Culture Contact and Cultural Boundaries in Iron Age Southern Korea

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ABSTRACT

Prevailing models of social development for the southern Korean Iron Age (ca. 300 B.C.–A.D. 300) focus on contact with China as well as the dynamic interaction between local polities to explain the development of socio-political complexity but the nature of this contact has not been critically examined or its more granular processes explored. This article uses two prominent grave good types discovered in southeastern Korean burials to question these models as well as conceptions of archaeological cultures in the region more generally. These objects, Chinese bronze mirrors and iron objects decorated with bracken-like spiral designs, both indicate significant interaction with Han China via its administrative commanderies, but their production and diverse mortuary contexts do not conform to any current model of culture contact, acculturation, hybridity, or entanglement. The variable production processes, expression of exotic motifs through these objects, and the way these objects were interred in graves suggests that we should look for cultural unity and early indicators of socio-cultural complexity within regions where local groups were particularly active in expressing their differences within a set of agreed-upon parameters. I argue that the southern peninsula is best described as a set of interdependent local groups with a similar ritual vocabulary, but little to no political unity even directly prior to the appearance of the Three Kingdoms polities of Paekche, Silla, and Kaya. KEYWORDS: Korean Iron Age, Samhan, Three Kingdoms, Han bronze mirrors, iron production, culture contact.

INTRODUCTION

CULTURE CONTACT, OR INTERACTION MORE BROADLY CONCEIVED, is at the core of many models of socio-political development in archaeology. This is especially true of East Asia. Influential models of social development in the region see interaction and culture contact as an essential, if not primary, mover in the genesis of the first state-level societies in northern China (Chang 1986; Liu and Chen 2003) as well as the formation of so-called secondary states in Japan, Korea, and Manchuria (Aikens et al., 2009; Barnes 1986, 2001; Pai 2000; Rhee et al., 2007). Centering culture contact in this way brings a problem common to all archaeological investigations into even sharper relief: how do we delineate coherent cultures or isolate relevant social units from the material record? As archaeology moves more toward conceiving of cultural identity as situational and cultural boundaries as constantly shifting liminal spaces, how do we

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make appropriate distinctions between local and foreign at a meaningful geographic scale?

The material indicators of such long-distance interaction or culture contact (such as trade objects, exotic decorative elements, and borrowed technological production processes) are similarly difficult to conceptualize and interpret. Characterizing objects of this kind as mere indicators of exchange networks, the broad reach of certain early polities, or markers of elite status for particular individuals ignores the specific qualities of the objects themselves as well as how and why they were reproduced and reinvented. Interpreting them instead as indicators of a hybrid cultural identity can lead to ignoring local particularities or anachronistically projecting a colonialist mode of cultural interaction onto the past (Liebmann 2013; Silliman 2005; Yao 2012).

All of these concerns are particularly relevant to Iron Age southern Korea (ca. 300 B.C.–A.D. 300), which appears to have experienced development towards state-level complexity as a direct result of contact and intensified interaction with Han China (Barnes 2001; Kim C., 2006; Kim W., 1973; H. Lee 2009; Pai 2000). Equally significant to social change in the region was interaction at a smaller scale among peninsular groups, which produced complex trade networks and shared ritual practices just prior to the appearance of the first historical kingdoms on the peninsula in the Three Kingdoms Period (trad. 57 B.C.–A.D. 668). What were the appropriate cultural and political units in southern Korea that were engaged in these complex interactions both with each other and with distant Chinese political outposts in the northern Korean peninsula?

Two artifact types common to Iron Age burial assemblages exemplify the interaction that was taking place in Korea and also complicate existing models of social development for the region: Han Chinese bronze mirrors and spiral and bracken-shaped decorative motifs on locally-produced iron objects (Kor. *kwŏlsuhyŏng ch'ŏlgi* 蕨手型 鐵器). Bronze mirrors produced in China were circulated throughout peripheral East Asia via Han's administrative commanderies like Lelang 樂浪 and Daifang 帶方 and were prominent components of peninsular elite burials, particularly those in the Yŏngnam region from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D. (Fig. 1). The objects themselves or their broken fragments were often refashioned into personal adornments, and locally-produced imitation bronze mirrors with simplified decorations have also been found in burials after the second century.

Spiral decorative motifs are found in second to fourth century southern peninsular tombs in the Kyŏngju plain, a sub-region of Yŏngnam where the Silla kingdom emerged sometime during the fourth or fifth centuries. This motif appeared on locally produced iron tools, weapons, and horse-riding equipment and is conventionally thought to be a stylistic imitation of similar decorative elements on Lelang and Central Plains bronze mirrors, bowls, and daggers, as well as iron horse harnesses.

Rather than focusing on how these objects exemplify acculturation of Chinese traditions on the peninsula or the influence of 'foreign' culture on social development, I suggest we approach these objects as complex amalgamations that demonstrate how culturally diverse and politically segregated the southern Korean Iron Age really was. By using these objects to examine interaction between sites at a small scale, we can begin to better understand how ritual practice facilitated cooperation and competition and how common symbols were modified to articulate difference. Not only do these objects clarify the granular mechanics of how southern peninsular polities interacted with each other and with Han China, they also force us to revise social and political

Fig. 1. Regional map of southern Korea with important subregions of Yŏngnam indicated in grey. Prominent Yŏngnam cemetery sites containing mirrors and spiral-decorated iron objects mentioned in the text: (1) Oksŏng-ni; (2) Sara-ri; (3) Imdang and Sindae-ri; (4) Hwangsŏng-dong; (5) Choyang-dong; (6) Hadae; (7) Chungsan-ni; (8) Kyo-dong; (9) Taho-ri; (10) Taesŏng-dong and Kayasup; (11) Yangdong-ni; (12) Taesŏng-dong and Kimhae Kayasup.

boundaries in the Iron Age more generally. Ultimately, I argue that we are better off, somewhat paradoxically, looking for cultural unity and early indicators of socio-cultural complexity within regions where local groups were particularly active in expressing their differences within a set of agreed-upon parameters.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The southern Korean Iron Age sits at the intersection of historical and archaeological scholarship, so archaeologists working on this period have tended to rely on historical texts when reconstructing social development in the region (Fig. 2). Many scholars still follow the approach of Kim Wŏnyong (1973), who developed a culture-historical acculturation model based on a close reading of the twelfth century Koryŏ 高麗 text known as the *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (History of the Three Kingdoms) and Three Kingdoms archaeology. Kim associated material culture dating to the Iron Age with the nascent or proto forms of the Three Kingdoms polities of Koguryŏ 高句麗, Paekche 百濟, Silla 新羅, and Kaya 加倻 discussed in the *Samguk sagi* and explained their development as a result of several punctuated migration events into the peninsula.

