



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The Lelang Commandery and its artifacts: a controversial heritage

Sorce, Veronica

Citation

Sorce, V. (2022). *The Lelang Commandery and its artifacts: a controversial heritage*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master thesis in the Leiden University Student Repository](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3453487>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Lelang Commandery and its artifacts: a controversial heritage



Veronica Sorce (s3124827)

Supervisor: Dr. Elena Paskaleva

MA History, Arts and Culture of Asia – Critical Heritage Studies

Leiden University

Date: 1st July 2022

Words: 14200

Table of Contents

Introduction: Lelang and its controversies.....	3
Methodology.....	7
Theoretical Framework and Literature Review.....	7
1. Museums in East Asia: The Difficulties of a Contested Heritage.....	9
1.1. Museums and Nationalism.....	9
1.2. National Museums in East Asia.....	10
2. The Japanese Narrative.....	14
2.1. Excavating Lelang.....	14
2.2. Lelang Artifacts in the Tokyo: Tokyo University Museum and Tokyo National Museum.....	20
3. The South Korean Narrative.....	27
3.1. National Museum of Korea	29
4. Chinese and North Korean Narrative.....	35
5. Two Realities in Comparison.....	38
Conclusion	39
Figures.....	41
Bibliography.....	43

Introduction

Lelang and Its Controversies

The Han Dynasty (202 BC -220 CE) was the second dynasty of Imperial China.¹ For the first time in Chinese history, the Han Dynasty expanded the territory beyond Central China, reaching Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Korean peninsula. In order to control these regions, military outposts called commanderies (*jun* 郡) were set up to administer the local governments.²

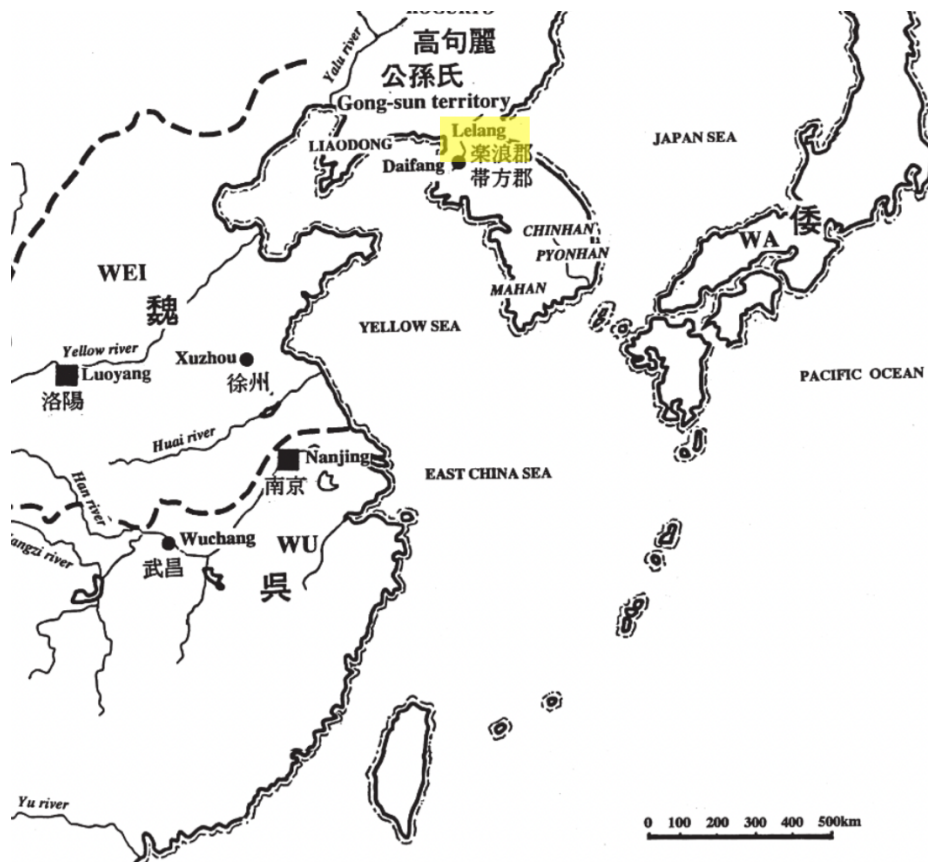


Figure 1-Map³

In 108 BC the Han emperor Wu (156 BC – 87 CE) conquered Gocheoson (Old Cheoson), after a whole year of war. He then established four different commanderies: Lelang, Xuantu, Zhenfan, and

¹ “Han Dynasty,” World History Encyclopedia, accessed May 14, 2022, https://www.worldhistory.org/Han_Dynasty/.

² Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing “Korean” Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000): 127.

³ Edward J. Kidder, *Himiko and Japan’s Elusive Chieftom of Yamatai: Archaeology, History, and Mythology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

Lintun.⁴ Lelang, at the easternmost part of the empire, dates from 108 BC to 313 CE.⁵ Its remains can be found in contemporary Pyeongyang, the capital of North Korea. Since its discovery the site has been subject to historical revisionism. The main reason why this phenomenon occurred lies in the fact that Lelang was excavated by the Japanese archaeologists at the beginning of 20th century, when Korea was still under colonial rule (1910-1945). Its excavation also represents the earliest scientific excavation of Han tombs.⁶

Scholars such as Hyung Il Pai⁷ have studied and written about the consequences of this archaeological site on the Korean nationalistic discourse and on the relationships between Korea, Japan, and China. Her most famous work has been “Constructing “Korean” Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories.”

The conflict between the Japanese and the Korean points of view on Lelang originated during the colonial years: Japanese scholars used the archaeological data to sustain the idea that Koreans are naturally dependent on stronger nations.⁸ The creation of Lelang studies followed the Japanese seizure of Korea in 1910. Sekino Tadashi⁹ (1868-1935) was the first to conduct a survey in Pyongyang. At first, he did not identify the site as a commandery. Following its studies, Fujita Ryosaku,¹⁰ Torii Ryuzo,¹¹ and Imanishi Ryu¹² worked on the site.¹³ The most complete analysis on the archaeological data was performed by Komai Kazuchika.¹⁴ On the other hand, Mikami Tsugio¹⁵ wrote the most detailed social analysis of the commandery.¹⁶

These scholars created the narrative that sees Lelang as the hard evidence of Korean cultural dependence on China. However, in the last couple of decades, the Japanese scholarship has ceased focus on the Lelang debate, as they confirm the results and the theories which date back to the colonial period.¹⁷

⁴ Tay Jeong, “The Politics of Historical Knowledge: The Debate on the Historical Geography of Old Chosŏn and Lelang Commandery,” *Journal of Asian History* 52, no. 1 (2018): 44, <https://doi.org/10.13173/jasiahist.52.1.0043>.

⁵ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 127.

⁶ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 128.

⁷ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*.

⁸ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 136.

⁹ Sekino Tadashi, “Raruko Taiho ryogun no iseki oyobi ibutsu” [Archaeological sites and artifacts of the Lelang and Daifang commanderies], in *Kokugaku koza* [Lectures on Archaeology], ed. Kokushi koshukai (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 1930).

¹⁰ Fujita Ryosaku, “Rakuro fudei ko” [Studies on clay sealings from Lelang], in *Chosen kokogaku no kenkyu* [Korean Archaeology of the Kenkyu] (Kyoto: Reimoku chokujū, 1948).

¹¹ Torii Ryuzo, *Torii Ryuzo zenshu* [Complete Works of Torii Ryuzo] (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1976).

¹² Imanishi Ryu, *Chosenshi no shiori* [A guide to Korean history] (Keijo: Chikazawa, 1936).

¹³ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 132.

¹⁴ Komai Kazuchika, *Rakuro – Kanbunka no zanzo* [Lelang: reflections on Han civilization] (Tokyo: Chuo koronsha, 1972).

¹⁵ Mikami Tsugio, *Kodai tohoku Ajiashi kenkyu* [A study of the ancient history of Northeast Asia] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1966).

¹⁶ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 133.

¹⁷ Jeong, *The Debate*, 61.

Chinese academia supported the idea that Korea was not a culturally autonomous region in the early days, but that it lacked agency, being completely dependent on China. Studies on Lelang performed by academics, such as Li Zongxun,¹⁸ refused the Korean indigenous theory, limiting the geographic expansion of Gocheoson, and fostering the diffusionist theories on the influence of Han commandery.¹⁹

The Korean point of view on Nangnang, Lelang's Korean name, is more complicated. The splitting of the Korean peninsula into two distinctive political units was followed by an academic division. North Korean academia is still crystallized into the thoughts of "resistance historians", active during the colonial period, who refused in toto Japanese interpretation.²⁰ The two official interpretations maintained by the regime is that Nangnang was either an indigenous state,²¹ or a Gocheoson or Koguryeo evidence.²²

On the other hand, South Korea is divided between academics and heterodox scholars. Yi Pyeong-do²³ is the main exponent of Lelang studies in South Korea. He, together with Son Pyeong-hon,²⁴ acknowledges the Japanese interpretation of a Korea dependent on China, sustaining the idea that "semi-sinicized Lelang people became the mainstream of native Korean culture."²⁵ The heterodox scholars, instead, strongly criticize the Japanese claims. Sin Chae-ho²⁶ can be considered the first scholar to go against the mainstream narrative, paving the way to those who are judged as pseudo-historians by the academia. They undermine the Chinese sources on the Han invasion in 108 BC, arguing that it was not as successful as the source tell. The emergent state of Koguryeo would have pushed the Chinese away, and the commanderies were, instead, indigenous states. Lelang commandery would have been the namesake of the indigenous state of Nangnang. A Nangnang king is actually mentioned in a Korean source, the Samguk Sagi (1145). Nevertheless, almost a thousand years had passed between the end of the commandery and the drafting of the Samguk Sagi.²⁷ Furthermore, the location of the commandery is contested. Even if there is some archaeological evidence that places Lelang in modern Pyeongyang, these historians query the authenticity of the

¹⁸ Li Zongxun, "Jin ershi nian lai zhongwai xuejie Gu-Chaoxian de yanjiu yu keti" [A 20-year study in China and abroad on ancient North Korea], *Yanbian daxue xuebao* 49, no. 3 (2016).

¹⁹ Jeong, *The Debate*, 65.

²⁰ Jeong, *The Debate*, 67.

²¹ Andrew Logie, "Enticement of Ancient Empire: Historicized Mythology and (Post)colonial Conspiracies in the Construction of Korean Pseudohistory" in *Invented Traditions in North and South Korea*, ed. Andrew David Jackson, Codruța Sîntionean, Remco Breuker, CedarBough Saeji (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022), 88.

²² Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 128.

²³ Yi Pyeong-do, *Hanguk kodaesa yongu* [Studies on ancient Korean history] (Seoul: Pagyongsa, 1981).

²⁴ Son Pyeong-hon, *Ancient tombs of Korea*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University: 1980.

²⁵ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 134.

²⁶ Sin Chae-ho Tanjae, *Tanjae sin-chaeho chonjip* [Collected works of Tanjae Shin Chae-ho] (Seoul: Tanjae Sin-Chaeho sonsaeng kinyom saophoe: 1972).

²⁷ Logie, "Enticement," 87.

artifacts found on site, considering them mere forgeries. ²⁸

Nevertheless, among this wide variety of theories, not many scholars have analyzed the topic from a museum studies and critical heritage perspective. The artifacts from this site were stored in the Pyeongyang Governor General Museum²⁹ during the colonial period, and then divided among the National Museum of Korea in Seoul, the Korean Central History Museum in Pyeongyang, the Tokyo University Museum, and the Tokyo National Museum. Most of the legacy fell on the South Korean government after the 1945 division of the country. In fact, the Americans took charge of the collections of the Governor General Museum and later the objects were stored in the Lelang gallery at the National Museum in Seoul.³⁰

In my thesis I aim to examine the importance of this site in the geopolitical agenda of the nations involved. My research questions are: “How do the nationalistic narratives influence our knowledge of the Lelang commandery and, more generically speaking, of archaeology? How is this reflected in museum exhibitions?”. In the first chapter, I will discuss the role of museums in East Asia, in particular of the archaeological museums. Archaeological heritage has always been a tool in the hands of politicians. Especially in the case of Lelang, this connection is of relevance, as the site happened to be at the center of the contemporary events of the region (Japanese rule over East Asia first, the Korean war with the following division of the two Koreas after).

