

Exploring the Historical Foundations of Korea's Connections with South Asia Using the Framework of "Mega-Asia"*

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ABSTRACT Due to the changing geopolitical environment of Northeast Asia, the Republic of Korea has come to adopt a broader geographic approach to its foreign policy in Asia, with heightened interest in South Asia. Accompanying this has been the need to explore the historical foundations of Korea's connections with South Asia. The narrative of Heo Hwang-ok, the Indian princess who became the Queen of Gaya, has played a central role in illustrating the deep bilateral links between Korea and South Asia. However, the Heo Hwang-ok narrative is a contested topic within the academic community, so other examples are required. This paper argues that the recently developed "Mega-Asia" approach has the potential to generate other narratives of connectivity between Korea and South Asia due to its broad analytical lens, focus on a networked Asia, and adoption of a multidisciplinary approach. Such additional narratives of connectivity, produced through the adoption of the "Mega-Asia" approach, are centered on the following: (1) the activities of Buddhist monks, who were the transnational intellectuals of their time; (2) the exchange of Indo-Pacific glass beads; and (3) the spread of *Sesamum indicum*, a key component of Korean cuisine, which was first domesticated on the Indian subcontinent.

Keywords Korea, South Asia, "Mega-Asia", Historical Foundations of Coconnectivity, Heo Hwang-ok

* 이 논문은 2020년 대한민국 교육부와 한국연구재단의 지원을 받아 수행된 연구임(NRF-2020S1A6A3A02065553).

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1. Introduction

The current geopolitical environment of Northeast Asia has led to changes in the Republic of Korea's foreign policy in Asia. A broader geographic approach, characterized by a heightened interest in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific, has come to supplement what has traditionally been a narrow political focus on Northeast Asia's core regional powers (i.e. China, Japan, and Russia). South Asia, in particular, has been highlighted as a key region for strategic partnerships in recent years, beginning with the "New Southern Policy" of the previous Moon Jae-in administration, and continuing with the "Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region" of the current Yoon Suk Yeol administration.

It is said that analogies with the past are often constructed to justify foreign policy decisions in the present (Klymenko & Siddi 2020: 945). In the case of the Republic of Korea's foreign policy towards South Asia, the narrative of Heo Hwang-ok, the Indian princess who became the Queen of Gaya, has played a central role. For instance, the Indian embassy's website¹ presents Heo Hwang-ok as a key example of bilateral relations between the two countries. In addition, during the Moon administration, the First Lady Kim Jung-sook visited Ayodhya, India, to participate in a ceremony to mark the laying down of foundations for a park commemorating Heo Hwang-ok (Yonhap 2018). It should be noted, however, that Heo Hwang-ok remains the subject of heated debate within the academic community. Indeed, there are other examples that could better illustrate how the connections between South Asia and Korea have deep historical

1 <https://www.indembassyseoul.gov.in/india-rok-bilateral-relations>

foundations, but which have tended to be overlooked until now.

Then what has been the reason for this oversight? Of the various possible reasons, the following three can be highlighted for the purpose of this paper. First, due to the geographical and cultural barriers that exist between the two regions, and due to the fact that, until recently, there has been little impetus to overcome these barriers, the connections that may have existed between South Asia and the Korean peninsula in the past have not merited in-depth investigation. As such, foreign policy makers have had little to work with when attempting to highlight the deep historical nature of the relationship between the two regions. Second, as the case of the Indian embassy's website (examined above) demonstrates, the discourse on the relationship between Korea and a given country/region has tended to focus on *direct bilateral relationships*. As a result of this, historical relationships that do not fit into this framework have tended to be overlooked. Third, the increased specialization of academic disciplines has led to the strengthening of barriers between the academic fields that actively contribute to policy making and those that do not. As a result, the research developments of the latter are unlikely to be shared with the former, and therefore even more unlikely to be recognized and utilized by policy makers.

Recently, however, the "Mega-Asia Research Group" based at Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) has presented an alternative framework for approaching Asia as "Mega-Asia",² they have proposed the need to adopt Asia itself as a unit of analysis, thereby allowing previously unrecognized connections between distant regions and countries within

2 <http://snuac-hk.snu.ac.kr/eng/>

Asia to be explored. By regarding Asia as a networked entity, the “Mega-Asia” approach also facilitates recognition of the importance of *indirect links*. In addition, it also involves a multidisciplinary perspective, acknowledging the contribution that the disciplines of the humanities may offer to the branches of the social sciences that have close ties with foreign policy making.³

It may be argued that such a “Mega-Asia” approach has the potential to generate new research on the past connections that existed between distant regions (such as South Asia and the Korean peninsula) which have yet to be fully explored. As such, the present paper aims to investigate the historical foundations of Korea’s connections with South Asia using this approach, thereby responding to a very clear and urgent need. For this purpose, the theoretical background, key concepts, and utility of the “Mega-Asia” approach will first be presented. The academic debate surrounding the narrative of Heo Hwang-ok will then be examined, which will illustrate the need for caution when adopting this narrative for foreign policy purposes. This will be followed by an investigation of other topics which also illustrate links between Korea and South Asia, such as the activities of Buddhist monks who were the transnational intellectuals of their time; the exchange of Indo-Pacific glass beads; and the spread of *Sesamum indicum*, a key component of Korean cuisine, which was first domesticated on the Indian subcontinent.

