

## THE SILK ROAD AND KOREA-MIDDLE EAST CULTURAL CONNECTIONS: GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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The Silk Road, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea all the way to the Korean Peninsula and Japan, connected societies across Eurasia.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, thanks to advances made by comparative approaches and archaeological findings, great progress has been made in the study of historical cross-cultural contacts and trading relations among Eurasian societies through the Silk Road network. This has allowed for a new perspective on the long-distance cross-cultural relationships in Afro-Eurasia. Societies as distant as Korea and the Middle East were in contact through long-distance trade routes both overland and sea long before the advent of Islam. Written references are few and far between, but documentation and archaeological excavations are sufficient to prove the existence of substantial commerce between Korea and the Middle East.

For example, *Samguk sagi*, the official chronicle of the Three Kingdoms era compiled in 1145 CE, provides a detailed account of commercial items that were sold by Middle Eastern merchants and widely used in Silla society.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, recent academic attention to *Kāshnāma*, a medieval Persian epic written in the early twelfth century based on an earlier orally transmitted tale, opened a new phase in the study of historical and cultural relations between Iran and Korea. Scholars in Korea, Iran, China, and Europe

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<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905), a well-known German geographer, coined the term “Die Seidenstrassen”, meaning the Silk Road, to refer to the overland trade route in Central Asia through which various goods—predominantly silk—were traded. It was since the introduction of the term that the Silk Road came to be recognized as a major route through which the trade of material goods as well as intellectual, artistic and cultural exchange took place. The term “Silk Road” came to encompass not only the Oasis route, the overland route, but also the northern Steppe route and the southern Maritime route. The culture of the Korean Peninsula located at the eastern end of the Eurasian Continent was shaped very much by the active cultural interactions that occurred through the Silk Road.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed information, see Hee Soo Lee, *The Advent of Islam in Korea* (Istanbul: IRICICA, 1997).

have begun to research this rare document, which deals substantially with a country it calls *Basilā*—a name that most likely refers to ancient Silla. Aided by Silk Road research, the story of *Kushnāma* deeply enriches our understanding of the historical and cultural relation that existed between pre-modern Iran and East Asia. Ongoing studies analyze the specific factors and changing historical contexts that affected these Silk Road societies and their interrelationship, as well as the transfer of technologies and ideas that connect the Middle East to East Asia. In this way, this special issue delves into the 1,500-year-long historical and cultural relations between Korea and the Middle East along the Silk Roads<sup>3</sup> based on the new topics, methods, and findings exemplified above.

### 1. THE ROLE OF THE SILK ROAD AS THE CHANNEL OF KOREANS' ANCIENT CONTACT WITH OUTSIDE CIVILIZATIONS

It was through the Steppe route during the Bronze Age that the Korean Peninsula began making contact with outside civilizations and embracing foreign influences. According to Young-pil Kwon, who has made remarkable achievements in the art history of the Silk Road, Iranian culture had already made inroads into the art history of the Korean Peninsula in the Bronze Age. It was also during this period that the Ordos Bronze culture and Siberian cultural factors reached the Korean Peninsula. Ancient shamanism was also introduced through the Silk Road.<sup>4</sup>

Chōng Su-il (Jeong Soo-il), a pioneer and a prominent expert of Silk Road studies in Korea, also writes that there is hard evidence about the close contact and exchanges made through the Silk Road between the Korean Peninsula and the Eurasian Continent after the Neolithic era. Certain artifacts of the Korean Peninsula relate to a nomadic heritage obviously connected to animal-style bronzes from the Ordos region and thus linked to formerly Scythic-Siberian influences.<sup>5</sup> Scythian art in the form of gold and bronze animal ornaments dispersed throughout the East and West mainly through the Steppe route and left strong imprints on the arts of the Korean Peninsula. It is also surmised that many cultural artifacts, including pottery portraying a horseback riding figure, a horn

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<sup>3</sup> Hee Soo Lee, "1500 Years of Contact between Korea and Middle East," *Middle East Institute*, (June, 2014): 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> Young-Pil Kwon, *The Silk Road Ethos* (Seoul: Hagyōn Cultural Publishing [Hagyōn munhwasa], 2017), 177–178; Ki-Seok Park, *Korean Cultural Heritage 1* (Seoul: Sigong Tech, 2010), 245.

