Korean Archaeology for the 21st Century:
From Prehistory to State Formation*

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1. Preface

Archaeological studies in the West have undergone several developmental stages in theory and methods, from cultural evolutionism to diffusionism, to modified diffusionism, to cultural ecology, to systems theory, to neo-evolutionism, to new archaeology, and most recently to post-processual archaeology. Within this historical framework, Willey and Sabloff (1993) outlined the history of American archaeology as follows:

The Speculative Period (1492-1840)
The Classificatory-Descriptive Period (1840-1914)

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The Classificatory-Historical Period: The Concern with Chronology (1914-1940)

The Classificatory-Historical Period: The Concern with Context and Function (1940-1960)

The Modern Period (1960-1992)

Since the 1950s American archaeologists have focused particularly on the origins and evolution of cities, civilization, and state formation. Concurrently, origin of agriculture became the subject of intense scholarly interests. In relation to American archaeology, the current status of Korean archaeology, with its emphasis on typology and chronology, may be considered to not yet have passed the Classificatory-Historical Period. To overcome this predicament, a number of scholars (Choi M. L. 1984; Rhee S. N. and Choi M. L. 1992; Choi M. L. 1997; Choi J. P. 1997; Choi M. L. 2000) have sought to introduce as well as apply to Korean archaeology modern archaeological approaches of the West, particularly those of new archaeology and post-processual archaeology.

In terms of future prospects for 21st century Korean archaeology, it is expected that the primary attention will be given to the emergence of kinship (clan)-based chiefdom societies and their evolution into highly stratified and more advanced early state level societies in the Korean Peninsula. Along with the increasing emphasis in socio-cultural developments, a new chronological framework will also be established. In this regard, increasing attention will be given to regional archaeology and to the chronology of socio-cultural developments at various regional levels. This will undoubtedly modify the uniform chronology hitherto applied to the whole Korean Peninsula.

With emphasis on regional archaeology, there will be a more
balanced understanding of the nature of socio-cultural developments, not only at centers, but also at their peripheral zones, and of the relationship among them. This will help clarify the origin of the Korean Bronze Age and the emergence of early states, from new perspectives. In this endeavor, it is important to keep in mind, regarding the formation of Korean culture, that the development, acceptance, and diffusion of culture differed from region to region as well as in timing. While it is still within the realm of hypothesis, it appears that the evolution of Korean culture was multi-linear and highly complex, and unlocking the complexity will become the task of 21st century Korean archaeology.

In the meantime, Kuksa p'yŏnch' an wiwŏnhoe (Korean National History Compilation Committee) published Korean History I: the Prehistory of Korea in 1973. Twenty-four years later, in 1997, it published a revised and enlarged version in two volumes, under the titles of Korean History II: the Paleolithic and the Neolithic Age and Korean History III: the Bronze and the Iron Age. This clearly suggests that there has been much advancement in Korean archaeology relative to pre- and early history and that the latter now occupies a highly significant niche in Korean history.

As shown in these revised versions of Korean history, new archaeological data has greatly increased during the last two decades, prompting changes in chronology as well as in archaeological terminology. Particularly prominent is the replacement of the Early Iron Age with Iron Age I (300 BC to 1 BC) and the Protohistoric Period with Iron Age II or Three Kingdoms Period I (AD 1 - AD 300). Recently uncovered archaeological data from the P'umgnap-dong Earthen Fortress (Historical Site no.11) in Seoul are invaluable in the
understanding of Korea’s ancient history. They, along with others coming to light, have encouraged Korean archaeologists and historians to view positively both the early accounts of the *Samguk sagi* (Historical Records of Three Kingdoms) and Korea’s early history.

2. Korean Prehistory at Glance

Paleolithic Period

1) Natural Environment

It is generally understood that during the Pleistocene period, the Korean Peninsula lay within the periglacial zone, with distinct sea level variations. When the sea level was low, particularly during the Third or the Riss Glacial Age, the mainland of China, the Korean Peninsula, and the Japanese Archipelago were connected, forming a land bridge and enabling the movement of people from the Asian continent to the Japanese islands. Faunal remains from paleolithic sites suggest that varying climates existed during the Pleistocene. Warm climate fauna such as rhinoceros, elephant, and monkey uncovered from Kūmgul, Chŏnmul, and Turubong sites suggest the existence of a warmer climate of the interglacial while cold climate fauna including wooly mammoth from the Tonggwanjin, a cold climate of the Würm Glacial.

2) Paleolithic Sites and Artifacts

While it is generally assumed that the Korean Peninsula was inhabited by *Homo Erectus* since the early paleolithic period, there is
no clear evidence to support it. A number of paleolithic sites including Kŏmŭnumoru of Sangwŏn in North Korea, Kŭmgul of Tanyang, and Chŏngok-ri have been considered by some to belong to the early paleolithic; however, much controversy exists among paleolithic specialists concerning their dates and authenticity.

