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WON-YONG KIM

BRONZE MIRRORS FROM SHIH-ERH T'AI
YING-TZU, LIAONING

In the spring of 1958, during an irrigation project, three tombs were discovered at Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu, Ch'ao-yang County, Liaoning Province in southwestern Manchuria just outside the Great Wall. Two of them, Tombs 2 and 3, had been already dug up by laborers before members of the Northeastern Museum arrived and conducted an excavation of the third tomb, Tomb 3¹.

Tombs 1 and 2 belong to the type of stone cist that is found in the Jehol, Liaoning, and Kilin districts of southern Manchuria as well as in the Korean peninsula². Tomb 3, however, seems to have been an earth pit grave, although the report does not give a clear, detailed account of its structure.

Tomb 1 was a rectangular chamber built with cobblestones and covered with large and small stone slabs. The chamber measured 1.8 meter long, one meter wide and 1.2 meter high, with its main axis running from east to west. A layer of pebbles was placed on the earth floor, on which planks were laid supported by one large stone at each corner. On the plank bed were two extended coffin-less bodies, probably a married couple, with their heads placed toward the west. The husband lay on the north side and the wife on the south. An additional stone slab was placed inside the west wall as if to protect the head³. The bulk of the funerary gifts were bronze objects, consisting of inward-curving knives, arrowheads, fishhooks, various ornaments, and two daggers and two mirrors (figs. 1, 2). Others were a pottery spindle, two potsherds, a stone net sinker, a perforated ornamental whetstone, and two microlithic blades made of reddish stone.

Tomb 2, located to the north of Tomb 1 at a distance of five meters, was also a rectangular stone chamber built with stone slabs. Its floor was also paved with stone slabs. The chamber measured 2.3 meter long, one meter wide and 0.7 meter high, with its main axis running from east to west like the previous tomb. It also contained two skeletons in extended position, but with their heads facing the east. Everything from this tomb was made of bronze, including two identical daggers (fig. 3) and two mirrors both very similar to those from Tomb 1.

Tomb 3 seems to have been a rectangular earth pit grave. The reporter does not mention the existence of any stones and, according to him, the laborers were unaware of any tomb

¹ Chu Kuei: "Bronze Dagger Tombs at Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu, Ch'ao-yang County, Liaoning." (Chinese) *K'ao-ku Hsiueh-pao*, 1960, 1, pp. 63-71.

² A detailed survey on these stone cists is in Mikami, T., *Mansen Genshi Fumbo no Kenkyū, Dolmens and Stone Cists in Manchuria and Korea* (Japanese), Tōkyō, 1961.

³ The reporter thinks that the stone slab marks the entrance to the chamber. But, if we consider the size of the chamber, the burial must have been made from the top instead of from the side. In this sense this is actually a variety of vertical stone cists.

structure when they were digging the earth and picked up a mirror (fig. 6) and a stone-made hilt ornament from the dirt.

The actual date of these stone cists in the Jehol and Liaoning areas may be, according to Prof. Mikami, placed somewhere from the first half of the first millennium B.C. to about the fourth or third century B.C.⁴. Tombs 1 and 2 which do not have accompanying iron objects may belong to the earlier part of the Manchurian stone cist period that runs from the Bronze Age to the early Iron Age.

Earth-pit tombs similar to Tomb 3, which was apparently northern Chinese in origin, are found in Korea both north and south, particularly in the northern half of the peninsula. Finds from such earth pit tombs include bronze daggers, halberds, parts of chariots, iron chisels, celts, sickles, glass beads, etc.⁵. The existence of iron implements in these tombs at once indicates that they belong to the Iron Age and are certainly later in actual date than the above mentioned stone cists. An earth-pit tomb at Unsong-ri in central western Korea, discovered in 1954, indeed produced a bronze T'o bell whose clapper had been replaced by a particular type of Wu-shu coin which is believed to have been cast in 60 B.C.⁶.

The bronze mirrors from these three tombs at Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu have one common feature: that is, all have not just one loop or knob but three or four of them, a feature never to be found on mainland Chinese mirrors.

The two mirrors from Tomb 1, both with a diameter of 20.4 cm., are identical in every detail. Each has three perforated loops placed on the back along the edge so as to form a triangular shape. The design which always appears on the back in Chinese mirrors is here placed on the front instead (fig. 2). It is a narrow circular band of geometric pattern consisting of short slanting and hooked lines.

