Long-term history, material culture, and meaning: an example from Korea

Martin T. Bale*

Polished groundstone daggers ⨯⨯⨯⨯ have a curious place in Korean prehistoric archaeology. They are thought to be imitations of bronze daggers, and are linked to a mortuary set for megalithic burials that include projectile points, and greenstone ornaments (Chon 1992; Gardiner 1969: 7; Kang 1990; Nelson 1999; Rhee and Choi 1992; Shoda et al. 2009; cf. Kim 1978: 82). This mortuary set was used for almost a millennium (c. 1300-300 BC) in the burials of the Korean peninsula (FIGURE 1). Although the main function of groundstone daggers is in mortuary ceremony, they are also found in dwelling contexts. Researchers have worked on various aspects of the function of daggers, but the meaning of daggers is unknown. Researchers have implicitly linked groundstone daggers with authority and leadership (i.e. Gardiner 1969: 7; Kim 1978; Sim 1990), and some have asserted that they were “... intended for ceremonial or symbolic use” (Rhee and Choi 1992: 66; see also Nelson 1999: 162). Much of the related scholarship has involved megaliths and bronze objects (Barnes 1993; Kang 1990; Nelson 1999; Rhee and Choi 1992). Yet groundstone daggers are essential in gaining a deeper understanding of leadership, power, life, death, households, burials, and other factors in the transformation of societies of the Mumun Pottery Period ⨯⨯⨯⨯⨯ (c. 1500-300 BC). What did they signify?

In this paper I investigate long-term processual and contextual elements of material culture to understand changes in the political and ceremonial landscapes of prehistoric transegalitarian and incipiently ranked societies. The production and distribution of groundstone daggers and other prestige artefacts was part of a nascent political economy in many regions of the Korean peninsula in a part of the Early

* Pusan National University Museum
and Middle Mumun Periods, c. 1300-550 BC. I use a perspective that incorporates several interconnected theoretical models to explore the interplay of culture change, the materialisation of ideology, and the construction of meaning of groundstone daggers in prehistoric Korea. Groundstone daggers were a key part of the mortuary complex over the longue durée, and I argue that aggrandising elite actors altered their meaning in the name of the accumulation of social capital and used the production and distribution of the artefacts to build political power by attracting and maintaining supporters between 700 and 550 BC. I use interpretive theoretical models (DeMarrais et al. 1996; Hill 1994; Hodder 1984, 1986, 1990; Preucel 1995) in my analysis as well as processual models (Blanton AD 1996; Costin 1991). More specifically, I consider theoretical issues of meaning, material culture, and social change in light of the groundstone dagger, which I argue is a special artefact made for the consumption of leaders and their supporters in transegalitarian and incipiently socio-politically complex settlements (Clark and Blake 1994; Hayden 1995: 16). I address groundstone dagger use in all settings: settlement, mortuary, and production.
Ground stone daggers, megalithic culture, and interpretive archaeology

Archaeologists of the cultural- historical tradition have established detailed seriations of daggers (FIGURE 2) and have plotted their regional spatial distributions (Chon 1992; Dyakov 1989; Kim J.H. 1978; Rhee and Choi 1992; Sim 1990). The shape and style of groundstone daggers changed from tanged and stepped- handle examples in the Early Mumun into increasingly tapered, curvilinear, and streamlined shapes in the Middle Mumun. Early Mumun examples are typically about 18- 25 cm in length, but a small number of Late Middle Mumun daggers exceeds 50 cm in length. Hwang suggested that daggers, along with other groundstone objects such as arrowheads, discoidal “axes”, and star- shaped implements are characteristic of males and patrilineal society (Hwang 1965: 8- 23). Dating of groundstone daggers is mostly determined by relative dating and associations with other artefacts. For example, Kim’s classification of daggers from the Yongdam Dam ン area is supported by 17 associated 14C dates (i.e. Kim 2003: 29,32) and thus generally confirms the relative dating scheme of Sim (1990: Fig. 40). A small number of Early Mumun groundstone daggers have been excavated in Middle Mumun archaeological features. In such situations it may be possible that some daggers that were produced in earlier times were curated and passed down through generations. Despite their important contributions, most culture- historical approaches to archaeological research ignore contemporary anthropological theory, and thus researchers do not focus the role of society or the individual in prehistory (Kim 2004). For example, in Rhee and Choi’ s publication on the emergence of complex society, the authors mostly address typological issues in their discussion of groundstone daggers (Rhee and Choi 1992: 66).

