1. Introduction

The materialistic expression of death (mortuary practice and burial) has been considered one of the most important research issues to reveal past societies in archaeology for a long time. In reality, excavations and other relevant research on burials are likely to dominate a considerable and crucial part in archaeological research in Korea, as well as in other regions including Europe.

This research includes augmenting theoretical debates on mortuary practice and burials as an important type of material culture, in addition to traditional but detailed chronological and typological examinations of individual burials and associated material objects. Particularly, with the advent of 'Processual' or 'New' archaeology in the USA and Britain, attempts to systematise the general characteristics of mortuary practice and burial (or cemetery) with regard to their relationship to social organisations, such as social rank and social

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hierarchy (and/or subsistence system), in which burial is seen as a 'record' to 'reflect' the past society have been made. Thus, various statistical methods have been applied to extract 'those reflections' from material objects, burials and their distribution (e.g. Binford 1971, Brown 1971, Chapman, et al. 1981; O'Shea 1984).

The processual approach to mortuary practice and burials as such has been criticised with the emergence of Post-processual archaeology in Britain since the 1980s (e.g. Parker-Pearson 1982, Pader 1982). This criticism made by them can be recapitulated as follows: 1) material culture including burial and mortuary practice is not a simple reflection of past society and human behaviour, but a result and context of social action of human beings, namely an active medium for social action In other words, (social) phenomena observed in burials and cemeteries are not a simple residue of past society and evidence of a specific social form but they are a product of various social processes emerging from a reciprocal relationship between individuals and community and they (social phenomena) can be an active medium to make social action of both the individual and community possible; 2) therefore, the interpretation of burials and mortuary practice should focus on various aspects of social action (of individuals and community) surrounding the death of individuals and its materialisation in a society, and the role of burial and mortuary practice as an ideological apparatus to hide or justify social contradiction beyond a simple revelation of formal and static class or hierarchy system of the society in question.

This epistemological change is, in part, one of the results induced from the efforts to import and reflect the achievements made in other disciplines (for example, Structural Marxism, Phenomenology, Herme-
neutics, Structuration theory and Practice theory) into interpretation of
material culture (Barrett 1994, Bourdieu 1977; Hodder 1991; Giddens
1984, Mizoguchi 1992, Miller and Tilley 1984; Pader 1982; Thomas
1996).

In spite of their contribution to broadening the theoretical spectrum
in archaeological research, several problems still remain unsolved.
These problems include: 1) while the process in which individuals (as
the mourners or builders) maintain the existing 'structure' (as a rule
or a norm) and conversely the 'structure' constructs the individuals in
mortuary practice and its materialisation (construction of burials), has
been possible to describe or explain to some extents, it has not been
suggested how and why such a 'structure' is changed in relation to
individuals, 2) it is very rare to find examples in which burial
location and associated material objects in burials or cemeteries are
synthetically interpreted within these theoretical frameworks; 3)
various attitudes of individuals (as participants) towards the existing
structure in mortuary practice and construction of burials, and the
role of burial as a medium of social change, have been, so far,
relatively less emphasised.

In Korean archaeology, attempts have been made to reconstruct
partial aspects of social structure through the hierarchisation of
Bronze Age burials in mid-west Korea (Chungnam region), based on
burial goods and the distribution pattern of burials (Kim, J-I 1994;
Choi, J-G 1999). Nevertheless, the majority of archaeological research
has been trapped in the establishment of a chronology based on the
typology of associated material objects and burials, and focused on
the clarification of the cultural diffusion process or establishment of
the regional boundaries of a specific culture through examination of
the distribution of material objects and burials. The attempts made by Kim, J-I and Choi J-G also seem to remain at the level of 'description' of the morphological characteristics of a society and fails to explain the various social actions of individuals and the community related to mortuary practice.