Middle paleolithic sites include Sangmuryong-ri of Yanggu, the middle cultural level of Kŭmgul, Sŏkjang-ri, and Turubong. Late paleolithic sites are found in abundance all throughout the peninsula. Particularly important among them is Suyanggae Site in Tanyang, an expansive open-air habitation site with a large number of lithic workshops. Besides Suyanggae, the late paleolithic sites include the late paleolithic horizon at Sŏkjang-ri and at Kŭmgul as well as the obsidian-bearing horizon at Sangmuryong-ri. In recent years late paleolithic sites have been discovered at Kokch'ŏn (Usan-ri), Kümp'yŏng (Shinp'yŏng-ri), Taejŏn (Hwasun), and Imbul-ri (Kŏch'ang) in the North and South Chŏllanam-do region, hitherto assumed to be absent of any paleolithic sites. Accordingly, the number of paleolithic sites are expected to grow, supporting the assumption that there was an active movement of people in the paleolithic Korean Peninsula.

In terms of artifacts, those assigned to the early paleolithic include heavy tools without any retouch, and crude choppers and chopping tools. Bifacially flaked core tools from Chŏngok-ri have been considered by their investigators to be hand-axes of Acheulean type; however, the Acheulean designation has been seriously questioned (Ayres and Rhee 1984). In comparison, Chŏngok-ri lithic assemblage appears to be related more closely to those from the regions of the upper Yenisei River, Gorno-Altai, and Southern Manchuria (Choi 1993). Tools assigned to the middle paleolithic are chopping tools and
various artifacts made on flakes including scrapers, points, burins, and knives. Middle paleolithic tools were made using direct as well as bipolar percussion and anvil hurling. Tools from the late paleolithic sites include microblades as well as prepared microblade cores in addition to scrapers (with edge retouch), burins, and points (tanged).

Included among the late paleolithic artifacts are sculptures of limestone and animal bones/horns with whale and fish designs; however, there is much controversy regarding their authenticity. The origin and development of Korean paleolithic culture is intimately related to the question of the origin of the Korean people. One the one hand, the northern origin theory assumes Korean origins to be in the upper regions of the Yenisei River of the Siberia-Mongolia-and southern Manchuria axis. On the other hand, North Korean theory emphasizes the autochthonous origin of the Korean people. Unfortunately, presently there is no sufficient archaeological or anthropological data with which to clarify the question of the origin of the Korean people and their culture.

Currently, two issues remain critically important to Korean paleolithic studies: (1) the age of the early paleolithic cultural deposit and (2) criteria for distinguishing the early paleolithic culture from that of the middle paleolithic.

3. Paleolithic Inhabitants of the Korean Peninsula

Current debate concerning the earliest human habitation in the Korean Peninsula comprises varying dates ranging from 700,000 BP of the early paleolithic to 100,000 BP of the middle paleolithic. The
oldest human fossil remains from Sŏngni-san (Tŏkch'ŏn), Taehyon-dong (P'yŏngyang), and Sangsi Cave (Tanyang) all bear the marks of *Homo Sapiens*. In addition, skeletal remains from Mandal Cave display highly developed features and are ascribed to the mesolithic period. Once dubbed *the New Man* they are now called *Mandal Man*.

**Mesolithic Period**

Regarding the mesolithic there are two prevailing views in Korea today. One, on the basis of European prehistoric chronology, assumes that the lithic technology of the Korean paleolithic continued to develop until it reached its zenith during the late paleolithic, which was in turn followed by the mesolithic. Among the so-called mesolithic sites are Hahwakye-ri (Hongch'ŏn), the lowest cultural level at Sangnodaedo (T'ongyŏng), and the uppermost cultural level of Sŏkjang-ri. In North Korea, the Mandal Cave and Pup'o-ri, sites previously ascribed to the late phase of the late paleolithic, are now considered mesolithic. With increasing number of sites yielding microliths, the number of mesolithic sites could grow.

Use of the term mesolithic in Korea and throughout northeast Asia has been the result of uncritical application of European chronology. According to a newly emerging picture of northeast Asian prehistoric cultural development, it appears more appropriate to view the so-called mesolithic not so much as a distinct phase of the stone age but as a transitional stage between the paleolithic and the neolithic periods. That is, it was essentially a period in which the peninsula inhabitants sought to readapt to a new natural environment
consequent to the ending of the last glacial period. The main reasons for this understanding are twofold: (1) the European lithic sequence never existed in northeast Asia and (2) pottery, characteristic of the neolithic in Europe and the Near East, appears in Korea already at the end of the Pleistocene. Kosan-ri on Cheju Island is a representative site in this regard.

Neolithic Period

1) Neolithic Lifestyle

Until recently, it was generally held that the Korean neolithic began around 6,000 BC. However, according to recently discovered Kosan-ri cultural remains, radiocarbon-dated to 10,500 BP, Korean neolithic appears to have begun as early as 8,000-10,000 years ago. (Present writers divide the Kosan-ri site into three cultural levels: 1) late paleolithic level represented by microliths and micro cores, 2) neolithic level I yielding pottery with clay bands and triangular shaped arrowhead without tang, and 3) neolithic level II represented by tanged arrowheads. In light of their close resemblance of those from Osipopka neolithic site in the Amur basin, the neolithic remains from level I of the Kosan-ri may be dated to as early as 10,000 BP.)