In the second chapter, I will focus on the Japanese perspective. I would like to examine the archaeological reports, as they represent one of the first and better examples of a scientific archaeological excavation and documentation. Since the research I conduct is museum-oriented, I will later analyze the artifacts stored in Japanese museums. Due to my lack of knowledge of the Japanese language and the difficulties in finding suitable Japanese sources, the part of the thesis on the Tokyo University Museum collection could be an opportunity for further research.

In the third chapter, I will examine the Korean narrative. At first, I will briefly explain the context in which the South Korean research has been moving in the last decades. Later, I will analyze the National Museum of Korea in Seoul, where part of the Lelang excavated relics are stored and exhibited.

The fourth chapter will deal with the Chinese and North Korean perspectives. China does not hold any artifacts from the Lelang commandery in its museums. However, I believe it is important to

²⁸ Jeong, *The Debate*, 57.

²⁹ 국성하 [Kook Sung-ha], “일제강점기 일본인의 낙랑군 인식과 평양부립박물관 설립” [Japanese perception of Nakranggun and the Establishment of Pyongyang Governor General Museum in Japanese colonization], *Komunhwa* 63, no. 63 (2004): 110.

³⁰ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 130.

take its perspective into account in order to foster a more complete analysis on the subject. With regard to North Korea, I will examine the collection from the Korean Central History Museum in Pyongyang. The limited primary sources from North Korea, especially in English, do not allow me to deepen my study as much as I wish to.

In the fifth and final chapter, “Two Realities in Comparison” I am going to make a comparison of the different narratives analyzed in the previous chapters.

Archaeological data interpretation is subject to the passing of time, the advancement of new technologies, and the political background in which they are conducted. Indeed, it is impossible to be objective and to interpret history without being subject to a bias. Nevertheless, what I am really interested in, are the logics behind the different interpretations and how these are utilized to create a national sense of identity.

Methodology

In order to answer my research questions, I will be using mixed qualitative research methods: a critical discourse analysis and a visual analysis. I will conduct a critical discourse analysis (CDA), which “emphasizes the role of language as a power resource that is related to ideology and socio-cultural change”,³¹ focusing on the relationship between discourse and social elements such as power relations and ideology.³²

When discussing archaeological excavations and data, it is important to explain the effects of power dynamics on the study itself and on the interpretation of the aforementioned excavations. I will analyze museum catalogues, as well as archaeological reports. Moreover, I will also conduct a visual analysis on extant visual materials,³³ such as the photographs taken during the digging in the early 20th century.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The theoretical framework I am going to provide will be based on the social research methods proposed by Alan Bryman³⁴ in his handbook. As the thesis is grounded in the critical heritage studies background, it is important to take the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) into account. The AHD,

³¹ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 536.

³² James Paul Gee, and Michael Handford, *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Routledge Handbooks in Applied Linguistics (London: Routledge, 2012), 9, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203809068>.

³³ Bryman, *Social Research*, 455.

³⁴ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*.

defined by Laurajane Smith in her book “Uses of Heritage”,³⁵ implies that heritage is a discourse, rather than a simple fact.

There are very few studies in English on the Lelang commandery. Researchers, such as Hyung Il Pai,³⁶ have mostly studied the relation between Lelang and the Korean state-formation theories, both from the Korean and from the Japanese perspectives. Scholars such as Defang Zhang and Dae Jae Park have recently analyzed the excavated slips and seals from the site.³⁷ The difficulty in studying this site is exacerbated by the lack of information on how it is managed by the North Korean government and how the new excavations have been conducted since the beginning of the Kim regime (1948-today). For this reason, my only primary sources will be the archaeological data from the 20th century and the artifacts stored in the museums. I would like to conduct an object-focused analysis highlighting how, the museums in Korea and Japan, have exhibited the archaeological finds, from the colonial period till today, according to their nationalist narratives.

Then, my primary sources will be the two editions of the National Museum of Korea catalogue, published in 1972³⁸ and in 2007³⁹ respectively, the Korean Central Historical Museum catalogue from 1989,⁴⁰ and the catalogue from the exhibition “The Ancient Culture of Nangnang”⁴¹ held at the National Museum of Korea in 2000. To examine the Ogura collection, which contains the Lelang artifacts stored at the Tokyo National Museum, I will use the 1982 *Ogura collection: donated by the Ogura foundation*⁴² catalogue, and the 2005 *Ogura Kōlleksyōn Han'guk*⁴³ published by the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage in South Korea. In acknowledging that these catalogues are not recent, I will consult the museums website to make my thesis more in line with the present and consider contemporary sources as well. As primary sources, I will also make use of the excavation reports⁴⁴ and of the photographs taken during the digging in the early 20th century.

Regarding the secondary sources, I will use several articles and books, written both in English

³⁵ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006): 11-44.

³⁶ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*.

³⁷ Defang Zhang, “Using Excavated Slips to Look at Effective Governance of the Northern Frontier during the Han Dynasty—The Lelang Commandery in Han Slips,” *Bamboo and Silk* 4, no. 2 (2021): 336–64, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24689246-00402014>.

³⁸ Kungnip Pangmulgwan, *The National Museum of Korea*, (Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 1972).

³⁹ Lee, Kyong-hee, Roderick Whitfield, Ted Chan, and Kungnip Pangmulgwan, *National Museum of Korea* (Seoul: Cultural Foundation of National Museum of Korea, 2007).

⁴⁰ Korean Central History Museum, *The Korean Central History Museum* (Pyongyang: the Museum, 1989).

⁴¹ 국립 중앙 박물관 [National Museum of Korea], 낙랑 樂浪 [The Ancient Culture of Nangnang] (Seoul: The National Museum of Korea & Sol Publication, 2001).

⁴² *Ogura collection: donated by the Ogura foundation (to the Tokyo National Museum)* (Tokyo: National Museum Tokyo, 1982), 4.

⁴³ Kungnip Munhwajae Yōn'guso [National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage], *Ogura Kōlleksyōn Han'guk munhwajae: Ilbon Tok'yo Kungnip Pangmulgwan sojang*. [The Korean Cultural Properties in the Ogura Collection: Collection of the Tokyo National Museum] (Seoul: National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, 2005).

⁴⁴ “関野調査カード” [Sekino excavation report], Tokyo University Museum, accessed May 14, 2022, http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DAnnex/sekino_cards/recordlist.php?-max=25&-action=findall&-skip=413&-link=ALL.

and in Korean. The main sources will be Pai's *Constructing Korean origins* (2000), where two extensive chapters on Lelang can be found, and *Ilbon e innun Nangyang yumul* (2008) by Yi Hyunhye, which contains an accurate review of the Lelang items stored in Japan.

1. Museums in East Asia: The Difficulties of a Contested Heritage

1.1. Museums and Nationalism

According to the definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), “a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment.”⁴⁵ This idea of a museum as an institution open to the public started in 1683, when the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford opened to the general public.⁴⁶ However, a museum is not just a place where tangible and intangible heritage are displayed to visitors for education or enjoyment.

The storytelling of a museum is influenced by different voices, some of them coming from politicians. Anywhere in the world, cultural institutions are always influenced by social and political processes. Heritage and museums are important in order to maintain an identity and a relationship with the territory.⁴⁷ The strong bond between museums and nations is particularly strong in the case of national museums, such as the British Museum, which was also the first in the world. In the 19th century, museums were born amid the nation-state formation, while most of the countries were trying to define their own self. National museums helped in the expression of this identity.⁴⁸ In Laurajane Smith's theory about the *authorized heritage discourse*, heritage is a cultural practice constructed and regulated by a hegemonic discourse which refuses alternative ideas.⁴⁹

As I aim to analyze in this thesis, the AHD is extremely present in national museums in East Asia, especially when they deal with archaeology and ancient history. As the American archaeologist Neil Asher Silberman states: “archaeological interpretation and the public presentation of archaeological monuments are used to support the prestige or power of modern nation-states.”⁵⁰ This

⁴⁵ “Museum Definition,” ICOM, accessed 26th June 2022. <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

⁴⁶ “History of Museum,” History of Museums, accessed 26th June 2022. <http://www.historyofmuseums.com>

⁴⁷ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past. Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1992), 38.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 197.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 11.

⁵⁰ Neil Asher Silberman, “Nationalism and Archaeology,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 103.

quote is especially relevant if we consider the East Asian context. Japan, China, North and South Korea have a rich and ancient past, in certain cases shared among them as, during the millennia, they constantly influenced each other. Since prehistory, the cultural interaction has been so strong to become the main driving force in the formation of the first state societies in northern China, Japan, and Korea.⁵¹

Nevertheless, the modern and contemporary events, such as the Korean War, the Second World War, and the Cold War, made the recognition of this cultural exchange impossible, even though testified by archaeological data. The East Asian narrative on heritage is generally focused on an idea of uniqueness and superiority with respect to the neighboring nation-states.

This attitude, attended in archaeological papers, is also shown in museum practices. The three major Asian museums I would like to examine are the National Museum of Korea in Seoul, the Tokyo National Museum, and the Korean Central History Museum in Pyongyang: all three hold artifacts from the Han Commandery of Lelang. I will not analyze the Tokyo University Museum as, being an academic institution, its study would go beyond the scope of this chapter.

1.2. National Museums in East Asia

Any interpretation of archaeology and of the past is connected to the ideologies and politics of the times.⁵² The artifacts stored inside the national museums, such as the National Museum of China, the National Museum of Korea, the Tokyo National Museum, or the Korean Central History Museum, sometimes share a troubled history of colonialism, revisionism, and nationalism. This is especially true in the case study I aim to examine, the Lelang objects which are stocked in the museums of Seoul, Tokyo, and Pyeongyang. These national museums have a collection which ranges from archaeological objects, to paintings, and furniture. However, this thesis will consider the archaeological collection only, and its relationship with nationalism.

⁵¹ Jack Davey, "Culture Contact and Cultural Boundaries in Iron Age Southern Korea," *Asian Perspectives* Vol 58, No. 1 (2019): 123.

⁵² Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 129.



Figure 2 - National Museum of Korea⁵³

The National Museum of Korea was established on 3rd December 1945. Before that date, the building was where the Cheoson Government-General Museum was located. Even if at that time the collection was small, its existence was a strong signal for the restoration of Korean pride. It also helped in dealing with the historical revisionism carried out by the Japanese during the colonial years.⁵⁴ In fact, the permanent collection of the National Museum is undoubtedly connected to the digs performed by the Japanese scholars, when Korean archaeologists were still excluded.⁵⁵ Archaeology is a discipline which relies on the interpretation of data, and the narratives carried by the Japanese were strongly against the recognition of a Korean cultural independence from the neighboring countries.⁵⁶ For this main reason, archaeology in South Korea, as in the other East Asian countries, did not develop as politically neutral, but it became an instrument for the reconstruction of the nation state.⁵⁷ The objects excavated in those years, later exhibited in the National Museum, had to deal with this heavy heritage. Korean curators had to untangle from the previous point of view in order to justify the items' presence inside the museum. This happened with the Lelang collection, as I will explain in Chapter 3.

⁵³ "National Museum of Korea," Museums: Museums of the World, accessed 29 June 2022.
<http://museu.ms/museum/details/16316/national-museum-of-korea>

⁵⁴ "History," National Museum of Korea, accessed 27 June 2022.
https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/content/history_1945

⁵⁵ Hae Woon Park, and Kaya Wee, "The Nationalistic Trend in South Korean Archaeology: Documenting the Development of a Unilinear Evolutionary Trajectory of a Homogeneous Korean People," *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* Vol 12, No. 3 (2016): 311.

⁵⁶ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 129.

⁵⁷ Park, and Wee, "The Nationalistic Trend," 306.



Figure 3 - Tokyo National Museum⁵⁸

The Tokyo National Museum is the oldest national museum in Japan, established in 1872, originated by the Yushima Seido, an exhibition of imperial artworks and stuffed animals.⁵⁹ With the Kyoto, Nara, and Kyushu National Museums, it is one of the museums that are operated by the National Institutes for Cultural Heritage.⁶⁰ It is divided in the Japanese gallery; the Heiseikan; which includes the Japanese Archaeology Gallery; the Toyokan (Asian Gallery); the Horyuji Homotsukan, which contains the relics from the Horyu Temple in Nara. The museum also has smaller sections such as the Hyokeikan, constructed for the marriage of Crown Prince Yoshihito and Sadako Kujo; the Kuroda Memorial Hall, which hosts the artworks of the artist Kuroda Seiki; and the Shiryoakan, the Research and Information Center.⁶¹

The museum has changed its name throughout the years: it was called Tokyo Imperial Museum from the 1889 to 1900, later it changed to Tokyo Imperial Household Museum till the 1947, and National Museum from 1947 to 1950.⁶² The change of the name, from the end of 20th century to nowadays, expresses the shift of its aim, mostly justified by historical events. The Empire of Japan lasted till 3rd May 1947.⁶³ The fall of the empire required a name modification in many institutions,

⁵⁸ "Tokyo National Museum: The Complete Guide," TripSavvy, accessed 29 June 2022.