It is true that this failure is mainly due to the lack of data. However, more fundamentally, the absence of a theoretical paradigm as a proper platform for interpretation seems to be a cause. I have already examined a process of formation of individual identity with a change of social structure by analysing burial placement and associated material objects in the Late Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age in Bavaria, South Germany (Kim, J-I 2002). This paper aims at examining the potential inherent to burial placement in the Korean Bronze Age, based on an interpretative framework originally designed for the Central European Bronze Age as a first step towards a better understanding of mortuary practice and associated material culture in the prehistoric and historical periods in Korea.

For this work, first and foremost, archaeological debates on burial placement in general will be reviewed and an alternative perspective suggested; secondly, the characteristics observed in burial placement of the Songgungni Culture, which is one of the main cultures in the Korean Bronze Age, will be clarified, thirdly, the significance and implications drawn from this will be discussed in the broader context of the Korean Bronze Age.

2. Symbolic Power and Space

It has been briefly outlined above that research on mortuary
practice has spawned many debates between archaeologists over what burials can tell us about society and the people responsible for building burials. In reality, since Binford’s attempt to frame law-like cross-cultural regularities and generalisations on the relationship between mortuary practice and social complexity (Binford 1971), he and other proponents of so-called processual archaeology have tried to set up and elaborate principles relevant to mortuary practice (e.g. Brown 1971; Chapman, et al 1981, Humphreys and King 1981; O’Shea 1984, Tainter 1978). Susan Shennan’s analyses exemplify this approach in European prehistory in a very detailed and elaborated way (S. E. Shennan 1975, 1978). The direction of this research on mortuary practice was criticised during the 1980s and 1990s with the introduction of social theories from other disciplines (e.g. Mizoguchi 1992, Pader 1982, Parker-Pearson 1982). Since then, the potential inherent to mortuary practice has been explored from various perspectives, which have been outlined by Parker-Pearson and others (Jensen and Nielsen 1997; Parker-Pearson 1999).

Problems related to the spatial structure of a burial group or cemetery have also been examined by many archaeologists. For example, Saxe developed a hypothesis with regard to the spatial structure of mortuary practice. Suggesting eight hypotheses about the social dimensions of mortuary practice, he claimed that formal disposal areas exclusively for burial of the dead (i.e. a cemetery) were maintained by corporate groups legitimising their rights over crucial but restricted resources through descent from the ancestors (Parker-Pearson 1999; Saxe 1971).

Goldstein elaborated and reformulated this hypothesis, saying that if a permanent, specialised, bounded area for the exclusive disposal
of the group's dead exists, then it is likely that this represents a corporate group that has rights over the use and/or control of crucial but restricted resources. This corporate control is most likely attained and/or legitimised by means of linear descent from the dead, either in terms of an actual lineage or in the form of a strong, established tradition of the critical resource passing from parent to offspring. The more structured and formal the disposal area, the fewer alternative explanations of social organisation apply, and vice versa (Goldstein 1981). This hypothesis gives many insights into interpretations of the various types of burials and cemeteries (for example the megalithic tombs of Western Europe and inhumation burials in Central Europe) (e.g. Chapman 1981; Renfrew 1984). These works emphasise the increasingly territorial behaviour, the role of ancestor and linear decent in forming a cemetery and the control of crucial but restricted resources.

This approach can, in part, be proved plausible in some cases from different regions and periods (e.g Morris 1987: 53-4). Nevertheless, this hypothesis is criticised for various reasons. For instance, based upon his ethnographic fieldwork, Hodder claims that what the cemetery clusters do express is not the totality of what actually happens in social relations. Rather, it represents one aspect that is seen as an ideal, while there is a distortion and structured disjunction between patterns in death and patterns in the living society (Hodder 1982b: 198-9). In a different article, he criticises the Saxe/Goldstein hypothesis (known as hypothesis 8) and the works based upon it, referring to the difficulty in identifying social stress and restricted resources (Hodder 1984). Based on diverse ethnographic and Greek/Roman case studies (Morris 1991), Morris shows that despite
its feasibility in general, there could be various reasons (or causes) for the linear pattern of burials other than the 'subsistence system' (including legitimisation of the right over resources). Parker-Pearson also points out that the materialist/cultural ecological formulation of the linkages presents a very limited perspective on the placing of the dead and the variety of ways in which ancestors are implicated in human affairs. Its deterministic formulation, he argues, hinders its use in exploring the particularities of societies and their trajectories (Parker-Pearson 1999: 137).