Neolithic inhabitants used ground and polished stone implements of varying types. Raw materials included hard stones such as nephrite and agate as well as soft slate. When broken, the stone tools were simply repolished for continual use. Pottery was used for cooking or storing food items. The polished or ground lithic implements and the pottery are the two representative remains of
Korean neolithic culture.

The representative pottery of the Korean neolithic is *Pitsal muni* (comb-pattern design) pottery, which was essentially a part of Asia’s northern cultural tradition. Likewise, pottery with a pointed bottom characteristic of the Han River basin as well as pottery with a flat bottom from the Hamgyôngbuk-do region quite possibly had a common origin in the northern regions of the Altai and the Baikal (Han 1995).

Recently, however, a new type of pottery older than the comb-pattern pottery has come to light in increasing numbers. Appearing either without any designs or with clay bands attached to their surface, the new pottery is called *Mimmuni* (undecorated) pottery or *Tötmuni* (clay band design, applique) pottery. Neolithic sites yielding such early potteries include Sŏp’ohang (Unggi), Osan-ri (Yangyang), and the Tongsam-dong shell mound. Even older than *Mimmuni* and the *Tötmuni* pottery are the pottery from the Kosan-ri, sharing characteristics of the most primitive potteries found in northeast Asia. If the number of sites, bearing paleolithic cultural features along with pottery, continues to increase, chronology of Korean neolithic will be significantly revised.

Current chronology of Korean neolithic sites investigated hitherto is as follows:

* Before 6,000 BC (8,000-10,000 BP): Primitive undecorated pottery, Kosan-ri.
* 6,000-5,000 BC: clay bands design pottery, Ubong-ri.
* 5,000-4,000 BC: impressed design pottery, Osan-ri.
* 4,000-3,000 BC: comb-pattern pottery, Tongsam-dong.
* 3,000-2,000 BC: partial comb-pattern pottery, Ponggye-ri.
* 2,000-1,000 BC: double-lipped pottery, Yul-ri.

(It must be noted here that by the time the last phase of double-lipped pottery appeared in southern Korea, the Bronze Age had already commenced as early as the 15th-20th century BC in northern Korea. But it now appears that the Bronze Age began at least in 15th century BC in southern Korea.)

By the 4th or the comb-pattern pottery phase, neolithic sites were established all throughout the Korean Peninsula. Representative sites include Kungsan-ri, Namgyŏng, and Chut’ap-ri, all in northern Korea, and Amsa-dong, Misa-dong, Tongsamdong, Suga-ri (Kimhae), and Osan-ri, in southern Korea. These neolithic sites were located either on the riverbanks or on the coast. The comb-pattern pottery is marked by its pointed bottom, often in the shape of an acorn or an egg, and varies in size. It is now assumed that they were used to store agricultural products.

Neolithic farming was initially most likely one of slash and burn cultivation or a simple form of horticulture close to dwelling sites. Along with simple farming, however, hunting and fishing continued to play an important role for the neolithic economy. Hunting tools included bows/arrows and spears, designed to kill deer and wild boar. Fishing tools comprised nets of varying sizes, harpoons, and fishhooks made of stone or bone. Wooden canoes were also used for deep sea fishing of whales. In addition, neolithic inhabitants along the coast harvested 40-50 different species of oysters and other shellfish.

Neolithic economy also involved primitive handcraft. Presence of spindle whorls and bone needles suggests that neolithic inhabitants made clothes and/or fishing nets.
2) Neolithic Settlements

While the paleolithic inhabitants of Korea lived in caves or on ridge tops along the rivers and the coast, those of the neolithic period lived generally in subterranean houses along the riverbanks and the coast. In some cases, as at Söp’ohang (Unggi), dwellings were constructed within hardened shell-mound. However, in general, neolithic dwellings consisted of a circular underground pit, 1-0.5m deep, a hardened floor, and a conical thatched roof. The underground pit was normally 5m in diameter and accommodated a family of five. At large neolithic settlement sites such as Söp’ohang and Amsa-dong, ten or more such subterranean houses have been discovered; however they appear to represent only a partial portion of dwellings at the said sites.

Some of the neolithic inhabitants continued to live in caves. Neolithic cave dwellings have been found at Misong-ri (Oiju), Yonggok (P’yöngyang), Kyo-dong (Ch’unch’ön), Kümugul (Tanyang), Sangsi (Tanyang), and Yul-ri (Pusan), among others. Except Kyo-dong, all cave dwellings were natural caves formed in limestone rich areas such as P’yöngyang and Ch’ungch’öngbuk-do. The neolithic cave dwellers undoubtedly subsisted on hunting and gathering.