More recently, researchers have begun to rely on the third century *Sanguozhi* 三國志 (Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms) and fifth century *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Eastern Han Dynasty), both of which describe several discrete cultural groups that existed south of the early third century Chinese commandery of Daifang (south of present day Pyongyang) and that differed considerably from the historical polities of
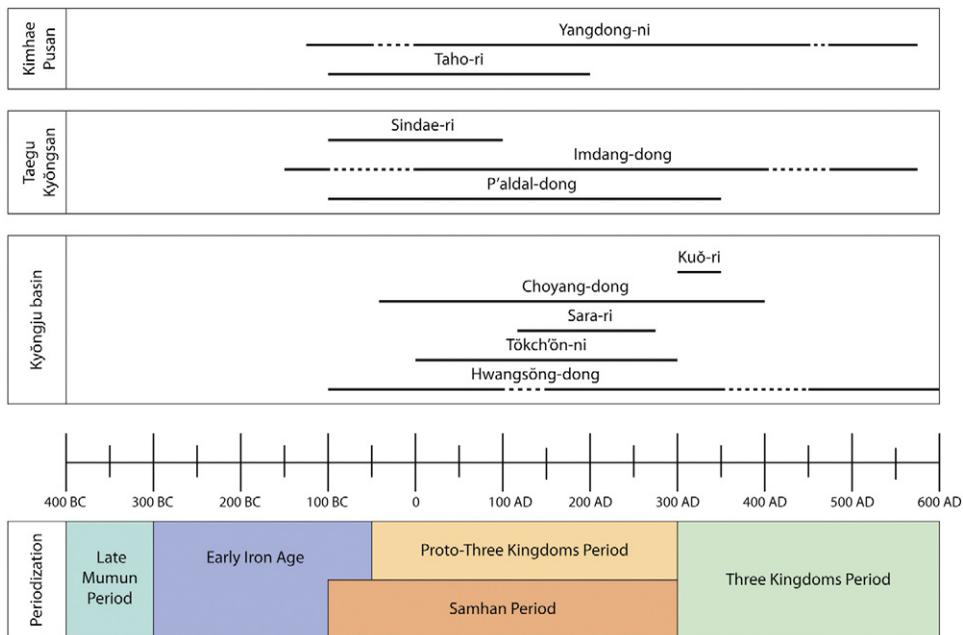

Fig. 2. Site chronologies by region. Dashed lines indicate periods for which no or little material has been recovered.

the *Samguk sagi*. Mahan 馬韓, Chinhan 辰韓, and Pyŏnhan 弁韓 (collectively referred to as the Samhan 三韓 or Three Han) are described in the *Sanguozhi* 三國志 as consisting of a large number of small polities or minor kingdoms (小國, Kor. *soguk*) that were in turn composed of hierarchies of villages (Yi Hŭijun 2000). Further to the north were the Ye 濊 who were made up of a similar set of polities with even less of an overarching political or social framework. The *Sanguozhi* image of the southern peninsula as a patchwork of relatively independent small polities is more consistent with the archaeological evidence and more compatible with a wide variety of social development models than the earlier *Samguk sagi*-based framework.

Among these developmental models, versions of peer-polity interaction have gained traction as an explanation for the development of states on the southern peninsula. Recent studies focus on specific aspects of the burial record to suggest a multitude of small, competing polities that gradually coalesced from the Mahan, Chinhan, and Pyŏnhan cultural zones into the historical polities of Paekche, Silla, and the Kaya groups, respectively.

Gina Barnes (2001) and Hyung Il Pai (1989, 2000) were the first to explicitly apply a peer-polity, interaction-focused framework to the peninsula reminiscent of the interaction sphere suggested by Kwang-chih Chang (1986) for Bronze Age China. Pai's two-stage Interaction Sphere foregrounds contact with the Han Lelang commandery in present day P'yŏngyang (Byington 2013) from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D. and, after Lelang's decline and fall in the fourth century, emphasizes the role of peer-polity interaction among local groups within the peninsula in prompting the political consolidation that led to historical Three Kingdoms polities. Similarly, Barnes (2015:322) emphasizes the role of waning Han power over its commanderies from the late second century as a major impetus for the economic and military growth of the Samhan, which eventually gave rise organically to the Three Kingdoms polities. Other archaeologists working on the region have long emphasized the political prestige-good economy as well as the development of local and long-distance trade networks within the southern peninsula (J. Lee 2009; Yi Hyŏnhye 1998; Yi S., 2009). Explicit peer-polity models focused around the appearance of human sacrificial burials (Yi and Kim 2011) and spiral motifs in domestic iron objects (U and Kim 2009) have also recently been proposed.

What is common to all these models is the not unreasonable emphasis on 'China' as both a facilitator and inhibitor of social and political development on the peninsula. Yet some of the implications that underlie this assumption are worth examining critically. First, despite assertions of peer-polities, it is difficult to determine what the basic socio-cultural units of the southern peninsula were or where to demarcate these in relation to northern Korean groups in more direct proximity to the Han commanderies. The description of the physical location of the Samhan cultures in Chinese sources is vague and difficult to reconcile with peninsular geography, but the scholarly consensus has been to assume that Mahan, Chinhan, and Pyŏnhan were the nascent forms of Paekche, Silla, and Kaya, respectively, and that their regional boundaries can be drawn according to the locations of these later polities (Ju 2009; No 1982).

The archaeology of southeastern Korea, however, does not show pronounced regional variation until the second century A.D. After this point, a number of divergent traditions are seen in Kyŏngju and Ulsan, Kimhae, and Taegu/Kyŏngsan that do not directly correspond to Chinhan or Pyŏnhan. The archaeology of the southwest, the

presumed southern extent of Mahan territory, is also extremely diverse with a number of unique tomb traditions along the southern coast, the Yŏngsan River basin, and the Kŭm River basin (Kwŏn 2015). Including all this diversity under the heading of 'Mahan' seems relatively arbitrary and unlikely to provide insight into the social development of this polity. A similar problem occurs when attempting to determine where Han and Ye begin and end in the central region of Korea from the mid-reaches of the Han River to the eastern coast. The very diverse material record of the region, including coffin and chamber tombs, mounded tombs, and a variety of different domestic architectural traditions, offers little clarity (Kwŏn 2010a, 2010b).

The exact nature of interaction with China is similarly difficult to apprehend. There are scattered references in Chinese sources to groups conventionally assigned to the Korean peninsula; these are usually described as "tributary states." But in this period, as in others, this seems to be a blanket term for a variety of diplomatic, trade, and military engagements between Han and its neighbors that masks the complex concessions, entreaties, and negotiation strategies Han employed to maintain and extend its territories among the cultural others at its boundaries. Southern peninsular contact with China from the first century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. was also mediated through administrative commanderies, particularly the Lelang commandery. Lelang was indeed an administrative outpost of the Han Empire, but like many of the "outlying" lands such as the Nanyue 南越 and Dian 滇 to the southwest (Erickson et al., 2010), the population and elite administrative structure likely retained its indigenous demographic profile after the defeat of the pre-existing Wiman Chosŏn government in 108 B.C. (itself a mixture of northern Chinese, Manchurian, and peninsular cultural elements). Some authors have gone as far as suggesting that Lelang and its attendant material culture might be better understood as a 'Korean' continuation of Ko Chosŏn rather than a Chinese state (Pak 2014).

The cultural ambiguities of the commanderies make classification and contextualization of the Sinitic material culture in the southern peninsular Iron Age difficult. Lelang certainly facilitated the movement of Han Chinese objects into the southern peninsula, but also acted as a conduit for the continued flow of Wiman Chosŏn and Warring States-style iron culture and material from Manchurian polities such as Puyŏ 夫餘 and Koguryŏ. As a result, it is often difficult to separate Han Chinese objects and practices from those of Lelang or late Warring States polities like Yan 燕.