<sup>5</sup> Chōng Su-il, *Silk'ŭrodūbak* (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yōngsa, 2001), 41–45; Barbara Seyock, "The Culture of Han and Wa around the Korean Strait: An Archaeological Perspective," *Acta Koreana* 6, no.1 (2003): 74.

chalice, and a golden ornamental sword excavated from the Kyerim tomb at Kyōngju reached the Korean Peninsula through the Steppe route.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the Wooden Chamber Tomb with Stone Mound, a typical tomb of the Silla kingdom, is closely associated with the Kurgan culture of the Altaic region and was also introduced through the Steppe route.<sup>7</sup> The golden crown excavated from the Wooden Chamber Tomb with Stone Mound closely resembles the art style commonly found in the northern part of the Black Sea region in overall form and pattern details, implying its association with Siberian shamanism. Artifacts from the Silla kingdom excavated from Kyōngju including various forms of gold products, diadem ornaments and waist bands as well as twenty-five pieces of luxurious and sophisticated glassware, also confirm that cultural exchange between the East and West through the Steppe route had much influence in shaping Korean culture.<sup>8</sup>

It was during the Tang dynasty that trade through the Steppe route declined while trade through the Oasis, the overland route in the desert, reached its peak. Global aspects of the Tang dynasty can be attributed to such Silk Road trade. However, with the advancement of the art of navigation and shipbuilding technology starting in the eighth and ninth centuries and the overseas expansion of Islamic power, a Maritime route connecting West Asia and China through the Indian Ocean opened up. Moreover, the occupation of the overland trade channel by the Tangut(西夏, K. Sōha) and by the Tibetan Empire(吐蕃, K. Tobōn) prompted the gradual decline of the Oasis route. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which correspond to an age of maritime trade prosperity, the main trade route bridging the East and West transitioned from the Oasis to the Maritime route.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of cultural exchange between Korea and Central Asia via the Oasis route, it is notable that the Afrasiab painting among the palace murals in Samarkand depicts diplomats from Koguryō wearing feathered hats, and the mural paintings in the Dunhuang Caves depict the image of ancient Koreans. In addition, the characteristics of cave temples originated from India were disseminated through western Afghanistan (Bamiyan Cave) and China, to reach as far as the southeast of the Korean Peninsula, as evident in the cave temple in Gunwi, North Kyōngsang Province, and Sōkkuram in Kyōngju.

<sup>6</sup> Hee Soo Lee, "1500 Years of Contact between Korea and Middle East," 1.

<sup>7</sup> Min Pyōnghun (Byung Hoon Min), "Silk'ū rodū rül t'onghan yōksajōk munhwa kyoryu," *The Silk Road and Korean Culture* (Seoul: 1999), 60–61.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 47; Chōng Su-il, *Silk'ū rodū hak*, 229–231.

<sup>9</sup> For more detailed maritime history and trade route, see Chōng, *ibid.*, 61–78.

The westward dissemination of paper-making technology is relatively more clear-cut. In 751 CE, Arab Muslim military forces marching east clashed with the army of the Tang dynasty under the command of Kao Hsien-Zhi (高仙芝, –755), of Korean origin. The Tang army lost the Battle of Talas, and many of their soldiers were taken prisoner. These prisoners included paper-makers who later became the first to produce paper in Samarkand. Samarkand paper was then passed onto the Arab world and eventually replaced sheepskin parchment, which had served as a key means of documentation during the tenth century. Europeans first imported paper produced in Syria, but began to produce paper independently in Europe after the twelfth century. The spread of paper-making technology played an important role in opening the modern era in Europe as a medium to convey knowledge and information, alongside the propagation of printing technology.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. KOREA-MIDDLE EAST CULTURAL CONNECTION THROUGH THE SILK ROAD

The exchanges between Korea and the Middle East and the Islamic sphere are a topic of particular interest in the East-West exchanges facilitated through the Silk Road. This is also a key topic in this special issue.

Contrary to popular belief, the presence of Islam in Korea and Korea-Middle East relations predates the Korean War by more than a millennium. Artifacts from the fourth and fifth centuries allude to an ancient history of commercial and political relations between Korea and the Middle East, which continued after the birth of Islam. Although the exact date of the arrival of the first Muslims in Korea has not yet been determined, relations between Korea and the Islamic world can be traced to the middle of the ninth century. Despite Korea's long history of close cultural and commercial relations with the Middle East, the image of Islam and Arabs harbored by many Koreans is still far from positive. Misconceptions about certain aspects of Islam—such as polygamy, the status of the Prophet Muhammad, attitudes toward violence and terrorism, human rights, and the role of women—are prevalent, and are even recorded in some Korean school textbooks.