Barnes proposed that daggers show that conflict existed during the transition from the late Jeulmun ン to Early Mumun Periods (c. 2000 to 700 BC) (Barnes 1993: 161). Nelson, in an article that outlined the development of early agriculture and megalithic culture, submitted that the production of groundstone daggers was connected with “a special class of people”, required some level of specialised production, and had dual functions in household and mortuary contexts (Nelson 1999: 162). Konkova suggested that groundstone daggers were crafted for mortuary ceremonies and interred with the dead as replacements for bronze daggers and spearheads (Konkova 1989). In addition, rock art featuring dagger motifs appear on
megalithic capstones of the Middle Mumun along with geometric designs. The above hypotheses point to the significance of “mental things” (Hill 1994) such as cognition, beliefs, symbolism, ideology, etc. However, archaeologists with processual theoretical backgrounds have avoided addressing such questions, perhaps because of a belief that archaeologists do not have the tools to study specific thought processes (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 17; Hill 1994).

Nevertheless, archaeologists should make an effort to try any appropriate methods to gain a deeper and more holistic understanding of the basic issues relevant to the development of intensive agricultural society in the Mumun Period. I divide the Mumun Period into three sub-periods: early, middle, and late. The Early (c. 1500-850 BC) sub-period is characterised by transegalitarian groups of slash and burn agriculturalists that lived in large settlements in the north and small settlements in the south. The Middle (c.850-550 BC) sub-period is characterised by a regional mix of small transegalitarian polities and simple chiefdoms with slash and burn cultivation and intensive agriculture. Large central-place settlements with fortifications and some rich burials are known. Bronze production technology spread into parts of the peninsula at that time. The Late (c.550-300 BC) period is characterised by agriculturalists and broad-spectrum low-level food producers who lived in small settlements, increases in

![Figure 2](Typology of groundstone daggers of the Korean Peninsula in the Mumun Period after Sim (1990: Fig. 40). Types III and IV have the greatest variety of forms and correspond to the Middle Mumun.)
bronze artefacts and conflict, and construction of large-scale megalithic burials and ceremonial spaces. Social inequality is clearly visible in some burials.

Hodder has criticised the processual approach, saying that it consists of stale lists of cultural traits that have weak links with broad economic trends. Hodder’s criticism was partly a reaction to studies on European megaliths (Hodder 1984: 52). This criticism could be levelled at the problem of Korean groundstone daggers. For example, processual arguments often invoke the use of functional explanations (Hodder 1986: 124-5). Nelson hypothesised that daggers could have had a ritual function in the household, or a subset of households, and in mortuary ceremonies (Nelson 1999: 162). This argument is reasonable and takes in some of what we want to know about daggers, but functionalist explanations are static and cannot capture developments resulting from cognitive change in past societies. This type of archaeological meaning is restricted to explaining how something functions in relation to these factors in addition to processes related to economic, environmental, and social structures (Duke 1992: 99-100; Hodder 1986: 124).

Interpretive archaeology can be used to shed light on the significance of groundstone daggers in Northeast Asian prehistory. However, a variety of circumstances are likely to prevent the researcher from being able to grasp the prehistoric mind, or what things meant to the past people who made them (Hill 1994). In other words, knowledge of the internal cultural meaning of artefacts may ultimately have been restricted to those who actually used them. Other challenges of this research include that Korean peninsular soils have poor preservation of skeletal material, most archaeologists in Korea are unavoidably concerned with the day-to-day travails of emergency archaeology, and a culture-historical approach to fieldwork and reporting persist there. A more eclectic and creative approach to theory that incorporates a number of paradigms is required to uncover the structures that existed at deeper layers of society.

Groundstone daggers – the essentials

Groundstone daggers date to between 1300 and 200 BC, and the earliest are from megalithic 墳 and stone cist 島 burials of the Daedong- gang 島 and Han- gang 江 River basins in West-central Korea. They are also found in western Japan,
specifically in Kyushu. Shoda suggests that the reconsideration of chronology in the 2000s mean that the earliest groundstone daggers may have appeared in Korea at the end of the second millennium BC (Shoda 2007). The origin of daggers is linked to the beginnings of megalithic society. Megalithic burials and groundstone daggers originated in the incipient polities of agriculturalists located in Northeast China some time before 1500 BC, and the phenomena spread southward as a fully developed mentalité (see below) to the Korean peninsula in the following centuries.