3 To regard Asia as a networked entity is in itself not a novel approach but the attempt to trace the evolving nature of the networks, made possible by the multidisciplinary nature of the research team, is a distinctive element of the Mega-Asia Research Group’s research agenda.

2. The “Mega-Asia” Approach

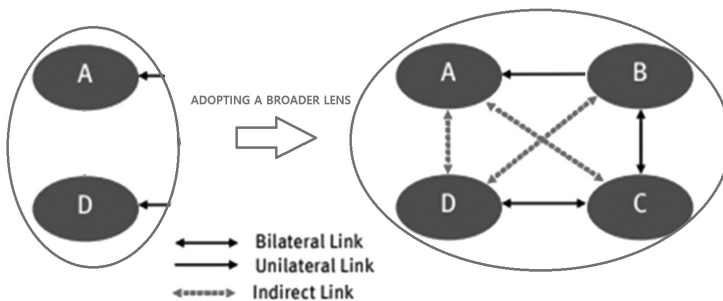
Asian Studies has tended to approach Asia in terms of its “parts”, limiting the unit of analysis to countries or regions, rather than looking at Asia in its entirety. As a result, it has been particularly difficult to explore the connections that may have existed between the regions of Asia that are located far apart, as is the case of the Korean peninsula and the Indian subcontinent. This is because, in the past, the connections that existed between distant regions were rarely direct and bilateral; instead, they tended to be indirect and networked. To observe such indirect and networked connections, a broader perspective that allows the researcher to consider not only the countries or regions under study but also the networked areas that lie in-between is required. This is the reason why an analytical lens that allows a comprehensive observation of Asia in its entirety to take place, thereby revealing the interactions between its diverse countries, regions, and subregions, is required.

Although the need for such a holistic approach toward the study of Asia appears to be self-evident, it must be acknowledged that such a proposal to regard Asia as a whole has also been met with skepticism. For example, any attempt to consider Asia in its entirety must provide a counterargument to Acharya's powerful statement that “Asia is not “one”. There is no singular idea of Asia.” (Acharya 2010: 1001). In addition, within the context of Korea, the specter of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” concept of Imperial Japan and the accompanying slogan of “Asia for Asians” has meant that researchers have been extremely reticent to imagine Asia as a singular community (Kim 2013: 31-32); even in the 21st century, such an imagination still requires the justification of how it differs

from the notion of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere”. It is due to these circumstances that any attempt to regard Asia as a whole requires justification of its aims and utility.

It is against such an intellectual backdrop that the notion of “Mega-Asia” was first proposed in 2020 by the Mega-Asia Research Group in an attempt to trace the reality and dynamics of an interconnected Asia, a research goal that required Asia to be approached in its totality. The need for a broader lens to observe the entire spectrum of connections between Asia’s countries and regions is illustrated in Fig. 1., which illustrates how *indirect* connections can come to be recognized when a broader spatial unit of analysis is adopted.

As Shin (2021: 12) has noted, such a perspective goes hand in hand with the wider trend in which space has come to be regarded, no longer as a “space of places” but rather as a “space of flows” (Castells 1996). In other words, a key element of the “Mega-Asia” approach has been to regard Asia in terms of its networked connections, which in turn has required Asia itself to be established as the unit of analysis.



[Figure 1] How the entire spectrum of connections between entities can come to be recognized when a broader analytical lens is adopted. (Image source: edited by the author from the original image featured in Görlach *et al.* 2015: 35)

But this is not to say that the significance of “Mega-Asia” lies only in its efficacy as a methodological tool. There have also been attempts to explore the possibility of “Mega-Asia” as an ontological reality of present-day Asia. For example, Shin (2021: 5) has proposed that “Mega-Asia” can be understood as “a global or regional dynamic emerging through the participation of the diverse regions of Asia, as well as being a mega-network connecting these diverse regions of Asia”. This understanding of the reality of “Mega-Asia” as a network of interactions between the many regions of Asia is also echoed by Yoon *et al.* (2021: 61). As Ru (2022: 182) has noted, this understanding of Asia being a “networked region” is crucial to the concept of “Mega-Asia,” for this networked identity – formed through internal practices that act to reproduce multi-layered connections and exchange – has the *potential* to provide the foundations of a “common identity” that *might be* defined as a “Mega-Asian identity.”

