'Three Kingdoms Period' archaeology.

Scholars working on early southeastern Korea, however, recognize further subperiods by interpreting the above sequence of tomb types as incremental stages of state formative trajectories. Differences occur in where they place the emergence of Silla as an early state-level entity. The main contention is whether to match the threshold of early statehood with the appearance of stone-piled wood-chamber tombs, or to view these tombs as reflecting a penultimate pre-state stage of consolidation.

[4] The numbering here is mine own.

Depending on where the period of Silla as an early state-level entity is placed, I argue that the preceding period can be inferred as corresponding to a proto-state stage of development. However, due to the strength of historiographic tradition (that attests named entities preceding Silla), the terminology of 'proto-state' is not used in this manner in Korean discourse. The subperiods of tomb type are instead variously associated with the name of 'Saro-guk' 斯盧國, or labelled as 'incipient Silla' (*Silla chogi* 早期) or 'early Silla' (*Silla chŏngi* 前期).[5] Saro-guk is attested in sources as the initial name of Silla and one of the earlier 'statelets' of the preceding Chinhan conglomerate. Despite these naming conventions, critical scholars argue for the 'arrival' of Silla as a fully-fledged state to have occurred as a process in the early sixth century, a period that overlaps with the end of stone-piled tombs and construction of Buddhist temples. They therefore interpret the periods labelled as 'Saro-guk' and 'early Silla' as representing Silla at an 'incipient state' stage of development prior to fully-fledged ('mature' / 'later') statehood of the sixth century.

7. The case for proto-Silla

In this final section, we will first consider arguments for placing Silla's arrival to statehood in the sixth century and then trace backwards to make the case for the preceding centuries being a period of proto-state stage of development transitioning from a preceding period to incipient statehood. To begin, during the sixth century evidence becomes available in both the written and material records indicating enhanced authority of a central ruling system that matches common definitions of an early consolidated state. *Samguk sagi* records that under the reign of Chijŭng 智證 (r.500–514), the name of the state, previously known by several variations, was fixed as 'Silla' and the Sinitic title for 'king' *wang* 王 was adopted in place of previously used native titles, the last of which had been *maripkan* 麻立干. It further records the outlawing of live burials (502 CE), standardization of mourning dress (504), and the organization of administrative divisions into province (*chu* 州), commandery (*kun* 郡) and

[5] In relative chronologies, *chogi* (incipient/early) precedes *chŏngi* (early); *chogi* should not be confused with *ch'ogi* (lit. "first phase/period"), that is either used separately, such as for the 'incipient state' (*ch'ogi kukka*), or if employed in a common chronology represents a period further preceding *chogi*.

prefecture (*hyŏn* 縣, 505). Upon his death, Chijŭng was also the first king to be given a posthumous title (*siho* 諡號), Chijŭng, by which he is known.

Samguk sagi then records the reign of his son, King Pŏphŭng 法興王 (r.514–540), to have witnessed the promulgation of a written law code (520), the first envoy mission dispatched to China (521 – that accompanied a Paekche envoy), the official adoption of Buddhism as state religion (528), the establishment of a prime minister or state councillor position (*sangdaedŭng* 上大等, 531), and the introduction of Silla year titles (*yŏnho* 年號, 536). The posthumous name Pŏphŭng ("Dharma flourishing"), is the first in a series of such names to clearly reference Buddhism. The entries thus signal systematic enhancements to state consolidation that were implemented during the early to mid-sixth century. Contemporary Silla epigraphy indicates some of these items, such as the new administrative divisions, to have been backdated but only by a matter of years rather than centuries. Stele texts themselves attest that by the 530s the title of the Silla king no longer referenced the preceding system of *pu* divisions (discussed below) indicating a qualitative shift toward centralization of power around the kingship.

