

Silk Road as Political Metaphor: Quest for an Ideal World in Ancient Korea

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Abstract

This paper explores the Silk Roads as a political metaphor in the context of Korea's ancient kingdoms. Typically, many consider Northeast Asia far from the Silk Roads. But the Silk Roads have always symbolized legendary, mythical, or sacred meanings for Koreans, imparting a sense of legitimacy to political life. Rulers apprehended "exotic" cultures in terms of holy objects from distant lands. Note three images from Korean history: "Heo Hwang-ok," who was Queen and wife of King Suro of the ancient Kingdom of Gaya (42-532); the "blue-eyed man," an alleged Persian who came to the Korean Peninsula to trade during the 10-14th centuries; and *An Account of Travel to the Five Indian Kingdoms*, a travelogue by the 8th-century monk Hyecho. These stories, images, and travelogues have figured prominently in the narrative of Korea's emerging statehood. The Silk Roads thus helped to generate a metaphor of an ideal yet replete with real world political legitimacy.

Keywords: silk road, blue-eyed man, travelogue, story, image

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1. Introduction

Silk Road has been often thought of much far away from the Korean Peninsula as well as Far East Asia while considered as an exclusive property of China. The reason is that Silk Road was surely great distance from Northeast Asia from perspective of ancient transportation technology.

Furthermore, Silk Road studies have received relatively little attention from all academic fields, even if it were, it has usually addressed in viewpoints of cultural context or social history (Jeong, 1992, 2001). In international academic fields, many studies have been actually performed in terms of social structures, cultures, and economies over time, mapping the diffusion of influence from the Mediterranean region, Central Asia and India to China, for instance, describing the path of ancient inter-trade (Sims-Williams 2001; Dale 2009) and cultural interaction (Frank 1990; Eliseeff 2000; Beckwith 2009; Mair et al. 2014). Their works are a kind of scientific researches based on real world, surely.

As for the Korean Peoples that have been surrounded by the three ocean waters and then more became a land of seclusion, however, it should be tried from a unique viewpoint because Silk Road has been recognized of as a symbol of a dreaming world and a door to strange culture. In other words, Silk Road was the door to arrive at the Western world that was a kind of sacred place where reality and illusion that were composed.

Sometimes, ancient stories are regarded as a sort of legend or folktale, not understood by scientific approach. We can surely explain given physical phenomena, which means basically an object, or area that one can assert an objective validity of recognition, through scientific conception, but also understand them even by alternative approaches such as encounter, moral, spread and experience. As Immanuel Kant (1781) points out, *phenomena*, contrary to *noumena*, appear with human senses that constitute personal experiences. Briefly, we should often depend upon the sensibility by telling a story, and imagine a scene and interpret moral in the course of time for better understanding that phenomena. Human consciousness and actions of a hermeneutical situation, facing a tradition to understand, is attributed to historical tradition and their influence. Nevertheless, this neglects the alienation from history that indispensably exists and is to include only ontological aspects, but to exclude epistemological approaches. Influence from history takes places under the circumstances of historical intervals. Our consciousness also is in the intervals occurred by itself. Encounter, moral, spread and experience are the conditions of distanciation and appropriation, and to understand events over the time before we exist.

In this essay, I focus on three points. Firstly, the story and legend in ancient world was a clue to adopt exotic culture as environment of admiration and amalgamation. Story tells something and indicates events that are often arrival of mysterious guest from ideal world. Silk Road should not be considered in standard civilization in particular pre-modern times, and it should be done as a political metaphor for the ancient people. And, the metaphor is interpreted and reinterpreted in the time. Secondly, the encounter does not mean only relationship beyond money transfer or

commercialism, but is a kind of interaction and a scene to extend hospitality to foreigner. Interaction, through encounter to foreigner, and hospitality are a condition for richness of human life before reasonable business or capital accumulation under the modern times viewpoint. Thirdly, hospitality to foreigner is interpreted by conflicts between laws. Norms, rights and duties of hospitality do not unconditionally impose on all the people, but were conditionally granted by laws or moral if we are thinking of culture exchange. As for the Korean People, however, Silk Road was a gateway to wait for foreigners coming from the ideal world and to depart of them seeking for universal laws. Then, their hospitality was unconditional moral. Remark this. Silk Road was the way of foreigner coming from an exotic world, the way of the hospitality communicating you and I, and the way of nomos having made us up.