The concept of “Mega-Asia” as an ontological reality – of what *it is* and what *it is not* – as well as its efficacy continues to be explored by the Mega-Asia Research Group. At present, “Mega-Asia” may be understood in the following ways, as has been summarized by Ru (2022: 175-6). First, “Mega-Asia” involves a new spatial imagining of Asia. For example, Russia is categorized as “North Asia” and “Central Asia” is seen to include countries such as Georgia and Azerbaijan within the framework of “Mega-Asia.” Second, the trajectory of “Mega-Asia” does not need to be traced according to a singular and homogenous temporal framework. Narratives of “Mega-Asia” in the past can adopt different historical tempos and also be discontinuous. Third, although it cannot be denied that “Mega-Asia” represents an attempt to overcome a Eurocentric definition of Asia, this does not mean that “Mega-Asia” is posited as the new global hegemon.

“Mega-Asia” is merely one of many ways of imagining Asia. Fourth, “Mega-Asia” is not accompanied by the ideology of modernization and regional development, and involves a form of multidisciplinary regional studies that can be viewed as an alternative to policy-driven regional studies.

With regards to the existence of that which can be *recognized* as a common “Mega-Asian” identity, there remains debate even within the Mega-Asia Research Group on whether such a phenomenon already exists or is in the process of emerging or can merely be anticipated in present. In the case of this author, who has adopted a rather cautious stance on the matter, a pan-Asian (or rather “Mega-Asian”) identity is regarded as one possible outcome of the “Mega-Asia” approach. This is because, once the stage has been set to allow explorations of networked links (i.e. indirect connections) between the nodes comprising Asia to take place – through the adoption of the broad analytical lens that accompanies this approach – then the identification of past and present connections, which heretofore had not been recognized, may provide the groundwork for the formation of common identities shared along these networked links. The accumulation of such common identities, sometimes nested and other times overlapping, may indeed at some point in the future result in something that may be defined as a “Mega-Asian” identity. It must be stressed, however, that this is *not the objective* of the “Mega-Asia” approach; it is *one possible outcome*.

Finally, it can be proposed that, if such a “Mega-Asian” identity is formed as a result of the application of the “Mega-Asia” approach, then Asia may indeed emerge as a “mega-region”, as a common platform sharing common objectives and facing common challenges (cf. on

regionalism Acharya 2010: 1002). Again, this is not proposed to be the *aim* of the “Mega-Asia” approach, but again, it can be considered as *one possible outcome*.

To summarize, “Mega-Asia” can be used as an insightful theoretical and methodological tool to consider the direct and indirect connections between all regions of Asia. The utility of such an approach will be presented in Section 4. In addition, the concept of “Mega-Asia” also has the potential to generate a pan-Asian identity and lead to an emergent phenomenon that is a mega-region. This is not presented as a causal result of the “Mega-Asia” approach but is anticipated as one possible outcome.

3. The Debate Surrounding the Heo Hwang-ok Narrative

The account of how an Indian princess, Heo Hwang-ok, arrived at the shores of Gaya and became the Queen Consort of the kingdom's founding father, King Suro, appears in an abridged version of *Garak Gukgi* (National Chronicle of the Gaya Kingdom), which is featured in *Samguk Yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms). According to this account, King Suro, anticipating the arrival of his future queen, sent his chief courtiers to Mangsan-do Island in the south. There they observed a mysterious ship with a red sail and flying a red flag on the horizon, sailing in a northerly direction. On board this ship was a beautiful princess who was escorted to the coast. Along with her entourage and a rich trousseau, she arrived at a tent that had been set up near the royal residence where King Suro awaited her. Upon meeting the King, she said “I am a princess of Ayuta. My family

name is Heo, my given name is Hwang-ok, I am sixteen years old.” She then recounted how her parents had received a message from the Gods in their dreams to send her to marry Suro, the King of the Kingdom of Garak, and become his Queen.⁴