3) The Question of Neolithic Agriculture

Critical to the understanding of Korean neolithic culture is the question of food production. Korea’s prehistoric agriculture first appeared during the neolithic, as evidenced by carbonized millets (Setaria italica or Panicum crus gali) found at Chit’ap-ri and Namgyöng neolithic levels. Having first emerged around 4,000 BC, on the west
coastal regions of the Taedong and the Han river basins, agriculture appears to have soon spread throughout the peninsula. Major agricultural implements included stone picks, shovels, stone ploughs, stone sickles, and crescent-shaped reaping knives. Though absent in archaeological records, it may also be assumed that neolithic farmers of Korea used wooden tools similar to those found in nearby China and Japan.

In light of lithic assemblages found at various neolithic sites, neolithic subsistence was one of a broad spectrum economy, involving, in addition to farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering as well. Which of the four subsistence activities was more important depended on environment and seasonal catch.

Why the neolithic inhabitants adopted agriculture, a labor intensive as well as risky economic activity, is an important question Korean archaeologists must address. Population increase and its resulting pressure on the carrying capacity towards the end of the paleolithic, might be explored as possible causes of agricultural emergence in neolithic Korea, as in other world scenes.

4) Social Organization during the Neolithic

It is assumed that neolithic society was one of various tribal organizations consisting of exogamous kinship-based clans. In terms of population, tribes may range between a large tribe of 300-2,000 and a small tribe of 30-40 people. In light of limited neolithic settlement data, it is not possible at this time to ascertain the sizes of Korean neolithic tribes.
5) Religion of the Neolithic

Neolithic religion worldwide is generally understood in terms of shamanism and animism. Presently, there is little or no archaeological data pertaining to religious beliefs and practices during the Korean neolithic period.

4. State Formation and Ancient Korean Culture

1. Bronze-Iron Age
   a) Bronze Implements and the Emergence of Social Stratification

   Around the 10th century BC, there commenced in Korea the Bronze Age (somewhat earlier in Manchuria, around 15th century BC). During this period Korea underwent unprecedented socio-cultural changes involving advancement in food production, rise of craft specialization, private ownership, and social stratification.

   Bronze Age sites, sharing similar artifactual remains, are scattered widely throughout northeastern China (regions of Liaoning and Jilin) and the Korean Peninsula. Representative artifacts of the Bronze Age include bipa-shaped bronze daggers, bronze mirrors with crude linear designs, bronze arrowheads, along with polished crescent-shaped stone knives and disc-shaped stone axes. Bronze Age pottery includes the so-called Misong-ri type pottery (high neck, wide mouth, and handles attached to sides) and the plain or decorated pottery with various regional characteristics. The plain pottery, representative of the Bronze Age pottery repertoire, is generally reddish-brown in color and is of two main types: top-shaped pottery with tapered bottom and the Hwabunhyŏng pottery (flower-pot type with a round body and
a flat base). These artifacts have generally been found in graves such as dolmens, cists, and tombs of piled stones.

The bipalute-shaped bronze daggers, found throughout northeast China and the Korean Peninsula, suggest that these regions belonged to the same cultural sphere during the Bronze Age.

Social stratification of the Bronze Age is evidenced in the dolmens of megalithic construction. Dolmens are found throughout the entire peninsula and manifested variant forms. Their construction, especially those with gigantic cap-stones weighing up to 50-100 tons, involved a large organized labor force, and they could have been built only under the direction of wealthy classes or elite with political power for themselves and their family members whose society is based upon kinship (clan)-based hierarchical-stratified order and ancestor worship. In the dolmens, their size, their contents, and their inter-relationships thus reflected the social organization of the Korean bronze age.

Consequently, in recent years, scholars have been attempting to reconstruct the Bronze Age society on the basis of data obtained through the analyses of dolmens and their cluster occurrence in various regions, particularly regarding construction labor force employed, population, and Bronze Age settlement sizes.

b) Chiefdom Society

Conventional interpretation of the Korean Bronze Age has long been beset by the use of terminologies, often ambiguous and confusing, such as tribal society, tribal state, and tribal alliance. Consequently, a number of Korean anthropologists have sought to understand the Korean bronze age in light of cultural evolutionary dynamics
suggested by Elman Service, Kent Flannery and others (Choi M. L. 1984; Rhee and Choi 1992; Choi M. L. 1997; Choi J. P. 1997; Choi M. L. 200). According to Service (1975), a chiefdom is a stratified society based on surplus economy marked by the presence of hereditary elite and economic redistribution. As a kinship-based regional community, chiefdoms are similar to tribal societies; however, they are similar to an early state in terms of their social stratification and elite rulers in place of simple big-man type leaders. In this light, a chiefdom may be viewed as a transitional stage in a socio-political evolutionary continuum from the egalitarian to the stratified and centralized society. Applied to Korean history, this evolutionary view has identified the Dolmen/Bronze Age as that of a chiefdom level society and Wiman Chosŏn (194 - 108 BC) as Korea's earliest state (Choi M. L. 1997). The Tŏkch’ŏn-ri dolmen, for example, identified as a sacral monument, was an ancestral cultic center of a regional elite class. Along with the cultic center was a fortified defensive structure, characteristic of a chiefdom society. Elsewhere, as at Kŏmdan-ri (Ŭiju) and Sŏsang-dong (Ch’angwŏn), the Bronze Age saw the emergence of fortified settlements with a surrounding moat.

