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**On I-du: Writing The Korean Language with Chinese Characters**

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In the course my search for the origins of Japan,1 I came upon a Japanese press account2 stating that the discovery in 1978 of the Inariyama Tumulus sword inscription may be ranked as one of the “three great postwar finds” of Japanese archeology and prehistory.

Another of the three great postwar finds was the discovery in 1979 of a Chinese epitaph on a bronze plate, excavated from the grave of O Yasumaro, the author of Kojiki, the earliest Japanese history book dated 712 C.E. Not one Japanese newspaper, however, reported that the Chinese language of the inscription contains a startling linguistic Koreanism. This means that the inscription was written in I-du, the general term used to describe the ancient system of writing Korean words or Korean sentences with Chinese characters.

The other of the three great postwar finds was a mural in the Takamatsu Tumulus, which contained paintings of four mythical animals and court ladies in color. These finds are all closely related to the ancient culture of the Korean kingdoms, especially Paeckche. Muriyama and Miller(2) often refer to the linguistic Koreanism in the text of Inariyama sword inscription. This raised questions concerning I-du or the ancient system of writing Korean with Chinese characters, Hanja.

First, I will summarize the historical developments of I-du as presented by Ryu Ryul in his book, Study of I-du in the Three Kingdoms Period(3) Next I will present the I-du interpretation of the Inariyama tumulus sword inscription. In conclusion, I will make some comments on the merits of the study of I-du. [page 50]

DEVELOPMENT OF I-DU

I-du refers to the system of writing the Korean language using Chinese characters or Hanja. By way of illustration, examine how the modern day Chinese are coping with the transcription of Western words. Take, for example, Coca Cola®, which is transcribed as 可口可樂 or Kokou kolau. In this example, the Chinese characters are phonetically similar in their pronunciation, but of course, have entirely different meanings from the name or flavor of the soft drink. Another example is cocktail party or 鷄尾宴 (Ji Wei Yen). The first Hanja means “cock”, the second “tail,” and the third, “party.” In this case the meaning of the original word was translated literally.

Another example is the name of a city or state. Los Angeles is transcribed 羅城 or City of Luo, where only the first syllable of Los Angeles was transcribed. America is called 美國 (Mei guo) or land of beauty (Mei), which is the transcription of the second syllable of America.

So we have seen several examples of words being transcribed into Hanja by making use of either the sound or the meaning of the particular Chinese character. This same approach was taken by Koreans two thousand or more years ago to transcribe and record the Korean language using Hanja. This system was used officially until 1897, when Hangul became the official standard writing system. We will now examine the history of the development of the writing system called I-du.

(i) Early period: Transcription of Names

In early Chinese records from the Han dynasty, 2nd c. B.C.E. to 2 c. C.E., we learn that the old Chosun or Koguryo people knew about Chinese characters and used that writing system. Several ink brushes were found in a log coffin from the first century B.C.E. in the Kara region of south Korea, attesting to the Kara people’s knowledge of writing.

More specifically one of the earliest examples of an I-du transcription is the name of the capital city of the old Chosun dynasty, Nimu Komo Kuru, written i 王儉城. Often the same name is transcribed as 儉凟, where the first Hanja stands for the syllable komo and the second for toh land; thus the land of Komo.

The capital of Koguryo was located near the Yalu river and was called Bruna Kuru in I-du writing 國內城; present Korean pronunciation would be Kuk- Nae-Sung. In this case another I-du transcription 不耐城 (Bul-nae-sung) also exists, so we can guess 國 (Kuk) in Hanja represents the Korean word for Buru (plain) and nae stands for na (land in Korean). This is an example of I-du, which [page 51] makes good use of both the sound and the meaning of Hanja in a mixed way.

The next example is the name of Paekche’s second capital 雄鎭 (Ung-Jin) or present day Kongju (公州). This stands for the original Paekche name, Koma nari, where Koma means a bear and nari means a port. These can be inferred from the Chinese as well as Japanese records.

The name of the founding king of Silla is written 赫居世 (Hyuk-Ko-Se) or 弗矩內 (Bul-Ko-Nae), which is the I-du writing for Balkanu, meaning the one who enlightens the world. The second king is named 次次雄 (Cha-Cha-Ung) in I- du writing for the Korean word zusung meaning a shaman. The words for monk 중 (zung) and teacher 스승 (susung) are said to have derived from this original word for a shaman.