The archaeological data itself also attests not just to the complexity of the relationship between the southern peninsula and Han China, but also to fluctuations in this interaction. Initially, large numbers of objects of Han and Lelang derivation appeared at first century B.C. sites along the southern coastal regions of Honam, Cheju island, and Yŏngnam. In both northern and southern Yŏngnam, non-local objects of this kind were mainly costly and sophisticated metalwork items (i.e., mirrors, equestrian equipment, chariot fittings, and crossbows) or bronze coinage; all of these items are typically found in richly furnished elite tombs like those of Taho-ri in Ch'angwŏn. Iron production centers developed in Yŏngnam and the locus of bronze production shifted eastwards on the peninsula, pointing to regional demographic shifts and production changes stimulated by trade with Lelang (J. Lee 2009).

The archaeology of the second century, in contrast, hints at a relatively abrupt change in patterns of trade. Although chronologies are based on somewhat problematic relative dates from artifact seriations and tomb construction techniques, it appears that there was a sudden decline in the number of Han objects filtering into the southern peninsula in the second century. In northern Yŏngnam, two official seals of

the Wei and Jin kingdoms are the only Chinese objects to have been recovered and these are unprovenienced. Han objects persisted only in southern Yŏngnam sites (in Kimhae and Ulsan) and in much smaller numbers (Yi Ch'ŏnggyu 2002). Any consideration of culture contact must take into account that it was inconsistent.

Sinitic or Han derivative objects are usually included in the category of 'foreign artifact' (Kor. *oerae yumul* 外來遺物) in Korean archaeological literature and defined simply as objects originating outside the Korean peninsula (Han'guk Munhwajae Chosa 2011). For the Iron Age, these are subdivided into three points of origin: the northern zone (early iron tools, bronze cauldrons and items of personal adornment such as belt hooks), central China (Han Chinese mirrors, lacquer, and coinage), and the Japanese archipelago (bronze bells, spears, and decorative objects) (Han'guk Munhwajae Chosa 2011; Im T., 2012; Yi Hyŏnhye 1998).

The term is helpful in that it isolates a set of objects that reflect long-distance contacts and possible cultural influxes, but has the consequence of creating a local–foreign binary and assumes a unitary and immutable 'Korean' culture in antiquity (Yi S., 2017). It also prevents us from investigating the possibility that 'foreign' may have been construed on a smaller scale from region to region or site to site. As a result, Chinese objects have tended to be characterized as simple markers of status in elite burials or as chronological indices. Artifacts that represent a complex amalgamation of local and various long-distance elements are also not addressed in this paradigm. Beyond simply suggesting a connection between two distant regions and the nebulous influence of northern China on Iron Age social development, what can these objects tell us about the ways foreignness was understood and put to use by southern peninsular groups?

In their models of social development, scholars such as Gina Barnes (2001, 2015) and Yi Sŏngju (2009) are certainly aware of the complexities of both the archaeology and the nature of contact between the southern peninsula and Han China. They and others also draw welcome attention toward the internal politicking and competition among Han groups and rightly point to peer-polity or similar interactions as key to understanding how Three Kingdoms states like Silla came into existence. My analysis here seeks to go one step beyond this in suggesting that our assumptions of a culturally similar Samhan must also be critically examined. We can begin this examination by looking at how southern peninsular groups understood their relationship to Lelang and Han China.

CULTURE CONTACT AND ACCULTURATION IN ARCHAEOLOGY

The approach I take to answering this question picks up several threads in ongoing anthropological and art historical discussions of cultural mixing. Progress has certainly been made in the recognition and interpretation of the complexities of culture contact in archaeology. There have been sustained critiques of treating material culture as a reflection of actual cultural dynamics (Hodder 1978; Meskell 2001), studies recognizing the difficulties of making meaningful ethnic distinctions on the basis of archaeology (Jones 1997), and objections to the uncritical identification of historical polities in the archaeological record (Papadopoulos 1999; von Falkenhausen 1993). All have chipped away at our confidence in static archaeological cultures as valid units of observation and simplistic binaries in culture contact studies. A new theoretical baseline eschews problematic assimilation models such as Sinicization and Hellenization and

assumes that the material record overlies complex cultural identities that were socially constructed and situational, with no clear cultural dichotomies (Eisenstadt and Giesen 1995; Herring and Lomas 2000; Mengoni 2010; Shelach 2009).

In border areas and other complex instantiations of culture contact, archaeologists have often seen Homi Bhabha's (1994) hybridity as an alternative to acculturation (Alt 2006; Lightfoot 1995). Studies of this kind adapt Bhaba's idea of a unique discursive field within a colonial encounter through which the colonized group asserts a set of new cultural identities. Settings of intense interaction, trade, migration, conquest, and conflict are thought to incubate a more fluid and changing identity with no clear 'local' or 'external' cultures. This in turn results in hybrid forms of material expression or invented traditions that take inspiration from, but do not conform to, pre-existing practices. This recognition attunes us to the persistence and agency of local cultures, particularly in cases of rather lopsided culture contact such as in the relationship between southern Korean Iron Age groups and the expansive Han Empire.

'Hybridity' seems to have fallen out of favor in more recent cultural studies (Silliman 2015) and scholars have warned against its uncritical use in archaeology (Liebmann 2013; Pappa 2013; Silliman 2005; Yao 2012). It also seems to have limited utility outside of an explicitly postcolonial context (Cusick 1998; Silliman 2015; Thomas 1991). It certainly seems premature to apply it to the protohistoric Korean case where the nature of culture contact remains fairly ambiguous. Nevertheless, archaeological applications spun off from the hybridity concept may help us model the processes involved in the integration and further mutation of foreign or exotic material culture in this period.

Among these is Stockhammer's (2012, 2013) relational and material entanglement, which seeks to break down the process of culture contact and the creation of so-called hybrid objects in the material record. Stockhammer assumes a relatively regularized process through which humans react to and eventually incorporate foreignness and that this process can be reconstructed to some degree with archaeology. Echoing Liebmann's (2015) use of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) organic and conscious hybridity, he makes the distinction between the appropriation and incorporation of a foreign object into pre-existing local frameworks with new meanings (relational entanglement) versus "the material creation" of a completely new object "that combines the familiar with the previously foreign" (material entanglement) (Stockhammer 2012:50).

The distinction is useful for isolating composite objects in the material record and the relative degree of familiarity that a local culture had with a 'foreign' culture. The two Korean Iron Age examples explored here are hybrids that both exemplify and complicate entanglements of this kind. Echoing Yao's (2012) discussion of creolization, Han mirrors blur the process of relational and material entanglement. On the one hand, they were a type of foreign object that had been appropriated and incorporated into pre-existing local ritual structures and use cases. But in other contexts, they were completely new objects that were either refashioned to the point of complete destruction of the original 'foreign' object or imitations of Han mirrors that loosely evoked the superficial appearance of Han decorative culture. Spiral decorations are an example of material entanglement in that they appear on new objects, thus mixing local and foreign attributes. However, these decorations seem to merely enhance pre-existing local object categories without indicating a deeper understanding or transformation of the 'foreign' attributes implied by the term.

The problem in applying the material entanglement concept seems to be that we cannot assume a uniform assimilation process for the entire region. Iron Age groups were actually fairly diverse in how they used and changed these exotic aspects of material culture. But even if their methodological usefulness falls short in this case, hybridity and its offshoots are still valuable in drawing our attention to exchanges of power (Liebmann 2015) rather than the acculturation-based understanding of foreign objects on which Korean social development models have been built. Can we carry this central insight forward while applying it to exchanges of power at a more local scale occurring between groups that, until now, have been considered part of the same culture and society?