As mentioned before, various philosophical and sociological methodologies have been introduced to archaeology and this recent trend in archaeological research is well outlined elsewhere (Ashmore and Knapp 1999, Bender 1993, Parker-Pearson 1999; Parker-Pearson and Richards 1994; Tilley 1994). Among these, the works done by Mizoguchi and Barrett are worthy of note since they attempt to interpret the meaning of burial placement in individual inhumation burials in a discursive mode based on structuration theory (Barrett 1994, Mizoguchi 1992). Barrett claims that funerary rituals can be understood as the deployment of a particular range of symbolic resources, which include the corpse, to confirm and redefine some of the principles out of which relationships between the living are defined. Those relationships are partly recognised by reference to the transformation of death where the burial ritual creates an image that can only be understood, or read, through the memories each participant brings with them to that ritual. The grave rituals which were established by the end of the third millennium in Britain involved a re-inscription of the immediate landscape by marking the moment at which the burial rite ended with the fixed place of the
grave (Barrett 1994: 113)

Additionally, by inserting a burial into a pre-existing grave, a sequential relationship was established and the significance of that one place was reaffirmed. The first burial precisely determined the placing of the second, and it created the image of a primary and of an origin, an order that could be described historically. Death now allowed for the specific reaffirmation of relationships back through the preceding generations (Barrett 1994: 124) Therefore, lines of specific genealogical identity were constructed whose own origins then came to be fixed by mythological images of increasingly distant times (Barrett 1994: 126) On the other hand, grave assemblages and the dead meant nothing in them. Their significance was expressed only by the remembered or claimed demands of relationship, and these could be situated historically by reference to the other graves within the cemetery (Barrett 1994: 126).

This perspective has been applied to the analysis of the inhumation burial groups and cemeteries in Bavaria with some modification (Kim, J-I, 2002). That is to say, a grave is, of course, a medium by which death as a social category is confirmed, the obligations of the mourners are realised, and the position of the grave in relation to other burials enable this social category to be historically situated. There is however more to it than that A grave is also a medium used for change in material categorisation (of associated burial goods) and the identity of individuals in the mortuary practice Burial placement is also a medium and outcome of negotiation and negation against the existing 'structure'.

Therefore burial placement needs to be interpreted in terms of its role in structuring (or being structured) various relationships between
individuals involved historically in relation to other burials. This is a theoretical platform as a ‘principle’ (not like a cross-cultural checklist) for the exploration of the spatial structure of the Songgungni Culture inhumation burials in the Korean Bronze Age

3. Structuration of Burial Placement in the Songgungni Culture

The Songgungni Culture, which is one of the main cultures in the middle phase of the Korean Bronze Age (approximately 700-300 BC), can be characterised by rectangular or circular types of settlement with a couple of post holes located in the middle of the settlement, domestic pottery with no decoration, an enclosure (surrounding the settlement) and inhumation burials (stone cist or pit grave) (e.g. Kang, I-G et al 1979; Kim, S-O 2001; Woo, J-Y 2002). Many Korean archaeologists have examined and discussed the typological and chronological significance of settlements, pottery and burials with associated material objects. In particular, grave 1 from the Songgungni stone cist burial group, in which a Pipa type bronze dagger and stone arrow heads are found, has become a focus of research since the bronze dagger is supposed to be the typical example of the use of metal ever found in the Korean peninsular (e.g. Yi, G-M, 1992; Kim, G-S, 1998). Furthermore, this burial group is assumed to be the burial place in which the elite (or the ruling class) of the neighbouring the Songgungni settlement group, are buried. In contrast, the Namsan-ri burial group is thought to be that of ordinary people from the same settlement group (Choi, J-G 1995; Kim, G-S 1998). This hypothesis is
based on the superiority of the burial location (located on a sort of hill top) and the absence of other burial groups that can be presupposed to be the builders of the Songgungni settlement group.