According to the reporter, one mirror was found at the top of the man's head and the other below his feet. A similar situation was again observed in Tomb 2.

The two mirrors from Tomb 2 also have a diameter of 20 cm, and 20.1 cm respectively; and a circular band design similar to that of the Tomb 1 mirrors appears on the convex front side of the mirror. These mirrors, however, have four loops, each of which is placed crosswise along the edge so as to form a square form (fig. 4). It was reported that the two mirrors were also found in the position described for Tomb 1⁷.

The type of design, the way of placing the design, the number of loops, and the way of placing the loops, all differ from what we see in Chinese mirrors. This is clearly a type of mirror invented outside of China. The particular way of placing multiple loops and the execution of the design on the front side instead of the back, lead us to think that the mirrors were originally meant to be attached or fastened to something like a garment, probably for certain ritual and religious purposes. Such a mirror may indeed have had the significance of a Shamanistic ritual ornament. Before discussing the mirror from Tomb 3, it will be interesting to notice a similar kind of mirror and a bronze T'o bell bearing a geometrical pattern both from the Tso-do site,

⁴ Mikami, T., *op. cit.*, pp. 339, 665–669.

⁵ Lee, C.H., "The Postwar Development of Korean Archaeology – Early Metal Age" (Japanese), *Kōkōgaku Zasshi*, vol. 45, No. 1, June 1959, pp. 46–64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

⁷ The reporter mentioned previously that Tomb 2 was dug up by laborers before his arrival. It seems that he obtained the information about the original location from the laborers.