c) Rice Cultivation

It now appears that by around 1,000 BC, rice cultivation had spread to all parts of the Korean Peninsula. Archaeological evidence comprises carbonized rice from Dwelling Site no. 36 at Namgyŏng (P’yŏngyang) in the northwest and Dwelling Site no. 12 at Hŭnam-ri in central Korea, and rice pollen from Kahŭng-ri (Muan) in the southwest. Introduction of rice cultivation may have been associated with population increase and its resultant intensive agriculture during
the Bronze Age. Evidence for intensive agriculture and paddy field rice cultivation comes from Kubong-ri (Puyŏ), Okhyŏn and Ya’im-dong (Ulsan), Majŏn-ri (Nonsan), and Tae’pyŏng-ri Okbang Areas 2, 3, 4 (Chinju), and the number continues to increase.

Regarding the origin of rice cultivation in Bronze-Age Korea, currently there are two views based on the study of rice specimens: (1) introduction by way of the Yellow Sea from the Yangtze River basin in southern China, and (2) diffusion by way of land route from northern China and Manchuria. Further studies are called for involving more scientific analyses of paleo-environment and characteristics of other grains being cultivated rather than concentrating on the rice itself.

d) Iron Implements and Iron-Age Culture

Iron implements first appeared in the Korean Peninsula in the around 4th century BC. With the introduction of iron, agricultural technology was further advanced, strengthening the economic base. With the appearance of iron, old bronze implements were now relegated to ceremonial use. At the same time, the bipa-shaped bronze daggers evolved into slender daggers, and bronze mirrors with crude designs into those with very fine linear decorations. Thus by now, the bronze technology was thoroughly indigenized (or Koreanized). Molding plates for these Koreanized and highly refined new forms of bronze implements have been found at numerous sites. Along with iron and Koreanized bronze implements, there appeared new forms of pottery including red burnished pottery, pottery with a round or elliptic-shaped clay band attached to the lip, and black burnished pottery.
Accompanying the iron implements were Ming-Tao-Chien, Panliang-chien and Wu-Shu-Chien Chinese coins of the Yen State, suggesting active inter-regional trading activities of the times. Also, discovery of brush pens at Taho-ri (Uich'ang) suggests the use of Chinese writing at this time. The advanced agriculture involved dry-land cultivation of millets, sorghum, and beans along with wet rice cultivation. With continual increase in population, however, agriculture became more intensified, with paddy rice cultivation gradually becoming dominant. Agriculture was greatly enhanced by iron implements (Rhee 1999). Dwellings were now rectangular in shape while still subterranean, but they were gradually replaced with above-ground structures and in some cases were equipped with under-floor heating tunnels. And with increasing population and continual advancement in agricultural technology, settlements continued to increase in size.

e) Formation of Ancient Chosŏn (Kojosŏn)

1) Tan'gun and Ancient Chosŏn

It appears that Ancient Chosŏn (Kojosŏn) was the first of the Bronze Age chiefdoms to evolve into a state-level society. According to Korea’s founding myths, it was Tan'gun Wangggŏm that established Ancient Chosŏn around 2,333 BC. Tan'gun Wangggŏm was the title of the then ruler. Ancient Chosŏn appears to have first emerged in the Liaoning region in southern Manchuria, and in time incorporated into it various neighboring chiefdoms, eventually extending into the Korean Peninsula. This coincides with the distribution pattern of dolmens, bipa(lute)-shaped bronze daggers, and Misong-ri type pottery. Toward the end of the around 4th century BC, Ancient Chosŏn had a hereditary kingship as well as official bureaucracy.
With increasing political chaos in Chinese mainland during its Warring Period (476-221 BC), many Chinese fled and sought refuge in Ancient Chosŏn (In North Korea, in recent years, under its extreme form of nationalism, state sponsored scholars have reported that Tar'ygun Chosŏn was established at least before 3,000 BC. Calling it Taedong River Civilization, they consider it to be the world’s first civilization. This report appears to be no more than a political exploitation of archaeology.)

2) Geographical Boundary of Ancient Chosŏn

There has been much controversy regarding geographical boundaries of Ancient Chosŏn. Currently, the prevailing view among South Korean scholars is that initially Ancient Chosŏn was located on the east side of the Liaoning river in southern Manchuria, but later it was centered at Wanggŏm Fortress in the P'yŏngyang area in northwest Korea. In the 3rd century BC, powerful hereditary kings such as Pu and Chun ruled with an official bureaucracy. By then, Ancient Chosŏn was in confrontation with China’s Yen state in the west, across the Liaoning River. Among North Korean scholars, the dominant view is that Ancient Chosŏn was located primarily in southern Manchuria, with its initial western boundary along the lower reaches of the Liao and the Hun river, and later at the end of the 2nd century BC, along the Daling river. There are, however, numerous archaeological problems with such a view. Some scholars, on the other hand, believe that Ancient Chosŏn, though initially centered in the Liaoning region, later moved its center to P'yŏngyang area in the Taedong River basin in northwest Korea.