It is only recently that all the settlements and burials have been synthetically reviewed and analysed using the conceptualisation of the Songgungni-type settlement or burial (e.g. Kim, S-O 2001; Woo, J-Y 2002). In particular it is Kim, S-O who makes it possible to understand the overall features of the Songgungni-type burials, suggesting that the Songgungni-type burials can be classified into stone cists, pit graves with stone covers and jar coffin (urn) tombs and again each type of tomb is divided into several categories according to their typological characteristics (for example, structure of pit, capstone and paved stones). He reveals that the Songgungni-type burials are densely located along with the middle Kum-gang River but they are also diffused into the upper and the lower Kum-gang River. He also proposes that the Songgungni-type burials are categorised into three inclusive levels, "burials", "burial clusters" and "macro cluster" (concentric or linear pattern) according to a 'layout plan of burial sites' and the burial structure is closely related to the age/sex of the dead (for example, male are related to stone arrowheads and stone slabs or an earthen floor whereas female are related to pot fragment-floor and no stone arrowheads). Furthermore, he argues that while most of the Songgungni-type burials are organised according to the age/sex of the dead, some burial groups, such as the Songgungni burial group, can be ascribed to that of high-ranking groups, there is, so to speak, some degree of social ranking within and between Songgungni-type burials (Kim, S-O 2001: 47-68).
It is true that his opinion makes it possible to define the conceptual boundary of the Songgungni-type burial according to typological classifications and to attempt to interpret its various facets in terms of social organisation. In particular, it is of importance that he notices the reciprocal relationship between burial structure (and associated material object) and the systematic sex/age division, which has not been emphasised in the ‘archaeological explanation’ of Korean archaeology.

Despite his own contribution as such, it should be pointed out that his argument is still limited to a simple ‘morphological description’ of society. He fails to conceptualise how symbolic power is executed in the construction of burial groups or cemeteries through the interpretation of placement of each burial group and in this process, how the existing structure (as a rule or norm) is structurated by individuals and community. In other words, it has not been considered that the ‘layout plan of burial sites’ (or burial placement) can show a process of maintenance or change of structure (structuration), which is inscribed onto time (the past, the present and the future) and space.

According to Kim, S-O, a total 36 burial groups (composed of 193 stone cist burials, 64 pit graves with cover stones and 46 jar coffins) have been found so far (see Fig. 1) (Kim, S-O 2001: 47-60). These burial groups can be divided into three categories according to distribution pattern, which are single burials (or no regular pattern), a linear pattern and a concentric pattern. A linear pattern is observed in the burial groups from Songgungni, Namsanni and Majeonni C district whereas a concentric pattern is observed in the burial groups from Sanuiri and Oseokni.
As mentioned before, Kim, S-O argued that most of the burial groups were organised by sex/age division but several burials can be ascribed to high-ranking groups, implying that the concentric pattern burial groups are the former, whereas those of linear pattern are the latter. However, in the case of the Sanuiri and Oseokri burial groups with a concentric pattern (see Figs 2 and 3), several important characteristics in burial placement can be observed by close examination. First and foremost, it can be observed that two burials are located in the centre and other burials surround them. For example, graves 8 and 10 in Sanuiri and graves 3 and 10 in Oseokri are burials located in the centre of the burial groups. Although it is difficult to prove at present because of the difficulty of physical anthropological examination, it seems very possible that the dead of these burials are considered as the common ancestors or origins of the other burials and that these burials are referenced by the dead in his/her lifetime and the mourners in mortuary practice and burial placement. In other words, the dead in his/her lifetime and the mourners express their membership in this community by emphasis on the relationship with specific burials as common ancestors or origins, in placing their burials around those specific burials. Secondly, it can also be observed that most of burials in these burial groups do not include any burial goods except for stone arrowheads and broken pottery shards in a few graves. It has been already pointed out that there is no conspicuous difference in burial goods between the burials and this has been interpreted as a lack of high-ranking existence in these burial groups (Kim, S-O 2001: 62-7). However, this phenomenon can also be interpreted as the less placing of care or emphasis on burial goods and body ornamentation in
mortuary practice. The dead in his/her lifetime and the mourners would not emphasise individual expression by using highly standardised burial practice in terms of material objects, whereas they stressed their relationship with specific burials. Thirdly, Kim, S-O mentioned that the burials of these burial groups would be composed of several segments, with two or three burials, and these burial segments are related to household or family groups. If this assumption is feasible, then it could also be inferred that several households or family groups would build their burials around their common ancestor or origin. Fourthly, the male/female and the adult/child differentiated by material objects (e.g. stone arrowheads or stone daggers with males and pottery-shard floors with females) are likely to be buried together in the same place. This indicates that equal membership would be emphasised between community members, at least in mortuary practice, regardless of sex/age. This equality in mortuary practice also implies that gender or age groups are differentiated by adoption of different material objects or floors within this emphasis on the relationship with common ancestors or origins in burial placement.