<https://www.tripsavvy.com/tokyo-national-museum-complete-guide-5087870>

⁵⁹ "Yushima Seido Exposition," Tokyo National Museum, accessed 27 June 2022.

https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=144

⁶⁰ "Home," National Institutes for Cultural Heritage, accessed 27 June 2022. <https://www.nich.go.jp/english/>

⁶¹ "Regular Exhibition," Tokyo National Museum, accessed 27 June 2022.

https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=2501

⁶² "Tokyo National Museum," Britannica, accessed 28 June 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tokyo-National-Museum>

⁶³ "Empire of Japan," Britannica, accessed 28 June 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Empire-of-Japan>

among which the museum, changing from an imperial establishment to a national one. Until 1947 the museum was owned by the imperial family who wanted to focus on cultural and scientific studies.⁶⁴ Later on, ownership was held by the Ministry of Education, until 2001 when it was placed under the Independent Administrative Institution National Museum. Since 2007 it has belonged to the Independent Administrative Institution National Institutes for Cultural Heritage.⁶⁵ In the museum, the Korean collection, along with the Lelang artifacts, are exhibited in the Toyokan, the Asian Gallery.



Figure 4 - Korean Central History Museum⁶⁶

North Korea does not have a national museum; however, the closest institution to it is the Korean Central History Museum. With its collection that ranges from prehistory to modern times, the museum was established on 1st December 1945. As it can be read in the English catalogue of the museum, its establishment was part of Kim Il Sung's plan for a "flourishing national culture in a liberated (from Japan) homeland."⁶⁷ The catalogue focuses on the magnanimity of the Great Leader who found time to visit the museum amidst the fight for revolution. He added that the Korean Central Historical Museum would have functioned as "sanctuary of the Juche science of history".⁶⁸

⁶⁴ "Ueno Museum: The Original Honkan," Tokyo National Museum, accessed 28 June 2022. https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=150

⁶⁵ "Home," National Institutes for Cultural Heritage.

⁶⁶ "Korean Central History Museum," KKFOnline, accessed 29 June 2022. <https://kkfonline.com/2020/06/01/korean-central-history-museum/>

⁶⁷ Korean Central History Museum, *The Korean Central History Museum* (Pyongyang: The Museum: 1989), 6.

⁶⁸ Korean Central History Museum, *The Korean Central History Museum*, 6.

2. The Japanese Narrative

2.1. Excavating Lelang



Figure 5 - Lelang and the surrounding tombs⁶⁹

The site of Lelang (Chinese name) or Nangnang (Korean name) is believed to be located in the south bank of the Taedonggang river in Pyeongyang (North Korea).⁷⁰ The fortress (red area in the map above) was constructed on a promontory in an area called T'osong-ni.⁷¹ It is surrounded by the river on three sides. More than 2000 tombs were excavated in the area surrounding the earthen fortress. The main concentration of burial was to the south and west of the fortress.⁷² The site measured 700 m from east to west and 600 m from north to south.⁷³ According to Komai Kazuchika, the commandery was established in the area of modern Pyongyang by emperor Wu (156-87 BC) after the destruction of the capital of Gocheoson, Wanggom-song, in 108 BC. He also proposed to move Lelang to the exact location of T'osong-ni at a later time, in 82 BC.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Hyon-hye Yi, and Toyo Bunko, *Ilbon e innun Nangnang yumul* (Soul T'ukpyolsi: Hagyon Munhwasa, 2008):19.

⁷⁰ Hyon-hye Yi, and Toyo Bunko, *Ilbon e innun Nangnang yumul* (Soul T'ukpyolsi: Hagyon Munhwasa, 2008):17.

⁷¹ “精神のエクスペディション” [Sekino Tadashi's Ancient Korea survey], Tokyo University Museum, accessed 14 May 2022. http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DKankoub/Publish_db/1997Expedition/02/020200.html

⁷² Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 166.

⁷³ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 162.

⁷⁴ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 166.

The first surveys of the site date from the period between 1909 to 1915. In 1909, the Japanese architecture historian Sekino Tadashi (1868-1935) conducted the first investigation on the ground. He examined some burials, including the Seokam-dong tomb. However, he did not recognize the site as a Han commandery, but as Koguryeo remains. The following year, anthropologist Torii Ryuzo argued that the ruins belonged to the Lelang commandery. According to him, Chinese influence in Japan spread from the Han commanderies in Korea⁷⁵. That same year, the historian Ryu Imanishi also started to link the Pyeongyang site to the commandery.

In 1913 a new survey was conducted by Sekino and other brick tombs were uncovered in the Nangnang district.⁷⁶ The attention was focused on the walls with Chinese-style roof tile pieces.⁷⁷ During those year a historical and archaeological debate started in Japan over the construction period of the site and the time period of the commandery ruling.⁷⁸

In the same year, new confirmation of the right identification of the site as Lelang came: the small hill on site, T'osong-ni (figure 6), was identified as the remains of the ancient fortress thanks to the discovery of brick inscriptions. Furthermore, a stele inscription had the same names as the Lelang county names recorded in the Hanshu and in the Hou-Hanshu (figure 2-3).⁷⁹ Nevertheless, some scholars were still identifying the site as a Koguryeo or even as the capital Wanggom-song, the capital of Gocheoson.⁸⁰ In 1916 the excavations revealed wood and brick tombs as well as Han burial goods (bronzes, lacquerware, ornaments).⁸¹ During those years, the Japanese government took some pictures after the surveys in the T'osong-ni area. Most of these photographs, stored as dry plates, are still available for consultation on the National Museum of Korea⁸² and on the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage⁸³ websites.

⁷⁵ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 132.

⁷⁶ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 160.

⁷⁷ “精神のエクスペディション”, Tokyo University Museum.

⁷⁸ Yi, *Ilbon*, 18.

⁷⁹ Hyung Il Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 132.

⁸⁰ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 160.

⁸¹ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 133.

⁸² “국립중앙박물관 소장 조선총독부박물관 유리건판” [Glass Dry Plate at the Museum of Government-General of Korea], accessed 14 May 2022.

https://www.museum.go.kr/dryplate/category_list.do?ids1=A&ids1_title=고고&ids2=A03&ids2_title=낙랑&cnt=4053&separator=ids.

⁸³ “국립중앙박물관 소장 조선총독부박물관 유리건판” [Glass Dry Plate at the Museum of Government-General of Korea], National Museum of Korea, accessed 14 May 2022.

https://www.museum.go.kr/dryplate/category_list.do?ids1=A&ids1_title=고고&ids2=A03&ids2_title=낙랑&cnt=4053&separator=ids.

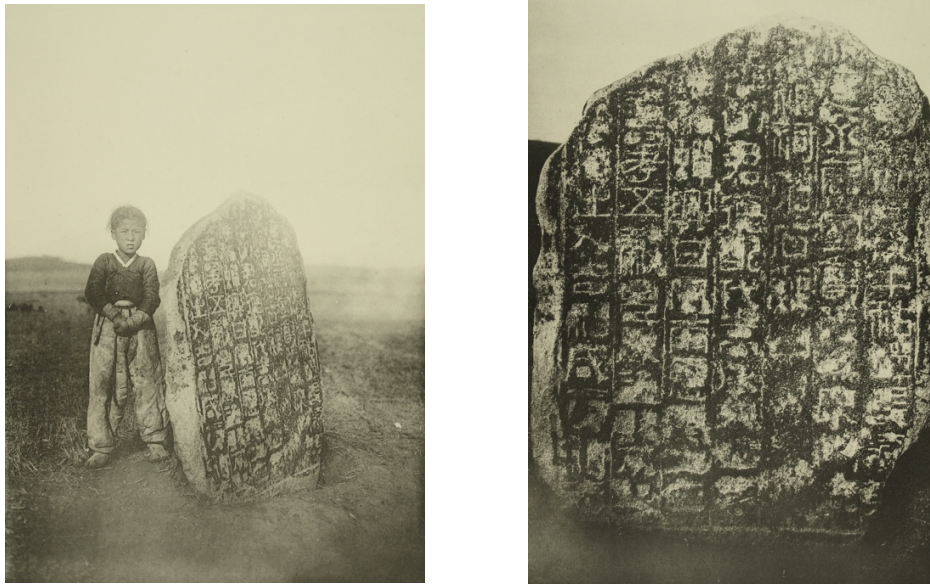


Figure 6 – 7 - Inscribed stele from Nianti-xian, a Han County⁸⁴

These two pictures (figure 6 and 7) represent the finding, in 1913, of a stele inscription in the T'osong-ni area. The body of the stele is 150cm high and engraved with Chinese seal characters. The text provides information about a shrine and the relative rituals conducted during the second year of the emperor Yuanhe (407-479). The name of a Lelang county, Nianti-xian is also provided. According to the Japanese interpretation, the text can be considered evidence of Lelang's presence in T'osong-ni.

However, this monument is quite controversial in Korea, as many scholars, especially those deemed “pseudo-historians”, argue that it was the result of a forgery made by the Japanese in order to convince everyone that the site corresponded to the commandery ⁸⁵.

⁸⁴ “유리건판” [Glass Dry Plate], National Museum of Korea.

https://portal.nrich.go.kr/kor/filePopUpImage.do?relmenucd=616&relkey=1&fileTypeCd=364&popType=P&file_idx=203182&rowType=Y&st=&sk=#link

⁸⁵ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 130.



Figure 8: earthenware finds⁸⁶

In this picture (figure 8) from 1916, a piece of layered earthenware can be seen appearing from the wall. As mentioned earlier, since 1912 archaeologists were discovering walls, bricks and earthenware coming up from the ground.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, as we have mentioned above, the archaeologists had much evidence to believe that T'osong-ni could be Lelang. One of the reasons why the Japanese archaeologists believed so was the style of the bricks found in this area: they were Chinese-style roof tile pieces.⁸⁸ However, whether it was Lelang or not, that could be only assessed with further excavations only. 1916 is a significant year for Lelang because the Gouvernement-General of Korea promoted the excavation of Nangnang tombs.

⁸⁶ “유리건판” [Glass Dry Plate], National Museum of Korea.

⁸⁷ “関野フィールドカード 東京大学総合研究博物館 小石川分館” [Sekino Field Card, University of Tokyo Research Museum], Tokyo University Museum, accessed 28 June 2022. http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DAnnex/sekino_cards/recordlist.php?-skip=5654&-max=25.

⁸⁸ “関野貞の朝鮮古蹟調査” [Sekino Field Card], Tokyo University Museum.

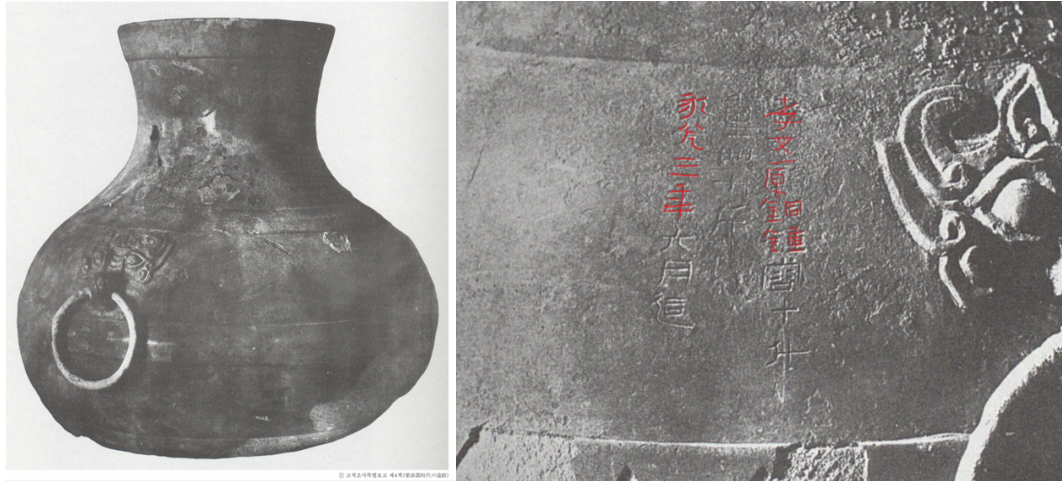


Figure 9-10: Bell⁸⁹

In 1920, during railroad construction, a bell was excavated on the site of the Pyeongyang Middle School. It was unearthed along with bronzes. There are three bands on the upper, middle, and lower parts of the bell's body and at the mouth. Three lines of inscriptions are engraved on the body of the bell. Yeonggwang is the era name of the emperor Yuan (49-33 BC) in the former Han Dynasty. The production date of the bell is 41 BC.⁹⁰

This bell became a controversial artefact: along with the stele found in 1913, these two artifacts represent the overwhelming evidence of Lelang in modern Pyeongyang. The controversy surrounding the bell questions the presumed location of the Filial Piety shrine in the Nangnang region.⁹¹ However, since this controversy is still persistent in contemporary Korean scholarship, I will discuss it further in the last chapter when I compare between Korea and Japan.