Changes of the early to mid-sixth century indicative of arrival to statehood are separately reflected in archaeology. During this time the shift occurs from stone-piled mounded tombs to smaller stone-chamber tombs. This is accompanied by a sharp drop in the number of burial goods placed in these tombs including the disappearance of gold crowns. Tombs are no longer constructed in the center of Kyŏngju but instead around the periphery. In the center they are replaced by the construction of Buddhist temples. The disappearance of stone-mounded tombs from central Kyŏngju most symbolically coincides with the construction of the massive Hwangnyongsa Monastery 皇龍寺, recorded to have begun in 553, situated east of the royal palace (Yi HS, 2022, p.204). This marks a development from mortuary-centered ritual to cosmopolitan, salvationist religion. While its early design is not certain, a monumental nine-storey wooden pagoda was built in the early 640s making it among the largest temples in East Asia and readily comparable to the religious monuments of Dvāravatī and Pre-Angkor.

Accompanying the building of temples, from the mid-sixth century the Silla capital was newly constructed around a grided city plan (*pangnije* 坊里制) centered on Wŏlsŏng Palace and Hwangnyongsa (Ch'oe, 2021, p.789; Yi HS, 2022, p.209). As central Kyŏngju is a valley flood plain, such urban development would have necessitated drainage of marshland and water management that began with the construction of Hwangnyongsa (Yi HS, 2022, p.208). The new

grided plan marks the dissolution of the preceding administrative divisions of the Six Pu system. From the seventh century, the Silla state expanded its road system to connect with regional centers (Yi HS, 2022, p.210). There was also a qualitative change in pottery that saw the discontinuation of autonomous regional styles (Ch'oe PH, 2022, pp.445, 586).

Among the above features indicative of statehood, those that have most direct parallel to mainland Southeast Asia include the construction of religious monuments, the adoption of a cosmopolitan term for 'king,' and scholarly consensus that early statehood was in fuller evidence from the sixth century. If the sixth century marks Silla's arrival to early statehood, then in terms of state formation discourse and by analogy to Murphy (2016), we can make the case that the immediately preceding centuries represented a proto-state stage of development. Working backwards, the penultimate period is that represented by the stone-piled wood-chamber tombs (mid-fourth to mid-sixth century). This period is commonly named the 'Maripkan period' (*maripkangi*) in reference to the title of *maripkan* attested in *Samguk sagi* for rulers of Silla between 356 – 540 CE. The highest order stone-piled tombs of central Kyŏngju are understood to be the tombs of these *maripkan* rulers. These tombs are characterized by their size, and both the quality and quantity of burial goods, including the iconic golden crowns and jewelry.

The size of the tombs and quality of goods demonstrates that the *maripkan* rulers were able to mobilize significant manpower and that they controlled gold metallurgy and the most advance pottery technology. These elements reflect accelation in the centralization of power under single paramount rulers that anticipated state-level consolidation. Nevertheless, despite their monumental aspect, critical scholars regard the tombs to remain at a level of personal aggrandizement of the rulers and their immediate kin. Although the etymology of *maripkan* is unclear, *kan* is a title attested in sources and epigraphy for local rulers of the Kyŏngju region associated with the Six Pu system. The *maripkan* rose as paramount rulers but in a preexisting system in which they were nominally first among equals. During this period the *maripkan* clearly completed their consolidation of power over the Six Pu of Kyŏngju. At this stage, however, regions beyond were ruled indirectly through bestowal of prestige items. This is inferred through smaller gold and silver crowns and headware that occur in regional tombs together with smaller quantities of centrally produced Kyŏngju pottery (Ch'oe, 2021, p.669; Yi HS, 2022) There was thus a region-wide hierarchy centered on Kyŏngju, but not yet a system of institutionalized administrative rule, that came with the promulgation of law codes and adoption of Buddhism in the sixth century. That the latter end of the stone-mounded tombs period overlaps with the introduction of state institutions and adoption of Buddhism, and that

there was continuity between the *maripkan* line and the Silla kings, all speak to trajectories of incipient state-level development. Other aspects exhibit continuity from the period preceding stone-mounded tombs.