Richard Wilk's (2004) idea of Common Difference also frames culture contact and the recombination of the foreign as a negotiation of power, but turns our attention away from the encounter between colonizer and colonized. Instead, the focus is on how the 'foreign' is incorporated and used *within* local cultures and to express difference between groups we might otherwise regard as archaeologically similar. What may appear to be a process of cultural assimilation or engagement with a distant political entity may have been just the opposite–an indigenous and local growth of social complexity that led to an immediate demand for foreign symbols, goods, and ideologies. The incorporation of foreign elements may have been prompted by local elites attempting to distinguish themselves from their regional peers and so does not necessitate the creation of a separate 'hybrid' identity.

This goes some way in helping us account for the diversity we see in Iron Age Korea. It also refines Korean peer-polity interaction models by suggesting a set of mechanisms through which contact with Han China and the subsequent interaction among local groups on the peninsula actually resulted in social change in the region. It also suggests that we might be able to reconstruct socio-political structures and regional contestation by looking to social arenas where local groups were particularly active and innovative in their incorporation and adaptions of Han culture.

One such arena seems to have been mortuary ritual. Not only are the vast majority of mirrors and decorated iron objects found in tombs, but mortuary practice itself underwent an explosion in complexity at the same time as Han and Han imitation objects began to appear in the region. From the first century A.D. onwards, tomb architecture grew larger, grave good inventories became more extravagant, and a number of new ritual elements appeared, including feasting and offering and meticulous arrangements of iron weaponry (Davey 2014, 2016).

By focusing on bronze mirrors and spiral bracken motifs as components of mortuary ritual, I explore two distinct modes of incorporation and reproduction of the foreign: (1) Chinese mirrors were imported objects with a specific cultural context that were reinterpreted, refashioned, and imitated in a new environment; (2) Spiral motifs were an exotic design element copied and applied to a variety of domestic iron objects. My analysis here differs in several key ways from the way Han objects in Korea have been approached in the past. First, I do not assume a political or cultural unity in the region, even in the more restricted area of Yŏngnam typically equated with Silla or Chinhan. My focus is the ritual context and how the use of these objects within it shifted as the southern peninsula's understanding of their foreignness changed over time. Similarly important is the production environment, which demonstrates how these foreign symbols were copied and intentionally warped to accommodate practical local considerations in different social arenas.

BRONZE MIRRORS IN FIRST CENTURY B.C. TO SECOND CENTURY A.D.
PENINSULAR CONTEXTS

Chinese bronze mirrors in the Han period were both toiletry items and symbolically significant ritual objects. They are frequently found in mortuary contexts in the Central Plains and regions more peripheral to the northern Chinese cultural sphere. These small bronze disks (usually around 15 cm in diameter and .5 cm thick) conventionally have an unadorned reflective side and an ornate decorative side with motifs that include a variety of floral and faunal designs, inscriptions, and geometric patterns all with some form of cosmological or cultural significance (Fig. 3A).

On the northern Korean peninsula, large quantities of Han artifacts, including mirrors, appeared in chamber tombs of the Lelang commandery in the mid to late first century B.C. These graves and their artifact inventories became more elaborate until the end of the first century A.D. before falling into decline beginning in the second century A.D. Beginning in the third century and lasting until the destruction of the commandery institution by Koguryŏ in A.D. 348, grave goods including mirrors were again interred in large numbers in wood-chamber and brick tombs. This may indicate a post-Han revival in the fortunes of the commanderies that coincides with the establishment of the Daifang commandery to the south of Lelang (Byington 2013). What is most significant here is the fluctuating fortunes of Lelang and the differential appearance of mirrors according to each phase of its existence.

Mirrors interred in Lelang tombs until the first century A.D. generally reflect Han burial customs. Many mirrors dating from the first century B.C. are found in lacquer containers placed outside the inner coffin, a Han custom that is also seen in Tomb 1 at Mawangdui 馬王堆, an elite early Han burial in the provincial region of Changsha, among many others. This is thought to represent the utilitarian aspect of the mirror in Han China as an object related to personal adornment that carried a certain amount of status but was not in and of itself a ritual object (Wang 1982:104). Conversely, in mortuary contexts, mirrors may have had additional ritual or symbolic meaning,
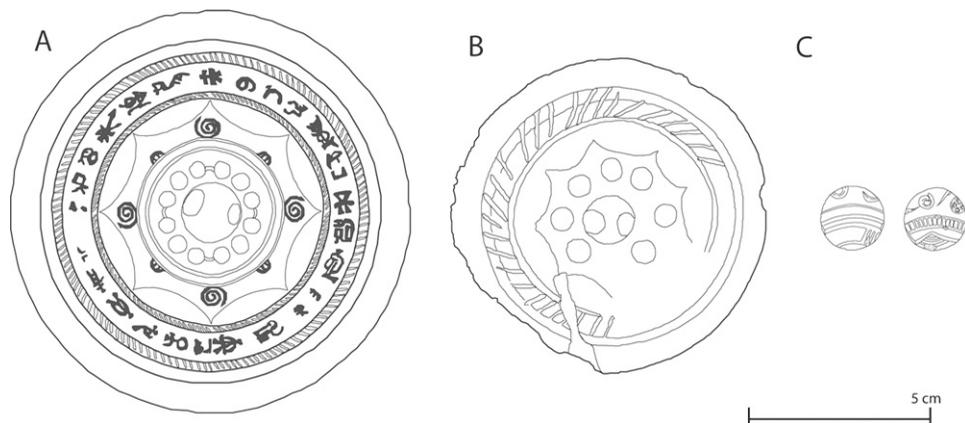

Fig. 3. Bronze mirrors in southwestern Korea: (A) inscribed Han mirror with linked arc design, Miryang Kyo-dong Tomb 17 (drawn from Miryang 2004:226); (B) imitation mirror from Kimhae Yangdong-ni (drawn from Tongŭi 2008:iv, 207); (C) circular mirror fragments from Kyŏngsan Sindae-ri Tomb 37 (drawn from Yŏngnam Munhwajae 2010b:298).

particularly with regard to having a preservative effect on the body of the deceased (Brashier 1995). In this sense, in addition to being luxury objects, mirrors also performed a concrete function in the funerary ritual, that of protecting the corpse during its preparation and after its interment.

Han mirrors began to appear in southern Korea in the first century B.C. and continued to be a prominent, though uncommon, component of mortuary assemblages until the third century A.D. A disproportionate number of these have been recovered from the southeast (Yŏngnam region), with fewer mirrors having come to light in the southwest or central areas of the peninsula (Fig. 1). Compared to the Japanese islands, however, there are far fewer mirrors in the peninsula overall, especially after the first century A.D. Like Lelang, the vast majority of provenienced examples are from mortuary contexts.

Mirror finds are conventionally divided into two phases corresponding to when the mirror was produced: the Western or Eastern Han periods (Table 1). The majority of Western Han mirrors in southern Korea are inscribed with Chinese characters (referred to as *myŏngmun'gyŏng* 銘文鏡) with either a linked-arc (*yŏnhomun* 連弧文) or star-cloud (*sŏngunmun* 星雲文) motif in the center or outer band. A few of the earliest have star-cloud designs without inscriptions; there are also a small number of serpentine dragon mirrors (*hweyongmun'gyŏng* 虺龍文鏡) and grass-leaf mirrors (*ch'oyŏmmun'gyŏng* 草葉文鏡). Eastern Han mirrors include those with TLV (*pakkukkyŏng* 博局鏡) (i.e., resembling T, L, or V shapes) and checkerboard (*panggyŏk kyugugyŏng* 方格規矩鏡) patterns, as well as coiled-dragon (*pallimun'gyŏng* 蟠螭文鏡) and serpentine-dragon motifs (translations of decorative formats based on von Falkenhausen 2011). However, the majority of Eastern Han mirror finds are imitation mirrors that evoke inscribed mirrors with geometric designs instead of characters or feature decorations reminiscent of those found on Chinese roof tiles.