3) Kija Chosŏn

Chinese historical records in the Shiji speak of the establishment of
Kija Chosŏn by China’s Zhou Dynasty in the region of southern Manchuria and Korea towards the end of the 12th century BC, with an official commission of a Zhou envoy named Kija. However, the historicity of Kija Chosŏn has been much debated. While some consider the Chinese account to be an outright fabrication, others view Kija as nothing more than an ancient Korean word for king. Still by others, Kija Chosŏn is believed to have been a new indigenous political power emerging in the course of Ancient Chosŏn autochthonous socio-political evolution. Others view Kija Chosŏn as an immigrant political force, which moved into the Taedong River Basin in the 12th century BC from north China via southern Manchuria, following the collapse of the Shang Dynasty.

4) Wiman Chosŏn

Wiman Chosŏn was centered in the P’yŏngyang area in northwest Korea during the second century BC (194-108 BC). According to the Shiji, Wiman Chosŏn was a fully centralized state with a professional bureaucracy of varying ranks, a strong military force, a stratified citizenry, an administrative center at Wanggŏm Fortress, and a hereditary kingship.

In terms of its origin, some view Wiman Chosŏn as a conquest state, that is, a state formed in northwest Korea by invading Chinese forces; however, it appears more appropriate to view it as an indigenous state based on inter-regional trading activities. Strategically located between China’s Han empire and various polities such as Ye, Chin, Mahan, and Pyŏnjin in the Korean Peninsula as well as Wa Japan, Wiman Chosŏn maximized its intermediary position for profit (Choi M. L. 1997). With a powerful economy built on the intermediary trade, Wiman emerged as a centralized state and
continued to expand its political influence. Han China, provoked by Wiman Chosŏn’s attempt to monopolize the trade between China and the various polities in Korea and Japan, conquered it in 108 BC, establishing in its place its own commanderies.

According to the Hanshu and the Houhanshu, compiled in China during the first and the fifth century AD respectively, Wiman Chosŏn had a population of about 250,000-300,000 people. They were placed under leaders, each controlling a population of 800-3,000 people. In governance, Wiman Chosŏn applied various laws and ordinances, which had evolved from the so-called "Eight Forbidden Rules" of Ancient Chosŏn. Laws were undoubtedly enforced with the help of the military and an armed police force.

5) Other Early States

Puyŏ

Puyŏ was an early state formed in the first century BC in northeastern Manchuria. Ruled by kings chosen by various tribal leaders, it maintained a tributary relationship with Han China; however, its power waned following invasions by the Senpei tribes. Subsequently, threatened by Malgal tribes, Puyŏ's ruling elite submitted to Koguryŏ in 4th century AD.

As with Ancient Chosŏn and Wiman Chosŏn, Puyŏ governed its population with formal laws like the so-called "Four Ordinances," which were essentially similar to Ancient Chosŏn's "Eight Forbidden Rules." Puyŏ elite worshipped the Heaven and conducted elaborate ceremonies at the beginning of each year as well as in times of war. They practiced fortune telling, using the hoop of a slain ox. Also, when kings died, they were buried with numerous human sacrifices, in some cases up to a hundred, suggesting the Puyŏ people's belief
in life-after-death.

Koguryŏ

According to the Sanguk sagi (Historical Records of Three Kingdoms) compiled in the 12th century AD, Koguryŏ, closely related to Puyŏ in its origin, was founded in 37 BC in southern Manchuria near the middle reaches of the Yalu river. In time, it continued to grow and expand its territory westward as well as southward into the Korean Peninsula, across the Yalu River. Long in conflict with Chinese commanderies in southern Manchuria as well as in northwest Korea, it finally conquered the latter region early in the 4th century AD. Subsequently it moved its capital from Jian in southern Manchuria to P’yŏngyang, where it flourished as a dominant political power in northeast Asia for another two and a half centuries. Koguryŏ state was based on a political and military alliance of five independent tribal organizations (or chiefdoms). In light of recent archaeological finds, it has been suggested that Koguryŏ states emergence was closely related to the Chinese expansion into southern Manchuria under the State of Yen and the Han Dynasty, beginning in the 3rd century BC. In self-defense, Koguryŏ chiefdoms formed an alliance. Concurrently, it appears that elite groups from north China, who had been defeated or had lost in a power struggle during the Warring Period as well as during Chin and Han Dynasty’s wars of conquest, fled and joined the Koguryŏ elite, further strengthening the emerging Koguryŏ power (Rhee 1992).

Okchŏ and Eastern Ye

Okchŏ and Eastern Ye were polities located along the east coast. According to recent archaeological data, this area followed a socio-cultural evolution similar to that of Ancient Chosŏn and elsewhere,
particularly during the Bronze Age/chiefdom period as well as
during the early phase of nearby Koguryŏ. This is evidenced among
archaeological finds at Sora-ri Earthen Fortress (Hamgyŏngnam-do),
Hasedong-ri (Pukch’ŏng), Ihwa-dong (Hamhŭng), and Ch’odo (Najin).
However, it appears that their growth into full-fledged states was
stifled by Koguryŏ’s expansionist exploits southward. Essentially, they
remained at the level of local chiefdoms.