Because the “Ayuta” that appears in this account has often been interpreted in modern scholarship as the “Ayodhya” located in Uttar Pradesh in Northern India, the Heo Hwang-ok narrative presented above has been actively used as evidence of the deep ties that existed between Korea and India in the past. The archaeologist Kim Byeongmo, currently Professor Emeritus at Hanyang University, has been particularly active in arguing for the historical authenticity of the Heo Hwang-ok narrative. Indeed, not only has Kim Byeongmo generated public interest in the Heo Hwang-ok narrative in Korea through various publications and media channels (e.g. Kim 2018), he has also played a seminal role in making this Korean interest known in India. For example, according to Bharati & Anand (2023: 1673-1674), after his third field trip to Ayodhya, Kim Byeongmo met up with Vimalendra Pratap Mohan Mishra, a key figure of the Ayodhya Dynasty royal family, to talk about Heo Hwang-ok in 1993. In 1999, Kim Jongpil, who was then Prime Minister as well as a head figure of the Gimhae Kim Clan (which descended from Kim Suro), invited Mishra to discuss the issue of Queen Heo with the members of the Gimhae Kim Clan. In 2001, the Gimhae Kim Clan society and several CEOs of businesses based in Gimhae funded a stone plaque commemorating Queen Heo, which was erected in Ayodhya. Finally, in 2005, Gimhae City invited Mishra (in his

4 For an English translation of the full account, see Ha Tae-Hung and G. K. Mintz’s translation of *Samguk Yusa* (Il-yeon 2016).

capacity as one of the key members of the Ayodhya Dynasty royal family) to Korea to participate in an exhibition on Indian folk customs.

First Lady Kim Jung-sook's visit to Ayodhya in 2018 can therefore be seen as a culmination of interactions that had taken place between Korea and Ayodhya over several decades. Unfortunately, however, the interpretation of the Heo Hwang-ok narrative as *historical fact* rather than *myth*, as well as the understanding of "Ayuta" as present-day Ayodhya in northern India (both of which have provided the basis for these interactions between Korea and Ayodhya), have been examined in detail by researchers, who have identified major logical flaws.

First of all, compared to the other foundation myths recorded in *Samguk Sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms) and *Samguk Yusa*, the expansion and reproduction process of the Heo Hwang-ok narrative is said to have been particularly active prior to being written down during the Goryeo Dynasty (Lee 2003: 180). This is due to two characteristic elements associated with the narrative, namely its association with Gaya and its association with Buddhism. In relation to the former, it has been argued that Gaya foundation myths were heavily reworked during the period of King Munmu and King Muyeol of Silla in order to enhance the value of their Gaya associations (Lee 2003: 183).⁵ This has made it particularly difficult to distinguish historical facts from politically motivated embellishments in the case of the Gaya foundation myths.

5 A key base of power for these two rulers of Silla (of the Gyeongju Kim Clan) was the family of Kim Yushin (of the Gimhae Kim Clan), who was the general that spearheaded the unification of the Three Kingdoms by Silla. Kim Yushin was a descendent of the Geumgwan Gaya royal family and his sister became the Queen Consort of King Muyeol.

In relation to the latter, the existence of another myth regarding the brother of Heo Hwang-ok (which does not appear in *Samguk Yusa* and was written down at a later date) should also be taken into consideration. According to this myth, Queen Heo's brother, Jangyoo Hwasang, is said to have been responsible for the introduction of Buddhism to Korea (Jung 2022: 336). Such a narrative can be interpreted as having emerged in order to accentuate Silla Buddhism's links with India, due to the the "Buddha-land ideology" that was prevalent at the time. According to this ideology, Buddhism was not a foreign religion but an indigenous one, and in order to justify such a stance, various attempts were made to link the events appearing in Buddhist cannon to the land of Silla (Lee 2003: 185-6). It has been pointed out by Lee Kwang-su (2003: 186) that the designation of Heo Hwang-ok's place of origin as "Ayuta" should be understood within such a historical and intellectual context. Indeed, it has also been pointed out that, prior to the fourth century, Ayodhya was called "Saketa". It has also been suggested that "Ayodhya", which appears in the *Ramayana*, was an esoteric term that would not have been widely known (as "Ayuta") within Silla society and so is likely to have been used to refer to India (Lee 2003: 190). To summarize, all of the above lines of evidence suggest that the phrase "I am a princess of Ayuta (妾是阿踰陁國公主也)" that appears in *Samguk Yusa* should be approached with caution; it should not be uncritically accepted as a historical fact.

Then does this mean that the Heo Hwang-ok narrative no longer has efficacy in promoting close ties between Korea and India? Certainly not, for the way in which various interest groups (from the Silla period to the modern day) have decided to actively utilize the Heo Hwang-ok narrative for their various agendas clearly demonstrates how the general public of

Korea, both in the past and the present, have been open to establishing connections with India. If this were not the case, the Indian origins of Heo Hwang-ok could have easily been forgotten. As such, it can be argued that, rather than approaching the Heo Hwang-ok narrative as historical fact and investing much time and effort in order to find evidence of a historical link between present-day Ayodhya and Heo Hwang-ok, and rather than using this quite fragile link⁶ as the historical back group for present-day interactions between Korea and India, it is the *current* Korean public's willingness to embrace the myth of an Indian princess as the founding mother of Korea's most populous Gimhae Kim clan that should be highlighted by foreign policy makers to promote stronger ties between the two countries. The *actual past connections* that existed between Korea and India are better found in other examples, as demonstrated in the following section.