The reason the inscription and arc motif are so well represented in pre-first century A.D. burials is unclear. Yao (2012) has pointed to the similar prominence of linked-arc mirrors with inscriptions in Sarmatian burials of the first to second centuries and suggests that the connotations of light, clarity, and durability in the motif and inscriptions would have appealed to Sarmatians in the context of mortuary ritual. Mirror-like objects in other contexts also appear to have similar connotations, with reflective objects of this kind and their associations with the sun having magical, metaphoric, and apotropaic significance to aspects of human cognition (Price and Gleba 2012; Yi Y., 2009).

A similar argument has been made for Korea: Han mirrors could have symbolically replaced Late Mumun fine-line mirrors in the ritual practice of Yŏngnam and would have easily been integrated into a pre-existing mortuary tradition (Horlyck 2011; Yi Ch'ŏnggyu 2010). Fine-line mirrors were bronze disks similar in size and appearance to Han mirrors with one reflective surface and the reverse side consisting of minute geometric decoration. They have been found mainly in central western Korea in stone-cist and early coffin tombs, usually associated with slim-bronze daggers near the waist of a corpse or placed alone underneath the head of the deceased. Fine-line mirrors disappeared after the second century B.C., shortly before Han mirrors began to be incorporated into coffin tomb burials in the southeast. The Han mirror, in this framework, provides the same connotations of light, sun, and authority that fine-line mirrors supposedly possessed. There is some additional support for this in the form of first century B.C. coffin tomb burials that prominently feature Han mirrors behind the

TABLE 1. BRONZE MIRRORS FOUND IN SOUTHERN PENINSULAR IRON AGE CONTEXTS

			HAN MIRRORS			
REGION	SITE	# MIRRORS	CONTEXT	MIRROR DATE	BURY DATE	DESIGN
Ch'ungch'ŏng						
Kongju	Kongsansŏng	1	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.–A.D. 100	Serpentine-dragon
Honam						
Iksan	P'yŏngjang-ni	1	Pit grave(?)	300–200 B.C.	300–200 B.C.	Coiled-dragon
Iksan	Yŏndong-ni	1	Coffin	A.D. 100–200	A.D. 100–200	Serpentine-dragon
Yŏngnam						
Ch'angwŏn	Taho-ri	1	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.	Star-cloud
Kimhae	Naedŏng-ni	1	Coffin	A.D. 100	A.D. 100–200	TLV
Kimhae	Yangdong-ni	3	Chamber	A.D. 100–200	A.D. 100–200	TLV, linked-arc, unknown
Kosŏng	T'ongwoe-dong	1	Midden	A.D. 100	Unknown	Animal band fragment
Kyŏngju	Choyang-dong	4	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.	Inscribed, linked-arc
Kyŏngsan	Sindae-ri	1	Coffin	A.D. 1–200	A.D. 1–200	Serpentine-dragon
Milyang	Kyo-dong	2	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.	Star-cloud, inscribed
Sach'ŏn	Nŭk-to	1	Burial	100 B.C.	Early Iron Age	Inscribed?
Sangju		1	Unknown	100 B.C.	Unknown	Inscribed, linked-arc
Taegu	Chisan-dong	6	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.–A.D. 100	Inscribed
Taegu	P'yŏngni-dong	6	Unknown	100 B.C.	100 B.C.–A.D. 100	Serpentine-dragon
Yŏngch'ŏn	Ŏŭn-dong	3	Unknown	100 B.C.	Unknown	Inscribed, grass-leaf
Yŏngch'ŏn	Yongjŏn-ni	1	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.	Star-cloud?

			IMITATION MIRRORS		
REGION	SITE	# MIRRORS	CONTEXT	DATE	MIRROR TYPE
Cheju					
Cheju	Kŏnip-tong	1			Small
Yŏngnam					
Haman	Sanae-ri	1			Small
Kimhae	Kaya ŭi Sup	1	Coffin	100 B.C.–A.D. 100	Blank
Kimhae	Yangdong-ni	16	Chamber	A.D. 100–200	Small
Kyŏngju	Sara-ri	4	Chamber	A.D. 200–300	Small
Kyŏngsan	Sindae-ri	1	Coffin	A.D. 100–200	Small
Pusan	Poksan-dong	1	Coffin		Small
Yŏngch'ŏn	Ŏŭn-dong	11		100 B.C.	Small (10), medium (1)

			REFASHIONED MIRRORS				
REGION	SITE	# OF MIRRORS	CONTEXT	MIRROR DATE	BURY DATE	TYPE	DESIGN
Yŏngnam							
Kyŏngju	Choyang-dong	1	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.	Circular fragment	Inscribed
Kyŏngsan	Imdang	5	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.–A.D. 100	Circular fragments	Inscribed, grass-leaf
Kyŏngsan	Sindae-ri	2	Coffin	100 B.C.	100 B.C.	Circular fragments	Inscribed

head of the corpse–such as seen in Tomb 17 at Kyodong in Miryang (Miryang 2004)–a context very similar to the fine-line mirror practice.

Simple ritual replacement of this kind would seem to be a classic example of the relational entanglement proposed by Stockhammer (2012) discussed in the previous section. A more thorough examination of mirror contexts, however, suggests that this does not account for the entire picture. For a start, the larger number of linked-arc

mirrors may simply reflect their relative ubiquity throughout the Han cultural sphere, while the fine-line mirror tradition of the Late Mumun is not particularly well-represented in the southeast, where Han mirrors are found most prominently in the Iron Age. The way mirrors were put to use in second century B.C. to first century A.D. tombs also reveals much more diversity than can be explained by ritual replacement alone.

The most significant way Han mirrors on the peninsula were put to alternative use was by reshaping or reconstituting them. There are examples of Han mirror fragments that were re-used as ornamentation, including the mirror shard from Taesŏng-dong with a hole punched though one end that may have been worn as a pendant or sewn into clothing (Kyŏngsŏng 2000, 2003). More intriguing still are the small circular mirror fragments found at several first century A.D. cemeteries including Imdang and Sindae-ri in Kyŏngsan and Choyang-dong in Kyŏngju (Han'guk Munhwajae Poho 1998; Kungnip Kyŏngju 2003; Yŏngnam Munhwajae 2010b, 2010c) (Fig. 3C). Rather than simple shards, these objects are carefully cut circular sections of complete mirrors and are found in a variety of contexts in Yŏngnam tombs. The positioning of two such fragments in Sindae-ri Tomb 37 suggests they were worn as earrings by the deceased, but in the same tomb, two additional circular fragments were discovered less carefully placed among other ceramic and iron grave goods. At Imdang, tombs A-I-122 and E-58 yielded two circular mirror fragments that appear to have been used as components in a small reflective device (Ch'oe 2001:34) or as part of a sword pommel (Yŏngnam Taehakkyo 1994, 1998). Interestingly, the mirror pieces were displayed with their reflective side facing outwards and all four were cut out of different mirrors (Ch'oe 2001:34), suggesting that the decoration or original object itself was rather less important than the reflective property of the metal.

