

# ROYAL TOMBS AT GYEONGJU -- CHEONMACHONG

**GRADES:** High School

**AUTHOR:** Daryl W. Schuster

**SUBJECT:** World History

**TIME REQUIRED:** 60 minutes

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Awareness of Korean tombs including size and structure of tumuli.
2. Analysis and appreciation of Korean national treasures discovered during excavations.
3. Understand the role of Japanese colonial and Republic of Korea archeological policies concerning excavation and preservation.
4. Discussion of the *essential question*: what is more important – maintaining the sanctity of tombs or recovering national treasures?

## **STANDARDS:**

Common Core

RH 9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event

SL 1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- Computers with internet access
- Handout 1: Silla National Treasures List
- Handout 2: Japanese Archaeological Excavations in Korea
- Handout 3: President Park and Cost/Benefit Analysis

**BACKGROUND:** On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012, I visited the Gyeong Ju National Museum which exhibits about 2,500 of the 80,000 artifacts from the Silla Kingdom that existed from 57 BCE to 935 CE. Our knowledgeable docent really surprised me when she recounted how Republic of Korea President Park Chung Hee ordered the Daerungwon tomb complex to be opened up in 1973. Since there were no governmental checks on President Park his commands were followed “without question,” she stated. Intermixed with the 23 tumuli, or burial mounds, were homes and a community that was relocated so that a park complex could be built to accommodate visitors. Cheonmachong tomb was excavated on April 6, 1973 with 11, 500 items recovered. This arbitrary decision by President Park had an antecedent though. In 1916 the Japanese

Colonial Governor-General Committee for the Investigations of Ancient Remains and Relics established guidelines for archaeological excavations leading in 1918 to work in Gyeongju with the museum established in 1921. Korean tombs' integrity has largely been maintained and even family graves in the hills are respected and maintained. Actions by both governments led me to the essential question and the conundrum of the riddle.

Cheonmachong means "heavenly horse tomb." Contrary to the impression the name gives, the tomb did not contain a horse. The name comes from a painting of a heavenly horse that was found during the tomb's excavation. The mound is 12.7 meters high and 47 meters in diameter. Some of the artifacts found during the excavation are displayed at the tomb, although most are replicas of the original pieces on display at the Gyeongju National Museum.

The tomb's wooden structure had stones piled over and around it, an upper covering of clay, and dirt and grass on top. The stones protected against robbers: walls collapsed on thieves trying to dig from the side. The site was made into a museum to reveal how it was excavated with imitations of the uncovered artifacts placed in the positions in which they were found.

Similar to Hwangnamdaechong, Cheonmachong was restored to its original shape. In this royal tomb, the burial chamber was placed above the ground, not underground. Such positioning helped prevent the decay of burial accessories by protecting them from groundwater. The entombed person was laid in the center of the grave, with his head pointed to the east, showing respect for the sun. Burial accessories were laid beside the body.

#### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Introduce students to the essential question and share the background of the royal tombs.
2. Go to Google images and show the students Cheonmachong so that they have a visual sense of the tumuli and how people access the tomb.
3. Distribute Handout 1 and give students time to explore the national treasures. I would recommend previewing the pages and choosing 5 to 10 examples; however, if the students have background knowledge in the arts you might want to let them cover a range of treasures.
4. Move students into groups and distribute Handout 2. Working in small groups will excite the most progressive discussion of the material. Continue with Handout 3.
5. Bring the class back together and discuss the essential question. Students should be able to expand the conversation into other examples of cultural artifacts retrieved from tombs in World History.

#### **EVALUATION:**

Students will be assessed on the completion of questions and cost/benefit analysis. In addition, points should be awarded for persuasive commentary in the whole group scenario as well as reference to Silla Kingdom artifacts.

#### **ENRICHMENT:**

Consider having the students create a visual that includes national treasures from Gyeong Ju National Treasures Museum and continue researching the artifacts.