The Kingdom of Kaya had many ways of writing its name; 駕洛, 加羅, 加 良, 加利, 加耶, 加世 etc. These I-du Hanja transcribe the original word kara which means gold as evidenced in its later name 金州, or 金官 (land of gold).

(ii) Second stage of I-du development

Korean grammar is entirely different from Chinese. The word order is different, and Korean employs a variety of particles and endings in phrases, which is typical of an agglutinating language group, to which the Korean language belongs. Korean used specific to denote some of the more frequently used endings.

One example is the Hanja 中 or chung, to mean “in” as a date or the Hanja 節 or chul to mean a builder. These unique I-du usages may be seen in many writings4 One can see the specific I-du usage also in the Funayama Tumulus Sword Inscription,5 which was excavated in 1873 in Kyushu, Japan. Another I-du usage is the Hanja 爲 (wi), which means do or hata in Korean. The other I-du Hanja is 迁 (chun) meaning sharpen or byorunda in Korean. All of these and other detailed observations of the I-du used in the inscription lead to the conclusion that the sword was forged by a feudal lord of the great King Kaero of Paeckche (455-475 C.E.).

(iii) Third Stage in I-du evolution

The final stage in the evolution of I-du writing takes place when whole texts in Korean are written with Hanja.

A typical example are Hyanga6 or lyrical poems, twenty-five of which were recorded in the Kyunyojon, an eleventh century biography of the Buddhist monk Kyunyo, and in the Samguk Yusa, a history of the Three Kingdoms, compiled in the thirteenth century. Many scholars have tried to read and understand these I-du [page 52] poems with varied results.

Interestingly, the I-du system of composing and writing poems crossed over to Japan years later, where an anthology of songs “Manyoshu,”7 8 which contains about four thousand-five hundred poems, was compiled in the middle of the eighth century. It is very difficult to understand the true meanings of these Manyoshu songs, and an increasing number of Korean scholars think they should be considered as written in I-du.8

(iv) Kugyul and Kana

As the readings and writings in Hanja became a necessity for courtiers, scholars and monks, Kugyul or a reading aid was developed and widely used in Korea along with a shortened version of Hanja, such as ヒ，タ，ソ，イ，ト etc. These Kugyul were added to the Chinese texts which then made it possible for Koreans to read these difficult Chinese works.

There had been active diplomatic relations between Silla and Japan since the fall of Paekche in 660 C.E. This was the period when Silla’s Buddhism was actively transmitted to Japan. Kugyul writings were also introduced to Japan along with the earlier tradition of I-du. Kugyul evolved into Kana, the Japanese phonetic writing sometime in late eighth or early ninth century.9

To summarize, I-du is a system of writing Korean by using Chinese characters, but not necessarily the Chinese language or grammar, with a collection of rules governing the transcription of Korean words using the sound and meaning of the Chinese characters. Sometimes Hanja was used to represent specific Korean idioms and the Hanja text was written in accordance with Korean grammar.

I-du continued to evolve during the Koryo dynasty and more completely during the Chosun dynasty, but this later development of I-du will not be discussed here.

APPENDIX

INSCRIPTION ON THE INARIYAMA TUMULUS SWORD

A gold-inlaid iron sword with one hundred-fifteen Hanja characters was excavated from the Inariyama Tumulus near Tokyo in 1978. This caused a sensation in Japan and was studied intensively by many scholars. Research determined that the inscription carries a number of I-du usages of Hanja as noted by S. Murayama and P. A. Miller and others.

“The use of the Chinese script in Japan, like the Buddhism that followed [page 53] closely, at least in the earliest stages of the process, through Korean intermediaries and the most important of these intermediaries was those from the Packche as number of impressive and orthographic indicators of Korean influence have already identified in the text of the inscription.”2

As previously stated, I believe that the “great king” mentioned in the inscription on the sword refers to King Kaero of Paekche. Here are the findings which provide the evidence for this assertion, as reported by Ryu Ryul.

1. 多加利 Ta-Kari

The first Hanja stands for Kana or Hana, meaning great in quality or in quantity (Ryu p. 398). The following two Hanja are variant words for Kara or Kaya (Ryu p. 488). So the name may be read Kana Kari or Hana Kari. This name sounds very close to a modem Korean word, Taegari, which means “the head of an animal.” Ta-Kari could have meant the head of a tribe, and later the chief of a village or community.