⁸⁹ “고고학으로 본 낙랑군” [Nangnang seen through archaeology], Prezi, accessed 14 May 2022, <https://prezi.com/yatuxad7iqu3/presentation/?frame=39375df9b543c5cf12d8acf0ec2f98998be88827>.

⁹⁰ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 164.

⁹¹ “한일역사전쟁 ‘금지된 장난, 일제 낙랑군 유물조작’ 다큐 - K 스피릿” [Korean-Japanese Historical War "Forbidden Pranks, Manipulation of Relics of the Japanese Occupation's Nangnang Army" documentary], IKorea Spirit, accessed 14 May 14 2022, <http://www.ikoreanspirit.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=14813>.



Figure 11: T'osong-ni hill⁹²

In the picture above (figure 11) from 1922, it is possible to see the small hill in the T'osong-ni area. To be more precise, this is the western part of the hill. Underneath it, the archaeologists found the ancient fortress of Lelang. In the picture, four people, probably locals, can be seen in the middle of the field. The museum does not have information on who they are, but it could be possible that the Japanese archaeologists assisted by local farmers to better explore the fields surrounding the hill. This photograph was taken in 1922.⁹³ According to the survey data of this decade, it is known that there are about 1600 tombs around T'oseong-ni, though only 70 of them were excavated by the Japanese.

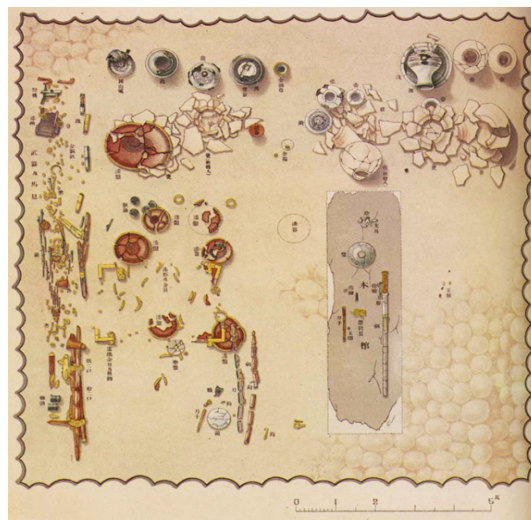


Figure 12: Seokam-ri Tomb No. 9⁹⁴

In 1926 Yoshido Harada commenced the excavation of the Seokam-ri Tomb No. 9. Inside the tomb, dating back to the 1st century CE, a gold belt buckle was found. However, I am going to discuss

⁹² “유리건판” [Glass Dry Plate], National Museum of Korea.

⁹³ “유리건판” [Glass Dry Plate], National Museum of Korea.

⁹⁴ “고고학으로 본 낙랑군” [Nangnang seen through archaeology], Prezi.

this artefact more extensively in the chapter dedicated to the National Museum of Korea in Seoul, since it is exhibited there.⁹⁵

After 1931, the excavation projects were carried out under the leadership of the Cheoson Koseki Kenkyukai (朝鮮古蹟研究会), the Korean Antiquities Research Association, to support the excavation of the Japanese Government-General of Korea. Yoshido Harada was the one in charge of the investigation.⁹⁶ On the hill in T'osong-ni, tiles and bricks were found. The most important inscription for identifying the site as Lelang commandery were those of “Lelang liguan”, “Lelang fugui”, “qianqiu wansui”. Molds for the banliang coins were discovered, indicating local minting activities at the site.

As I have tried to underline in the previous paragraphs, there are several archaeological artifacts that are considered by the Japanese as overwhelming proofs of the connection between the T'osong-ni area and Lelang commandery. One of these is pottery: Lelang pottery is different from Korean native wares because they used to make use of the potter's wheel. The pottery from T'osong-ni resembles Han burial ware from tombs in the Liaodong area.⁹⁷ Bronzes were found in the area as well and they resemble the finds excavated in Warring States period fortresses or in Han palaces of the Latter Han dynasty.⁹⁸ The seals had a great value as well in the recognition of the site as Lelang: the majority of them, both official and private types, were related to the Han administration or military. The site dating relied on the eaves tiles and on the bronze bell discovered in 1920.

2.2. Lelang Artifacts in the Tokyo: Tokyo University Museum and Tokyo National Museum (1500)

Where did the artifacts from the Lelang site go? The majority of the objects are exhibited in Seoul, at the National Museum of Korea. Nevertheless, some of them are still in Japan, stored in the Tokyo National Museum and in the Tokyo University Museum.

It has been hard to research the Lelang collections of these two cultural institutions: little academic research on these artefacts has been made in English. The main source I am going to use are the websites of these museums and the Ogura collection catalogues. This disclaimer is necessary as to make the reader aware of the incompleteness of this analysis. After having been excavated by the Japanese archaeologists, the remains were organized under the pretext of writing a report that would have been published. Most of them were stored in the Department of Literature, University of

⁹⁵ “Gold Belt Buckle | Curator's Picks”, National Museum of Korea, accessed 14 May 2022, <https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/archive/united/14938>.

⁹⁶ Yi, *Ilbon*, 18.

⁹⁷ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 163.

⁹⁸ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 164.

Tokyo. The reason behind the artefacts location is because the colonial Governor-General's Office hired professors and students mainly from the Tokyo Imperial University, which after 1947 became the University of Tokyo.⁹⁹ The excavation notes are available for consultation on the University Museum's website. Besides these, it is possible to examine technical drawings of the artifacts, planimetries, and pictures.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, the items stored in the Japanese university seemed to have been neglected for a very long time. According to Yi Hyeon-hye, who wrote an extensive study on the Lelang collection in the museum, the reports regarding these relics were not published before 1964 and, even at that point, no new element was added to the research. After that brief investigation, the first study on the Lelang objects held in Japan was performed by Yi herself,¹⁰¹ organizing and writing partial reports of the objects stored in the Archaeology Lab at the University of Tokyo.¹⁰² More than 223 objects are stored at the University of Tokyo. Most of the artifacts were kept in plastic bags and dirty wooden boxes. The outer side of them had information about the contents written in chalk, with the high risk of erasing it. Some boxes contained a mixture of artifacts from different sites. For example, some items excavated from Kyeongju, the capital of Unified Silla (57 BC-935 CE) were found in a box with the word "Lelang fortress" on it. Sekino's son, Yusei, took care and rearranged the collection; nevertheless, afterwards these objects were stored without a lid, causing the mingle of relics from different periods and sites.¹⁰³

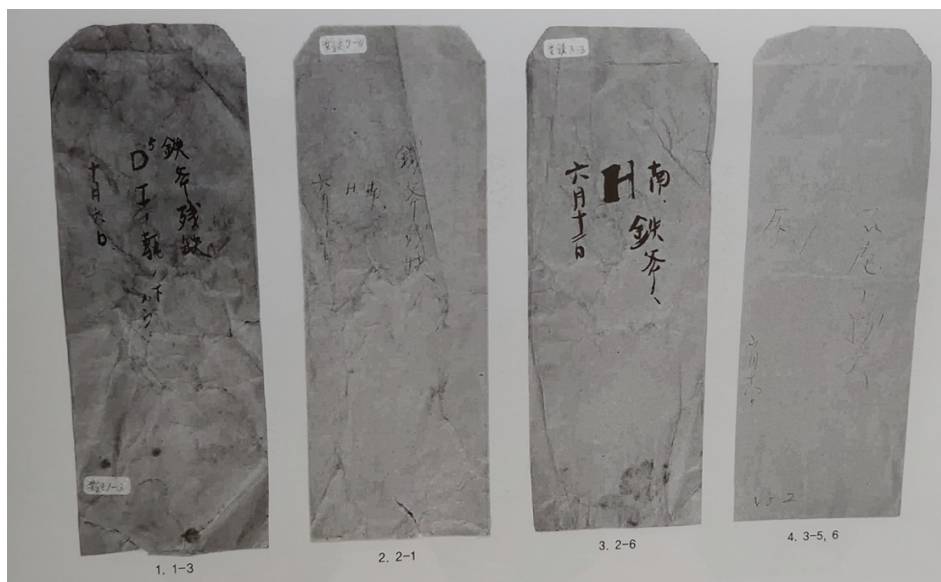


Figure 13 - Iron Relics Storage Bag¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 128.

¹⁰⁰ “関野フィールドカード” [Sekino Field Card], Tokyo University Museum.

¹⁰¹ Yi, *Ilbon*.

¹⁰² Yi, *Ilbon*, 18.

¹⁰³ Yi, *Ilbon*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Yi, *Ilbon*, 353.



Figure 14 - Tiles from the Tokyo University Museum¹⁰⁵

Yi performed a remarkable work in organizing and studying the Tokyo University Museum collection in 2000: she examined the tiles, ironware, and pottery coming from the surrounding tombs of the Lelang area.

Without further analyzing the objects from an archaeological perspective, since it goes beyond the goal of this thesis, it is interesting to note how the collection from Lelang has been neglected for years inside the museum depository. Apart from the excavation documents, the Tokyo University Museum website does not have much information on the collection stored inside the institution. I believe that the lack of sources from the museum itself and the carelessness with which the artifacts have been treated could be deemed as a statement. Indeed, the selection of the items to exhibit is a conscious choice performed by curators and museum directors, with consequences on the historical interpretation of the objects.

¹⁰⁵ Yi, *Ilbon*, 302.

The Tokyo National Museum, instead, has a limited selection of objects from the commandery. The Lelang collection is stored in the Asian gallery, Toyokan, among other Korean artifacts. To be more precise, the gallery holds thematic exhibitions in which the objects are connected to deepen a particular topic. Room 10 presents the polished stone tools and metal objects from the Korean Peninsula: the Lelang collection can be found in this section. The Korean objects selected are considered important from the Japanese point of view as they had a strong influence on the Yayoi culture (300 BC-300 CE),¹⁰⁶ known for wet-rice cultivation.¹⁰⁷



Figure 15 - Eaves Tile with inscription¹⁰⁸

Most of the Korean collection in the Tokyo National Museum, including the Lelang artifacts, comes from the Ogura collection. This is the name given to the Korean archaeological and artistic items that were collected by Ogura Dakenosuke. Born in 1870, he became the owner of Daehung Electric and Namson Electric Trust in Korea. While working there, Ogura collected Korean relics, from the 1921 till the 1950s. He decided to start collecting Cheoson's artifacts because through them, it was possible to reconstruct Japanese ancient history.¹⁰⁹ The collection was divided between his house in Daegu, South Korea, and the other one in Tokyo. Moving back to Japan, the Daegu collection remained in Korea, while the Japanese one was donated to the Foundation for the Preservation of Ogura's Collection. In 1982 the collection was given to the Tokyo National Museum "in order to preserve it (...) *en masse* permanently, and that it may be made available for wider use."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ "Polished Stone Tools and Metal Tools of Korea," Tokyo National Museum, accessed 28 June 2022.

https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_exhibition/index.php?controller=item&id=6975

¹⁰⁷ "Yayoi Culture (ca. 300 BC-300 AD)," Met Museum, accessed 28 June 2022.

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/yayo/hd_yayo.htm

¹⁰⁸ "Polished Stone," Tokyo National Museum.

¹⁰⁹ Choe Kwangshik, "Silla Art and the Silk Road," *International Journal of Korean History* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2014): 8.

¹¹⁰ *Ogura collection*, Tokyo National Museum, 4.

The importance of the objects included in the Ogura collection is such that the Korean government asked Japan to return the artifacts. Nevertheless, the request was refused by Tokyo since the collection technically belongs to a family (Ogura's relatives) and was not smuggled from Korea on behalf of the museum.¹¹¹ The circumstances in which the Lelang relics, along with other important evidence of Korean ancient history and art, were taken from Korea to Japan increases the controversy related to the Japanese colonial rule in the country and the impact that it had on the history of Korean archaeology.