To recapitulate these four points, equal membership between individual burials and between the segments of burials is stressed in relation to the common ancestor or origin. The dead in his/her lifetime and the mourners (the future dead) would recognise this relationship and build burials based on it. The reason that individual expression is not encouraged could be traced to this circumstance. The observed concentric burial placement is a medium and result of this process. The burial of a common ancestor or origin would be a power source where this structuration of burial placement takes place.
Therefore, it can be said that its own unique power execution would exist in this structuration of burial placement, rather than just the absence of social rank or hierarchy. The fact that no other burials of a specific sex or age group with their associated ostentatious burial goods are found around these burial groups reinforces this interpretation.

In contrast, in the linear pattern burial groups, burials with stone (or bronze) daggers or stone arrowheads tend to be located at the end of rows as in the Songgungni, Namsanni and Majeonmi C district burial groups (see Figs 4, 5 and 6), or five burials with stone daggers are located in a row as in the Gazuungni burial group (see Fig 7). It is certain that (stone or bronze) daggers and arrowheads are likely to be associated with males in the European Neolithic and Copper Ages in general (Sherratt 1998a; 1998b, Kim, J-I 2002) Kim, S-O has already pointed out this association in the Songgungni Culture burials (Kim, S-O 2001. 66). In reality, 12 out of a total of 27 stone cist and pit graves with cover stone burials (except for five burials which are 1 m in length and thus assumed to be of children) include stone daggers and arrowheads in the Namsanni burial group. This proportion (12/27) does not correspond to the expected sex ratio (male/female), however, it could imply the association of stone daggers and arrowheads with a specific sex (male) indirectly. It is not clear at present that the role of stone daggers and arrowheads as a sex symbol extends to that of a status symbol in these burial groups. This is because the role and meaning of stone daggers or arrowheads as a 'sign' should be examined in the 'syntagmatic chain' as well as in the 'paradigmatic relation' as a symbol (Barthes 1973, Leach 1976). The fact that stone daggers or arrowheads are found in the concentric
pattern burial groups (see Figs.2, 3 and 4), also demonstrates that it is difficult to argue that they are status symbols. In other words, the males in the linear pattern burial groups would be buried in the restricted area, not because they are high-ranking people but because they are male. The differentiation in these burial groups would be between males and females, rather than between male and other ordinary people. Therefore, structuration of these linear pattern burial groups could be understood as a process of differentiation of male from female rather than that of high-ranking people from others. The male dead in his lifetime and the mourners would recognise that males should be buried in a specific area in a row or a separate place. This structuration is also a process in which a few males would attempt to hold social power in a community by differentiation in burial placement.