Refashioned mirrors of this kind do not fit a model of ritual replacement and suggest that local groups in southern Korea were profoundly ambivalent regarding the proper ritual context of mirrors and their origins in Han China. In the cases of intentionally cut fragments that obscured or ignored decoration and complete mirrors that replicate Late Mumun burial practices, burying groups were more concerned with integrating Han mirrors into pre-existing ritual paradigms than properly reproducing the way they were used in China. On the other hand, mirror fragments that were reused as pendants or other personal adornment speak to the continuing efficacy of these exotic and perhaps magical objects. They seem to have retained their connection to a distant and powerful entity even after they lost their function as mirrors or reflective devices.

A similar lack of consensus can be seen with the many different burial contexts in which mirrors are found. While some first century B.C. burying groups seem to have followed the Late Mumun fine-line mirror custom of placing a mirror directly beneath the head of a corpse and others used mirrors to adorn the deceased, other burying groups hewed more closely to the pattern of mirror use in Chinese tombs. First century B.C. mirrors such as those found at Naedŏng-ni Tomb 3 (Pokch'ŏn 2009) have been recovered in tomb fills mimicking the Lelang custom of interring mirrors and other luxury goods outside the coffin at one end of the tomb. At Taho-ri, a first century B.C. cemetery containing graves with large quantities of Han objects, a mirror was interred with a number of other metal objects of local and distant origin, seemingly without any concern for the ritual significance of the item (Kungnip Chungang 2008). After the first century A.D., sets of mirrors were sometimes placed on the waist of the deceased or arranged around the coffin interior, seen most elaborately in Sara-ri Tomb 130

(Yŏngnam Munhwajae 2001a, 2001b) and Yangdong-ni tombs 162 and 427 (Tongŭi 2008).

Imitation mirrors that also appeared after the first century A.D. introduce a further layer of complexity to peninsular mirror practices (Fig. 3B). These are usually classified into three types based on size (small, medium, large), with a further subdivision of small mirrors into A or B types based on their most prominent motifs (Minami 2007; Takakura 1972). Some of these imitate the inscriptional and linked-arc mirrors common to the first century B.C. mirror finds, but occur in a much more simplistic form with inscriptions replaced with geometric patterns possibly borrowed from Chinese roof tiles (Yi Chaehyŏn 2004). Other examples consist of bands of radial or diagonal lines, as well as imitations of the serpentine-dragon and floral motifs of Han designs. Unlike later peninsular and Japanese mirrors that display a high degree of production skill and technological expertise, these early imitation mirrors were rather cruder than the Han archetypes and were likely produced with stone molds rather than wax models (Yi Chaehyŏn 2004).

The first complication imitations introduce is one of provenience. While stylistic relatives of Type A mirrors, such as those from Yangdong-ni, have not been discovered outside of the Korean peninsula, all other imitation mirror types are well represented in northern Kyushu. The majority, if not all, of these objects may in fact have been produced in Japan (Minami 2007:241; Yi Chaehyŏn 2004). Finally, the imitation mirror at Kimhae Kayasup, which is completely devoid of decoration, does not conform to any other imitation mirror tradition (Samgang 2006).

Like the diverse contexts of mirror finds in the southern peninsula, the lack of understanding of Han motifs or inscriptions and the inability to reproduce complex designs demonstrated by many imitation mirrors, as well as the substitution of other 'Chinese' elements on other mirrors, further highlights the distinctions between peninsular and Han traditions. Yet there was still a recognition that genuine, Chinese produced mirrors were somehow more important than imitations in some peninsular mirror contexts; when imitation and Han mirrors are found together, as seen in Tomb 427 at Yangdong-ni (Tongŭi 2008), the genuine Han import takes a central position compared to the imitations.

Burial context, refashioning, and imitation demonstrate the diversity of ways in which these objects were understood and incorporated into the ritual life of the southern peninsula. The foreign in this case was incorporated in a practical way that engaged with pre-existing local traditions, concerns, and ritual sensibilities, but there was also a high degree of invention and new local customs emerged as a result. The focus of engagement was inward-looking, with ritual concerns of primary importance at the site level. The incorporation of the foreign cannot be encapsulated by any version of hybridity or simple local assimilation models. Mirrors were part of a larger discursive field in which local traditions remained important as the guiding structure for how foreign objects were used, but the novelty and appeal of the distant and exotic were also significant.

Within this discursive field, there was a lack of consensus regarding how mirrors should be incorporated into mortuary practices and differing degrees of understanding of the original Han context of the objects. This further undermines the idea that the southern peninsula was made up of the relatively cohesive cultural and political units described in the Samguk sagi or Sanguozhi or that we can even generalize about culture contact between 'Han China' and 'Samhan Korea'. Attempts to do so only smooth

over the significantly different intensities of interaction between Han's administrative outposts and various southern peninsular groups that persisted even as late as the second century A.D.

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SPIRAL DECORATED IRON IN SOUTHEASTERN KOREA,
SECOND TO FOURTH CENTURIES

</div>

Mirrors in their various forms were emblematic of contact with China from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D., but there are no clear equivalents to these in the material record of the second to fourth centuries. Archaeological evidence of contact with China is more indirect in this period, including: new chamber tomb forms reminiscent of Lelang styles from the first century B.C., elaborate feasting and offering components in burials similar to northern Chinese bronze vessel sacrifices, and the growth of a long-distance iron production network that likely incorporated the peninsula in the northern Chinese trade and tributary sphere.

Spiral bracken motifs or thorn-like spikes adorning iron are some of the more direct indicators of contact and influence from China in this period. Mid-second century tombs often contained locally-produced iron objects of this kind, including horse harnesses, spears, sickles, bores, and axes. Objects adorned with spirals are most common in cemeteries within the Kyŏngju plain, the eventual heartland of Silla. The motif's entry into this territory is difficult to determine precisely, but the design seems to have found its way into southeastern Korea from an external rather than local source. Some researchers emphasize indigenous predecessors for the motif in the bronze objects of the Late Mumun and Early Iron Age (Im H., 1998; Sŏ and Yi 1997), but there are also decorative motifs found on bronze mirrors, bowls, and iron horse harnesses originating from Lelang or the Central Plains that show a more direct similarity to the brackens on early staff-heads and other southern Korean ironware objects (U and Kim 2009).

The current evidence, then, suggests that the bracken was adopted as an exotic design element from continental models that had made their way into multiple parts of southeastern Korea. The earliest examples seem to have arrived simultaneously in the growing centers of Silla and Kŭmgwan Kaya 金官伽倻 power (i.e., Kyŏngju and Kimhae, respectively) and soon after at sites in Hadae in Ulsan and Oksŏng-ni in P'ohang, both of which were ostensibly peripheral to Silla (U and Kim 2009). There is still insufficient data to completely disregard a single and central origin point for the bracken motif, but for now the more likely model is one that sees multiple groups in the region adopting a compelling and exotic decorative element more or less at the same time.

If indeed these motifs originated outside the peninsula, they represent a significant change from the engagement with the foreign that was suggested by mirrors. Rather than the incorporation of a pre-existing object into local contexts or even the whole-scale imitation of such, the spiral motifs found their way onto a number of different iron object types and show the transference of a foreign motif to a completely different material context. The hybridity of the object only extends to its decoration; the object itself remains a common local type produced on a relatively large scale throughout southeastern Korea. The context of these decorated iron objects do not evoke any sense of understanding of the original contexts of the embellishments; instead, these decorations only serve to augment an existing cultural and ritual context rather than

creating something completely new out of pre-existing foreign and local elements. They represent a more sophisticated and selective adaptation of a foreign attribute, while simultaneously suggesting a disengagement with the original context of this attribute.