Sam Han (Three Han)

Beginning in the first century BC there existed numerous
chiefdoms in the southern Korea, south of the Han river, organized
as three political alliances, known as Mahan, Chinhan, and Pyŏnhan.
Of the three, Mahan was the largest, consisting of about 50
chiefdoms, of which Mokjiguk state acted as primus inter pares. Each
of Sam Han chiefdoms was led by two types of leaders: one civil,
and the other religious, called Ch’ŏn’gun, who presided over religious
and agricultural ceremonies. Within each chiefdom was also a sacred
place known as Sodo, which functioned as a city of refuge. During
the Sam Han period, iron became increasingly important, particularly
thanks to Pyŏnhan’s advanced iron technology and its flourishing
iron trade throughout the peninsula. The iron technology speeded up
socio-cultural and economic development of the Sam Han chiefdoms.
In time, Paekche in the Han River Basin grew into an early state
incorporating other nearby Mahan chiefdoms. In the Nakdong river
basin, Pyŏnhan chiefdoms evolved into early Kaya states, while in the
southeast, Saro, one of Chinhan chiefdoms, emerged as the early
Shilla state.
1. Sam Han and Early State Formation

In recent years, a number of scholars have sought to understand Sam Han in the context of early state formation in the Korean Peninsula (Kim J. B. 1979; Lee J. W. 1982; Rhee S. N. and Choi M. L. 1992). From cultural evolutionary perspectives, they argue, the chiefdoms which had emerged during the Bronze Age continued to develop in their complexity, particularly with advancement in agriculture, iron technology, and inter-regional trade. The increasing socio-cultural complexity inevitably led to the emergence of Paekche, Shilla, Kaya, and other such early state as Mokjiguk from Mahan in southern Korea.

2. Mokjiguk

Initially, Mokjiguk, as the *prinus inter pares* of Mahan chiefdoms, was located in Sŏnghwan and Chiksan area. Under Paekche’s expansionist pressure, Mokjiguk state moved its center southward, first to Iksan and the Yesan area, and eventually to the Naju plains in the southwest. It appears that in the Naju area, it flourished as a full-fledged early state. A large number of great tumuli at Pannam-myŏn and the finding of a gilt-bronze crown in them strongly connects Mokjiguk state with Naju. It continued to prosper until the end of the 4th century or possibly until the early 6th century AD when the Naju area came under Paekche control (Choi M. L 1991; Rhee 1998).

3. Kaya

Known as Korea’s lost kingdom, Kaya received little attention in Korea’s ancient historical narratives, particularly in the *Sanguk sagi*,
compiled by Kim Pu-sik, a Shilla-centered historian. Recent archaeological investigations, however, have brought to light brilliant cultural achievements of Kaya states, located in the lower reaches of the Nakdong river and on its west bank. Emerging from the old Pyŏnhan tribes, Kaya states flourished for three centuries between the fourth and the sixth centuries AD, until they were either absorbed or conquered by Shilla in AD 532 (Kūmgwan Kaya) and 562 (Tae Kaya). Kaya strength lay its highly developed iron technology, which it traded with Chinese commanderies in the northwest, Wa Japan, and various local polities within the peninsula. Highly refined Kaya stoneware influenced Shilla pottery and became the Sueki pottery of Kofun in Japan (Lee 1998).

5. Postscript

1) Chinese Impact on State Formation in Ancient Korea

In the emergence of early states in Korea, Chinese influence, politically, economically, socially, and culturally, played a salient role. Discovery of Chinese coins Wu-shu-Chien, Panliang-chien and Ming-Tao-Chien throughout the Korean Peninsula suggests a close interaction between the Chinese and local Korean polities during the dynamic iron age. Particularly, Korean interaction with Chinese commanderies in the northwest, a small China within Korea with all of the Chinese cultural elements, greatly enhanced increasing socio-cultural complexity among local Korean polities in all walks of life, including the introduction of Chinese writing (Rhee and Choi 1992).
2) Chronology of Ancient Korea

In this paper the traditional chronology of the Korean Bronze and Iron Age is revised as follows: 300 BC for the lower limit of the Bronze Age; 300 BC - 1 BC for the Former Iron Age (Iron Age I, corresponding to the traditional Early Iron Age); AD 1 - AD 300 for the Later Iron Age (Iron Age II or Early Three Kingdoms Period, corresponding to the traditional Proto-Three Kingdoms Period or Sam Han Period). This revision reflects recent archeological investigations and also simplifies the traditional chronology for 300 BC - AD 600. Underlying this revision is the hope to overcome and further refine chronological differences resulting from the on-going regional studies. Also presented here is a chronology of Korean prehistory to be standardized for 21st century Korean archaeology:

- Paleolithic Period: Currently, there is too much controversy regarding the upper limit, all the way from 700,000 BP to 200,000 BP. This problem is yet to be resolved.
- Neolithic Period: from 8,000 - 10,000 BC to 2,000 - 1,500 BC.
- Bronze Age: 1,500 BC - 300 BC (available date common throughout the whole Korean Peninsula).
- Former Iron Age (Iron Age I): 300 BC - 1 BC (formerly the Early Iron Age).
- Later Iron Age (Iron Age II/Early Three Kingdoms). AD 1 - AD 300 (formerly, the Proto-Three Kingdoms Period or the Sam Han Period).