2. Foreigner and the other

A door is often considered as the spot to meet 'foreigner' who "carries and put the question." (Derrida 2005: 5) It put forward an unacceptable question as it was told by the confession of Oedipus. In the triple-branching roads, the foreigner disrupted the authority of the kingdom and also eliminated logos although his patricide was God's revelation, but he also did not want to be taken for such a miserable fate. (Sophocles 2005: 39-41) In the ancient world, the pathway, as his arriving way, should be secured against foreigners because the natives considered them as the unwelcome guests. In so far as we experience in the political and the ethical thoughts, a pathway arises as to foreigner and hospitality. The first question is from Immanuel Kant. As for Kant (1903), "hospitality signifies the claims of a stranger entering foreign territory to be treated by its owner without hostility" (p. 137). It means, in the period of enlightenment, the foreigner takes a right to be treated as a welcome guest as long as he lives peacefully in the land although the foreigner cannot have a right to reside perpetually. That is to say, hospitality was a right as citizens of the world with whom the benefits of standard civilization provided, not from human nature. Therefore, Kant (1903) thought that the right to a foreigner arriving on foreign territory does not "amount to more than what is implied in a permission to make an attempt at intercourse with original the inhabitants." (p.139) Hospitality to foreigner was a behaviour way of the personal level to construct peaceful relationship among the political societies under the public law in International Relations.

The road as route where visitors are arriving was a beginning point to extend hospitality to foreigner. Therefore, it was opened late after the trade was activated. We must focus on Silk Road as a pathway that is the course of delivering humanity that could be reached through encounter with foreigners and then hospitality to them. Silk Road was a physical space and route that was a kind of network to trade economically and to interact culturally across Eurasian continent. In the ancient Korean Peninsula, however, a road was not the place to arouse absurdity. Silk Road was rather a sacred gateway to wait for an ideal guest than the trade route bringing transaction. Contrary to the Greek tradition, a foreigner, who arrived from abroad, was not the man that raised problems in the ancient Korean Peninsula.

3. Story, Image and Travelogue

1. Foreigner to Marry: Heo Whang-Ok

History or legend in the Korean life tells a different story. There is a legendary woman long years ago. According to, *Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* which is a chronicle, she came from the Western kingdom and then became the Queen as the wife of King Suro of Gaya which was one of kingdoms in South Korean Peninsula 2000 years ago.

“....In the twenty-fourth year of Kien-wu of Kuang Wu-ti in the Later Han period in the year of the monkey (A.D.49) on the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month, the nine chief courtiers of King Suro repaired to the palace and were received in royal audience, ‘It is not good for the King to be alone,’ they said. ‘Let Your Majesty choose the most beautiful and virtuous maiden from among the girls whom we shall bring to the palace and make her your queen.’ ‘I was sent down from heaven to rule this land,’ the King replied, ‘and so my spouse will also descend from heaven at divine command. Sail toward Mangsan-do (Mountain-Viewing Island) in the south and see what happens.’ The courtiers obeyed. When they were far out at sea, a ship with a red sail and flying a red flag appeared on the horizon, darting toward the north like an arrow. The Kaya sailors waved torches and made signs for the mysterious ship to come near. When it did so, they found that a beautiful princess was on board...”

According to the legend, she arrived on a boat from a distant kingdom, and married the king in the year AD 49.