The origin of the shape of groundstone daggers is a matter of debate. They have been compared with short bronze swords of the Western Zhou 亝 亝 to Warring States Periods 亝 亝 亝 亝 亝 (c. 1045- 256 BC) in China (Barnes 1993: 161; Gardiner 1969: 7; Nelson 1999: 162). The comparison applies especially to the earliest examples of groundstone daggers (Type I). In contrast, Kim maintained that certain groundstone dagger shapes developed from stone projectile points (Kim 1978: 81). Notably, Liaoning-style bronze daggers overlap chronologically and sometimes with co-occur with Type IV groundstone daggers (FIGURE 2), but these daggers are not morphologically similar to Liaoning bronze daggers. Okladnikov and others proposed that the cultural and technological influences that account for groundstone daggers in Korea and Japan came from Karasuk 亝 亝 亝 亝 亝 and Tagar 亝 亝 亝 亝 亝 bronze cultures (Andreeva and Studzitskaya 1987; Andreeva et al. 1986; Brodyansky 1996; Dyakov 1989; Konkova 1989; Okladnikov 1956). Shoda et al. hypothesise that the origin of groundstone daggers in Korea is from Upper Xiaijadian Culture 亝 亝 亝 亝 亝 and that the influence for the daggers in the Middle Mumun is from Tagar Culture (Shoda et al. 2009: 187).

Groundstone daggers that date from c. 850 to 400 BC come from houses and megaliths in the interior of the peninsula. Groundstone daggers from the Late Mumun Period are found in elaborate megalithic burials in the southeast peninsula and near the southern coast. Although a few may yield evidence of use along the blade, if one observes the level of thinness to which most daggers are ground and polished, it is likely that groundstone daggers were used for ceremonial purposes rather than for practical circumstances (Gardiner 1969: 7; Nelson 1999: 162; see also Barnes 1993: 163). Groundstone daggers may break at weak points or flaws in the stone material if thrust at an object with effort. Yet a brief visual inspection of well-crafted groundstone daggers reveals the great effort and expertise that was required to produce them (Nelson 1999).
Groundstone dagger distribution in pit- houses and burials

Some bronzes and other artefacts of Shang, Zhou, and Warring States Period China are weapon- shaped but likely had ceremonial functions (Chang 1983, 1986; Underhill 2002), and are primarily found in burials and hoards. Although they may have been modelled on bronze examples, Korean groundstone daggers are found in burials and pit- houses, while many bronze artefacts are found on caches located in hard to access areas, steep hillsides, etc (Lee 2000). I have observed that all groundstone daggers can be divided into the following categories: 1) well- made examples, (2) examples that are either in an unfinished state, or (3) in a poor state of manufacture. Category 1 is found in megalithic and stone cist burials, and 1 through 3 are found in pit- houses. Some daggers from Middle Mumun sites were made with low- quality material, suggesting that they were locally produced. These categories may be the product of the vagaries of preservation in mortuary features, but the observation holds nonetheless.

In my research on the topic with Ko, I found that groundstone daggers in South- central Korea are not distributed equally across all archaeological features (Bale and Ko 2006; Ko and Bale 2008). The majority of groundstone daggers are unearthed from pit- houses, although that changed in the Late Middle Mumun (TABLE 1). Only 5% of all pit- houses and 5% of all burials contained daggers in the Middle Mumun of South- central Korea. Bronze daggers are even more rare in the Middle Mumun. In contrast, groundstone daggers are found in comparatively greater numbers across a wider range of features. For example, they are found in association with pit- houses and burials, and broken daggers are found in pit features and ditches. Daggers may have been broken in the process of production or perhaps as part of a ritual. On the other hand, bronze daggers are found in burials in hoard features.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub- period</th>
<th>Pit-houses</th>
<th>Burials</th>
<th>Pits</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>Okbang</th>
<th>Outside Okbang</th>
<th>Outside Daepyeong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Early Mumun</td>
<td>5 (63%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (12%)</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>3 (38%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Middle Mumun</td>
<td>12 (63%)</td>
<td>3 (36%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
<td>19 (100%)</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
<td>14 (74%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Middle Mumun</td>
<td>10 (33%)</td>
<td>13 (43%)</td>
<td>4 (15%)</td>
<td>5 (32%)</td>
<td>32 (100%)</td>
<td>14 (44%)</td>
<td>3 (9%)</td>
<td>15 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>27 (44%)</td>
<td>18 (29%)</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>10 (21%)</td>
<td>59 (100%)</td>
<td>21 (36%)</td>
<td>21 (36%)</td>
<td>17 (28%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<Table 1> Summary of archaeological features and locations with groundstone daggers in Mumun South-central Korea, after Bae and Ko (2006:Table 5). * Other refers to ditches, outdoor hearths, piled-stone features, and surface finds. Okbang is a ward of the Daepyeong settlement with multiple ditches, pit-houses, and other features.