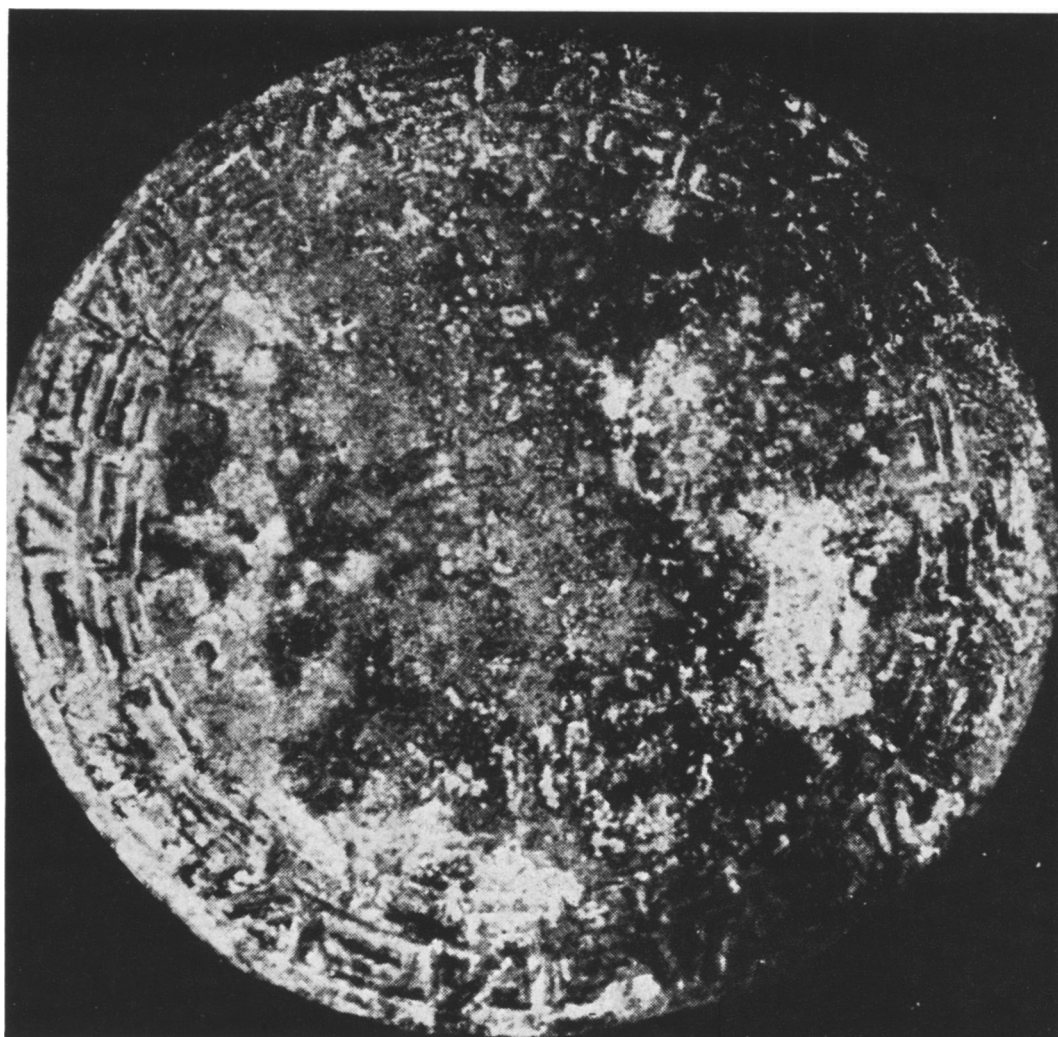


Fig. 1
Bronze mirror, Tomb 1 (Chu Kuei, pl. 1, 2)