6 For example, Geo Lyong Lee (2019) has pointed out that the "double fish emblem" associated with Heo Hwang-ok in Korea, which can be found throughout Ayodhya, can also be found in Faizabad. Based on a detailed field study of the architecture featuring this emblem in the two cities, Lee has argued that it is associated with the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Awadh/Oudh, a Mughal state that was located in the Awadh region of North India. In other words, it is possible that the use of the "double fish emblem" in Ayodhya may not stem back to the time of Heo Hwang-ok. Given that, along with the similarity between the place-names "Ayuta" and "Ayodhya", the presence of the "double fish emblem" in Ayodhya is the only other line of evidence that connects Korea (via Heo Hwang-ok) to Ayodhya, it can indeed be argued that the basis for the connection between Korea and Ayodhya is flimsy at best.

4. The Historical Foundations of Connections Between Korea and India: Alternative Narratives

The adoption of a “Mega-Asia” approach that (1) considers Asia itself as an unit of analysis, making it possible to recognize the indirect connections that existed between distant places, and (2) is multidisciplinary in nature, allowing such connections to be observed through a wide range of evidence, has the potential to produce other narratives that may provide the historical foundations for present policies of connectivity between Korea and India. This section presents three such narratives: one based around the movement of people, another based around the movement of goods, and the third based around the movement of ideas (i.e. “taste”).

4.1. Buddhist Monks: The Travelling Intellectuals of their Time

The straight-line distance between Seoul and New Delhi is approximately 4769 km. By air, the journey takes around 8 hours; by sea, the journey takes around 24 days, covering a distance of 5853 nautical miles at the speed of 10 knots.⁷ Even with modern transportation, the journey between the Korean peninsula and the Indian subcontinent is not easy by any means, and so we can only imagine how difficult it must have been to travel between the two places in pre-modern times. Nevertheless, the movement of people between the two places did occur, and in the case of the Buddhist monks that made this journey, their efforts were recorded in texts that are accepted as having historical validity.

7 <http://ports.com/sea-route/port-of-mumbai,india/port-of-chinae,south-korea/>

The most famous of these journeys was made by the Silla Monk Hyecho who first went to Tang China in 721 CE and then continued to make his way to India via Shrivijaya on Sumatra in Indonesia. From 724, he embarked on a pilgrimage of Buddhist sacred places in South Asia (including India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan) before travelling further west to Persia and then traveling eastwards again, along the trade routes of the Silk Roads in Central Asia. In 727, he arrived at Dunhuang where his diary (known as *Memoir of the Pilgrimage to the Five Regions of India* (往五天竺國傳)) remained before being discovered again in 1908 (Jung 2010).

Other less famous journeys to India are recorded in *The Great Tang Biographies of Eminent Monks who Sought the Dharma in the Western Regions* (大唐西域求法高僧傳) written by the Tang Monk Yijing (義淨). Of the 61 monks whose biographies appear in this text, eight were from Silla⁸ and one was from Goguryeo⁹ (Kim 2015: 173-4). This text contains detailed information on the where, when, and what of the monks' journeys in South Asia and so can be regarded as a valuable source on the personal interactions that took place between India and Korea in the past. In addition to these Silla and Goguryeo monks, the Baekje Monk Gyeomik (謙益) is also known to have made the journey to India, returning in 526 with 72 Buddhist scriptures that were later translated (Chae 1983).

In addition, the movement of monks took place in both directions. The Indian monk Baedalda (倍達多) accompanied Gyeomik to Baekje (Chae 1983). It is recorded in *Samguk Sagi* that in 575, during the reign of King

8 Ariyabalma (阿離耶跋摩法師), Hyebeop (慧業法師), Goobon (求本法師), Hyuntae (玄太法師), Hyungak (玄恪法師), Hyeryoon (慧輪法師), Bokyoo (復有法師) (2 monks of this title)

9 Hyeonyoo (玄遊)

Jinheung of Silla, Monk Ahnhong (安弘) returned from Sui China with the Indian monk Vimara (毘摩羅).¹⁰ In the Goryeo period, Monks Mahura (摩睺羅), Silivaila (唎哩囉日羅), Sunyadisa (蘇那的沙野), and Dalmasit (達摩悉) came to Korea from India (Hwang 2020).