I have consulted two special catalogues dedicated to the Ogura Collection: one dates to 1982 and comes from the Tokyo National Museum;¹¹² the second one, 오구라 컬렉션 한국문화재 (The Korean Cultural Properties in the Ogura Collection),¹¹³ was issued by the Korean National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage in 2005. The former, apart from an abstract in English and Japanese, does not have enough text: most of the catalogue is filled up with plates of the artifacts coming from the collection. Essential information about the objects, such as the place of discovery, the period, and the title, are provided at the end of the book in English and Japanese. The 1982 catalogue shows 65 objects coming from the Lelang commandery, most of them from funerary contexts.¹¹⁴

The catalogue published by the Korean National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage is, instead, accompanied by long descriptions of individual items, as well as an exhaustive introduction to the history of the collection. The abstract is provided in English and Chinese, while the rest of the book is in Korean and Japanese. When considering the archaeological objects of the Ogura collection, the ratio between the number of Korean objects (557) and objects from China, Japan, and other areas (18 in total)¹¹⁵ is considerable. The Tokyo National Museum has 4800 Korean cultural assets in total.¹¹⁶ In this edition, 57 artifacts from the commanderies are shown. One of them originates from the Han commandery of Daifang (204-314), in the south of Lelang.¹¹⁷

Each of the relics displayed in the National Research Institute's catalogue are followed by a comprehensive description in Korean and Japanese.

¹¹¹ Choe, "Silla Art," 9.

¹¹² *Ogura Collection*, Tokyo National Museum.

¹¹³ Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, *Ogura Kŏlleksyŏn Han'guk munhwajae*.

¹¹⁴ *Ogura Collection*, Tokyo National Museum.

¹¹⁵ Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, *Ogura Kŏlleksyŏn Han'guk*, 9.

¹¹⁶ Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, *Ogura Kŏlleksyŏn Han'guk*, 12.

¹¹⁷ "Daifang Commandery," Google Arts & Culture, accessed 30 June 2022.
<https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/daifang-jun/m0119ch>



Figure 16 - Model of a Cooking Stove¹¹⁸

This miniature model of a cooking stove (figure 16) is made of earthenware with green glaze. The shape is a trapezoid with four corners, and the vertical cross section is rectangular. Wavy patterns are applied to the left and right. There is an overhang on the fire mouth. The chimney, extremely small, is placed separately.¹¹⁹



Figure 17 – Incense Burner¹²⁰

The incense burner in Figure 17 is also made of earthenware with green glaze. This type, called Baksan-ro, was popular in the Han period: covered with a mountain-shaped on top, the bottom part of the lid symbolized the sea. Thirteen mountain peaks were arranged horizontally.¹²¹ I have chosen these two items from the catalogue of the Ogura collection because they are the only Lelang artifacts

¹¹⁸ “Polished Stone,” Tokyo National Museum.

¹¹⁹ Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, *Ogura Kōlleksyŏn Han'guk*, 270.

¹²⁰ Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, *Ogura Kōlleksyŏn Han'guk*, 269.

¹²¹ Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, *Ogura Kōlleksyŏn Han'guk*, 269.

shown in the Tokyo National Museum website. Apart from these, the rest of the collection seemed to have been neglected, at least virtually.

The Lelang relics of the Ogura collection hold extremely important historical data: some bricks are engraved with the names and official titles of the occupants or builder of the tombs, giving useful information on the historical events related to the Korean region at the turn of the 1st century BC and 1st century CE.¹²²

¹²² Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, *Ogura Kŏlleksyŏn Han'guk*, 534.

3. The South Korean Narrative

Even if a part of the objects is stored in Japanese museums, most of the artifacts excavated in Lelang are in Seoul, at the National Museum of Korea. The South Korean museum has a whole gallery dedicated to the controversial site, called Lelang gallery.¹²³ After the division of the two Koreas, the South had to deal with the heavy legacy left behind by the Japanese after years of colonial rule. In 1945, the American soldiers, in charge of the collections of the Chosen Sotokufu Museum, moved the objects into the new National Museum.

Why is this problematic for Koreans? In the 1980s a huge debate ensued regarding the location of Gocheoson, in comparison with the commandery. The discussion was led by Yun Nae-hyon¹²⁴ who predated Gocheoson and made its geographical territory larger, including this way Pyeongyang and, the area of the commandery. The scholar rejected the hypothesis that the Han commanderies ever existed on Korean ground, refusing the idea that Korean society, at such an early stage, had external influences.¹²⁵

This narrative has not disappeared in South Korea up to this day: the Youtube channel STB, a history broadcast, shared the video of a 2020 conference about Lelang¹²⁶ held by Shim Baek-kang. Shim is the president of the National Culture Research Center.¹²⁷ He also published a book about Lelang and the other Han commanderies.¹²⁸ The historian states that Japan would have reduced the duration of Gocheoson's history on purpose in order to incorporate the Han commandery of Lelang. In his opinion, it is important to determine Lelang's location because it would make the understanding of Gocheoson and Koguryeo events clearer. Shin identifies the location of the commandery around the Liaoning area, not in Pyeongyang, as showed in Figure 8.

¹²³ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 130.

¹²⁴ Yun Nae-Hyon, *Hanguk Kodaesa Sillon* [A New Theory of ancient Korea] (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1986).

¹²⁵ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 129.

¹²⁶ “낙랑군 위치에 대한 논란 22 분 총정리,” Youtube, accessed 18 June 2022.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mrVDitWuZM&t=438s>

¹²⁷ “Historical Roots found in Amity Between Korea, Vietnam,” The Korea Times, accessed 18 June 2022.

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2019/03/120_266258.html?fbclid=IwAR16kWRdLEswntFcKCMqlffYrYCCn7EfP1KI6c6B_pQM55tnaKKCgPhkYFk

¹²⁸ Shim Baek-kang, *사고전서 사료로 보는 한사군의 낙랑* [Han Sagun's Nangnang as a source for historical records] (Seoul: bareun yoksa, 2014).



Figure 18 - Lelang's location according to Shim¹²⁹

The reason why the presence of Lelang artifacts at the National Museum of Korea is still problematic today is that these finds are clearly not forgeries. Scholars, in particular the North Korean Hong Kimun (1949), believed that Fujita and Sekino, the archaeologists who dug Lelang, and the police officers who helped them shipping the remains to the Sotofuku Museum in Seoul, were involved in the creation of forgeries to confirm the seat of the Han commandery in the site of Tosong-ni. 130

In South Korea the debate on the site is heartfelt by both scholars and the general public: for Koreans, the interpretation of this site plays an important role in the post-colonial reappropriation of their ancient history. Academics such as Yun in the 1980s or Shim nowadays, are still highly skeptical about the Japanese interpretation of archaeological documentation and whether Lelang was truly located in Pyeongyang. Moreover, even if online comments cannot be deemed as reliable for an academic thesis, the comments underneath Shim's discussion on Youtube confirm involvement and excitement of the Korean public towards this archaeological site, and towards their ancient history. Some netizens commented with strong emotional participation, arguing that Korea should pursue a historical liberation; others expressed how proud they were of being Korean; one also complimented the logic behind Shim's argument.¹³¹

¹²⁹ “낙랑군 위치에 대한 논란 22 분 총정리” [22-minute Summary of the Controversy over the Location of Nangnang], Youtube, accessed 18 June 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mrVDitWuZM&t=438s>

¹³⁰ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 129.

¹³¹ “낙랑군 위치에 대한 논란 22 분 총정리”, Youtube.

Consequently, the presence of the Lelang objects in Seoul causes a curatorial problem, as the National Museum should tell the story of this site in an objective way; however, neutrality is impossible to be achieved anywhere, especially in a post-colonial context.

3.1. National Museum of Korea

How has the National Museum of Korea approached the challenge of taking care of these controversial artifacts? In this chapter I am going to analyze three different publications related to the musealization of Lelang in Seoul. The first one is the catalogue from 1972¹³², while the second one is the edited version from 2007.¹³³ The last primary source I am going to examine is the catalogue from the temporary exhibition of 2001 dedicated to the site in the same museum.¹³⁴

As mentioned before, the collection was placed by the Americans in the National Museum of Korea when it was created, after South Korea gained its independence in 1945. The artifacts were moved from one venue to the other, as the National Museum changed its location six times because of war devastations, and relocations. In 2005 the museum reopened in a new building, located in the Yongsan, the “geographic heart of Seoul.”¹³⁵

In 1972 the museum catalogue was published, with didactic texts about the collections in Korean, English, and Japanese. Since my knowledge of Korean is limited and I do not have a knowledge of the Japanese language, I will analyze the English text regarding Lelang. The commandery section is inserted into the “Historical Period” section, within the Three Kingdoms subsection, with the transliteration *Lo-lang*. The text lectures the reader about the history of Lelang: the commanderies are defined as provinces of the Han China empire, in an area located north of the Han River. The paragraph highlights the strength used by the Koreans to push away the foreign domination. According to the catalogue, by 75 BC the four original commanderies were reduced to Lo-Lang only; Lo-Lang would have been culturally Chinese, with a highly-developed material culture, as can be seen in the tombs of Chinese officials. The object stored in the museum, among which lacquer wares, gold, bronze, and jade objects, are deemed as typical of the Han period, according to the catalogue.¹³⁶

¹³² Kungnip Pangmulgwan, *The National Museum of Korea*.

¹³³ Lee, Kyong-hee, Roderick Whitfield, Ted Chan, and Kungnip Pangmulgwan, *National Museum of Korea* (Seoul: Cultural Foundation of National Museum of Korea, 2007).

¹³⁴ Kungnip chungang pangmulgwan, *Nangnang*, (Seoul: S.I. Sol, 2001).

¹³⁵ National Museum of Korea, *History*, accessed on 22 June 2022.
https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/content/history_1945

¹³⁶ 國立博物館, and Kungnip Pangmulgwan, *The National* (1972), 135.

The artifacts shown in the catalogue originate from Tomb No. 9 at Seokam-ri, already mentioned in the chapter related to the Lelang excavation. The most famous object is the gold buckle decorated with turquoise ornaments; other important items are the bronze incense burners, and the bear-shaped legs of a table.¹³⁷ Other tombs, such as the Tomb of the Painted Basket, held painted lacquered pots, lacquered bowls, boxed, and cases.¹³⁸

Lee Kyong-hee, Roderick Whitfield, Ted Chan, the editors of the 2007 edition of the catalogue changed the sitename from Lo-lang to Nangnang. It is not in the Three Kingdom section anymore, but it can be found under the Asian Arts Gallery. The catalogue focuses on the defeat of Gocheoson by the Han Dynasty in 108 BC and the establishment of the four commanderies. Then it is underlined how the Lelang commandery ruled for 400 years. What differs compared to the text of the first edition is the focus on the influence of the commandery on the ancient Korean culture. There is a strong reminder about the influence of Gocheoson culture in the first years of Lelang; however, the predominance of the Chinese influence in the following centuries is acknowledged, as well as the birth of a unique culture from the union of the two cultures.¹³⁹ This point of view on the commandery and its culture is similar to the interaction theory presented by Hyung Il Pai¹⁴⁰ in her book, *Constructing Korean Origins*. According to this theory, the native population was not passive, but actively took part in the process of creation of the Lelang culture.¹⁴¹ Later, in what Pai calls “the course of acculturation”, the conflict unleashed by the Han seizure settled down until reaching a peaceful coexistence between the two ethnicities.¹⁴² At the end of this process, the different cultures influenced each other to the extent that they created a new, unique tradition.

The 2007 catalogue also focuses on the Lelang rulers: the Chinese governors, dispatched by the Han central government, would have ruled from the earthen fortresses, in Lelang and in the other prefectures which were under its influence. This version of the nationalistic narrative emerges as much as the 1972 version describes the rebellion led by a Gocheoson citizen named Wang Jo and the subsequent six-year independence. The text judges the Japanese excavations as “more systematic”; nevertheless, it is highly critical towards the approach of the Japanese scholars to their interpretation of the commandery. The National Museum of Korea criticizes the revisionism performed by the Japanese academia to give a historical justification to the Nipponese colonization of Korea. The explanation lies in the traditional lack of independence in Korean history and in the strong cultural

¹³⁷ 國立博物館, and Kungnip Pangmulgwan, *The National* (1972), 20-22.

¹³⁸ 國立博物館, and Kungnip Pangmulgwan, *The National* (1972), 23-24.