It may be hard to believe that a fifteenth-century Muslim leader recited verses from the Quran as he wished the Korean King a long life and prosperous nation, that the traditional Korean lunar calendar was likely influenced by Islamic calendar

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<sup>10</sup> Lee, *The Advent of Islam*, 28–29.

science or that there was a grand mosque in Kaegyōng, the capital of the thirteenth-century Koryō kingdom. Yet all of these historical circumstances are cited in reliable Korean and Islamic sources.<sup>11</sup> This essay introduces the 1,500 years of contact between Koreans and the Middle East based on a brief historical survey from the fifth century to the present.

### 1) Ancient Relations before Islam

Long before the advent of Islam, Korea and the Middle East had already established trade relations by sea and overland routes such as the Silk Road. Written references are few and far between, but there is sufficient documentation to confirm the existence of significant commercial ties. One example is the discovery of Roman and Persian glass cups from the ancient tombs of Kyōngju, capital of the Silla kingdom. In addition to specimens of conventionally cut glass, the bottle unearthed from tomb No. 98 shows the typical manufacturing technique of Sassanid Persia. Assuming that the tomb was constructed in the fifth or sixth centuries, it is safe to say that Persian merchandise had already found its way into Korea and was being used by Koreans.

Other items uncovered during the excavation include a silver bowl engraved with an image of the Persian goddess, Anahita; a golden dagger from Persia; clay busts; and figurines portraying Middle Eastern merchants. *Samguk sagi*—the official chronicle of the Three Kingdoms era, compiled in 1145 CE, contains further descriptions of commercial items sold by Middle Eastern merchants that were widely used in Silla society.

The influence of Sassanid culture was profoundly present in other ways as well, most notably in the fields of music, visual arts, and literature. The popularity of Iranian designs in Korea can be seen in the widespread use of pearl-studded roundels and symmetrical, zoomorphic patterns.

An ancient Persian epic poem, the *Kūshnāma*, contains detailed descriptions of Silla. According to the book, a Sassanid prince named Abtin immigrated with his subjects to Silla. There, Abtin married a Silla princess named Frārang and contributed substantially to Silla society.

### 2) Muslim Settlement in Silla Society

With the birth of Islam, Korean-Muslim cultural contact accelerated, and commercial relations were further strengthened. Encounters between Korea and the

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<sup>11</sup> Lee, "1500 Years of Contact between Korea and Middle East," 1–2.

Islamic Middle East are thought to have started as early as the middle of the seventh century and have continued until today without generating much conflict or antagonism.

Direct contact between Muslims and Koreans on the Korean Peninsula is described in twenty-three Islamic sources written between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. These documents include writings from eighteen Muslim scholars, including Ibn Khurdādhbih, Sulaiman al-Tajir, Mas'udi, and others. Ibn Khurdādhbih was the first Arab scholar who chronicled Muslim settlement in Korea during the Unified Silla era (661–935):<sup>12</sup>

Silla is located to the extreme end of China and as a white race, Silla people are descendants of Noah's son Japhet and Japhet's son Amur...Silla is a country abounding in gold. Muslims who advanced there, captivated by its congenial surroundings, tend to settle there for good and do not think of leaving the place (845 CE).

The writings of Dimashqi, al-Nuwairi, and al-Maqrizi are particularly noteworthy. They relate the surprising story of a group of Alawis (the followers of Ali) who sought refuge on the Korean Peninsula after fleeing persecution during the Umayyad dynasty (661–750). The Alawis are known to have travelled as far as the southeastern coast of China. According to the mid-seventh century chronicle of Nureddin Muhammad al-Awfi, a great number of Shi'a formed their own community in allegiance to Ali on Hainan Island, located south of China.<sup>13</sup> The presence of this settlement raises the possibility that some of Ali's followers could have advanced as far as the Korean Peninsula seeking a more peaceful existence.