D. 20.4 cm.

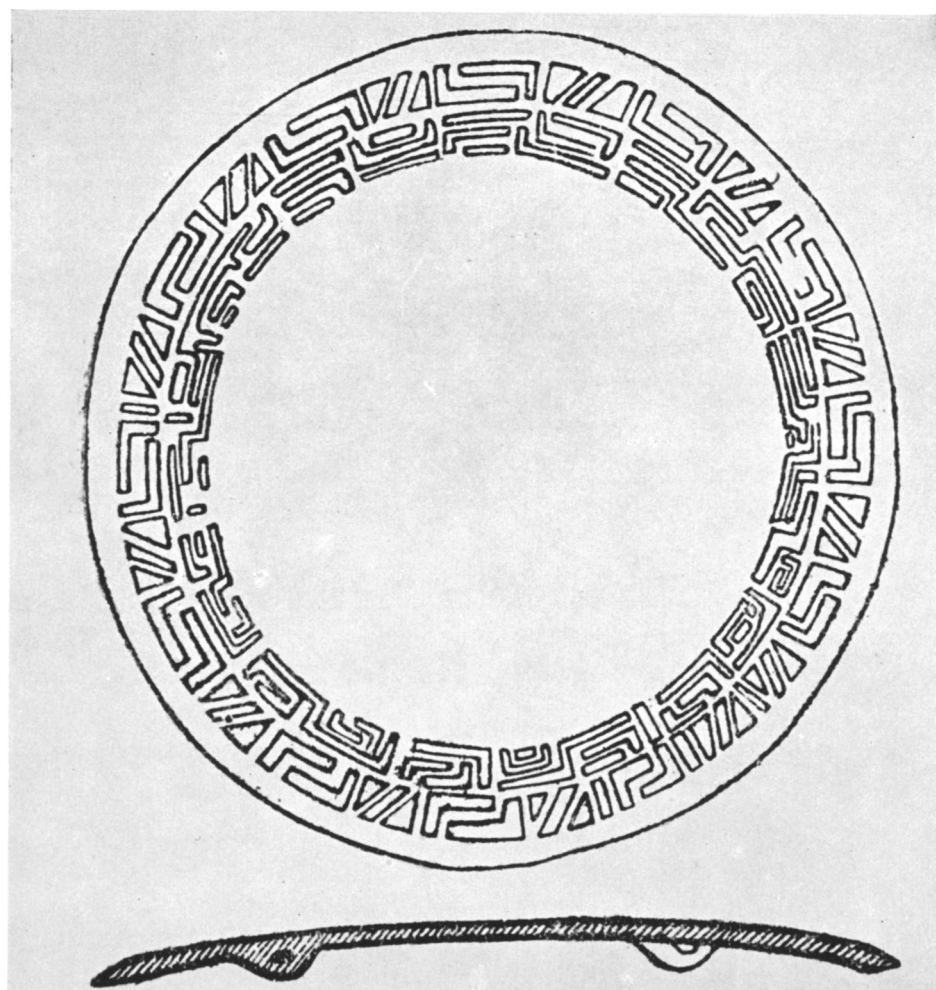
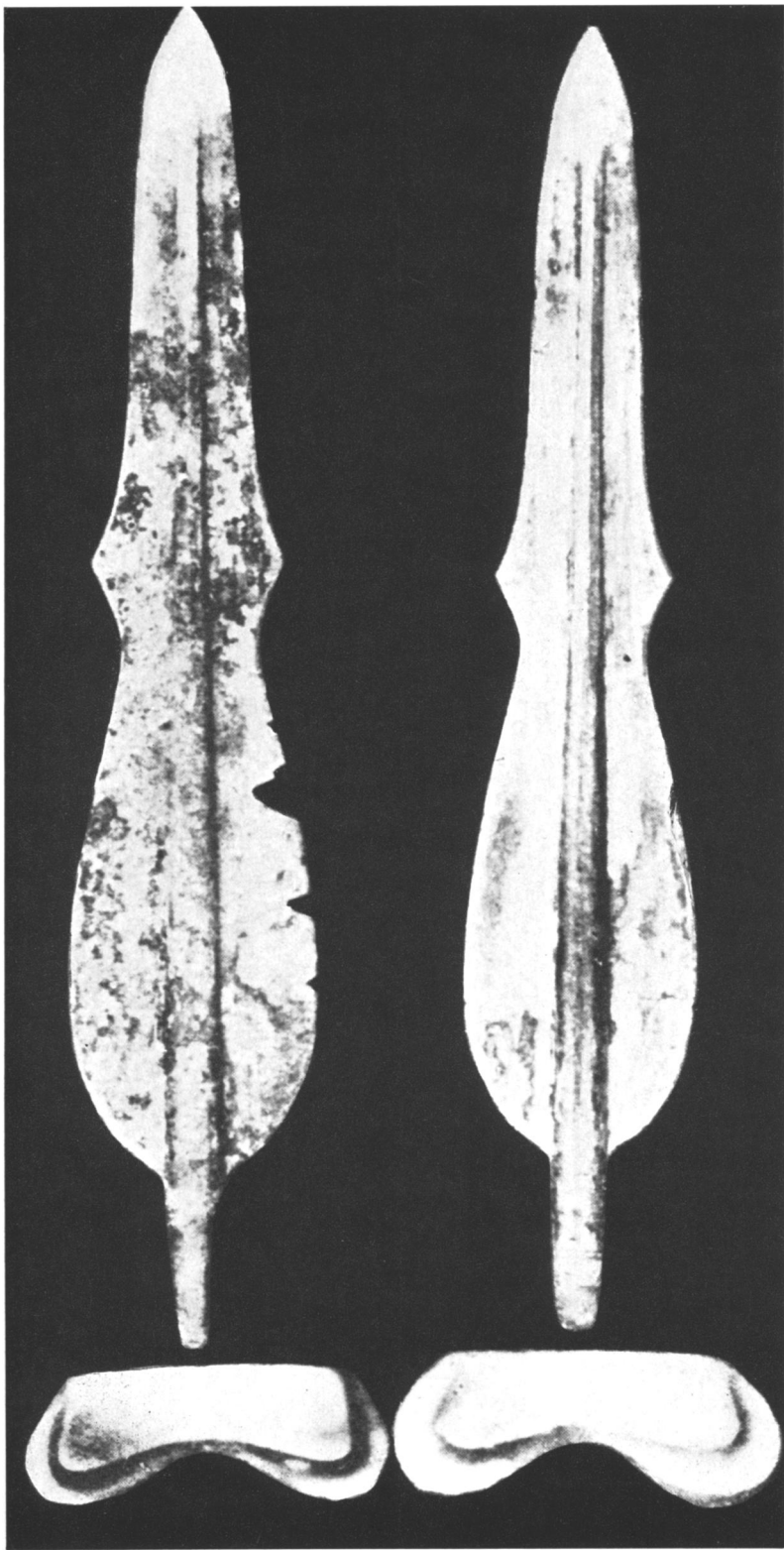