The journeys made by these monks present a more detailed picture of human movement between the countries that is based on historical facts rather than myth. However, it is Heo Hwangok who is regarded to be the representative figure of bilateral relations between Korea and India and not these monks. One possible reason for this may be because the monks have been regarded foremost as Buddhist individuals, which research on them mainly being undertaken within the context of Buddhist studies. Given that Buddhism is no longer a major religion in India, such a Buddhist link may not be a particularly persuasive basis for connectivity on the part of the Indians. In relation to this, it should be stressed that these monks were the intellectuals of their time who travelled to distant lands in search of knowledge. Through their journeys, they acquired and spread knowledge of various subjects, such as medicine. For example, there are many lines of evidence that show how, via Buddhist texts, the principles of Indian traditional medicine came to influence Korean traditional medicine in the Unified Silla and Goryeo periods (Kim 2005: 206). Re-interpreted in this way, the Buddhist monks that journeyed between India and Korea in the past can be regarded as intellectuals who were responsible for the exchange of knowledge, similar in vein to the academic exchange between Korea and India which has become intensified with each passing year in the present-day.

10 *Samguk Sagi* Vol 4. Account from the 37th year of King Jinheung's reign.

4.2. Indo-Pacific Glass Beads: Evidence of an Ancient Global Supply Chain

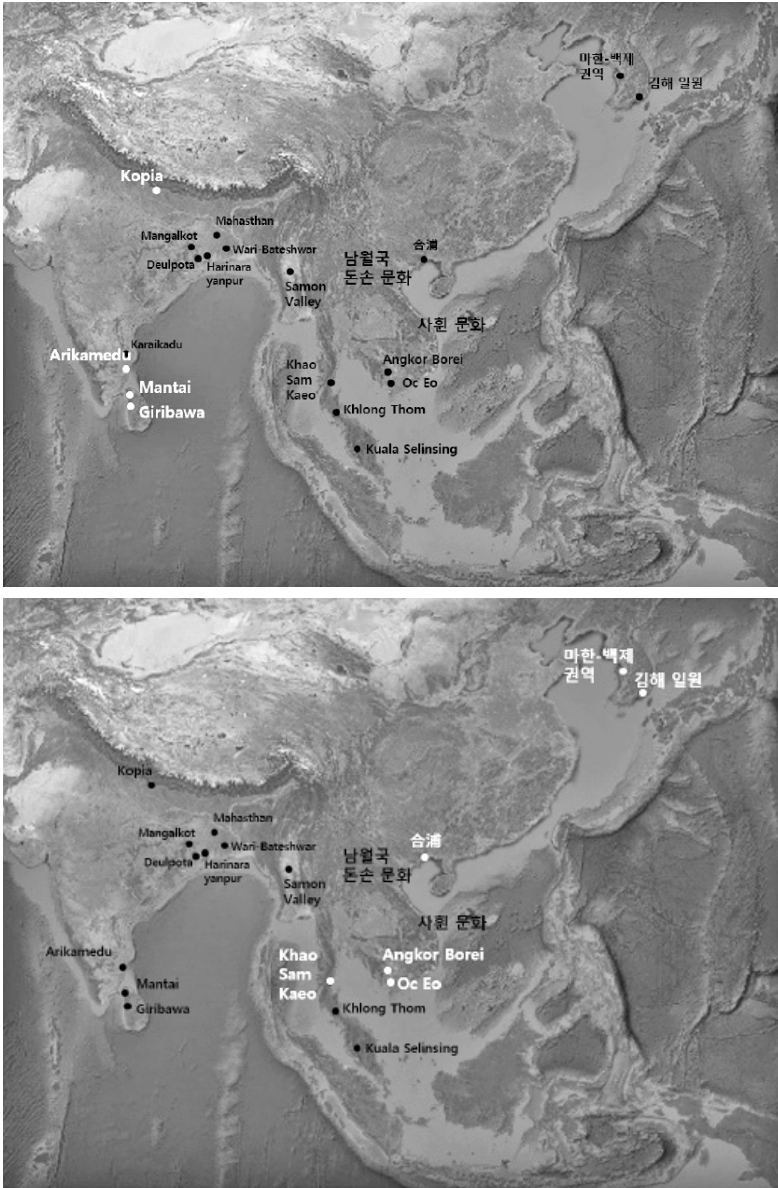
Upon watching the footage of Korean President Moon Jae-in's State Visit to India in July 8, 2018, several members of the Korean archaeology community mentioned how it was a shame that the First Lady had not worn a necklace of replica Indo-Pacific glass beads, imitating those excavated from the ancient tombs of the Gimhae region in southern Korea. This is because the beads from Gimhae have been scientifically proven to have come from India along a maritime route, thus providing evidence of the deep historical nature of the maritime connections between the two countries.