### **3) Muslims in Koryŏ and Early Chosŏn (Eleventh and Fifteenth Centuries)**

Records describing exchanges between Korea and the Middle East during the Koryŏ period can be found in both regions. In *Koryŏsa*, it is recorded in 1024 and 1025 that Arab and Persian merchants, collectively known as Taesik, led a large-scale caravan of around 100 people to engage in trade with the royal court of Koryŏ, while the fourteenth-century historian Rashid al-Din of the Mongol Ilkhanate documented a variety of noteworthy records describing the situations in Koryŏ in his book *Jami' al-tawarikh*. The book *Khitai-name* from the sixteenth

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<sup>12</sup> Lee, *The Advent of Islam*, 40–53.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–52.

century Ottoman Empire also contains valuable information on Koryŏ's exports and international trade.

During the Mongol Empire and the Yuan dynasty that succeeded it, many Central Asian Muslims moved to East Asia. Through the revitalized Silk Road, sophisticated Islamic culture was introduced into East Asia. Yuan China benefited greatly from Islamic astronomy, medicine, calendar science, architecture, and weaponry. At the same time, during the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), many Muslims settled permanently in Korea and were assimilated into Korean society. They came to Korea with their Mongol masters for official purposes, as traders, or as private immigrants. One example of a Muslim's integration into Korean society is the case of a man named Samga. Of Uighur descent, he married a Korean woman and is now recognized as the progenitor of the Chang clan of Tŏksu, whose descendants continue to prosper in present-day Korea.

Soju, the distilled liquor that represents Korea serves as a good example. This alcoholic drink was referred to as '*aragi*' at that time, itself a transliteration of the word '*Al-Araq*' for the distilled Arab spirit. Soju was ironically a cultural heritage originally created by Arab society in which the drinking of alcohol is normally forbidden.

Muslims in the late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn (1392–1910) dynasties formed their own communities, which allowed them to preserve their cultural customs, traditions, and religious rituals. Members of these communities owned shops that sold local Muslim products, and even built mosques called Yegungs (ceremonial palaces). Some Muslim leaders attained such high social status that they were even invited to attend court ceremonies, into which they incorporated their own religious rituals, including reciting the Quran.

In addition, advanced scientific knowledge and technology was introduced by the Mongol Empire to the Chosŏn dynasty in the early fifteenth century. For instance, the Korean lunar calendar was created based on the Islamic calendar and Islamic science made significant contributions to the invention and maintenance of numerous scientific devices of the highest standard of science in the world at the time. Uighur Muslim intellectuals, who formed their own communities in Korea, served as cultural proliferators from the late Koryŏ to the early Chosŏn era, and contributed their knowledge and experience to Korean society. In this respect, the renaissance of scholarship and science under King Sejong's reign was not a coincidence.

However, in the early fifteenth century, the traces of Middle Eastern and Islamic culture began to diminish. The *Annals of the Chosŏn Dynasty* attribute this to the rapid assimilation of foreign culture into Korean, in accordance with King Sejong's royal decree in 1427 to drive out foreign culture. As new emphasis was

placed on neo-Confucianism as the state ideology, the focus of Korea's worldview became solely directed toward China. This cost Korea its global mindset and resulted in its failure to adopt global trends, which later resulted in a tragic outcome for Korea.

#### **4) The Modern Muslim Community in Korea**

Islamic activities in pre-modern Korea began in the 1920s, when Russian Turks fleeing the Bolshevik regime arrived in Korea. Around 250 Russian Muslims, mostly Kazan Turks, established permanent settlements in Korea by building their own schools, mosques, and cemeteries. Many supported themselves through profitable regional trade with Manchuria, Korea, and Japan. However, due to the social disorder that befell Korea in the aftermath of the Japanese withdrawal in 1945, most of these Turkic settlers left for other countries.

The contemporary Muslim community in Korea was established in the 1950s by Turkish Muslim soldiers who participated in the Korean War. In addition to carrying out their military duties, they also propagated their religion and inaugurated a new era for Islam in Korea. As a result, Islam gradually spread in Korea. In the mid-1970s, Islam witnessed a period of rapid development in Korea when a number of oil-rich Arab states extended generous assistance to Korean Muslims. The Seoul Central Mosque and Islamic Center, built in 1976, has become a symbol of Korean-Arab cooperation and Muslim society in Korea. At present, there are eleven mosques in Korea attended by roughly 40,000 local Muslims and 150,000 foreign Muslims.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

To examine the long history of Korea-Middle East relations through the Silk Road, four valuable articles have been contributed to this special issue.