Fig. 2
Bronze mirror, Tomb 1 (Chu Kuei, fig. 4, 1)
D. 20.4 cm.



b
 Fig. 3
 Bronze daggers, Tomb 2 (Chu Kuei, pl. 4, 1)
 L. 35.6 cm. (both)



Fig. 4
 Bronze mirror, front and back (Chu Kuei, pl. 4, 2)
 D. 20.1 cm.

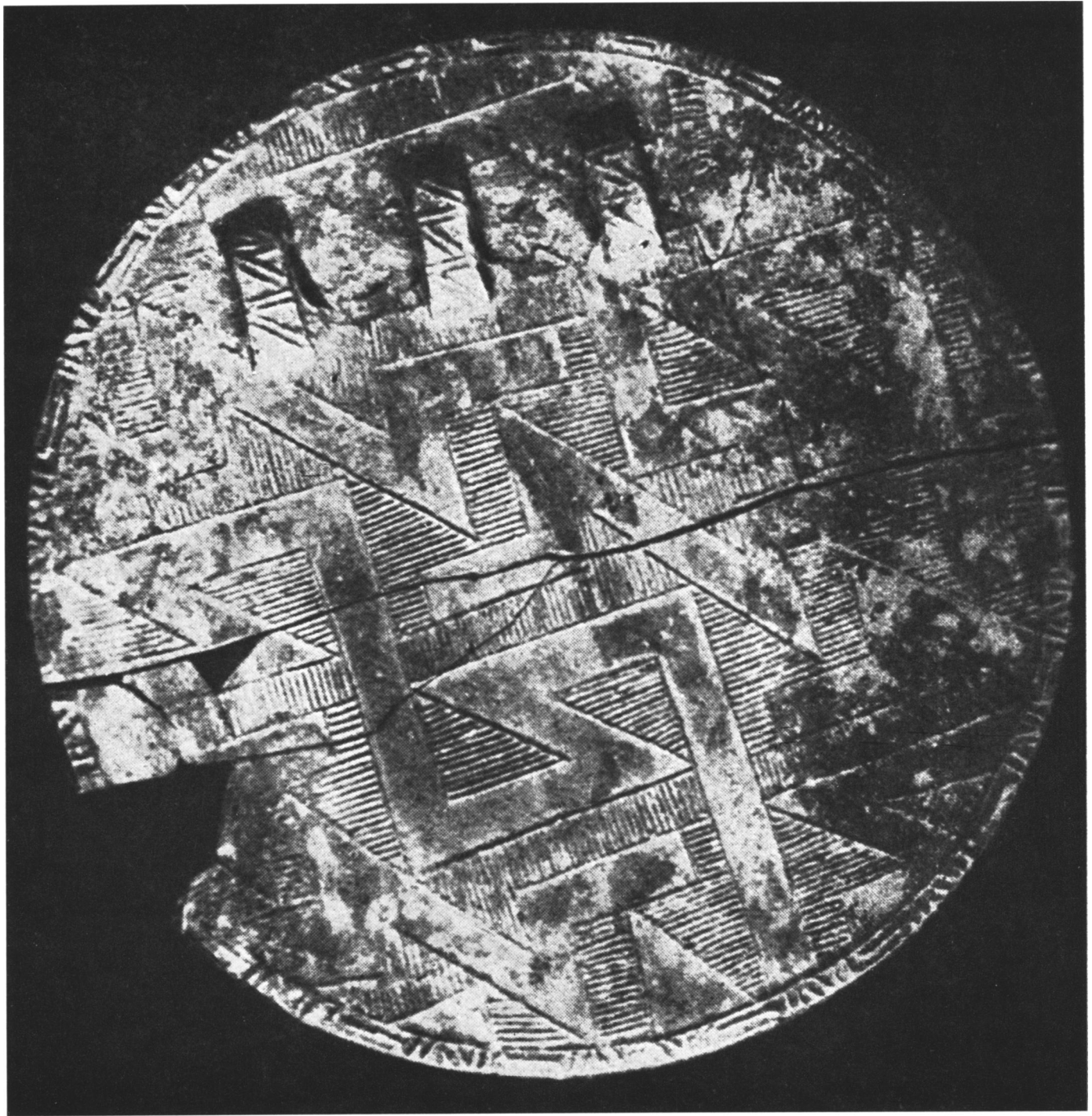


Fig. 6
Bronze mirror, Tomb 3 (Chu Kuei, pl. 5, 2)
D. 22.5 cm.

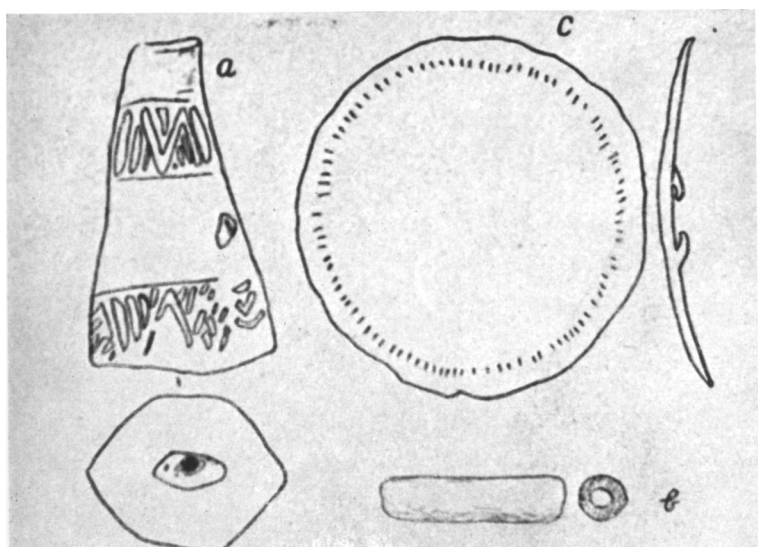


Fig. 5
Bronze bell

- a) Bronze bell. H. 6.2 cm.
c) Bronze mirror. D. 6.7 cm.
North Korea. Cf. note 8