**RESOURCES:**

Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place In The Sun: A Modern History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005.

Hyung il Pai. "Travel Guides to the Empire: The Production of Tourist Images in Colonial Korea," found in Laurel Kendall, ed., *Consuming Korean Tradition in Early and Late Modernity, Commodification, Tourism, and Performance*. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2011.

Gyeong Ju National Museum website <http://gyeongju.museum.go.kr/eng/> Korean Studies Workshop 2012 background readings.

## HANDOUT 1: SILLA NATIONAL TREASURES LIST

Gyeongju National Museum, a treasure house of the Silla Kingdom's 1,000 year-old culture, is loved by Koreans and attracts great interest from people all over the world. With more than 80,000 relics from the Silla period, 2,500 are on display at all times. In front of the main building stands the bronze Divine Bell of King Seongdeok, designated as National Treasure No. 29. Also called the Emile Bell, it stands more than 3 meters high and weighs more than 25 tons, making it Asia's largest. It makes a clear, resonating sound when rung, reputedly able to travel more than 3 kilometers. The area of 600 meters is composed of the Main Hall, the Ancient Tomb Hall in the first annex, the Anapji Hall in the second annex and the outdoor garden. The Main Hall owns various relics excavated at Gyeongju and the neighboring areas, the Ancient Tomb Hall shows things unearthed from the old burial mounds (tumuli) of the Silla period, and Anapji Hall displays the relics found near the Anapji pond.

Directions: Visit the English language National Treasures web page at <http://gyeongju.museum.go.kr/eng/html/sub02/0201.html> and then answer the below questions.

1. Do you see patterns among the treasures, for example, materials, style, form, etc.?
2. What do these treasures inform you about Korean culture?
3. Make an inference about preparation for death and the living seeing to the comfort of the dead royalty.

## HANDOUT 2: JAPANESE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN KOREA

Bruce Cumings writes that Korean scholars likely named Japan the “land of the rising sun” and transferred knowledge from China as well as Korea’s own intellectual and artistic legacy to the Japanese islands. However, Japan *opened* Korea much as it was *opened* by the United States. By 1910, Korea was incorporated into an imperial Japan. In 1874, Japan banned excavations of Japanese tombs, leaving Korea as an alternative for Japanese archeologists. In 1916 the Japanese Colonial Governor-General Committee for the Investigations of Ancient Remains and Relics established guidelines for archaeological excavations leading in 1918 to work in Gyeongju with the museum established in 1921. Rebuilt temples and excavated artifacts provided *hands-on* experience for the Japanese and Hyung states that “[w]hen the Gold Crown Tomb, dating to the Old Silla Kingdom (ca. fifth century), was excavated in 1921, it was widely hailed as the greatest archaeological discovery of the century.”

Directions: answer the below questions.

1. Do you believe archaeologists are influenced by nationalistic motives?
2. Do you see parallels with other imperialist powers that did likewise, for example Europeans in Egypt or Americans and Native Americans?
3. If Japan banned archaeological digs in Korea, what would have been the result?

### **HANDOUT 3: PRESIDENT PARK AND THE COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS**

The Korean War left South Korea devastated, but by the 1960s its economy began to recover. Bruce Cumings writes that “the period from 1965 to 1971 was one of rapid economic growth and comparative political stability.” President Park Chung Hee perhaps saw this as a perfect time for strengthening South Korea’s position as the dominant power in comparison to North Korea. Part of that is the historical legacy of the Silla Kingdom and his decision to open the tumuli of Gyeong Ju.

Directions: below is a cost/benefit analysis of President Park’s decision to open the royal tombs; list three benefits and three costs of opening the tombs and then answer the below questions.

Benefits:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Costs:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

1. Does a nation’s sense of its cultural legacy depend on artifacts and national treasures from the past?
2. Should one man, albeit a president or a king, have the right to make a decision that goes against the religious principles of the people?
3. In hindsight, did President Park make the correct decision?