As the best evidence for ancient relations between Korea and the Middle East, particularly the Persian cultural sphere, three scholars from Korea, China, and Iran discuss *Kūshnāma*, the ancient Persian epic compiled in the eleventh century, through comparative approaches based on Persian, Arabic, Chinese and Korean sources.

In the first article a Korean scholar, Hee Soo Lee assesses the descriptions of "Basīlā" in the *Kūshnāmā* as historical evidence. The descriptions of Basīlā in *Kūshnāmā* are largely consistent with those of Sīlā/al-Sīlā in contemporaneous Islamic texts, which clearly correspond to the Silla kingdom. The author has

proved that Basīlā was also used, together with Sīlā/al-Sīlā, to refer to the Korean Peninsula. With the advent of Islam, references to Korea found in twenty-three Islamic sources written between the ninth to sixteenth centuries by eighteen Muslim scholars such as Ibn Khurdādbih, Sulaiman al-Tajir, and Mas'udi hint at Islamic connections in the Korean Peninsula. Before the discovery of *Kūshnāma*, however, no documents or epics described ancient relations between Iran and Silla in a detailed manner. In this sense, this article on *Kūshnāma*'s descriptions of "Basīlā" expands our understanding of premodern relations between the Middle-East and Korea.

In line with the above argument, the Chinese historian Yingjun Liu discusses possible connections between plots depicted in *Kūshnāma* and historical events. Considering the Iranian literary tradition of retelling history by combining pre-Islamic legends with newly acquired knowledge in the Islamic era, he suggests that the information on *Kūshnāma* should be examined in the light of the historical context in which this epic was composed. This article proposes that the narrator of *Kūshnāma* might have derived certain aspects of the work from the long-standing oral and written traditions of the Iranians, including the collective Iranian memory of the last Sasanians in China.

The Iranian historian Mohammad Bagher Vosoughi also discusses—based on mainly Persian sources—the relations between ancient Korea and Iran. He mentions that the origin of Middle Easterners' knowledge about Korea, displayed in their historical, geographical, and astronomical texts, can be divided into several basic categories. First is the product of pre-Islamic historical relations as described in *Kūshnāma*.<sup>14</sup> Historical evidence shows that this story originated in past relations between Iran and East Asia, especially China and Korea. The story of *Kūshnāma*, which is about Iranian-Korean connections especially and is mentioned in *Mojmal Al-Tawārikh W-al-Qesas* (Collection of histories and tales)

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<sup>14</sup> For more detailed information about the *Kushnāma*, see Hee Soo Lee, *Kush-Nāmeḥ: 1000 Years Love Story between Persian Prince and Silla Princess* (Seoul: Chong A Publication, 2014); Hee Soo Lee, "A Preliminary Study on Kush-Nāmeḥ, an Ancient Persian Epic and Its Description on Silla," in *Proceeding of the 1500 Years' Korea-Iran Cultural Encounter Based on a Persian Epic: Kush-Nāmeḥ*, Hanyang University, 2010, 100–113; Hee Soo Lee, "Kodae P'erūsia sōsasi Kuswiname ūi palgul kwa Silla kwallyōn yōn'gu [A preliminary study on Kushnameḥ, an ancient Persian epic and its descriptions of Silla]," *Han'guk Isūllam hakhoe nonch'ong* (Journal of the Korean Association of Islamic Studies) 20, no. 3 (2010): 99–113; Hee Soo Lee, "A Study on the Kush-Nāmeḥ Epic Characteristics Compared to the Shah-Nāmeḥ," in *Proceeding of The 1500 Years' Korea-Iran Cultural Encounter Based on a Persian Epic: Kush-Nāmeḥ*, Hanyang University, 2012, 60–84; Hee Soo Lee, "The Significance of Kush-Nāmeḥ Kush-Nameḥ as the Source Material for Re-interpretation of Silla History," in *Proceeding of the Eighth International Seminar on Kush-Nāmeḥ*, Hanyang University, 2013, 41–47.

(1126CA/520AH), books on Iranian history from the twelfth century reveals long-lasting historical ties between the two countries.<sup>15</sup> Similar examples reflecting cultural and historical ties between Iran and East Asia can be seen in other poetry books such as the Persian epic poems *Bahman-nāma*<sup>16</sup> and *Humāy and Humāyun*.<sup>17</sup> The combination of myth and historicity in these poems poses an obstacle to clearly understanding the reality of the historical relations between Iran and Korea. The second group consists of travelogues and Islamic geographical texts containing information on ninth-century Korea.<sup>18</sup> Most likely, Muslim society knew about Korea through Muslim sailors engaged in commercial dealings at Chinese and Korean ports. It is interesting to note that the Silla kingdom has been described as a utopia in which wealthy and fortunate citizens reside.