Spiral decorated iron objects in tombs enjoyed a prominent place within the structure of the grave—usually arrayed individually near the waist or head of the corpse in chamber tombs. Apart from their decorative flourishes, however, iron objects were ubiquitous in first century A.D. tombs. Within a production environment that was gradually becoming more efficient and focused around the replication of a few basic shapes, ritual disposal of iron by emerging elites seems to have been undergoing a process of multiplication and accumulation reminiscent of the competitive ritual displays of Bronze Age Mycenae discussed by Voutsaki (2012) as a form of value creation. Some threshold of production seems to have been reached by the third century as these elite strategies changed from accumulation and multiplication of fairly ubiquitous objects to a tactic of singularization: imbuing widely-produced iron objects with additional significance through modification and prominent placement near the deceased. Perhaps the best example of this process is the evolution of the barbed staff-head (Kor. *yuja igi* 有刺利器), a prestige good that first appeared in the first century A. D. as a slight modification of common flat iron axes (relative chronology established by Kim Hunhǔi 2011) (Fig. 4). Staff-heads are one of the most prominent objects to gain spiral decorations in the second century and are found throughout the southeast.

Morphological classification schemes for spiral-decorated iron have been largely concerned with producing an accurate chronological seriation for the development of the decoration and therefore focused on the overall similarity in appearance of spiral decorations and the base-objects that were modified to produce a spiral flourish (Kim H. 2011; U and Kim 2009) (Fig. 4). Early objects of the second to early third centuries tended to be axes, horse bridles, swords, and sickles with tightly-curled and very long spirals. By the mid-third century, decorated spears were much more prominent and flat iron ingots seem to have replaced axes as the base object for decorated staff-heads. Over time, spiral decorations loosened and shortened, eventually becoming little more than curved thorn-like motifs curled slightly away from the body of the decorated object.

Despite the overall similarity of the motif throughout the southeastern region and the relative uniformity of its evolution through time, divergent trends emerge when the motif is considered in relation to iron production and mortuary contexts. The decorations could be accomplished in different ways and there is a particularly large diversity in the way pairs of spines were arranged on the surfaces of objects (Table 2). The majority of staff-heads contain a single pair of spirals, one on each side of the object, but a number of examples include two, three, or four pairs of brackens. In examples with more than one pair, some pairs are arranged uni-directionally, while others are a mirror image of each other. Certain arrangements are specific to particular sites, with some sites such as Hwangsŏng-dong in Kyŏngju, Oksŏng-ni in P'ohang, and Yangdong-ni in Kimhae generally exhibiting much greater diversity in bracken arrangements.

The same is true for the base object on which spirals were executed and the mortuary contexts in which these objects were found (Table 3). The most common object types at most sites are axes, ingots, and spears, but the same cemeteries with a diversity of spiral arrangements also have a greater diversity of base objects that spirals were applied to, including horse harnesses, saddle hooks, sickles, swords, and long flat
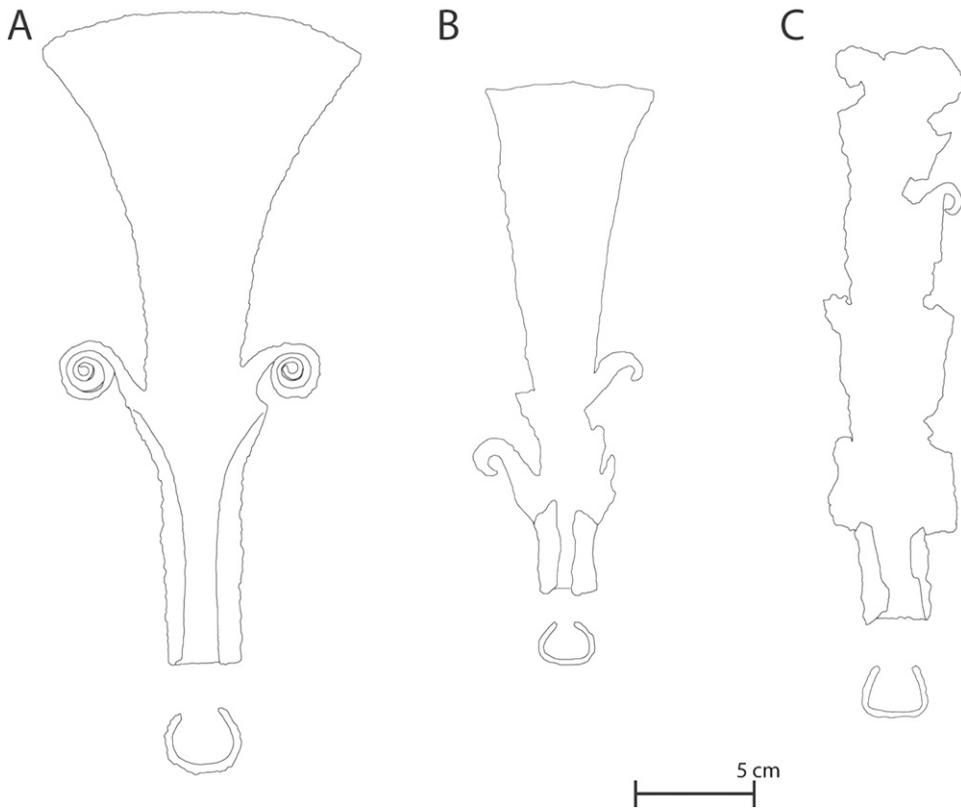
Fig. 4. Relative chronological sequence of bracken designs on barbed staff-heads showing gradual shift from tight spirals to loose to short curls: (A) staff-head from Hwangsŏng-dong 575 Tomb 5 (drawn from Yŏngnam Munhwajae 2010*a*:48); (B) 1 staff-head from Chungsan-ni Tomb IA-26 (drawn from Ch'angwŏn 2006:115); (C) staff-head from Sara-ri Tomb 34 (drawn from Yŏngnam Munhwajae 2001*b*:565).

sheets of cast iron. Most spiral-decorated objects are found prominently near the corpse, with staff-heads in particular located near the head or shoulder of the deceased. At Hwangsŏng-dong and Oksŏng-ni, these decorated objects are found together or singly in a number of different locations in the tomb. Further muddying the situation, while the spiral decoration and presence of a larger number of spiral-decorated objects do correlate to elite tombs with large numbers of grave goods, brackens are curiously more common at sites considered peripheral to ruling polities or regional centers (Yi Hŭijun 2011).

Taken as a whole, the motif does seem to have been a regionally coherent symbol, but more subtle differences such as the arrangement of spirals on the object's surface seem to have signaled difference both within and between burying groups at different sites. There was variable participation in this process of differentiation. Greater enthusiasm for spirals and different ways of rendering them may have been related to burying groups who were directly invested in the production of finished iron objects. Tombs and sites where spiral-decorated objects are most common do not always contain other markers of elite status (such as complex iron object arrangements and lavish decorative ceramics).