¹³⁹ Lee, Whitfield, Chan, and Kungnip Pangmulgwan. *National Museum of Korea*.

¹⁴⁰ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*.

¹⁴¹ Hyung Il Pai, “Culture Contact and Culture Change: the Korean Peninsula,” *World Archaeology* Vol. 23, No. 3 (1992): 308.

¹⁴² Pai, “Culture Contact,” 312.

influence exercised by China, implying the absence of a native culture. The museum judges these claims as unfair, and it states that the results would need a new review.¹⁴³

Subsequently, the catalogue analyzes the material culture from the tombs of the commandery. In examining the artifacts from the burial chambers from the 1st century BC, it becomes clear that there are influences of local bronze culture, which differs significantly from the Han Chinese artifacts of the same period.¹⁴⁴ The most distinctive objects from this time were bronze vessels, chariot fittings, pottery jars, unglazed earthen vessels, and bronze daggers: these artifacts were all in the Gocheoson style.

The curators highlight, as time passed by, the presence of a peculiar culture which combined local elements with Chinese influences, especially in the funerary context. The wooden chamber tombs became double wooden chambers, representing an evolution of the previous Gocheoson style. In the second half of the 1st century, the examples of Chinese cultural material culture exponentially increased.¹⁴⁵ Personal ornaments were the objects where the Chinese impact was more obvious, being almost identical to Mainland artifacts. The well-known gold buckle from the Seokam-ri Tomb No. 9 is a perfect example of the Chinese influence on the local craftsmanship. The buckle is one of the most prominent objects in the museum, recognized as National Treasure No. 89 by the South Korean Government.¹⁴⁶



Figure 19 - Gold Buckle from the National Museum of Korea¹⁴⁷

It is made of pure gold: the decoration, representing a dragon, is made of hundreds of bits of gold, pasted on a thin plate. The rim is made of gold yarn. Around the dragon at the center, six smaller

¹⁴³ Lee, Whitfield, Chan, and Kungnip, *National*, 237.

¹⁴⁴ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 182.

¹⁴⁵ Lee, Whitfield, Chan, and Kungnip, *National*, 238.

¹⁴⁶ Lee, Whitfield, Chan, and Kungnip, *National*, 239.

¹⁴⁷ "Seogamni Gold Buckle of Pyongyang," National Museum of Korea, accessed 29 June 2022.
<https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/relic/represent/view?relicId=487>

ones revolve around him: between the small ones and the big one, tiny blue jewels are placed.¹⁴⁸ The Han influence on Lelang goldsmith becomes clear when this artifact is compared with another gold buckle, now stored at the Metropolitan Museum of New York.



Figure 20 - Gold Buckle from the Metropolitan Museum¹⁴⁹

Made with the same granulation technique, it dates to the 1st century BC - 1st century CE, Han period, as well. This item was excavated from the site of Fortress Bogedaqin in Xinjiang.

The lacquerware production, instead, was traded to Lelang directly from other parts of the Han empire: the vessels were made in Sichuan.¹⁵⁰ Jade, a mineral with a spiritual connotation for the afterlife in ancient China, were common in the Lelang tombs as symbols of rebirth and abundance after death.¹⁵¹ Pottery, instead, followed a different trend, not undergoing the influence of Chinese material culture, but retaining the Gocheoson forms such as the short-necked jars and the unglazed wares. However, some pottery with Han influences was found in double wooden chamber tombs.¹⁵²

If the latter were the predominant type in the Pyeongyang area, in the other prefectures the tombs started to be erected using bricks. They represented the prototypes for the stone chamber tombs with horizontal entrance of the later Three Kingdoms period.¹⁵³

The last primary source I am using for this chapter is the Nangnang's catalogue from the National Museum of Korea temporary exhibition in 2001.¹⁵⁴ The book is written in Korean; however, at the end, there is a translation of the main themes in English. For the same linguistic reasons that I have underlined for the 1972 museum catalogue, I will focus on this translation. This may result in a

¹⁴⁸ "Seogamni Gold Buckle of Pyeongyang", National Museum of Korea.

¹⁴⁹ "Belt Buckle with Granulation," Metropolitan Museum, accessed 29 June 2022.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/640953>

¹⁵⁰ Lee, Whitfield, Chan, and Kungnip, *National*, 240.

¹⁵¹ Lee, Whitfield, Chan, and Kungnip, *National*, 241.

¹⁵² Lee, Whitfield, Chan, and Kungnip, *National*, 242.

¹⁵³ Lee, Whitfield, Chan, and Kungnip, *National*, 243.

¹⁵⁴ Kungnip chungang pangmulgwan, *Nangnang*, (Seoul: S.I. Sol, 2001).

less detailed analysis of the subject.

The first macrosection studies the relationship between Gocheson and the commandery. By the 4th century BC, societies with an articulated political and social structure began to exist in the Korean peninsula. During this period, the bronze industry developed, especially the Korean bronze daggers. The commandery was then established because the Han dynasty felt threatened by Gocheoson, a fear that resulted from invasion in 108 BC. At first there were four commanderies; nonetheless, Lelang was the only one that resisted till 313 CE.¹⁵⁵ The rest of the chapter is similar to the 2007 catalogue text since it analyzes the development of the building techniques for tombs in the commandery.¹⁵⁶ The exhibition catalogue highlights the military power of the Gocheson army and navy, praising its mobilization capability. According to the authors, Han China decided to keep the Gocheson military system since it was so efficient.

An important information, not mentioned in the other catalogues, is the pivotal role of the Lelang commandery in importing the Chinese writing culture to the Korean peninsula. The upper class began to learn the characters, which functioned as symbols of the aristocratic status quo, and by the end of the 1st century CE, the knowledge of Chinese among the commandery elite and the imperial aristocracy in China was almost identical. With this top-down approach, the Chinese writing system started to be incorporated into the local language.¹⁵⁷ In the catalogue texts, the influence of Chinese craftsmanship is not denied, attended both in ornaments and pottery.¹⁵⁸

The last chapter about the history of Lelang concerns the relationship between the commandery and the three large societies that developed in the south of the Han River, Baekchae, Silla, and Koguryeo. The commandery was technologically more advanced at the beginning, also thanks to the commerce with China. The objects produced there started to be exported to the south as luxurious items. Moreover, iron commerce created a strong bartering between the two regions; nevertheless, it did not stop within the peninsula, as commerce with Jeju Island and Yayoi Japan are also attested.¹⁵⁹

Museum catalogues from the National Museum of Korea have slightly changed overtime. More information has been added in the most recent publications, analyzing the material culture in relation to the society of that time. The ideological position taken by the curators at the museum is not as sharp and controversial as that of the South Korean scholars, such as Shin Baek-kang. Lelang is presented as a Chinese commandery which developed from 108 BC to 313 CE in the Pyongyang area.

¹⁵⁵ Kungnip, *Nangnang*, 284.

¹⁵⁶ Kungnip, *Nangnang*, 283.

¹⁵⁷ Kungnip, *Nangnang*, 286.

¹⁵⁸ Kungnip, *Nangnang*, 289.

¹⁵⁹ Kungnip, *Nangnang*, 293.

It is not a Korean independent kingdom, a Gocheoson site, and it does not have a different chronology compared to the one Japanese provided.

However, the museum stresses the contribution of the indigenous population in the construction of the Lelang culture. Especially in the first years of the commandery, the influence of native tradition was dominant on the material production, represented by earth-pit tombs, funerary pottery, and the Korean slim dagger. These artifacts embody the continuation between the previous Gocheoson bronze age culture and Lelang.¹⁶⁰ Instead, Han Chinese culture began to prevail only after a couple of decades. The curators emphasize the constant cultural exchange between the two traditions which later created a unique culture.

Moreover, the National Museum highlights the strength and the power of Koreans, their spirit of rebellion towards the foreign invasion; the fall and abandonment of the other three commanderies in the area is deemed as a native success, as proof of Korean's eagerness to defend their territory. Nevertheless, as mentioned, most of the Japanese interpretation on the site is accepted by the institution, even though the tentative of Japanese archaeology to discredit Korean's contribution to their own history is highly criticized.

¹⁶⁰ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 200.

4. Chinese and North Korean Narratives

Even if the whole debate on this topic is focused on Japan and South Korea, it is important not to forget the North Korean and Chinese's takes on this issue. The former is the place where the commandery was identified, close to the capital Pyeongyang. The latter is one of the most powerful nations on the international stage nowadays; for this reason, it is crucial to know how Beijing deals with the Lelang controversy. Moreover, China, according to the official narrative of the Lelang's history, founded the commandery during the Han dynasty, under emperor Wu. However, the site has not been systematically studied by Chinese scholars. The main source on the topic is the 2016 book by Wang Feisin and Oh Yeong-Chon,¹⁶¹ called 중국 고고학에서 본 낙랑고분 (Lelang Tombs in Chinese Archaeology). As the title says, the authors focus more on the funerary culture. Analyzing the material culture of Lelang tombs, the scholars concluded that the commandery influenced the funerary art of Koguryeo. The two cultures, the northern one from Koguryeo and the military one from the Chinese commandery, collided and mutually influenced each other.¹⁶² As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, this is the same point of view of Hyung Il Pai, which described the Chinese commandery culture and what is considered "native" Korean culture as constantly interacting with each other.¹⁶³

Nevertheless, even if the reciprocal impact has been attested by archaeological data, nationalism is a constant in the political discourse related to ancient history and Nation State's origins. In April 2017 Chinese President Xi Jinping told former American President Donald Trump that "Korea used to be part of China."¹⁶⁴ The news sparked a sense of outrage in South Korea: it is no surprise, since, as shown in this thesis, Chinese commanderies on the Korean ground have always been a delicate and divisive topic. Xi's message was in accordance with his expansionist policy: the Chinese president is often associated with Emperor Wu who established the commanderies. Xi's military strength and impact on the worldwide economy in the past decade has been so crucial that for Chinese the comparison is almost natural. Moreover, Wu and Xi share the use of Korea as a "bridgehead to the east".¹⁶⁵ Since the Korean War, North Korea had a decisive role as a bearing state

¹⁶¹ Wang Feisin, and Oh Yeong-Chon, "중국 고고학에서 본 낙랑고분 [Lelang Tombs in Chinese Archaeology], (Guachon: Jinjin, 2016).

¹⁶² Wang, and Oh, 중국 고고학, 188.

¹⁶³ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 208.

¹⁶⁴ Katsuji Nakazawa, "Was Korean Peninsula Part of China? Xi and the Han Dynasty game plan," *Nikkei Asia*, accessed 28 August 2017. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Was-Korean-Peninsula-part-of-China-Xi-and-the-Han-dynasty-game-plan>

¹⁶⁵ Katsuji, "Was Korean Peninsula Part of China?"

especially during the Cold War, keeping American army in South Korea and the Chinese communist troops at a certain distance.¹⁶⁶

China's interpretation on Lelang is close to the Japanese one. Both agree on the subordination of Korea to Han China, politically and culturally. The indigenous intake is completely ignored, and the idea of a Korea perpetually subjected to a foreign power is strong in the storytelling. To the best of my knowledge, China does not have Lelang artifacts on its territory. Therefore, it is impossible to conduct an analysis on Chinese museums or institutions. For this reason, I could only dwell on a broader study, focused on the Chinese political agenda on the ancient Han commandery of Lelang.

In North Korea, where the site excavated by the Japanese archaeologists is located, academics have continued to explore Lelang.¹⁶⁷ Given the political situation in the country, very little is known about these excavations; foreign scholars are not allowed. North Koreans' narrative on the site differs from any other interpretation given. According to them, the site of T'osong-ni, across the Taedong River in Pyongyang, is not the seat of the Lelang commandery. In their opinion, the ruins could date to Gocheoson or belong to the much recent period of Koguryeo. Their views are similar to the South Korean Yun Nae-hyon in the 1980s.¹⁶⁸

Unfortunately, it is hard to access to museum catalogues and the results of the archaeological excavations are yet to be announced.¹⁶⁹ My primary source is the Korean Central History Museum catalogue, dating to 1989: more recent data was not available. However, most of the English version is made of photos without descriptions which make it difficult to have an insight on the North Korean musealization of the Lelang artifacts.