“...The sailors escorted her to the shore, where a courier mounted a swift steed and galloped off to convey the news to the King. The King was exceedingly glad. He commanded the nine senior courtiers to meet the princess on the seashore and conduct her to the palace. “Welcome, princess!” they said. “The King desires you to enter the palace and be received in audience immediately.” “You are strangers,” the princess modestly replied. “I cannot follow you, nor can I be so unmaidenly as to enter the palace without due ceremony.” The courtiers conveyed the princess' words to the King, and he was struck by her virgin modesty and queenly dignity. He ordered a tent pitched in front of his detached palace on a hill sixty feet southwest of the royal residence and awaited her arrival. The princess left her ship with her suite, which consisted of the two courtiers Sin Po and Cho Kuang, their wives Mojong and Moryang and twenty slaves who carried gold, silver, jewels, silk brocade and tableware in countless boxes as her trousseau. When she reached the top of the hill she changed her brocade trousers and offered them as a gift to the mountain spirit. Then she approached the tent and the King rose to meet her. The King bestowed native costumes and jewels upon the suite and bade them rest on beds covered with embroidered quilts and pillows. Then he and the princess entered the sleeping chamber....”

Her name is Heo Hwang-ok(yellow jade), she described how to arrive in Gaya herself later. The Heavenly Lord appeared in her father's dreams and told them to send Heo to KIM Suro who had been chosen as the king of the kingdom in the South of Korean

Peninsula. Heo's father then told her to go to Suro. After two months of a sea journey, she arrived in the Korean Peninsula and then married King Suro. They had 12 children, her last name 'Heo' was an origin of Kimhae Heo family in Korea. You can often find man Heo with last name in Korea. Even though this is a kind of legend to support justice of building an ancient Kingdom, Gaya, Korean scholars think, she is the first symbol of interaction between the Occidental region, silk roads and Korean peninsula.

"... 'I am a princess of Ayuta,' the princess said. 'My family name is Heo, my given name is Hwang-Ok, and I am sixteen years old. In May this year my royal father and mother said to me, 'Last night we had a dream, and in our dream we saw a god who said, 'I have sent down Suro to be King of Karak, and Suro is a holy man. He is not yet married, so send your daughter to become his Queen.' Then he ascended to heaven. It is the command of the god, and his words are still ringing in our ears. My daughter, bid farewell to your parents and go.' So I started on my long voyage, with steamed dates of the sea and fairy peaches of heaven for my provisions. Now I blush to stand in your noble presence...."

As it told, She was from India.

"[Suro said]...I knew that you were coming," the King told her. "so I refused all the maidens whom my courtiers recommended as my spouse. Now my heart leaps with joy to receive a most beautiful and virtuous princess as my Queen." The King passed two nights and one day with the princess from India. When it was time for her escort to return home he gave each person thirty rolls (one roll is forty yards) of hempen cloth and ten large bags of rice to sustain them on their voyage..."

Her death left memories and legacies to Karak-kuk and Korean culture.

"....On the first of March in the sixth year of Chung-p'ing in the reign of Ling-ti, the year of the snake, Kisa (189) the Queen died at the age of one hundred and fifty-seven. The people mourned as if they had lost their own mothers and buried her on a hill northeast of Kuji. They changed the name of the beach where she first landed to Chup'och'on, that of the hill on which she changed her brocade skirt to Nunghyon, and that of the seacoast where she waved her red flag at the shore to Kich'ulpyon, so that her arrival in Karak should always be remembered...."

According to historic research, her hometown is called as Ayodhya Kingdom where is one country of India and estimated now as one of countries in India. Ayodhya is known as an ancient city in India and many thousands kilometers from the Korean peninsula. Maybe the route is considered as the first long trip in line with silk road. In 2015, South Korea-India held a conference about Heo Hwang-ok under the title of "Shared Heritage as new variable in the Indo-Korean Relations: Historicising the legend of princess from Ayodhya and its legacy".