The number of chronologically sensitive archaeological features with daggers increased over time (TABLE 1). More than 60% of daggers are found in pit-house floors in the Late Early and Early Middle Mumun, but they are split between burials and pit-houses in the Late Middle Mumun. In contrast to greenstone ornaments, the geographical distribution of daggers in the Middle Mumun is wide (i.e. outside Daepyeong 주거지, a large central-place settlement with extensive ditches and palisades in the upper Nam-gang River 주거지 in South-central Korea) and more evenly spread out. However, when daggers from pit features and other contexts are included, features from Daepyeong contain the largest number of groundstone daggers in the Middle Mumun.

Groundstone dagger production in settlements of South-central Korea

Daggers from South-central Korea are made with grey and brown mudstone, hornfels, and slate. Sandstone, diorite, granite, and quartzite were used to make other tools such as semi-lunar blades. Evidence of groundstone dagger production at Daepyeong can be inferred from broken pieces found in three Early Middle Mumun pit-houses outside the ditch- and-palisade precinct. In contrast to greenstone production, I have difficulty to determine if dagger production was concentrated specifically in Daepyeong or generally in South-central Korea. Nonetheless, production was likely dispersed because individual pit-houses were the location of the production of the objects. Contrary to the circumstances of greenstone production in the Early Middle Mumun, independent producers may have made daggers based only
on need. This idea is supported when we consider that daggers were found in only 59 features in South-central Korea, an area that was continuously occupied for many centuries in the Mumun. This implies that the scale of production was small, intensity of production was low, and that daggers were special artefacts (Bale and Ko 2006; Ko and Bale 2008).

On the basis of the results of studies Ko and I have conducted on the distribution of daggers in household contexts (Bale and Ko 2006; Ko and Bale 2008), we suggest that they may have been used as a political badge of local leadership or personal prominence in regions such as the upper Nam valley during the Early Mumun. Local leadership were able to procure a supply of groundstone daggers and distributed them in return for loyalty and support in the Middle Mumun.

Theory and material culture

Megalithic burials and artefact sets connected to long-term mortuary practices, such as groundstone daggers, red-burnished pottery, and greenstone ornaments can be better understood if seen through the chronological lenses developed by the Annales School historians (Bintliff 1991; Braudel 1972; Ladurie 1979). The Annaliste scholarship on time scales enables archaeologists to construct multi-scalar research designs that account for symbols and groups of symbols (structures) that endure over the long-term. Interpretive archaeologists have used Annaliste concepts because they allow the researcher to look at problems using an approach with multiple time-scales that enable analysis of structural change (Bintliff 1991; Duke 1991, 1992; Knapp 1992).

Annaliste scholars divide time into three scales of événements (events), moyenne (medium term), and longue durée (long term) (Bintliff 1991; Braudel 1972; Knapp 1992). These ‘wavelengths’ operate contemporaneously at different scales. Mentalités are elements of persistent cognitive structures characterised by the religious, ideological, and behavioural systems, and the way the individual and societal thought process is shaped in particular ways (Duke 1992; Knapp 1992). They may include change-resistant cultural features such as ideology and technology (Bintliff 1991: 7). In this way, megalithic culture is a structure that existed over the long-term.