The preceding period: mid-third to early fourth century. Elements exhibiting continuity in the fourth to fifth centuries are those that in the preceding period, mid-third to early fourth century, constituted new trajectories. They include: 1) differentiation in quality between the tombs of central Kyŏngju (Wŏlsŏngbuk cemetery) and other regions, and 2) the technical innovation of harder porcelain-like pottery that continues into subsequent centuries as the pottery type of Silla and Kaya. Elite tombs of this period are wood-chamber type. They, again, exhibit continuity from 'new-style' wood-chamber tombs of the preceding period but are distinguished through partitioning of a separate section for burial goods. The highest order tombs occur in central Kyŏngju and are characterized by the partitioned sections having separate vertical openings (*ihyŏl chubugwaksik*, Ch'oe, 2021, p.254). By contrast, the partitioned graves of other regions, have one opening for both sections (*tonghyŏl chubugwaksik*). Among goods of elite tombs throughout the southeast there occur iron staffheads with spiral barbs (*yujaigi* 有刺利器) that also first appear from the end of the preceding period (Ch'oe, 2021, p.238; Davey 2019, pp.137-140). During this period *wajil* pottery that had evolved from preceding periods continues to occur while hard pottery newly spreads. Ch'oe Pyŏnghyŏn characterizes this period as one in which local elites exhibited stronger social differentiation from the preceding periods while themselves becoming subordinate to central Kyŏngju (Saro, Ch'oe, 2021, p.255). This can be inferred from the highest order tombs of the region (for the period) occurring at Kyŏngju, and the spread of centrally produced hard pottery.

'Proto-historical Silla' from the records: Six Pu and* kanji *elite. All three source types providing proto-historiographical representation attest the Kyŏngju region to have consisted of six territories. Silla epigraphy and transmitted history term these territories *pu* 部.[6] Consensus understanding is that early Silla (Saro-guk) emerged through the consolidation of what tradition has reified as the Six Pu, with two of the *pu*, Hwebu (or T'akpu) 喙部 and Sahwebu (Sat'akpu)

[6] *Liangshu* records Silla's capital to have comprised six *t'akp'yŏng* 啄評.

沙喙部, forming the center. Archaeology equates the *pu* polities to the elite burial sites of the Kyŏngju basin, with central Kyŏngju corresponding to Hwebu and Sahwebu.

Both epigraphy and sources attest the title for the rulers of the *pu* to have been *kanji* 干支. One of the earliest Silla steles, the Naengsu Stele (503), records a council held by the king and six named *kanji*. It collectively refers to them as "seven kings" (*wang*) indicating that the *kanji* were themselves understood as local kings reflecting their autonomous status. This supports an interpretation that the *pu* were originally peer polity territories ruled by *kanji*. As the *maripkan* rulers who arose from the two central *pu* consolidated power at central Kyŏngju, the *pu* survived in name but their status was changed from formerly independent territories to administrative districts of the Silla capital. *Kanji* were incorporated into the Silla elite. From the time that *pu* and *kanji* are attested in early sixth-century epigraphy this transition was already underway and is reflected in diminishing emphasis of *pu* and *kanji* titles between the Naengsu Stele and subsequent Pongp'yŏng Stele (524) (Chŏn, 2000, pp.231-239).[7] Best attested for Koguryŏ and Silla, in Korean state formation discourse the 'Pu System' (*puch'ejeron*) has been theorised as the political structure of each of the Three Kingdoms polities prior to their integration under centralized rulership. Pak Chaedae (2023) highlights a weakness of the "Pu System" discourse being its failure to distinguish clearly between the *pu* as a confederation of autonomous polities prior to statehood, and the *pu* within a polity structure at the stage of incipient statehood (pp.25-26). I contend that this points to the stage of *pu* polities as they are represented in proto-historical sources as having precisely been transitional.