The discussion of Kaveh L. Hemmat of the United States discusses medieval Korea based on Khatāyī's *Book of China (Khaṭāynāmah)*, a description of China written in 1516, in Persian, for the Ottoman court, by a merchant named Alī Akbar Khaṭāyī. It contains a very brief excerpt on Korea, which the author miscategorizes as a province of Ming China. The didactic and political nature of the text, which presented a utopian image of China as a model to be emulated by a nascent Ottoman Empire, as well as the author's more general familiarity with East Asian cultural and political circumstances, suggest that his subsuming the Chosŏn state into the Ming empire was more an ideologically-motivated choice than a manifestation of negligence or ignorance. However, the brevity of his direct description does not preclude his having had more extensive knowledge of the Chosŏn dynasty. Khaṭāyī's description generally demonstrates keen awareness of important features of East Asian world-views and political culture. The *Khaṭāynāmah* was not merely a geographical work; it carried a strong political message for the court and would, ultimately, play a part in Ottoman political culture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The book thus attests to, and constitutes part of, a global process of political communication that connected the Ottoman Empire with Central Asia, China, and Korea.

<sup>15</sup> Moğmal-ot-Tavārīḥ va'l-Qaṣaṣ. Persia, 1475. Heidelberg Cod. Heid. Orient. MS-118. Archives of Heidelberg University Library.

<sup>16</sup> Inhwa Choi, "The Position and Significance of Bahman-Nāmeḥ and Kush-Nāmeḥ in the Persian Epic," in *Proceeding of the Eighth International Seminar on Kush-Nāmeḥ*, Hanyang University, Seoul, 2013, 111–13.

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Bürgen, "Humāy and Humāyun: A Medieval Persian Romance," in *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies*, Rome, 1900.

<sup>18</sup> Kei Won Chung and George F. Hourani, "Arab Geographical on Korea," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 58, no. 4 (1938): 658–661.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Silk Road, the great trade network bridging the Eurasian Continent, has since ancient times been a communication route and path of trade of significant value. Scythian art patterns and a particular form of a tomb, the Wooden Chamber Tomb with Stone Mound, were introduced into the Korean Peninsula through the Steppe route in the Bronze Age. The golden crown, ornaments, and sword of state excavated from the Wooden Chamber Tomb with Stone Mound are also evidence of cultural contact with the Eurasian Continent through the Steppe route. As the Oasis route began to emerge as the main path for trade and exchange, the cultures of Iran and the Arab world were introduced to the Korean Peninsula. Roman-Sassanid Persian glassware and various burial mound figures of Central Asian people, as well as twenty-three Arabic books and the *Kūshnāma* vividly reveal the details of interaction between the Silla kingdom and the Islamic world. Moreover, a thorough study on the *Kūshnāma*, an ancient Persian epic poem that deals extensively with the relationship between ancient Iran and the Silla kingdom, sheds new light on the work, not just as a collection of legends, but as historical resources. That the name “Basīlā”, which appears in the *Kūshnāma*, refers to the Silla kingdom and that much of the descriptions in the *Kūshnāma* are very similar to those that appear in later historical Arabic sources largely points to the possibility that the *Kūshnāma* was used as a historical resource.

Exchange and cultural interaction through the Silk Road between the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East-Islamic world became far more active in the late Koryŏ dynasty under the rule of the Mongol Empire and lasted until the reign of King Sejong in the early Chosŏn dynasty. However, the relationship between the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East ceased due to the royal decree issued in 1427 forbidding any type of exchange with foreign cultures. The Islamic elements and Silk Road culture that survived within Korea rapidly assimilated into Korean society.

The relationship between Korea and the Middle East was not initiated by construction projects or petroleum resources for the purpose of mutual economic benefits after the 1970s but can be traced to a deep historical background of 1,500 years of cultural exchange. Furthermore, the relationship between the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East through the Silk Road corroborates the fact that Korea was not an isolated country, but one that actively embraced diverse beliefs and cultures. The source of the global power of Korea, one of the most notable aspects of Korea as a nation, can be dated back to such a dynamic adoption of other cultures.

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