TABLE 2. SPIRAL DESIGNS FOUND AT YŎNGNAM IRON AGE SITES

| SUBREGION | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | TOTALS |
SITE	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	PER SITE
Kyŏngju	**22**		**1**		**2**	**1**	**3**		**1**	**1**	**1**	**3**	**2**	**1**		**38**
Choyang-dong												2				2
Hwangnam Taech'ong													1			1
Hwangsŏng-dong	18		1		2		2							1		24
Inwang-dong									1		1					2
Sara-ri						1				1		1	1			4
Tŏkch'ŏn-ni	4						1									5
P'ohang	**2**							**1**								**3**
Oksŏng-ni	2							1								3
Pusan–Kimhae	**1**	**1**		**1**			**1**			**1**					**1**	**6**
Yangdong-ni	1	1		1			1			1					1	6
Taegu–Kyŏngsan	**4**		**1**		**1**		**4**			**1**						**11**
Kach'ŏn-dong					1		4			1						6
Sŏbyŏn-dong	4		1													5
Ulsan	**11**															**11**
Chungsan-ni	2															2
Taun-dong	9															9
Totals per design type	**40**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**3**	**1**	**8**	**1**	**1**	**3**	**1**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**69**

Key: A = 1 pair of spirals; B = 1 pair on end of object; C = 2 pairs; D = 2 pairs, arranged in a ring; E = 2 pairs, mirrored arrangement; F = 2 pairs, on ends; G = 2 pairs, unidirectional; H = 3 pairs; I = 3 pairs, mirrored; J = 3 pairs, unidirectional; K = 4 pairs, mirrored; L = 4 pairs, on ends; M = 4 pairs, unidirectional; N = 8 pairs; O = 8 pairs, branching ends.

Compared to the diversity of mirror placements, spiral motifs do indicate a greater degree of regional engagement between polities represented by cemetery sites. But the diverse expression of this common symbol and the variable participation in the production of the motif between sites suggests a corresponding lack of political coherency similar to the competing polities of Wilk's (2004) Common Difference model. The foreign was integrated into a complex and ongoing local interaction, but, over time, the exoticness of this motif was almost completely elided in favor of replicating the symbol with minimal effort. The foreignness that initially marked these iron objects out as singularized and valuable eventually became a rote replication of a thoroughly localized motif.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Mirrors and spiral-decorated iron objects add depth to our understanding of a prolonged period of culture contact and the course of social development in southern Korea during the Iron Age. They also expose an area where archaeological models of acculturation, hybridity, and entanglement are insufficient to explain culture contact. Neither object type corresponds exactly to any existing conception of a hybrid. Instead, both show an incorporation and then erosion of the foreign that represents what culture contact looks like when interaction is intermittent and unevenly dispersed. While hybridity models focus our attention on the asymmetrical relationship

TABLE 3. TYPES OF IRON OBJECTS DECORATED WITH SPIRAL OR BRACKEN MOTIFS AT YŎNGNAM IRON AGE SITES

SUBREGION SITE	AXE	HARNESS	INGOT	KNIFE	POLE	SADDLEHOOK	SICKLE	SPEAR	SWORD	TOTALS PER SITE
Kyŏngju	**11**	**5**	**10**	**9**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**16**		**54**
Choyang-dong		2		1						3
Hwangnam-dong			2							2
Hwangsŏng-dong	5	2		7	1		1	13		29
Inwang-dong			3							3
Kujŏng-dong	1							1		2
Kuŏ-ri								1		1
Nodong-ni			1							1
Pokch'ŏn-dong								1		1
Sara-ri		1	4	1		1				7
Tŏkch'ŏn-ni	5									5
P'ohang	**11**	**2**	**8**				**7**	**12**		**40**
Hakch'ŏn-ni	6						1	6		13
Masan-ni							1	1		2
Oksŏng-ni	5	2	8				5	4		24
Tŏgong-ni								1		1
Pusan–Kimhae	**1**	**2**	**7**		**1**				**3**	**14**
Pokch'ŏn-dong	1		4							5
Taesŏng-dong		1								1
Yangdong-ni		1	3		1				3	8
Taegu–Kyŏngsan	**2**		**22**				**3**	**1**		**28**
Choyŏng			3							3
Hobyŏn-dong			1							1
Imdang			1					1		2
Kach'ŏn-dong			6				2			8
Kyoch'on-ni							1			1
Nopyŏn-dong			1							1
Pullo-dong			1							1
Puno-dong			1							1
Siji			5							5
Sŏbyŏn-dong	2		3							5
Ulsan	**14**	**4**	**2**		**1**			**10**		**31**
Chungsan-dong	4									4
Chungsan-ni	2	2	1					3		8
Hade	3	2			1					6
Hasamjŏng	2									2
Taun-dong	3		1					7		11
Western Naktong								**1**		**1**
Wŏlsan-ni								1		1
Totals per type object	**39**	**13**	**49**	**9**	**3**	**1**	**11**	**40**	**3**	**168**

between colonizer and colonized, the enthusiastic adoption of foreign elements could be more indicative of complex social competition *within* a society (Wilk 2004).

The relatively wide distribution of Han mirrors beginning in the first century B.C. attests to a relatively robust contact with China via its commanderies, but the diverse ritual contexts and sporadic imitation of Lelang mirror burial customs

shows that certain groups were more receptive to or cognizant of the cultural context of these and other Chinese objects and that contact did not extend evenly to all groups in the region. By the end of the first century A.D., a pronounced lack of Chinese objects in peninsular contexts seems to indicate a relatively abrupt decline in contact between the commanderies and the southeast. Despite this, mirrors continued to be a significant feature of the burial record and retained their exotic value, as seen in the imitations of genuine mirrors and the refashioning of broken fragments. At the same time, the diversity of mortuary contexts in which we find mirrors demonstrates that there was no single 'correct' way to utilize or understand these objects.

The incorporation of spiral motifs on local iron occurred soon after in the same context of declining direct contact with China and its commanderies. Unlike mirrors, these decorations represent a very specific local appropriation of the foreign to ongoing and inward-looking ritual interactions in the second century. In a process similar to Wilk's Common Difference model, spirals appear to have been a conscious adoption by local groups to establish uniqueness and regional legitimacy. After the second century, when genuine and imitation mirrors had completely disappeared from the archaeological record, spirals began to be reproduced with less care and shed their visual similarity to the foreign motifs on which they were based. At this point, the original Han Chinese source of these motifs was so distant and the symbol so thoroughly entangled with local meaning that they may have lost their connection to the foreign completely.

Apart from culture contact, these objects offer us a reference point for determining how culturally unified the region actually was in the first two centuries A.D. Mirror diversity argues against the idea of a normative or unitary cultural sphere in southern Korea. Not only does the foreign-local or Han Chinese-Korean binary need to be broken down, but we need to look even further and distinguish multiple cultures at the local scale. Rather than clear political boundaries or social cohesion, the southern peninsula was made up of a set of relatively interdependent local groups communicating with a common ritual vocabulary, but arranging this vocabulary into entirely different grammars. As regional burying groups shifted mortuary ritual strategies to one of ostentatious display and disposal of large quantities of locally-available resources, mirrors and spirals emerged as common symbolic reference points evoking a connection with the exotic and foreign that could be replicated, modified, and reinterpreted.

The example of the southern Korean Iron Age suggests that we must reframe the idea of cultural unity not as a package of material culture with a distinct territorial range, but as a process of interaction among neighboring groups through their variable adherence to common symbols and ritual practices. We can see areas where difference and similarity were negotiated through the variable expression of common material symbols. So-called foreign objects offer one such material symbol, the variable expression of which can be tracked through time and space. While this reading of the archaeological record does not radically redraw the boundaries of southern Korea or dispute the existence of historical cultures like Mahan, Chinhan, and Pyŏnhan, it does highlight the difficulty of defining discrete cultures or locating historic polities with the material record alone. To properly evaluate these textual assertions with archaeology, we need a more nuanced version of what 'culture' in the material record actually entails.

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