For earlier centuries the *Sanguozhi* treatise on the Samhan provides further details on the broader southeast region. It names the highest local elites (*changsu* 長帥, *kŏsu* 渠帥) as *sinji* 臣智, and secondary elites as *ŭpch'a* 色借. These titles are used for all three Samhan conglomerates; while their specific characteristics would have differed by region or conglomerate, in each case they correspond to the local rulers of the sub-samhan 'statelets.' The *Sanguozhi* treatise provides coverage for the mid-third century. For the southeast, this date corresponds to the evolution between 'new-style' and 'partitioned' wood-chamber tombs. *Sanguozhi* does not attest the *pu* territories, but we may reasonably infer that some third-

[7] *Kanji* is also attested on the one stele fragment that may possibly be attributed to Kaya, the Hapch'ŏn Maealli Stele (dated pre-sixth century), indicating common social organization of the southeast.

century *sinji* and *ŭpch'a* would have continued as fourth-century *kanji* elites with those in the Kyŏngju region consolidating into the rulers (future local kings) of the *pu* territories. *Sanguozhi* describes each of the three conglomerates being ruled by an overlord 'king,' however, not enough detail is provided to know if the king of Chinhan was ancestral to the future Silla elite.

Material and inferred socio-political trajectories across the 'stone-piled' and preceding 'partitioned' wood-chamber tomb periods support viewing the entities that would form the Silla state (centered at Kyŏngju) as transitioning through a proto-state stage of development during the fourth to fifth centuries. Trajectories of continuity from preceding centuries, meanwhile, parallel Heng's conceptualization of "proto-historical" elites and sites being those that begin from prior to the fourth century. In southeastern Korea, such proto-historical elites would have been those interred in the new-style wood-chamber tombs that begin from the mid-second century, and who are identified in proto-historical sources as *sinji* and then *kanji* rulers. The emergence from this time of Wŏlsŏngbuk cemetery as the highest order political center of the wider region, and the process by which the Wŏlsŏngbuk elite would consolidate their rule over the Six Pu of Kyŏngju and then more distant local centers parallels Heng's discussion of site consolidation that was formative to Pre-Angkor.

Aside from many areal specifics, even at a general-model level, two potential differences exist between the proto-state periods of southeastern Korea, and Thailand and Cambodia: 1) the relative importance of warfare and trade as mechanisms for local integration, and 2) the building of monumental structures.

Warfare and trade. Warfare appears to have been a stronger spur to integration for Korea and possibly Cambodia, than for central Thailand. For southeastern Korea, material evidence for a culture of warfare occurs from the mid-second century through a marked increase in iron weapons included as elite burial goods in the 'new-style' wood-chamber tombs – the first period in which Wŏlsŏngbuk appears as a political center (Ch'oe, 2022, p.126, Fig.1-7; p.231, Fig.2-11). The significance of warfare for the second to third centuries is nevertheless hard to gauge. Increase in weaponry notwithstanding, prior to the late fourth-century interpretations of 'Samhan' archaeology tend to emphasize material exchange and trade as longer term integrative forces than warfare.[8] By contrast, proto-historiographical representation of the late fourth century onwards, that pertains to the emergence of early states, heavily documents warfare. Early entries of the *Samguk sagi* Silla annals, for example, record Saro-guk

[8] This view is supported by the *Sanguozhi* description.

(future Silla) militarily subjugating eleven named polities. Although dated to earlier centuries (c.87–250 CE), these entries may better indicate Saro's expansion over the wider southeast (former Chinhan and beyond) that could only have occurred in tandem or most likely following the consolidation of the Six Pu during the Maripkan Period.

For early Thailand opinions are divided on the role of warfare. This circumstance may itself reflect regional variation. For Dvāravatī there is less evidence for a culture of warfare having been a spur to integration than for Pre-Angkor or Korea. Consequently trade and religion are emphasized over military conquest (Bennet 2017, XIV). The relative absence of warfare may also be inferred from the continued autonomy of Dvāravatī's multiple centers. By contrast, for Pre-Angkor warfare is clearly attested in early epigraphy (Heng 2016: 489; Higham 2016). This speaks to the problem that warfare tends to be emphasized in locally authored written sources, while it is less visible from the material record alone. We only know of Saro-guk or Pre-Angkorian campaigns because they are attested in transmitted sources and epigraphy rather than from archaeology.