3) Issues for 21st Century Archaeology

Korean archaeology, deeply involved in salvage archaeology up to
now, must strive for quality in terms of scientific analyses and interpretations. This calls for efficient and effective utilization of laboratory methods already used in natural science: accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) for more precise absolute dating, electromagnetic subsurface profiling (ESP) for efficient site studies, X-ray diffractive (XRD) analysis as well as X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis for artifact contents, among others. With the help of natural sciences, ancient trade (inter-regional as well as long distance) and the paleo-environment will also be clarified. Particularly urgent in this regard is the task of ascertaining a reliable chronology of the paleolithic sites and paleolithic culture, which may be resolved only with scientific insights from geology and paleobotany.

Another critical issue relates to standardization of archaeological terminologies in anticipation of the South-North unification of Korea. Far more critical is the deep chasm in the theoretical framework, hermeneutics, and chronological perspectives existing between North and South Korean archaeologists and historians. At the heart of the debate will undoubtedly lie the issues regarding the so-called Taedong River Civilization and the identity of what is claimed by North Koreans to be the tomb of Tan’gun.

In conclusion, it is time for Korean archaeology to free itself from the quagmire of endless debates on artifact typology and their dating, and to move forward in the understanding and reconstructing of Korean pre- and early history, on the basis of solid theoretical and methodological foundations. This will help narrow the gap between Korean archaeology and that of advanced nations.
References


Hakyŏn Munhwasa.
<Abstract>

Korean Archaeology for the 21st Century: From Prehistory to State Formation

Choi Mong-Lyong • Rhee Song-nai

Since the 1950s American archaeologists have focused particularly on the origins and evolution of cities, civilization, and state formation. Concurrently, origin of agriculture became the subject of intense scholarly interests. But, the current status of Korean archaeology, with its emphasis on typology and chronology which are the two main topics of the traditional archaeology, may be considered to not yet have elevated the level of the Classificatory-Historical Period of American archaeology. To overcome this predicament, a number of scholars have sought to introduce as well as to apply to Korean archaeology modern archaeological approaches of the new and post-processual archaeology of West. In terms of future prospect for the 21st century Korean archaeology, it is expected that from the new evolutionary perspectives, the primary attention will be given to the emergence of kinship(clan)-based hierarchical chiefdom societies for dolmen builders during the Bronze Age (15th - 4th century BC) and their evolution into highly stratified and more advanced ancient state of the Wiman-Chosön (194 - 108 BC) during the Former Iron Age (Iron Age I, 300 - 1 BC) in the Korean peninsula. Along with the increasing emphasis in socio-cultural developments, a new chronological framework will also be established. In this regard, an
increasing attention will be given to regional archaeology and to the chronology of socio-cultural developments at various regional levels. This will undoubtedly modify the uniform chronology hitherto applied to the whole Korean peninsula.

While it is still within the realm of hypothesis, it appears that the evolution of Korean culture was multi-linear and highly complex, and unlocking the complexity will become the task of the 21st century Korean archaeology.

In the emergence of early states in Korea, Chinese influence, politically, economically, socially, and culturally, played a salient role. Discovery of Chinese coins Wu-shu-Chien, Panliang-Chien and Ming-Tao-Chien throughout the Korean peninsula suggests an existence of interaction sphere between the Chinese and local Korean polities during the dynamic iron age. Particularly, Korean interaction with Chinese commanderies in the northwest, a small China within Korea with all of Chinese cultural elements, greatly enhanced increasing socio-cultural complexity among local Korean polities in all walks of life including introduction of Chinese writing.

In this paper the traditional chronology of Korean bronze and iron age is revised as follows: 300 BC for the lower limit of the bronze age; 300 BC - 1 BC for the Former Iron Age (Iron Age I); AD 1 - AD 300 for the Later Iron Ages (Iron Age II or Early Three Kingdoms Period). This revision reflects recent archeological investigations and also simplifies the traditional chronology for 300 BC - AD 600. Underlying this revision is the hope to overcome and further refine chronological differences resulting from the on-going regional studies. Also presented here is a chronology of Korean prehistory to be standardized for the 21st century Korean
archaeology:

- Paleolithic Period: Currently, there is too much controversy regarding the upper limit, all the way from 700,000 BP to 200,000 BP. This problem is yet to be resolved.
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And finally Korean archaeology, deeply involved in salvage archaeology up to now, must strive for quality in terms of scientific analyses and interpretations. This calls for efficient and effective utilization of laboratory methods already used in natural science.