

Korean Mummies of the Joseon Kingdom.
An Introduction for Archaeologists



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Edited by

Dong Hoon Shin

Associate Editors

Chang Seok Oh and Jong Ha Hong



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

13-14 Market Square

Bicester

Oxfordshire OX26 6AD

United Kingdom

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80583-205-8

ISBN 978-1-80583-206-5 (e-Pdf)

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Front cover, main image: The discovery of Eung Cheok Koh (Gumi mummy)'s tomb.

Front cover, image behind main title: *Lion's chest emblem* on the *Heukdanryeong* recovered from Kim Yeo-on's tomb.

Back cover: Portrait of Eung Cheok Koh (Gumi mummy) based on craniofacial reconstruction.

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Preface

Mummies uncovered at archaeological sites around the world have proven to be invaluable subjects for the fields of history, archaeology, and anthropology. Today, mummy research has expanded considerably, benefiting from continually advancing techniques and methodologies. The study of mummies offers rich opportunities to investigate the sociocultural and medical dimensions of ancient peoples and societies, providing multifaceted insights into their lives within specific historical contexts.

This is equally true for the people of Korea during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910 CE), as evidenced by studies of mummies excavated from graves dating to the 15th through 19th centuries. The exceptional preservation of these Joseon mummies has astonished anthropologists and drawn the attention of archaeologists. Over the past several decades, systematic and well-structured studies conducted in Korea have yielded invaluable biological data on the people of that era. Today, there is broad academic consensus regarding the scientific importance of Korean mummies, based on the significant scholarly progress made to date.

Research on Joseon Dynasty mummies has been widely disseminated in academic journals and book chapters, gaining increasing recognition. These studies have offered important insights into the health and disease patterns of pre-modern East Asia, employing rigorous scientific methodologies. However, it is important to acknowledge that research to date has primarily focused on biomedical aspects. As many scholars have emphasized, historical and archaeological perspectives are equally essential for fully contextualizing these findings.

Despite these advances, detailed accounts of the cultural context surrounding Korean mummies remain limited. While biomedical analyses have dominated the field, integrating historical and archaeological viewpoints is critical to deepening our understanding. Beyond the fact that these individuals lived centuries ago, little is known about their daily lives, social roles, or historical significance. To date, Korean mummies have not been thoroughly examined through the lenses of the humanities and social sciences.

This book seeks to fill that gap. Our aim is to advance the academic discourse by investigating historical and archaeological materials related to Joseon Dynasty mummies. We offer a comprehensive exploration of the cultural background of these mummies—an area insufficiently addressed in the existing literature. Multiple chapters in this volume focus on the historical, archaeological, and anthropological dimensions of Joseon-period mummies, subjects that have largely remained inaccessible to scholars outside Korea. We believe this work will serve as an important synthesis and reference point, providing a deeper understanding of Joseon mummies while presenting compelling historical and cultural narratives not yet explored in other studies.

Dong Hoon Shin, Chang Seok Oh, Jong Ha Hong

About the editors



Dong Hoon Shin graduated from the Seoul National University College of Medicine (MD) in South Korea, where he also earned his PhD in Anatomy. His research has primarily focused on gaining scientific insights into the health and disease status of pre-modern populations. Using a combination of anatomical, histological, and molecular techniques, he has uncovered the physical and pathological traits of ancient peoples across various historical periods. Due to his academic achievements, he has been recognized as a National Geographic Explorer and a speaker at the Kavli Frontiers of Science. He is currently a full professor in both the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology and the Institute of Forensic and Anthropological Science at Seoul National University.



Chang Seok Oh earned his PhD in Anatomy from Seoul National University. His research focuses on identifying the bioanthropological characteristics of ancient populations and the diseases that affected them. To achieve this, he conducts studies on ancient human remains, including genetic analyses. He is currently an assistant professor at Eulji University, where he teaches courses in biology, anatomy, and bioanthropology.



Jong Ha Hong studied in Seoul National University (PhD) and currently works as a research professor in Kyung Hee University. His research interest has been mainly focused upon acquiring scientific information of pre-modern animals and people's health, disease and migration patterns in history. Studies are currently being conducted at multiple archaeological sites across Eurasia, expanding the geographical scope of his research.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the families and institutions whose contributions were instrumental to the successful completion of this project. In particular, we are profoundly grateful for the generous and unwavering support of the descendants of the Gangneung Choi Clan, Onyang Jeong Clan, Sungju Yi Clan, and Kosung Yi Clan. Their invaluable assistance and cooperation throughout the course of our research made this work possible, and we deeply appreciate their commitment to advancing scientific inquiry.

This research was partially supported by Seoul National University Hospital (2025) and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) through grants funded by the Korean government (RS-2022-NR072193 and NRF-2022S1A5C2A01093269).

Credit for the cover photographs of this book is given to Won Joon Lee, A Young Yoon, Joon Yeol Ryu, Soon Chul Cha, and Gyeongkuk National University Museum.

List of editors and authors

Editor:

SHIN, Dong Hoon *Seoul National University*

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KOH, Ensung	<i>Seongbuk-Seoul Convalescent Hospital</i>
KWON, Young-Suk	<i>Pusan National University</i>
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LEE, Da Yeong	<i>MEDICAL IP Co. Ltd.</i>
LEE, Eun-Joo	<i>Gyeongkuk National University (Professor Emeritus)</i>
LEE, Hyejin	<i>MND Agency for KIA Recovery & Identification</i>
LEE, Hyo-sun	<i>Daegu National Museum</i>
LEE, In Sun	<i>Samsung Medical Center</i>
LEE, Jaesung	<i>Cultural Heritage Conservation Science Center, NRICH</i>
LEE, Jung Eun	<i>Pusan National University</i>
LEE, Mi Youn	<i>Freelance Photographer</i>
LEE, Myung Eun	<i>Woori-ot Research Studio</i>
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PARK, Yeon Kyung	<i>National Forensic Service</i>
ROH, Byung-Yoon	<i>National Forensic Service</i>
RYU, Joon Yeol	<i>National Forensic Service</i>

SEO, Min	<i>Dankook University</i>
SHIN, Myung Ho	<i>Pukyong National University</i>
SONG, Mi Kyung	<i>Seoul Women's University</i>
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YIM, Se Gweon	<i>Gyeongkuk National University (Professor Emeritus)</i>
YOO, Dongsoo	<i>Good Morning Hospital</i>
YOON, A Young	<i>Visual Communication Design (Sungkyunkwan Univ.)</i>

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