Examples of mentalités in archaeology are found in Duke (1991, 1992). In his work about structure and event in North American bison hunting societies, Duke analysed
mentalités and structural change in gender relationships by using projectile points and pottery. While mobile bison-hunting and megalithic agricultural society are different in many ways, Duke’s consideration of prehistoric attitudes toward Plains projectile points have some potential as a point of departure in a contextual understanding of Mumun groundstone daggers. According to Duke, the manufacture of projectile points was part of a mentalité in which the point-makers were concerned with prestige and status, changes in style, and competition among males (Duke 1991: 105). Changes occurred approximately every one hundred years in the design and length of Mumun groundstone dagger blades, as well as details in the hilt and pommel (FIGURE 2). What was the cause of the change?

In order to answer the above question, it is helpful to consider daggers in a context similar to the cases as discussed by Duke (1991, 1992). The making of a single groundstone dagger represents an event. The tradition of the production and use of daggers in the Mumun, along with greenstone and red-burnished pottery, are examples of the longue durée. In other words, the production and use of groundstone daggers was part of a megalithic culture mentalité, a system of symbols for mortuary rituals and deposition in burials. It is relatively straightforward to place dagger-making and megalithic culture up as example of structure and event, but what did it mean? By using contextual analysis that employs “tight local analogies” or TLA, we can provide a more plausible inferences about prehistoric meaning (Hill 1994: 88), see also von Gernet and Timmins 1987).

Differences in the meaning of artefacts can be inferred by differences in archaeological context (Hodder 1986). Let us consider the medium term and archaeological context for groundstone daggers between the Early and Middle Mumun periods. Moyenne durée is a force that operates over several generations or a few centuries (Bintliff 1991: 7). As mentioned above, the earliest groundstone daggers were excavated from megalithic and cist burials. In contrast, during the time that emergency archaeological activity has increased, many daggers have been found in household contexts. Archaeological evidence indicates that most of these daggers correspond to the Middle Mumun Period, and some were made from low-quality material.
Korean megalithic culture, groundstone daggers, and long-term change

Groundstone daggers were produced and used as burial goods for almost 1000 years, and so they must have been a powerful symbol in political and ritual culture. I argue that the attention and craftsmanship used in the making of the groundstone artefacts provides clues as to the symbolic meaning of groundstone daggers: the roles of hunting and warrior-ship. These symbolic elements would have been important in the oral histories of transegalitarian mixed subsistence economies of the Final Jeulmun and Early Mumun Periods. Since they are placed in megalithic burials – the interment place of the actors who were leaders in early agricultural societies, daggers are clearly associated with the ancestors, the past, and agriculture. Kim has interpreted early megalithic burials found amongst carefully made circular platforms of river cobbles as locations of ceremonies (Kim 2003: 40). Although in transegalitarian societies production was likely confined to the household, the degree of labour used to produce such thin, polished daggers would have been considerable. This raises questions, since researchers have found noted that some kinds of specialisation are not associated with the existence of a stratified society (Cross 1993; Prentice 1983). In transegalitarian societies, inequality may be expressed through age or sex differences (Clark and Blake 1994: 18; Hayden 1995: 20). Thus, perhaps they were the symbols of authority of the community elders who distinguished themselves in youth as providers of meat and protectors of the community.

However, the presence of a larger number of daggers in Middle Mumun household contexts implies that the daggers were used in a different way between 700 and 500 BC. The regular changes in dagger shape and embellishment may indicate that competition between producers took place to make more impressive daggers in circumstances analogous to Duke's (1991: 105) hypothesis. As such, I propose that the symbolism of daggers was co-opted by ambitious leaders or factions who sought to control of agricultural surpluses for personal and/or factional gain (Clark and Blake 1994). The comparatively wider pattern of distribution of daggers in household contexts in the Nam- gang area suggests that leaders likely acquired or sponsored the production of daggers and gave them to key local actors in return for labour, grain, or other goods (Bale and Ko 2006). The spatio-temporal patterning of daggers in the Middle Mumun indicates the waxing and waning of political and ideological cycles. In
other words, the distribution and use of daggers made up a part of the *moyenne durée*. Many examples of daggers that date to the Middle Mumun Period are poorly made or made of inferior stone material. In conditions of more intense production, it might be expected that daggers would sometimes break during production. Poor-quality daggers from burials may be objects that were made in an effort by individuals to gain authority, power, and recognition in an environment of competition.