For Korea, larger-scale warfare of later centuries is more clearly evidenced by stone-built fortresses, the capacity required for their construction being another indicator of a polity being at a state-level stage of development. For the southeast, the earliest earthen fortress remains date to the mid-fourth century, while stone fortresses start to appear in the fifth, their number and quality markedly increasing in the sixth (Cho 2014). For earlier centuries, the *Sanguozhi* treatise records Chinhan having "towns with walls and palisades" (有城柵) yet few such sites have been confirmed indicating them to have been less substantial. Thus, while both earlier and later periods saw the elite being interred with iron weapons, the *magnitude* of warfare clearly differed between them. For early Thailand, moated sites that were constructed from the proto-Dvāravatī period paradoxically constitute potentially clearer evidence for fortified sites than is available for either Pre-Angkor or southeastern Korea.

We should separately also consider that the occurrence of warfare, especially of lower absolute magnitudes, is not incompatible with trade and religion functioning as longer term integrative forces. For southern Korea, the interpretations archaeologists draw from material evidence speak equally, if not more strongly to models of coexistence and trade-based cultural and technology exchanges than to the warfare described (and typically glorified) in proto-historiographical sources. For example, until the fourth century CE, the relationship of the Samhan polities of southern Korea to the Lelang and Daifang commanderies located in the north, has been described as an extended interaction sphere based on trade and exchange. In the

southeast there is material evidence in the form of ink stones and brushes for writing having been adopted that would have enabled the peaceful spread of cosmpolitan ideas. The largest volume of iron, including both as ingots and finished weapons and armour, notably occurs in Kaya tombs and is as much reflective of its trade-focused economy rather than capacity for expansive warfare. For the period of partitioned tombs in the southeast, Ch'oe Pyŏnghyŏn describes the emergent Kyŏngju and regional elite centers constituting their own interaction zone. During the subsequent Maripkan period, the bestowal of gold crowns and spread of pottery from the Kyŏngju center, elaborated by Yi Hansang, speak to coexistence and strategies of co-optation rather than military conquest.

Pre-sixth century monumentalism. One common index of early statehood appearing across the cultures from the sixth century are Buddhist and – for Dvāravatī and Pre-Angkor – Brahmanic (Viṣṇuite and Śivaite) religious monuments. They reflect political adoption and sponsorship of cosmopolitan religious symbols and practice that are interpreted to have been key mechanisms for state-level consolidation. The difference between the regions is that for southeastern Korea, the Buddhist temples are preceded by the *maripkan* stone-piled tombs, the scale of the largest of which constitutes their own monumentalism. By contrast, for Dvāravatī and Pre-Angkor there are no equivalent ritual monuments preceding the brick-built Buddhist or Brahmanic phases. Two issues arising from this are: 1) whether the stone-piled tombs are evidence of an earlier, state-level religious practice preceding Buddhism, and 2) what implication their monumentalism has for comparison to Dvāravatī and Pre-Angkor.

If we take the simplified formula that large-sized ritual monuments equal a state-level stage of development, then the larger of the stone-piled tombs might be argued to indicate Silla's arrival to statehood prior to the adoption of Buddhism. The Kyŏngju tombs emulate the mounded tombs of Koguryŏ and Central Asian practice and thus exhibits a trans-Asian cosmopolitanism connected to mortuary ritual, that is further supported by Altaic motifs found on the golden crowns and jewellery (Joo, 2013). The alternative view, however, is that as tombs they are a zenith but also endpoint of preceding trajectories of inflated chiefdom-ship; they encode belief in an afterworld but do not constitute religious institutions.