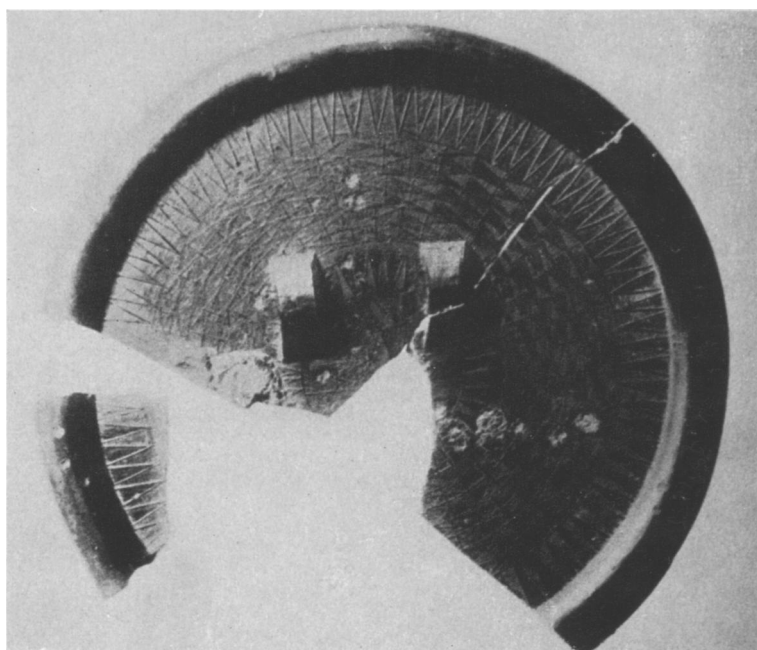


Fig. 8
Bronze mirror. North Korea. D. 13.4 cm.