The introduction focuses on the leader Kim Il Sung, praises the Juche theory of political independence, economic self-sufficiency, and military self-reliance.¹⁷⁰ A quote of the beloved Leader about history and archaeology says: "a solid knowledge of the history of our people's struggle and creative activities is indispensable to us in order to develop an ardent feeling of patriotism and foster both national pride and revolutionary self-respect." It is not a mystery that every single aspect of North Korean life is subordinated to the regime's ideology. Nevertheless, this quote makes it obvious: history is connected to patriotism and national pride, as well as to the revolution itself. It goes without saying that the consequence of this mindset towards material culture does not leave space for an interpretation that differs from the one released by the State.

¹⁶⁶ Katsuji, "Was Korean Peninsula Part of China?".

¹⁶⁷ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*.

¹⁶⁸ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*, 129.

¹⁶⁹ Kungnip, *Nangnang*, 284.

¹⁷⁰ Brian Reynolds Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth* (Busan: Sthele Press: 2015): 11.

The introduction also addresses the theme of anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle which led to the construction of the Korean Central History Museum on 1st December 1945 by Kim Il Sung himself.¹⁷¹

Then, the museum and its collection are described: going from the early Paleolithic to the March First Popular Uprising in 1919, the institution encloses inside more than 600.000 years of history. In this roundup of historical events, Lelang and its commandery is not even mentioned. After the ancient states of Gocheoson, Puyo, and Chinguk, the Koguryeo culture is the one exhibited.¹⁷² Even when the objects are displayed in the catalogue, there is no mention of the Lelang commandery. Lelang, written according to the North Korean transliteration as *Rakrang*, is only used as a geographical reference, as the district in Pyeongyang where a bronze three-legged cooking pot was found.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, it is not associated with the Lelang culture, but with Gochoson or Koguryeo. Even if it is hard to make an in-depth-analysis of the musealization of the commandery in Pyeongyang, given the lack of sources, it is safe to say that the political agenda in North Korea does not seem to have space for a foreign commandery within its territory. North Korean nationalism and pride makes impossible conducting a scientific and factual analysis of the archaeological data, having to twist the narrative in the regime's favor.

¹⁷¹ Korean Central History Museum, *The Korean Central History Museum* (Pyeongyang: the Museum, 1989): 6.

¹⁷² Korean Central History Museum, *The Korean Central*, 7.

¹⁷³ Korean Central History Museum, *The Korean Central*, 23.

5. Two Realities in Comparison

Asian museums in possession of Lelang artifacts have different ways of dealing with controversies surrounding this site. For years, Japan pushed a narrative which refused the idea of an indigenous element in the commandery's culture. Nonetheless, as I mentioned in the introduction, in the last couple of decades, Japanese scholars seem to have lost interest in this topic. This disinterest is witnessed by the negligence with which the Tokyo University Museum treats the collection. As Yi Hyeon-hye¹⁷⁴ says in “Ilbon e innun Nangnang yumul”, the artifacts were kept for a long time in precarious boxes, often mixed with objects from other periods and provenance.

The Tokyo National Museum has an undeniable controversial history with the collection, being the relics smuggled from Korea between the 1920s and the 1950s by the wealthy businessman Ogura Dakenosuke.¹⁷⁵ Leaving the dispute between Japan and South Korea on the Ogura collection behind, the exhibition of the Lelang collection by the Japanese museum is included in the context of other Korean artifacts from the Iron age, the Bronze age, and the Three-Kingdom period.¹⁷⁶ Both the Tokyo National Museum and the Tokyo University Museum's websites do not provide enough information on their Lelang artifacts. The lack of this information might be placed in the context of the general disinterest towards this site in the last decades, an indifference that concern the academia, but might be extended to museum institutions.

The National Museum of Korea valorizes the artifacts from the Lelang collection, exhibiting them to the public. Nonetheless, the inclusion of it in the Asian gallery, instead of in the Korean history exhibition, sparked confusion. In the article written by Katsuji Nakazawa¹⁷⁷ in 2017 in the online newspaper Nikkei Asia, the author writes about his visit to the Korean institution to learn more about the Lelang period. However, he states that the National Museum would have skipped this part of history, “bypassing the era of the Lelang Commandery, and going straight into the later Three Kingdoms Period”.¹⁷⁸ The hypothesis given by the Katsuji Nakazawa, placing the blame on the nationalist South Korean scholars who subscribe to the theory that Lelang never existed, is not too far from the reality of Korean pseudo-history, as I have mentioned in the chapter related to the Korean narrative on Han commanderies. However, this is not the case as the Lelang collection is placed in another area of the museum.

I decided to mention this article because, according to me, it is revealing of how, also in contemporary media, the manipulation of information related to archaeology and ancient history still

¹⁷⁴ Yi, *Ilbon*.

¹⁷⁵ Choe, “Silla Art,” 8.

¹⁷⁶ “Polished Stone Tools,” Tokyo National Museum.

¹⁷⁷ Katsuji Nakazawa, “Was Korean Peninsula Part of China?”.

¹⁷⁸ Katsuji, “Was Korean Peninsula Part of China?”.

exists. It is worth mentioning that the author of the article is Japanese, and that Nikkei Asia is a Japanese newspaper, which factors in to any potential considerations the author has.

Conclusion

The controversy on the Lelang commandery represents one of the most heated debates in the East Asian archaeology, especially in South Korea. Used by Japanese academia as a political instrument to belittle “autonomy and agency of early Korean cultures” in colonial times,¹⁷⁹ South Korea scholars did not give up to this narrative, beginning a process of postcolonial revision of the theories enforced by Japan on its own history. Academics such as Yun Nae-Hyon¹⁸⁰ and Shim Baek-Kang¹⁸¹ might be considered as pseudo-historians, heirs of a heterodox approach to Lelang studies created by Shin Chae-ho Tanjae.¹⁸² However, they managed to bring the debate among ordinary people, and not to keep it in the academia.

This research aimed to identify whether the nationalistic narratives have modified our perspectives on the Lelang commandery and, more generally, on archaeology. By analyzing different theories made by scholars through the past century, this thesis has shown that even though the commandery was excavated following a scientific approach, nationalism plays such a heavy role on the narration of this archaeological site that, depending on who is telling the story, our point of view on it drastically changes.

In my dissertation, I also addressed a museum-oriented analysis, trying to answer to a second research question: “How is this reflected in museum exhibitions?”. East Asian museums are inevitably related to the past events of their countries. Simon Knell’s definition of national museums is meaningful for my thesis, as it says that “the national museum as it is locally produced reflects local conditions of nationalism and wealth, international connections, identity, and competition, individual and corporate interests, political and economic relationships, the ideological possibilities of culture, networks of appropriation and emulation, diplomatic efforts.”¹⁸³ This interpretation is line with the answer to my research question because the Lelang collection is exhibited in the Japanese,

¹⁷⁹ Jeong, “The Debate,” 65.

¹⁸⁰ Yun Nae-Hyon, *Hanguk Kodaesa Sillon* [A New Theory of ancient Korea] (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1986).

¹⁸¹ Shim Baek-kang, *사고전서 사료로 보는 한사군의 낙랑* [Han Sagun’s Nangnang as a source for historical records] (Seoul: bareun yoksa, 2014).

¹⁸² Shin Chae-ho Tanjae, *Tanjae sin-chaeho chonjip* [Collected works of Tanjae Shin Chae-ho] (Seoul: Tanjae Sin-Chaeho sonsaeng kinyom saophoe: 1972).

¹⁸³ Simon Knell, “National museums and the national imagination,” in *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, ed. by Simon J. Knell, Peter Aronsson, Arne Bugge Amundsen, Amy Jane Barnes, Stuart Burch, Jennifer Carter, Viviane Gosselin, Sarah A. Hughes, and Alan Kirwan (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 6.

South Korean, and North Korean museums in accordance to their “local conditions”,¹⁸⁴ may that be the Korean effort of decolonizing their history, or the Japanese desire of holding to narrative constructed during the same colonial rule.

South Korean cultural institutions show an increasing interest in studying and analyzing the relics from the site, both the ones stored in the country and the ones exhibited in Japan. It is significant that most of the research on the Korean artifacts of the Ogura collection was conducted by the Korean National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage,¹⁸⁵ and not by the museum itself. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Japanese museums seem to express a general indifference towards the Lelang artifacts; however, still holding to an outdated colonial mindset, the Japanese government refused to give the Korean part of the Ogura collection back to Seoul. An online petition was also created, signed by a thousand of people, asking the Tokyo National Museum to bring the artifacts back.¹⁸⁶

Even if studies on the Han commandery are numerous, this dissertation is unique in its approach to examine the museum collections which exhibit these artifacts. As a large number of papers have been written on the political exploitation of the archaeological data, I aimed to switch the viewpoint to an analysis centered on the material culture. Further research is needed on this topic, especially on the North Korean collection stored at the Korean Central History Museum, and on the artifacts in possess of the Tokyo University Museum. While studying the North Korean museum might be challenging for geopolitical reasons, the Tokyo University Museum collection could be analyzed by scholars who have the opportunity to examine first-hand the objects. Moreover, a more detailed analysis on the Chinese narrative on Han commanderies would make an interesting research topic.

It is not easy to predict if Japan and Korea will ever come to the same conclusion on the Lelang heritage. Nevertheless, new theories on the interaction sphere made by Hyung Il Pai¹⁸⁷ might open the doors to a new way of thinking about ancient history, which is less focused on division, and more on the reciprocal influence that people have on each other.

¹⁸⁴ Knell, “National museums,” 6.

¹⁸⁵ Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso, *Ogura Kölleksyŏn Han'guk*.

¹⁸⁶ “The Tokyo National Museum should restore cultural assets that were illegally smuggled out,” Change.org, accessed 30 June 2022. <https://www.change.org/p/international-council-of-museums-the-tokyo-national-museum-should-restore-cultural-assets-that-were-illegally-smuggled-out-from-joseon-of-the-japanese-colonial-era>

¹⁸⁷ Pai, *Constructing Korean Origins*.

List of figures

Figure 1. *Map*.

Kidder, J. Edward. *Himiko and Japan's Elusive Chiefdom of Yamatai: Archaeology, History, and Mythology*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

Figure 2. *National Museum of Korea*.

"National Museum of Korea." Museums, Museums of the World. Accessed 29 June 2022.
<http://museu.ms/museum/details/16316/national-museum-of-korea>

Figure 3. *Tokyo National Museum*.

"Tokyo National Museum: The Complete Guide." TripSavvy. Accessed 29 June 2022.
<https://www.tripsavvy.com/tokyo-national-museum-complete-guide-5087870>

Figure 4. *Korean Central History Museum*.

"Korean Central History Museum." KKFonline. Accessed 29 June 2022.
<https://kkfonline.com/2020/06/01/korean-central-history-museum/>

Figure 5. *Lelang and the surrounding tombs*.

Yi Hyon-hye, and Toyo Bunko. *Ilbon e innun Nangnang yumul*. Soul T'ukpyolsi: Hagyon Munhwasa, 2008:19.

Figure 6 – 7. *Inscribed Stele from Nianti-Xian, a Han County*.

"조선충독부박물관: 유리건판" [Choseon Chungdokbu Museum: Glass Dry Plate]. National Museum of Korea. Accessed 30 June 2022.
https://portal.nrich.go.kr/kor/filePopUpImage.do?relmenucd=616&relkey=1&fileTypeCd=364&popType=P&file_idx=203182&rowType=Y&st=&sk=#link

Figure 8. *Earthenware finds*.

"조선충독부박물관: 유리건판" [Choseon Chungdokbu Museum: Glass Dry Plate]. National Museum of Korea. Accessed 30 June 2022.
<https://www.museum.go.kr/dryplate/viewer.do?relicnum=004245>.

Figure 9-10. *Bell*.

"고고학으로 본 낙랑군" [Nangnang seen through archaeology]. Prezi. Accessed 14 May 2022.
<https://prezi.com/yatuxad7iqu3/presentation/?frame=39375df9b543c5cf12d8acf0ec2f98998be88827>.

Figure 11. *T'osong-ni Hill*.

"조선충독부박물관 유리건판" [Choseon Chungdokbu Museum: Glass Dry Plate]. National Museum of Korea. Accessed 14 May 2022.
https://www.museum.go.kr/dryplate/category_list.do?ids1=A&ids1_title=고고&ids2=A03&ids2_title=낙랑&cnt=4053&separator=ids.

Figure 12. *Seokam-ri Tomb No.9*.

"고고학으로 본 낙랑군" [Nangnang seen through archaeology]. Prezi. Accessed 14 May 2022.
<https://prezi.com/yatuxad7iqu3/presentation/?frame=2f152224f97796b38625c8f62181211199465e25>

Figure 13. *Iron Relics Storage Bag*.