1. 工已加利 Kongyi Kari

The first Hanja 工 is read as 弓 (e) in most Japanese articles, but Ryu Ryul reads it correctly as Kong to make sense out of its usage in the Funayama inscription.

Ryu gives the example of a place name 多已 (Ta-e) that must be read as Tari which means land in Korean (Ryu p. 532). In the same way, 工已 (Kong-e) could be read as Kori in I-du. This name may be read as Kori Kari. Kori may refer to the place where Koryung (古濘) Kaya flourished for centuries (Ryu p. 539).

1. 多加披次 Taka Pacha

Kanghwa Island was called Kabi Kosi and written as 甲非古次 in Hanja in Koguryo. Kabi becomes Kawa or river in Japanese and Kosi becomes Kuchi or mouth in Japanese (Ryu p. 229) In the same way, 披次 (Pacha) may be the transcription of pasi or peach in Old Korean (Ryu p. 326).

1. 多沙鬼 Tasakwi

Tasa is the old name of present day Hadong in the Kaya region of Kyungsang Namdo, Korea. Tasa means east in old Korean and has passed down to be written as dong or east in Hanja (Ryu p. 357). The last Hanja stands for the Old Korean ki or fortress. So one can see Tasakwi is the I-du way of writing Tasa Ki or east fortress. [page 54]

1. 半工比 Pankongbi

After the example of I-du writing, 沙伴 saban for sabara (Ryu p. 337), the first syllable may represent bara which means a village or bow. The following two syllables may represent kobi or kabi (Ryu p. 229), which means sea or river in old Korean, so it may be read as Bara Kobi.

1. 加差披余 Kachapayo

The first two Hanja may stand for kasa or kasi (Ryu p. 468) which means new. Since Puyo (夫餘) is said to stand for puri (Ryu p. 417), payo 披余 may be understood to represent pari or a variant of puri or village. As a whole, this name may be read as Kasa pari.

1. 獲加多支鹵 Hoekkatakiro

This is the most important name of all those listed in the text.

First we notice that the last Hanja 鹵 is used in the Japanese chronicle Kojiki or Nihon Shoki only for King Kaero of Paekche. Kiro is shown to be a variant transcription of the original sound karo or kaero as it is used today (Ryu p. 334).

The second Hanja, ka (加) stands for a ruler in the old kingdoms of Korea (Ryu p. 220). The Paekche word for king is arika (Ryu p. 340), so the two initial Hanja may be read waka and stand for ruler.

The third Hanja, ta means greatness (Ryu p. 398), which is the I-du way of writing the Korean word kana or hana.

Therefore as a whole, these five Hanja may be read waka kana kiro. Kiro is the proper name, while waka suggests a supreme ruler and ta stands for great or kana. These five Hanja characters precede the title taewang or great king in Chinese, so as a whole, the five Hanja may be read supreme ruler, excellency Kiro.

1. 伊珍阿鼓 Ijinashi

This is the I-du transcription of the name of the founding ancestor of Great Kaya.

1. 伊獎諾 Izanagi

This is the I-du transcription of the name of the founding god of Japan.

These two (#8 and #9) I-du names are considered to refer to the same being.

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With these observations, the inscription may be translated as follows.

“I write, in July 471 C.E. His subject, O Wake’s ancestor, is called Oho Bico, and his son’s name is Hana Kara Sukuni, his son’s name is Kori Kara Wake; and his son’s name is Tasaki Wake, his son’s name is Bara Kobi, his son’s name is Kasa Pari, and his son’s name is O Wake. We subjects have served as the heads of guards to this day in the service of our lord. During the reign of the supreme ruler, excellency Kiro Great king, I, in residence at the Saki Palace, ordered the forging of this excellent sword to record the root and origin of our service.”

My own interpretation of the Inariyama inscription suggests that the owner of the Inariyama sword is a descendant of a family from Kara in the southern part of Korea. They may have passed through Tasa or today’s Hadong in Kyungsan- do, Korea and eventually settled in the Inariyama, Japan area in the service of Paekche Kings.

Recent findings of other archeological evidence are consistent with this thesis. According Soh J.C., (11) the Japanese King Mu, who sent a state document to China in 478, must be the son of King Kaero if the document is read correctly. This document suggests that King Mu’s ancestor Nyeh conquered the west, north, and east of Japan. Soh J.C. also has demonstrated that King Mu, the son of King Kaero, returned to Paekche to become King Muryong in 501. In 503 King Muryong ordered the powerful governor of Kawachi or today’s Osaka area to produce bronze mirrors for King Namje, who is thought to be King Mu’s successor, according to Soh J.C.’s interpretation of the inscription on the bronze mirror kept at the Sidahachiman shrine in Nara, Japan.