4. Conclusion

It is true that the existing approaches towards an interpretation of burial placement represented by Saxe/Goldstein hypothesis 8 can give an insight to understanding mortuary practice and further 'social organisation'. However it also becomes obvious that this sort of approach cannot be treated as a cross-cultural law or checklist in spite of its potentials. It is of importance to contextualise it in an actual context. In other words, it should be borne in mind that there could be various visible or invisible reasons other than the subsistence system or social organisation (e.g. social rank or social hierarchy) based on a causal effect relations in the formation of a specific burial placement pattern.
In this respect, the structuration theory suggested by Giddens and developed by Barrett in archaeology can contribute to a better understanding of burial placement and mortuary practice as a 'principle'. Based on their theories, it can be argued that burial placement is structurated by individuals (the dead in his/her lifetime and the mourners) and the community as a 'structure' and, conversely, this structure structures the individuals and the community. In this process, the individuals and the community place their burials to negate the existing structure as well as to maintain it.

The Songgungni Culture burial groups are good cases in point to show this structuration in burial placement. It has been confirmed that specific burials play a role as the common ancestor or origin and thus they are referenced in burial placement in a concentric pattern. Concomitantly, an equal membership in relation to the common ancestor or origin and equality between the members are encouraged. In contrast, it can be observed that male burials are separated from those of females and this differentiation of male from female is well recognised by the dead in his/her lifetime and the mourners (the future dead) in the linear pattern burial groups. Therefore, the difference between the burial groups of linear pattern and those of concentric pattern does not mean the existence of social rank or hierarchy but the emergence of sex differentiation (in particular, male burials and the male himself from others, including female burials and females).

In order to understand this process more systematically in the context of a long-term change of material culture, it should be accompanied with the analysis of: 1) the relationship between linear burial placement of megalithic tombs (dolmen) located in the
neighbouring area and the Songgungnu Culture, 2) the relationship between burial groups with other types of sites belonging to different discourses in this culture (e.g. settlements) in terms of symbolic structure, 3) the continuity and discontinuity with single pit graves with cover stones (including various ostentatious bronze ritual artefacts) in the same region in the later period. I wish to leave these crucial but impending problems as the next topics to be settled here.

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<ABSTRACT>

An Archaeology of Death

- Interpreting the Spatial Structure of Burial Groups in the Songgungni Culture of the Korean Bronze Age -

Kim, Jong-il

The Songgungni Culture is one of the important cultures of the Korean Bronze Age. For this reason, it has been a focus of research in Korean archaeology. However, its archaeological concept and cultural boundary has only recently been established. This article attempts to explore the potential inherent to burial placement of this culture based on those recent debates. For this work, Saxe/Goldstein hypothesis 8 (which argues burial placement pattern and its relationship with social organisation and the subsistence system) and its critiques raised in archaeological research, have been examined. It has been argued that despite its implication, this hypothesis should not be regarded as a cross-cultural law or checklist and that a specific pattern should be contextualised in the overall material culture when interpreting burial placement. In addition, a perspective for interpretation of the Songgungni Culture burials has been suggested, based on structuration theory.

As a result, the concentric pattern of burial placement in this culture is interpreted as a medium and outcome of the emphasis on equal membership in a community and the equality between members reinforced by referencing specific burials as the common
ancestors or origins. By contrast, the linear pattern shows a process in which males (or male burials) differentiate themselves from other members (or burials of other members). Therefore, it is concluded that the significance of the linear pattern does not lie in its exemplification of high-ranking people, but gender differentiation.
Figure 1. Distribution of the Songgungni Culture burials
(Based on Kim, S-O 2001)

Figure 2. The Sanuiri burial group
(Based on Yi, N-S 1999 and modified by the author)
Figure 3. The Oseokni burial group
(Based on Yi, N-S 1995 and modified by the author)

Figure 4. The Songgungni burial group
(Based on Kim, G-S 1998 and modified by the author)
Figure 5. The Namsanni burial group  
(Based on Yun, M-B, 1987 and modified by the author)

Figure 6. The Majeonni C district burial group  
(Based on Sohn, J-H 2000 and modified by the author)
Figure 7. The Gazuungni burial group (After Kim, S-O 2001)