Yi, Hyon-hye, and Toyo Bunko. *Ilbon e innun Nangnang yumul*. Seoul T'ukpyolsi: Hagyon Munhwasa, 2008: 353.

Figure 14. *Tiles from the Tokyo University Museum*.

Yi, Hyon-hye, and Toyo Bunko. *Ilbon e innun Nangnang yumul*. Seoul T'ukpyolsi: Hagyon Munhwasa, 2008: 302.

Figure 15. *Eaves Tile with Inscription*.

“Polished Stone Tools and Metal Tools of Korea.” Tokyo National Museum. Accessed 28 June 2022. https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_exhibition/index.php?controller=item&id=5105&lang=en

Figure 16. *Model of a Cooking Stove*.

“Polished Stone Tools and Metal Tools of Korea.” Tokyo National Museum. Accessed 28 June 2022. https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_exhibition/index.php?controller=item&id=5777&lang=en

Figure 17. *Incense Burner*.

Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso [National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage]. *Ogura Kölleksyŏn Han'guk munhwajae: Ilbon Tok'yo Kungnip Pangmulgwan sojang*. [The Korean Cultural Properties in the Ogura Collection: Collection of the Tokyo National Museum] Seoul: National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, 2005: 269.

Figure 18. *Lelang's Location according to Shim*.

“낙랑군 위치에 대한 논란 22 분 총정리.” Youtube. Accessed 18 June 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mrVDitWuZM&t=438s>

Figure 19. *Gold Buckle from the National Museum of Korea*.

“Gold Belt Buckle | Curator's Picks”. National Museum of Korea. Accessed 14 May 2022. <https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/archive/united/14938>.

Figure 20. *Gold Buckle from the Metropolitan Museum*.

“Belt Buckle with Granulation.” Metropolitan Museum. accessed 29 June 2022. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/640953>

Bibliography

Britannica. "Empire of Japan." Accessed 28 June 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Empire-of-Japan>

Britannica. "Tokyo National Museum." Accessed 28 June 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tokyo-National-Museum>

Bryman, Alan, *Social Research Methods*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Change.org. "The Tokyo National Museum should restore cultural assets that were illegally smuggled out." Accessed 30 June 2022. <https://www.change.org/p/international-council-of-museums-the-tokyo-national-museum-should-restore-cultural-assets-that-were-illegally-smuggled-out-from-joseon-of-the-japanese-colonial-era>

Choe, Kwangshik. "Silla Art and the Silk Road." *International Journal of Korean History* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2014).

Davey, Jack. "Culture Contact and Cultural Boundaries in Iron Age Southern Korea." *Asian Perspectives* Vol 58, No. 1 (2019).

Defang, Zhang. "Using Excavated Slips to Look at Effective Governance of the Northern Frontier during the Han Dynasty — The Lelang Commandery in Han Slips." *Bamboo and Silk* 4, no. 2 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1163/24689246-00402014>.

Fujita, Ryosaku. "Rakuro fudei ko" [Studies on clay sealings from Lelang]. In *Chosen kokogaku no kenkyu* [Korean Archaeology of the Kenkyu]. Kyoto: Reimoku chokuju, 1948.

Gee, James Paul, and Hanford, Michael. *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Routledge Handbooks in Applied Linguistics. London: Routledge, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203809068>.

Google Arts & Culture. "Daifang Commandery." Accessed 30 June 2022. <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/daifang-jun/m0119ch>

History of Museums. "History of Museum." Accessed 26th June 2022. <http://www.historyofmuseums.com>

ICOM. "Museum Definition." Accessed 26th June 2022. <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

IKorea Spirit. "한일역사전쟁 '금지된 장난, 일제 낙랑군 유물조작' 다큐 - K 스피릿" [Korean-Japanese Historical War "Forbidden Pranks, Manipulation of Relics of the Japanese Occupation's Nangnang Army" documentary]. Accessed 14 May 2022. <http://www.ikoreanspirit.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=14813>.

Imanishi, Ryu. *Chosenshi no shiori* [A guide to Korean history]. Keijo: Chikazawa, 1936.

Jeong, Tai. "The Politics of Historical Knowledge: The Debate on the Historical Geography of Old Chosŏn and Lelang Commandery." *Journal of Asian History* 52, no. 1 (2018): 44.
<https://doi.org/10.13173/jasiahist.52.1.0043>.

Katsuji, Nakazawa. "Was Korean Peninsula Part of China? Xi and the Han Dynasty game plan," *Nikkei Asia*, 28 August 2017. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Was-Korean-Peninsula-part-of-China-Xi-and-the-Han-dynasty-game-plan>

Kidder, Edward J. *Himiko and Japan's Elusive Chieftdom of Yamatai: Archaeology, History, and Mythology*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

Knell, Simon. "National museums and the national imagination." In *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, ed. by Simon J. Knell, Peter Aronsson, Arne Bugge Amundsen, Amy Jane Barnes, Stuart Burch, Jennifer Carter, Viviane Gosselin, Sarah A. Hughes, and Alan Kirwan. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

국성하 [Kook, Sung-ha]. "일제강점기 일본인의 낙랑군 인식과 평양부립박물관 설립" [Japanese perception of Nakranggun and the Establishment of Pyongyang Governor General Museum in Japanese colonization]. *Komunhwa* 63, no. 63 (2004).

Komai, Kazuchika. *Rakuro – Kanbunka no zanzo* [Lelang: reflections on Han civilization]. Tokyo: Chuo koronsha, 1972.

Korean Central History Museum. *The Korean Central History Museum*. Pyongyang: the Museum, 1989.

Kungnip Munhwajae Yŏn'guso [National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage]. *Ogura Kōlleksyōn Han'guk munhwajae: Ilbon Tok'yo Kungnip Pangmulgwan sojang* [The Korean Cultural Properties in the Ogura Collection: Collection of the Tokyo National Museum]. Seoul: National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, 2005.

Kungnip Pangmulgwan [National Museum]. *The National Museum of Korea*. Seoul: National Museum of Korea, 1972.

Lee, Kyong-hee, Roderick Whitfield, Ted Chan, and Kungnip Pangmulgwan, *National Museum of Korea*. Seoul: Cultural Foundation of National Museum of Korea, 2007.

Li, Zongxun. "Jin ershi nian lai zhongwai xuejie Gu-Chaoxian de yanjiu yu keti" [A 20-year study in China and abroad on ancient North Korea]. *Yanbian daxue xuebao* 49, no. 3 (2016).

Logie, Andrew. "Enticement of Ancient Empire: Historicized Mythology and (Post)colonial Conspiracies in the Construction of Korean Pseudohistory." In *Invented Traditions in North and South Korea*, ed. Andrew David Jackson, Codruța Sîntionean, Remco Breuker, CedarBough Saeji. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022.

Metropolitan Museum. "Belt Buckle with Granulation." Accessed 29 June 2022.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/640953>

Metropolitan Museum. "Yayoi Culture (ca. 300 BC-300 AD)." Accessed 28 June 2022.
https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/yayo/hd_yayo.htm

Mikami, Tsugio. *Kodai tohoku Ajiashi kenkyu* [A study of the ancient history of Northeast Asia]. Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1966.

Myers, Brian Reynolds. *North Korea's Juche Myth*. Busan: Sthele Press: 2015.

National Institutes for Cultural Heritage. "Home." Accessed 27 June 2022.
<https://www.nich.go.jp/english/>

National Museum of Korea. "Gold Belt Buckle | Curator's Picks." Accessed 14 May 2022,
<https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/archive/united/14938>.

National Museum of Korea. "국립중앙박물관 소장 조선총독부박물관 유리건판" [Grass Dry Plate at the Museum of Government-General of Korea]. Accessed 14 May 2022.
https://www.museum.go.kr/dryplate/category_list.do?ids1=A&ids1_title=고고&ids2=A03&ids2_title=낙랑&cnt=4053&separator=ids.

National Museum of Korea. "History." Accessed. 27 June 2022.
https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/content/history_1945

National Museum of Korea. "Seogamni Gold Buckle of Pyongyang." Accessed 29 June 2022.
<https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/relic/represent/view?relicId=487>

국립 중앙 박물관 [National Museum of Korea]. 낙랑 樂浪 [The Ancient Culture of Nangnang]. Seoul: The National Museum of Korea & Sol Publication, 2001.

Pai, Hyung Il. *Constructing "Korean" Origins: A Critical Review of Archaeology, Historiography, and Racial Myth in Korean State-Formation Theories*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000.

Pai, Hyung Il. "Culture Contact and Culture Change: the Korean Peninsula." *World Archaeology* Vol. 23, No. 3 (1992).

Park, Hae Woon, and Wee, Kaya. "The Nationalistic Trend in South Korean Archaeology: Documenting the Development of a Unilinear Evolutionary Trajectory of a Homogeneous Korean People." *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* Vol 12, No. 3 (2016).

Sekino, Tadashi. "Raruko Taiho ryogun no iseki oyobi ibutsu" [Archaeological sites and artifacts of the Lelang and Daifang commanderies]. In *Kokugaku koza* [Lectures on Archaeology], edited by Kokushi koshukai. Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 1930.

Shim, Baek-kang. *사고전서 사료로 보는 한사군의 낙랑* [Han Sagun's Nangnang as a source for historical records]. Seoul: bareun yoksa, 2014.

Silberman, Neil Asher. "Nationalism and Archaeology," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Sin, Chae-ho Tanjae. *Tanjae sin-chaeho chonjip* [Collected works of Tanjae Shin Chae-ho]. Seoul: Tanjae Sin-Chaeho sonsaeng kinyom saophoe: 1972.

Smith, Laurajane. *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Son, Pyong-hon. *Ancient tombs of Korea*. Ph.D. dissertation. Harvard University: 1980.

The Korea Times. "Historical Roots found in Amity Between Korea, Vietnam." Accessed 18 June 2022.

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2019/03/120_266258.html?fbclid=IwAR16kWRdLEswntFcKCMqlffYrYCCn7EfP1KI6c6B_pQM55tnaKKCgPhkYFk

Tokyo National Museum. *Ogura collection: donated by the Ogura foundation (to the Tokyo National Museum)*. Tokyo: National Museum Tokyo, 1982.

Tokyo National Museum. "Polished Stone Tools and Metal Tools of Korea." Accessed 28 June 2022. https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_exhibition/index.php?controller=item&id=6975

Tokyo National Museum. "Regular Exhibition." Accessed 27 June 2022. https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=2501

Tokyo University Museum. "関野調査カード" [Sekino Excavation Report]. Accessed 14 May 2022. http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DAnnex/sekino_cards/recordlist.php?-max=25&-action=findall&-skip=413&-link=ALL.

Tokyo University Museum. "精神のエクスペディション" [Sekino Tadashi's Ancient Korea survey]. Accessed 14 May 2022. http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DKankoub/Publish_db/1997Expedition/02/020200.html

Tokyo University Museum. "関野フィールドカード 東京大学総合研究博物館 小石川分館" [Sekino Field Card, Univeristy of Tokyo Research Museum]. Accessed 28 June 2022. http://umdb.um.u-tokyo.ac.jp/DAnnex/sekino_cards/recordlist.php?-skip=5654&-max=25

Tokyo National Museum. "Ueno Museum: The Original Honkan." Accessed 28 June 2022. https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=150

Tokyo National Museum. "Yushima Seido Exposition." Accessed 27 June 2022. https://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=144

Torii, Ryuzo. *Torii Ryuzo zenshu* [Complete Works of Torii Ryuzo]. Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1976.

Walsh, Kevin Walsh. *The Representation of the Past. Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Wang, Feisin, and Oh, Yeong-Chon. "중국 고고학에서 본 넉랑고분 [Lelang Tombs in Chinese Archaeology]. Guachon: Jinjinjin, 2016.

World History Encyclopedia. "Han Dynasty." Accessed 14 May 2022. https://www.worldhistory.org/Han_Dynasty/.

Yi, Hyon-hye, and Toyo Bunko. *Ilbon e innun Nangnang yumul*. Soul T'ukpyolsi: Hagyon Munhwasa, 2008.

Yi, Pyong-do. *Hanguk kodaesa yongu* [Studies on ancient Korean history]. Seoul: Pagyongsa, 1981.

Youtube. “낙랑군 위치에 대한 논란 22 분 총정리” [22-minute Summary of the Controversy over the Location of Nangnang]. Accessed 18 June 2022.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mrVDitWuZM&t=438s>

Yun, Nae-Hyon. *Hanguk Kodaesa Sillon* [A New Theory of ancient Korea]. Seoul: Ilchisa, 1986).