Between these views, I contend that the stone-piled tombs be read as a *transitional* stage of ritual monumentalism precisely indicative of a proto-state stage of development. That the paramount ritual monuments of the polity were rulers' graves speaks to continuity from preceding periods, but their scale and the quantity of burial goods, including highest grade greyware pottery, represent a qualitative leap in organizational and technical capacities. The greyware notably continues as Silla type pottery and so the tombs encapsulate both preceding

and incipent state-level trajectories, as well as their own moment in time. Their transregional aspect as mounded tombs, meanwhile, is the easiest way to build large structures, rather than representing a common religious culture. Importantly, they appear as a development in elite tomb culture only from the mid-fourth century, within the argued window of the proto-state period, with the largest tombs being constructed towards the end of the period. During this time there would have been ovelap with Buddhism. Having been adopted by the neighbouring polities of Koguryŏ and Paekche in the fourth century, Buddhism would have spread to the southeast prior to the official adoption date of 527 and thus have been establishing itself among the populous and elite during the Maripkan period; although records indicate the Silla elites' initial resistance to Buddhism, there would have been a period when early temples coexisted with the active culture of the tombs. That there was a smooth transition from stone-piled tombs to Buddhist temples in the center of the Silla capital indicates that the tombs spatially anticipated the state temples, and that both were monuments *of* the fifth to sixth centuries; thereafter, the tombs were neither decommissioned nor robbed but clearly maintained as active agents in the capital landscape. This understanding of the stone-piled tombs as transitional monuments accords with Kim Taehwan, who has termed them "monumental spaces" of Silla as an 'incipient state' (Kim T., 2014, p.227). The spatial transition also parallels Heng's discussion of Pre-Angkor, in which he notes brick temples being "built atop previous proto-historic burials" suggesting the "transformation from ancestor worship into the later Indic-related religious institutions" (Heng, 2016, p.486).

In terms of comparison, rather than highlight the difference between the two regions that the stone-piled tombs represent, I argue their instantiation of a transitional proto-state monumentalism provides an opportunity to think through the blanks of the proto-Dvāravatī and proto-Pre-Angkorian record. First there is a reverse symmetry, that while Silla's pre-Buddhist monuments were rendered as permanent features in stone and earth, Dvāravatī and Pre-Angkor adopted the nonperishable medium of brick at a time that Silla switched its ritual monuments to wood-built Buddhist temples, the majority of which are confirmed only from stone foundations and pagodas. Ideas of incipient state monumentalism that first manifested in stone-piled tombs for Silla may have had alternative forms in Dvāravatī and Pre-Angkor, or been 'zero-marked' until requisite technology enabled their expression.

In several ways, incipient religious monumentalism can be aligned. Murphy reasons Buddhism to have been present in central Thailand by "at least the fourth to fifth centuries" (Muphy, 2016, p.391); its earliest inferred structures, rendered in wood, would have parallelled the Kyŏngju tombs as monuments *of* the proto-period. For Dvāravatī, the subsequent brick-built

stūpas, meanwhile, share an aspect more analogous in shape and scale to mounded tombs than to wooden pagoda architecture that was adopted in Korea from China. The accompanying monastic buildings, constituting institutional space, by contrast, would have been rendered in wood just as in Silla. Brahmanic temples, enshrining Śiva-liṅga and Viṣṇu statues, by contrast combined external monumentalism with interior space. Although not occurring in brick or stone until the seventh century, they, too must have had predecessors.

8. Conclusion

The above analysis has presented a triangulating discussion between the three cultural areas of Dvāravatī, Pre-Angkor, and Silla and Kaya. Focusing on the period of their formative emergence in both the material record and historical memory, this article has explored tentative convergences – proto-parallels – between the cultures and their associated archaeological and early-historical discourses. In doing so, it has begun the work of constructive comparison between early Korea and central Mainland Southeast Asia.

This article's framework has initially been predicated on the claim that for both regions (central Thailand and inland Cambodia, and southeastern Korea) the three cultures arrived to levels of organizational complexity corresponding to early statehood(s) by or during the sixth century. As a consequence the preceding fourth to fifth centuries can be treated as a transitionary period, one penultimate to early statehood. This argument has been articulated in recent Anglophone discourse of Dvāravatī and Pre-Angkor, in particular by Murphy and Heng, respectively. The analysis here has demonstrated its applicability to corresponding discourses of southeastern Korea. The level of social complexity inferable from fourth to fifth-century archaeology of Kyŏngju and the wider Yŏngnam region formative to Silla corresponds to a 'proto-state' stage of development analogous to that elaborated by Murphy. The identification of material archaeology (tombs and burial goods) with elites and organizational structures attested in early epigraphy and transmitted history, meanwhile, resembles Heng's methodological correlation of site sequences to 'proto-historical elites,' evinced from Pre-Angkorean epigraphy.