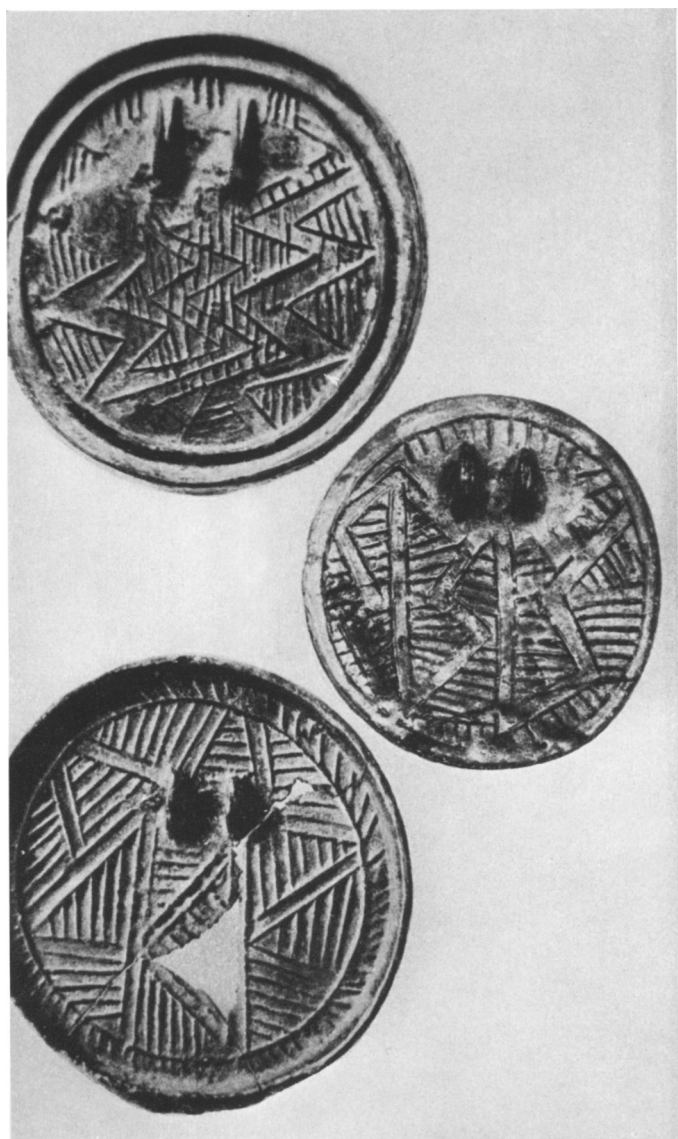


Fig. 7
Bronze mirrors
Top: South Korea. D. 11.3 cm.
Middle: North Korea. D. 9.4 cm.
Bottom: North Korea. D. 11.4 cm.

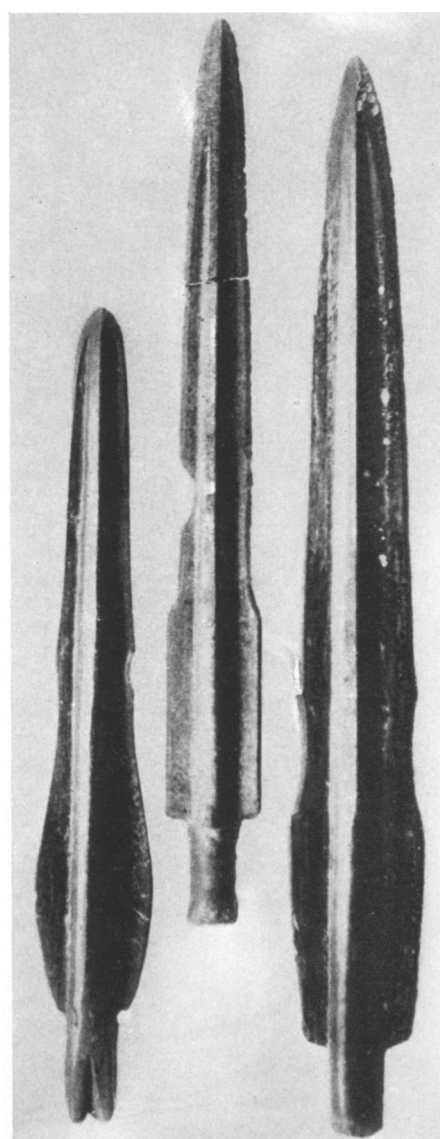


Fig. 9
Bronze daggers. North Korea
L. 32.2, 26.5, 32.4 cm. (l. to r.)

a bronze age site excavated in 1949 in northeastern Korea (fig. 5 c and a)⁸. The circular band of short slanting lines on the front side of the Tso-do mirror, which has only one loop in the center of its back, however, is clearly a degenerated, simplified form of the geometric pattern of Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu mirrors.

The mirror from Tomb 3 (fig. 6) shows distinct differences from the foregoing ones. The design, which is something like a continuous Z-pattern set against a space-filling linear background, is now on the back as in Chinese mirrors; and the three loops are aligned horizontally in one line although they are placed toward the edge following the tradition of the mirrors from Tombs 1 and 2.

The Z-like pattern certainly shows originality in form and composition, but its sudden appearance particularly on the back, as in Chinese mirrors, may suggest a foreign influence. Indeed, the design looks like the so-called interlocked T's and zigzag lozenges which can be seen in Chinese mirrors of the Warring States. There must be some relation between the two, i.e. the Z-pattern and the slanting T-pattern. In that case, as has been pointed out by Karlgren, the interlocked T's motif has a long history in Chinese art going back to the Yin period⁹. In Chinese art, the pattern cannot be a foreign element introduced during the Warring States period. We may conclude then that the Z-like pattern of the Tomb 3 mirror was derived from Chinese interlocked T's pattern, and not vice versa. The direction of influence from south to north is also demonstrated by the Chinese type of earth-pit grave of Tomb 3.

Tomb 3, with the mirror with its Z-like design on the back, must reflect the emergence of a new hybrid metal culture during the Warring States period. The inhabitants in the region involved during the period, i.e. fifth to third century B.C., were called by the Chinese as Tung-hu (Eastern Barbarian) whose racial identity has not been fully established¹⁰. Around 300 B.C. the area fell under the control of Yen, one of the Warring States, which expanded into the Liaoning area.