**Contextual Analysis**

Rock art of the Middle Mumun demonstrates the importance of daggers in the ideational world of prehistoric Korea. This art links megalithic burials, people, daggers, and worship. Part C shows a rock-carving on an Orim-dong megalithic capstone of a large dagger and small human figures kneeling or standing, looking up at the tall dagger (FIGURE 3). To the right is another human figure kneeling at an altar. Daggers depicted on the megalithic capstone of Burial 16 in Inbi-ri in A give further weight to this inference (FIGURE 3). I propose that in the Middle Mumun, possible meanings for groundstone daggers are leadership of the domestic and ideational spheres, protection, violence, and perhaps claims to the ownership of the agricultural fields or surplus harvested from them. Some megaliths were constructed with large square or circular platforms made of river cobbles after 1000 BC, representing an increase in the scale and labour invested in burials. The cobble platform megalithic

![Figure 3](image)

*Figure 3* Two depictions of groundstone daggers carved into the capstones of megalithic burials at (a) Inbi-ri and (b) Orim-dong, redrawn after Lee et al. (2006) after Bale and Ko (2006: Figure 8). Note the kneeling human representation, especially the size of the figure on the left-hand side of (b). Both figures are much smaller than the dagger.
burials are likely connected to ceremonial activity (Kim 2003: 40). A number of large settlements such as Daepyeong have several burial grounds located in different areas, suggesting that some were based on lineages. Some burial grounds have evidence of ceremonial activity such as the presence of red burnished pottery with the base punched out, small mounted Mumun cups, and burning evidence along with red-burnished potsherds in and around the raised stone platforms. In the absence of direct ethnographic analogy (von Gernet and Timmins 1987), I concur with Hill that a contextual interpretation such as I make above with the rock art on megalithic capstones is less convincing because there are a limited number of similarities between the known and unknown that are close together in space and time (Hill 1994: 88).

However, I can strengthen the above analogy and add that ancient, pre-Buddhist beliefs exist to this day in Korea. Some of these may be related to or have origins in megalithic culture. For example, there are sacred spaces for married women who want to bear male offspring; they offer prayers at the foot of large, towering boulders at Namsan in Gyeongju.sendMessage(0x0,0xff)

(GNRICP 2002) and other places in Korea. Yet this contextual analysis is not a TLA as it is found in von Gernet and Timmins (1987) because I cannot make more than two analogies. Even so, I make a preliminary association between the following elements: Inbi-ri megalith + similar unprovenienced dagger from nearby Gyeongju + other similar daggers. Additionally, the symbolic relationship that is evident in the stone carving at Orim-dong megalith can be stated thus:

dead – ancestors – megaliths – stone daggers – worship or deference.

Processual Analysis

The presence of a comparatively larger number of daggers in Middle Mumun household contexts implies that the daggers were used in a different way between 700 and 500 BC. The regular changes in dagger shape and embellishment may indicate that competition between producers took place to make more impressive daggers. As such, I propose that the symbolism of daggers was co-opted by ambitious leaders or factions who sought to control of agricultural surpluses for personal and/or factional gain. The comparatively wider pattern of distribution of daggers in household contexts in the Nam River suggests that leaders likely acquired or sponsored the production
of daggers and gave them to key local people in return for labour, grain, or other goods. The spatio-temporal patterning of daggers in the Middle Mumun indicates the waxing and waning of political and ideological cycles. In this way, the distribution and use of daggers made up a part of the medium term. Many examples of daggers that date to the Middle Mumun are poorly made or made of inferior stone material. In conditions of more intense production, it might be expected that daggers would sometimes break during production. Poor-quality daggers from burials may be objects that were made in an effort by individuals to gain authority, power, and recognition in an environment of competition. Alternatively, the presence of poor quality daggers is reminiscent of DeMarrais’ model, in which the scarcity of elite Moche (c. AD 100-700) ceramics in Peru led to copying with lower quality material for distribution to lower elites (DeMarrais et al. 1996: 26). An analogous practice is also found in Silla (c. AD 300- 935) with the distribution of iron and gilt bronze crowns by gold crown-wearing central elite actors to lesser elites in peripheral areas.