Glass beads were highly prized in ancient times and were distributed over long distances. In addition, glass is made of silicates and other compounds that act as flux, and due to the different mixture of compounds, each type of glass has its own distinctive chemical fingerprint. Due to these fortuitous circumstances, glass artifacts can be used for the reconstruction of ancient trade networks. In particular, "Indo-Pacific glass beads", which are monochrome glass beads manufactured using the "drawn technique" of bead production, have played a central role in allowing ancient maritime trade networks of Asia to be reconstructed, since they originated in India and were distributed throughout Southeast and Northeast Asia (Francis 2001).¹¹

11 Maritime contacts between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia can be traced back to the 4th to 3rd centuries, if not earlier. These contacts were first initiated by the seafarers of the ancient state of Kalinga (located in the present-day state of Odisha and northern parts of Andhra Pradesh), who had already established maritime connections

Although various different types of Indo-Pacific glass beads were produced on the Indian subcontinent, two types are in relevant in terms of connections with the Korean peninsula. One is potash I (m-K-Ca-Al) glass and the other is high alumina soda glass of the A-m-A1 type. The production of both types of glass took place at sites located along India's eastern coastline. In the case of potash I (m-K-Ca-Al) glass, production sites have been identified at Arikamedu in southern India and Deulpota, Harinara Yanpur, and Wari-Bateshwar in northern India. In the case of high alumina soda glass of the A-m-A1 type, production sites have been identified at Karaikadu, Mantai, and Giribawa in southern India. Both types of glass beads were distributed eastwards, following the trade wind routes, and have been excavated at sites in Thailand and Vietnam, but again the sites yielding the respective bead types are mutually exclusive. Finally, both types of glass have been discovered at sites in Korea: potash I (m-K-Ca-Al) glass beads have been identified at the elite tombs of the Gimhae region, along the southeastern coastline; high alumina soda glass of the A-m-A1 type has been identified at royal Baekje tombs along in Korea's central-western region. It has also noted that potash I (m-K-Ca-Al) glass beads have been identified at sites in Hupo in southeastern China but high alumina soda glass of the A-m-A1 type has yet to be discovered at sites in China (Kim & Park 2023: 80-7) (Fig. 2).

with Southeast Asia in pre-Mauryan times (Tripathi 2000: 2). However, it was in the aftermath of Ashoka's conquest of Kalinga (i.e. the Kalinga War), which led the emperor to embrace Buddhism and dispatch missionaries for Buddhism's worldwide dissemination, that the movement of people, things, and ideas along the maritime network Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia was intensified (Sharmin & Shahidul 2021). The movement of "Indo-Pacific glass beads" via this network can be understood within context.



[Figure 2] Sites yielding Indo-Pacific glass beads produced on the Indian subcontinent and consumed on the Korean peninsula. (Above) Sites yielding potash I (m-K-Ca-Al) glass in white letters. (Below): Sites yielding high alumina soda glass of the A-m-A1 type in white letters. (Image source: Kim & Park 2023, pp. 85, 87)

Based on the above lines of evidence, Kim and Park (2023) have suggested that the movement of Indo-Pacific glass beads within the Asian world took place along multiple production-distribution-consumption networks in ancient times. Of these, two connected the Indian subcontinent and the Korean peninsula. One network was the potash I (m-K-Ca-Al) glass bead supply chain that was in existence from the 3rd century BCE to the beginning of the 1st century CE. The other network was the supply chain of high alumina soda glass of the A-m-Al type which was in existence from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE. It is of particular interest to note that the latter network did not feature any nodes based in Mainland China. Therefore, the existence of these two different ancient “global supply chains” connecting India and Korea in ancient times not only illustrates the deep maritime links between the two countries but also demonstrates the multiplicity of such ancient links.

4.3. Sesame: A Crop Domesticated in India Forming the Backbone of Korean Cuisine

A distinctive component of Korean cuisine is sesame (*Sesamum indicum*), be it in the form of sesame seeds sprinkled on top of *namul* (vegetable side dishes) or in the form of sesame oil added to *bibimbap*. However, Koreans consume much more than they produce, which means that a considerable amount of sesame is imported. According to statistics on the import of sesame provided by the Korean government, just under 50% of all imports of sesame come from China. However, it is interesting to note that the percentage of the market shares by Indian imports has increased from 22.2% in 2019 to 33.4% in 2020. During this time period, Chinese imports

increased from 46% to 48.9% (ROKMAFRA & KAFFTC 2020: 467).