That type of culture spread¹¹ into the Korean peninsula prior to the establishment of the Lolang colony by Emperor Wu Ti of the Han Dynasty in 108 B.C. The horse-riding, dagger-carrying people crossed the sea even to enter Japan. The above-mentioned earth-pit tombs in Korea are the burials of the new hybrid type of bronze-age people as demonstrated in Tomb 3 of Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu. Those who lived in north Korea were dispersed by the incoming Han army. However, those who fled to the south continued to build earth pit graves, as they established a superior society among native Koreans who were then still largely dependent on stone implements.

Bronze mirrors associated with bronze daggers found in Korea also carry similar linear patterns. As shown in fig. 7, the zigzag pattern against a linear background shows close re-

⁸ Lee, C.H., *op. cit.*, p. 58, fig. 12. Also, Institute of Archaeology, N. Korea, *Najin Tso-do Won-shi Yu-jok (Prehistoric Site at Tso-do Island)*, Pyongyang 1956, Pl. CXXXI, Nos. 1, 2, 4.

⁹ Karlgren, B., "Huai and Han", *BMFEA*, vol. 13, pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ Investigations of the skeletal remains discovered at Ch'ih Feng showed that they have close resemblance to modern north Chinese.

Cf. *Hung Shan Hou, Ch'ih Feng*, *Archaeologia Orientalis Ser. A*, Vol. VI, Tōkyō & Kyōto 1938, pp. 109-110.

¹¹ Indeed, a political refugee from Yen by the name of Wei-man fled to north Korea in 198 B.C. and set up a kingdom which was later defeated by Wu Ti of the Han Dynasty. *Shih Chi*, vol. 115, "Annals of Ch'ao Hsien".

semblance to the Tomb 3 mirror¹². Without doubt, the Korean pattern is a simplified, crudely done version of the Liaoning design which in turn derived from a Chinese prototype.

Other bronze mirrors with a finer linear design found in Korea and western Japan (fig. 8) should be a further developed variety of the same pattern¹³. Korean bronze daggers associated with such mirrors show also changes in form (fig. 9)¹⁴. The bulbous lower body of the Liaoning dagger (fig. 3) has been greatly reduced. The slight indentation at the both sides of the blade in the Korean dagger is now nothing but a meaningless reminiscence of the curved part of the Liaoning dagger, which is a natural form resulting from the joining of a spear-like upper part and the bulbous lower part.

In general, the non-Chinese bronze culture should be linked, in its origin, to Ordos bronzes. However, we do not find anything like these particular objects in the Ordos or even in the Minusinsk Basin¹⁵. They are only found in south Manchuria, Korea, and western Japan. And, the Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu mirrors and daggers are the earliest type, so far as we know, among them, as mentioned above. Then we must presume that the birth place of the particular bronze culture — what I may term “the multiple-looped mirror culture” lies somewhere around the Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu region until we have further discoveries that may alter this theory.

As was mentioned by Chu Kuei in his report of these Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu tombs, there have been in the Liaoning region several scattered, isolated finds of similar bronze objects. The Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu tombs, however, particularly Tomb 3, were the first of their kind to be excavated by archaeologists and thus reported scientifically. The discovery certainly has thrown a new light on the study of pre- and proto-history of southern Manchuria, Korea and Japan.

¹² Umehara S. and Fujita R., *Chōsen Kobunka Sōkan*, I, Nara and Kyōto, 1947, pl. 43.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pl. 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pl. 36.

¹⁵ However, it is interesting to notice some similarities between the geometric design on the Tomb 1 mirror (fig. 2) and that which appears on some of the Andronovo pottery. Cf. Jettmar, V., “The Altai before the Turks”, *BMFEA*, vol. 23, pl. I B, Nos. 1, 2, 5, 6.

NAMES AND TITLES

Ch'ao-yang 朝陽
Ch'ih Feng 赤峰
Ch'ong-hai-myon, Ham-gyong Namdo 青海面咸
鏡南道
Chu Kuei 朱貴
Ch'ung-ch'ong Nam-do 忠清南道
Hung Shan Hou 紅山後
K'ao-ku Hsüeh-pao 考古學報
Kilin 吉林
Kōkōgaku Zasshi 考古學雜誌
Liaoning 遼寧

Lolang 樂浪
Mikami, T. 三上次男
Najin Tso-do Won-shi Yujok 羅津草島原始遺蹟
Pyong-yang 平壤
Shih Chi 史記
Shih-erh T'ai Ying-tzu 十二台營子
Tso-do 草島
Unsong-ri 雲城里
Wei-man 衛滿
Wu-shu 五銖
Yen 燕