All these interpretations of archeological findings and ancient documents in Japan are consistent with the new interpretation of the inscription on the swords from both the Inariyama tumulus and the Funayama tumulus.

It is impossible to overemphasize the enormous importance of I-du in under-standing Korean culture such as Silla’s Hyanga and the old Korean language. Furthermore I-cki can help us understand ancient Japanese culture and history as well, since many of their ancient records such as the inscriptions on the Inariyama and Funayama Tumuli swords were written in a variant form if I-du by descendants of people from the old kingdoms of Korea. Despite the introduction of Hangul in 1445, I-du remained in use especially by low echelon officials, until 1894. [page 56]

I-du phrases used during the late Chosun dynasty

卜數 딤슈 Dimshu Tax

 上下 치하 Chiha Payment

 尺文 잣문 Janmun Receipt

 召史 쇼사 Shosa Widow

 進賜 나으리 Naun Sir

爻周 쇼주 Shoju Cancel

 件記 발긔 Balki List

 業作 업질 Opchil Document

 矣身 의몸 Uimom Person

 作文 질문 Jilmun Registration record

 作紙 작지 Jakchi File

 役只 격기 Kyokki Entertainment

 的只 마기 Magi Certainty

 所志 소지 Soji Petition

 流印 홀니 Hulni Installment

 流音 홀님 Hulnim Copy

 退印 물이 Mulyi Postponement

 根脚 근각 Kungak Criminal’s Identity

 斜(只) 빗기 Bikee Report to office

 捧上 밧자 Batja Receipt

 推刷 츄쇄 Chuswe Recall of fund

 推閱 츄열 Chuyul Cross examination

NOTES

1. “In Search of Japan’s Origin”, Y.D.Kim Transactions, RAS. Korea. Branch Vol.73. 1998.

2. “The Inariyama Tumulus Sword Inscription”, S. Murayama and R. A. Miller, Journal of Japanese Studies, Vol. 5 No. 2, 1979.

3. Study on I-du in three kingdoms’ names and titles, Ryu Ryul, Korean Culture, 1983.

4. Inscription on Pyung yang Wall,

“内戊=月中 漢城下后部 小兄文澾節 自比西北行涉之”

5. Inscription on Funayama Tumulus Sword

□□□□□ 鹵大王奉爲曲曹人

名尤利工八月 中用大鑄釜幷四尺 [page 57]

迂刀八十練六十振三才上好□

刀服比刀者 長壽子孫洋洋

得三思也不失 其所統作刀者

伊太於書者張安也

6. An example of Hyanga,

Choyong Song

東京明期月良夜入印游行

如可入良沙寢矣見昆脚烏

印四是良羅二肹隱吾下於

叱古二肹隱誰支下焉古本

矣吾下是如馬於隱奪叱良

乙何如爲理古

7. An example or a poem in the Manyoshu anthology.

味酒三輪乃山靑丹吉奈良能山乃

際印隱万代道 印積流伊代

委曲毛見管行武雄數二毛

見放武八万雄情無雲乃隱

障倍之也

8. Japan’s Manyoshu, Kim Savup, Minumsa Co., 1983; Chonhyo Tarun Hyanga and Manyopka, Kim In-bae & Kim Mun-bae; Manyoshu Makurakotoba dictionary, Park Byungsik, 1990; Manyoshu, Lee Yunghui, Bungei Shunshu pub. Co., 1993; Fujimura Yuka, Hitomaro’s code, Shinjosha Co., 1989.

9. Kojiki Taisei, p185, Hyoban Co., 1962.

10. Inscription on the Inariyama Tumulus Sword

“辛亥年七月中記 手獲居臣 上祖名

意富比垝其兒名加利足尼其兒名

工己加利獲居其兒名多加披次

獲居其兒名多沙鬼獲居其兒名

半工比其兒名加披余其兒名獲居

臣世世爲杖刀人首奉事來至今

獲加多支鹵大王寺在斯鬼宫時

吾左治天下令作比百練利刀

記吾奉事根原也.”

11. King Muryong’s World as Recorded in Metal and Stone, Soh Jin-chul, Wonkwang University Press, 1994.