From an archaeological point of view, this market share of Indian imported sesame is not at all surprising, since the domestication of sesame is known to have taken place on the Indian subcontinent. Archaeobotanical research indicates that cultivated sesame was established in India by the time of the Harappan civilization, and spread to Mesopotamia before 2000 BCE (Fuller 2003).¹² Domesticated sesame also spread eastwards, most likely along routes that would later form the Silk Roads network, and was farmed during China's Neolithic period. On the Korean peninsula, sesame was consumed from the Bronze Age (from around 1300 BCE), when farming was established as the main subsistence strategy (Shin 2001).

Of course, the spread of sesame was a gradual process that took place over centuries, and the communities that farmed this crop on the Korean peninsula are unlikely to have had any conception of distant places such as the Indian subcontinent. However, the reason why sesame can still be regarded as a mechanism of connectivity is because its common presence in Indian and Korean cuisine provides the basis for a "common taste" to be shared. As Jou (2023: 38) has noted, "Taste is not a purely personal matter, but a social entity that controls people in a society over a long period of time. Historians call this the "structure of taste." This is the substance of *longue durée* that is formed over a long period of time and restrains and dominates the people living within it. "Taste" is so dominant that once people in a society have become accustomed to a particular

12 The view that sesame was domesticated in Africa has been refuted based on a critical examination of the genetic and chemical data of sesame (Bedigian 2003).

taste, entering a society with a different structure of taste can be an embarrassing or painful experience.”

It is this common “structure of taste”, provided by sesame and maintained over millennia, that has provided the foundations for modern-day commercial interactions between Korea and India based around sesame. Because people of both regions are influenced by sesame’s “structure of taste”, the crop continues to be produced and consumed in both regions, allowing for the emergence of connectivity generated by the import and export of sesame. It is due to this way in which the spread of sesame that occurred in the past has laid down the foundations for connections maintained by the commercial exchange of sesame in the present that this crop can also be regarded as a key example of connectivity between Korea and India.

5. Conclusion

It was proposed above that if, through the application of a “Mega-Asia” approach, previously overlooked connections can come to be recognized, and if the narratives of these networked links can provide the groundwork for the formation of common identities, then a “Mega-Asian” identity of sorts may indeed emerge in the future. However, the role of the researcher is *not* to argue for the need for such a “Mega-Asian” identity but merely to provide empirical evidence that may *lead to* its formation and, if the stirrings of such identity formation are observed, to *trace* that formation.

In the case of this paper, the multi-dimensional connections that existed between Korea and India in the past were sufficiently presented

using empirical evidence. It should be noted that the significance of these connections is not limited to the two countries alone; the connections also provide insights into the nodes and links that formed the networks spread out over the various regions of Asia. Therefore, the narrative of connectivity between Korea and India represents a starting point from which narratives of connectivity between Korea and India, respectively, and the regions in between can be pursued in the future.

Finally, it was also argued that the Heo Hwangok narrative should not be regarded as empirical evidence of such *past* connections but instead be acknowledged as representing a desire to develop such connections in the *present*. In other words, the value of the Heo Hwangok narrative lies in its usefulness as a *symbol* of the *present desire* to develop links between Korea and India.

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초록

“메가아시아” 개념을 이용한 한국과 남아시아 연결성의 역사적 기반 검토

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동북아 지역의 지정학적 환경이 변화하면서 대한민국은 아시아 대외정책에서 보다 폭넓은 지리적 접근을 취하고 있으며, 그 결과로 남아시아 지역에 대한 관심이 높아지고 있다. 이에, 한국과 남아시아 지역 간 연결성의 역사적 기반을 탐구할 필요성이 대두되었다. 지금까지는 고대 가야의 국모가 된 인도 출신의 공주 허황옥에 관한 서사가 한국과 남아시아의 뿌리 깊은 양국 관계를 설명하는 데 중심적인 역할을 해왔다. 그러나 허황옥 설화가 학계 내에서 여전히 논란의 대상이 되고 있는 만큼, 다른 사례들도 고려할 필요가 있다. 본고에서는 최근에 제창된 “메가아시아” 접근 방식을 도입할 경우, 그것의 광범위한 분석 단위, 네트워크화된 아시아에 대한 초점, 그리고 학제간·융복합적 접근 방식으로 인해 한국과 남아시아 간의 연결성에 대한 또 다른 서사를 제시할 수 있다고 주장한다. “메가아시아” 접근을 채택할 경우 제시될 수 있는 두 지역 간 연결성에 대한 또 다른 서사들은 다음과 같다: (1) 고대 사회에서 초국적 지식인이었던 불교 승려들의 교류 활동; (2) 인도-태평양 옛 유리구슬의 유통; (3) 역사적으로 인도에서 처음으로 재배되었으며 교류의 결과로 오늘날 한국 요리의 핵심 요소로 정착된 참깨의 확산.

주제어 한국, 남아시아, “메가아시아”, 연결성의 역사적 기반, 허황옥

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