Conclusions

Investigations on the persistence of long-term traditions in ancient Korea such as megalithic burials, groundstone daggers, bronze daggers, and the use of greenstone ornaments shows that time operates at multiple scales (FIGURE 4). The organisation of data according to Annaliste time scales has some potential to lend greater chronological coherence to the data so that we might pose more incisive and informed research questions. Further steps need to be taken to understand some of the questions addressed here. Archaeologists should conduct radiocarbon dating of Mumun burials with greater frequency to nail down nagging questions about chronology. The processes and organisation of production and distribution need to be investigated with greater rigour in order to gain insight into how and why the objects came to be used in different regions across Korea. Red-burnished pottery shows a pattern similar to that of groundstone daggers: they moved from an exclusively mortuary context to household and mortuary contexts. The tradition of using greenstone ornaments as prestigious mortuary goods continued from the Mumun until approximately AD 668, when Silla expanded, Buddhist beliefs spread among elite actors, and the building of rich mounded burials started to decline. In contrast, groundstone daggers and
red-burnished pottery were part of a substratum of the belief system in the Mumun Period and faded with the demise of megalithic culture, as bronze and then iron weaponry ascended in mortuary ceremonial use. This change occurred as elite culture changed from being dominated by corporate ceremonial culture to that of conspicuous consumption of more exotic and precious objects characterised by an outwardly-oriented, network-style mortuary culture.
Preucel has written that material culture has a dual character: artefacts can shape and are shaped by social action. For almost a millennium, when daggers were wielded in ceremonies, leaders were the personification of authority. The use and meaning of the artefact was not static over time, however. Groundstone daggers were a key part of the mortuary complex over the longue durée, but leaders concerned with creating personal power and gathering supporters used a strategy of social capital and altered their meaning between 700 and 500 BC. In the case of Mumun culture, it is likely that concurrent evidence of ongoing intensification of dry- and wet-field agriculture is one of the factors behind the rise of such leaders and the concomitant increase in socio-political complexity. Other strategies were also used in tandem with attempts to control agricultural surpluses. The production and distribution of groundstone daggers and other prestige artefacts was part of an emerging political economy in many regions of Korea in the Early and Middle Mumun Period. An understanding of groundstone daggers as part of the ‘Mumun Ceremonial Complex’ can be extended outward as part of a wider “Yellow Sea Interaction Sphere” as described by Barnes in which ritual bronzes, oracle bones, and greenstone were main parts of the political, ceremonial, and belief systems of Northeast Asia.

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Abstract

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Martin T. Bale
(Pusan National University Museum)

In this paper I investigate long-term processual and contextual elements of material culture to understand changes in the political and ceremonial landscapes of prehistoric transegalitarian and incipiently socio-politically complex societies. The production and distribution of groundstone daggers and other prestige artefacts occurred as part of a nascent political economy in many regions of the Korean peninsula in parts of the Early and Middle Mumun Period, c. 1300-550 BC. I use a perspective that incorporates several interconnected theoretical models to explore the interplay of culture change, the materialisation of ideology, and the construction of meaning of groundstone daggers in prehistoric Korea. Groundstone daggers were a key part of the mortuary complex over the longue durée, and I argue that aggrandising elite actors altered their meaning in the name of the accumulation of social capital and used the production and distribution of the artefacts to build political power by attracting and maintaining supporters between 700 and 550 BC.

Key words Korean archaeology, material culture, long-term history, Mumun Period, prestige, power

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(1300–3000) (TABLE 1). 


1300–550
Long-term history, material culture, and meaning: an example from Korea
mentalité (Barnes 1993: 161; Gardiner 1969: 7; Nelson 1999: 162).}

The mentalité can be studied through various lenses, including cultural, historical, and societal contexts. The study of mentalité is crucial in understanding the dynamics of the material culture and its evolution over time.

In conclusion, mentalité plays a significant role in shaping the material culture and its meanings. Further research is needed to explore the nuances and complexities of mentalité in the context of Korean material culture.
(1) (2) (3) ... (1) (2) (3) ... 5% 60% 59%
annalistes (Annales School) (Bale and Ko 2006; Bale and Bale 2008).

(longue durée)  et ..., à savoir aussi ... (Hill 1994: 88; von Gerner and Timmins 1987). ... (Hodder 1986). ... (medium term) ... (Bintliff 1991: 7). ... (Cross 1993; Prentice 1983). ... (Clark and Blake 1994: 18; Hayden 1995: 20). ... (Clark and Blake 1994: 18; Hayden 1995: 20). ...
...

Moche (100~700) (100~935)