2. Color-eye men: foreigner who lost his language

In ancient country era, many relics, history and legacy indicate surely a point which describes that blue-eye men came to the Korean peninsula to trade with old Korean countries. But nobody knows still the itinerary of them, but we infer these men came

for business trip from some countries in Persia or Uighur, Tangut, Saracen of the Western region in line with silk roads. Once again, we think one point that it is possibility that the Korean Peninsula is one of spot in silk roads a many years ago, even though it is aside from the main roads. But becoming modern era, those historic evidences and remembrance have fade down, and it became a strange story to the modern people. We think that ourselves as civilized man was born in modern era in 19th century when the Western attack to Northeast Asia. However, in spite of confrontation to strange with Asian people, we have made an interaction through silk roads before then. In the Korean Peninsula, the first Color eye man was from the Netherlands, as called Nam-Man in Korea, and referred 11 times in The Annals of the Choseon Dynasty.¹

3. Golden Sword and Hyecho(Wang ocheonchukguk jeon²): Foreigner

Although the Korean Peninsula was thought of aside from Silk Road, in view point of spread of Buddhism, it was an intermediate way to deliver the cultural tradition from the continent to the island. Therefore, Buddhism is an important key to deal with stories of Silk Road in the Peninsula, as well.

We have the third evidence with silk roads. 'Golden Sword' was found at Kyung Ju city in the South province of the Korean Peninsula in 1973. This sword is estimated as being made 5-6th century and much different from Korean traditional style. Because this Golden Sword is decorated with gold and jewelry but is quite similar to the one of the Western region, such as Kazakhstan or stone caves in Kizil of the Western China. As you know, Kizil stone cave is a kind of Buddhist rock-cut caves located near Kizil Township in Xinjiang, China. Kizil is a town in silk roads and thus some scholars insist that Kyung Ju city in South Korea is the final destination of silk roads. Above those, many ancient relics are found in the Korean Peninsula, which are presumed as the things influenced by exotic culture from perspective of Korean tradition, neither China nor Northeast Asian culture. Those relics were estimated in being made 1,000 years ago at least. How to explain this? Reasonable assumption is that, already told, the Korean Peninsula was that final destination of Silk Roads or mid-spot at least.

Meanwhile in tradition of IR, Modern-politics is characterized as anarchy, state unit and hierarchy structure, reasonable explanation based on meta-theory. But Post-modern IR is against those. Prof. Ling already criticize western viewpoint. Modern-IR is originated from enlightenment while Post-Modern IR is known as middle-range approach, thinking of divers-turns such as linguistic turn, aesthetic turn, and multi-level actor rather than meta-theory, state-centric, reasons. Since open the door to the Western in 19th century, Northeast Asian countries have been pressed by the Western civilization or Western socialization. Long times ago, it seems that Northeast Asian countries built their own culture and interaction through silk roads.

¹ UNESCO has designated it as Memory of the World Register in 1997.

² In English, it is called as 'Memoir of the pilgrimage to the five kingdoms of India'.

IV. Conclusion

Recently, China, Russia and Korea called differently silk roads in modern name, such as 'Siberian rail way business', 'One belt, one road' and 'Eurasia Initiatives', but those ideas were from ancient legends and ancient dreams. Camel and silk now are replaced on train and factory products. We desire now not only material interaction as modern meaning but also our life and spirit of the people around the way. Finally, I would like to remarks this. Silk road is a kind of symbol of the way coming from distant guests, interaction way between I and you, and the way of new ideas. This is still valid across Asia.

We approach modern reality in neorealism through ancient world while other panels almost focus on technology, science, business and political power to understand now and future. In this context, I would like to ask one thing for anybody, now we are living in complex society, I think, silk road in ancient world was a symbol of a kind of interaction and culture-exchange, but today, silk road is becoming more and more a kind of tool of power politics under capitalism. Furthermore silk road is politically to be a line and scope of power range, for instance, China's slogan 'one belt, one road' means that in geopolitics. In this context, what is the role and the mean of silk roads in High technology and high science generation of 21st century?

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