What, then, is to be gained from these parallels? Instructive value lies in situating these regions in global archaeological frames and, potentially, a trans-regional 'proto-historical' period. Bringing Korea (a region rich in archaeological and proto-historical data) into the conversation currently happening on Mainland Southeast Asia (Murphy & Stark, 2016) adds to data and available case studies by which to elaborate proto-states and proto-historical transitions. Further, the fact of synchronized trajectories between central Thailand, Cambodia

and southern Korea creates a case for the fourth to fifth centuries having been a proto-historical period in more than one region of Asia. For the regions to which it pertains, this common periodization is one of proto-state development and often, too, of proto-historiographical auto-representation (local epigraphy and transmitted histories).

I submit that a fourth-to-fifth century 'proto-' periodization is valid for what I term '*semi*-protected' regions: areas such as southern Korea and central Mainland Southeast Asia located at a distance but not unconnected from the preexisting, state-level civilizational centers of Central Plain China and India. The cultures of semi-protected regions are usually associated with notions of 'secondary state formation,' a language of 'perepheries,' and paradigms of Sinization and Indianization; all these terms contain hierarchical connotations. By contrast, treating semi-protected regions by their own common periodization foregrounds the regions' trajectories on their own terms. A proto-historic period still allows for discussion of interconnections with neighbouring entities and cosmopolitan cultures. Simply formulated: interactions and cultural adaptions that spurred new trajectories to statehood occurred during the cultures' proto-state periods.

While these arguments could be made for either one region, correlation has only come through the process of comparison, and the understanding gains from the dual vantage point afforded. For Korea, application of a common periodization enables us to synchronize (proto-)Silla data with the Southeast Asian substrand of global archaeology. In current syntheses of Korean history – including Anglophone surveys – that are critical enough to reject traditional foundation dates, Silla is characterized as the 'late-developer' of a still reified Three Kingdoms Period, the timing of whose rise was contingent on inter-peninsular competition and a strategic alliance with Tang China. As long as Silla history is told from a peninsular or regional perspective, it cannot be otherwise. However, the trans-Asian perspective reveals Silla's rise to have been less late than convergent and in sync with other semi-protected regions.

We may finish by noting that the convergence gains further significance when we consider that each of the three cultures went on to constitute territorial charters that maintained *longue durée* trajectories to modern statehood(s) (Lieberman, 2003, pp.77-78). In each case further aspects of charterhood are partial but the trajectories remain. Religious pluralism notwithstanding, Dvāravatī constituted a Buddhist charter for future T(h)ai states and modern Thailand, while Pre-Angkor was the material and political charter to Angkor, and thence Cambodia. Silla's historiographical status as charter is heavily inflected by the pluralism of the preceding Samhan and Three Kingdoms Periods. In particular, the other Three Kingdoms Period entities of Koguryŏ and Paekche emerged as consolidated polities in the fourth century

and integrated to levels of early statehood up to more than a century and a half earlier than Silla. However, although they consolidated earlier than Silla, their preceding proto-state periods – the moment characterized by an overlap of pre-state continuity and new accelerations – on the peninsula would not significantly predate the fourth century; rather as polities more 'exposed' to continental interactions and relatively less protected, their trajectories were compressed. Nevertheless, it is only subsequent to Silla's seventh-century conquests, and thus under the trajectory of Silla, rather than of Koguryŏ or Paekche, that an integrated pan-Korean Peninsular early medieval state evolved. For each of the three cultures and areas discussed, the proto-historical periods of the fourth to fifth century thus represent a trans-Asian proto-charter period of the modern states.

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