



KOREA IN ASIA



○ Capitals ● Major cities





Neolithic comb-pattern pot
excavated at Amsa-dong, Seoul.
[National Museum of Korea]

200,000 BP–7TH CENTURY BCE

1 PREHISTORIC KOREA



Bronze rattle
from the 3rd century BCE.
Excavated at Daegok-ri,
South Jeolla province.
[National Museum of Korea]

The prehistoric era spans the period from the earliest hominid inhabitation on the peninsula, some time before 200,000 BP, up to the first recorded polities that emerged between the seventh and third centuries BCE. The Paleolithic peoples of the Korean peninsula were nomadic and subsisted on what they could gather and hunt; from the Neolithic period, people began to live a more settled life, and primitive agriculture developed. The Bronze Age saw the first signs of significant social differentiation such as dolmen tombs containing luxury objects, and the transition from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age was marked by a change from pottery incised with various patterns to a plain style.

The Peopling of the Korean Peninsula

Existing evidence shows that hominids populated the Korean peninsula by at least 200,000 years BP, but many archaeologists believe that early humans were living on the peninsula as long ago as 500,000 BP. Modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) began to populate the Korean peninsula around 30,000–40,000 years ago, replacing or intermingling with the earlier inhabitants. Recent genetic evidence suggests that there were two distinct paths by which modern humans migrated to the peninsula, one from the north and one from the south.



The Paleolithic Era | Approximately 200,000 BP–8,000 BP (6,000 BCE)

The Paleolithic period on the Korean peninsula is characterized by the use of stone tools. As in other parts of the world, finds of such tools show a progression over thousands of years from large rough tools to smaller and more delicate ones. The inhabitants of Paleolithic Korea were hunter-gatherers who relied on foraging for edible plants. They are thought to have lived a nomadic life in small bands, setting up temporary camps or living for brief periods in caves. The warming climate at the end of the last ice age brought about changes in the mode of human life on the Korean peninsula, as elsewhere, and marked the beginning of a transition to the Neolithic period.



Hand axe
excavated at Juwol-ri,
Gyeonggi province.
Length: 235mm.
[Yonsei University Museum]



Obsidian burin
[chisel-type implement]
excavated at Seokjang-ri,
South Chungcheong
province. Length: 39mm.
[Yonsei University Museum]



Stone scraper
excavated at Jungnae-ri,
South Jeolla province.
Length: 155mm.
[Yonsei University Museum]



**Stone tool with
tanged point**
excavated at Wolpyeong,
South Jeolla province.
Length: 71mm.
[Yonsei University Museum]

The Neolithic Era | 8,000 BCE–2,000 BCE

The Neolithic period is marked by two major developments: the appearance of pottery and the development of ground rather than chipped stone tools. The earliest pottery of the Korean peninsula was characterized by raised or stamped decoration. This later tended to be replaced by incised decoration, typified by *jeulmun* or “comb-pattern” pottery. The people of the Neolithic era also made adornments and symbolic items such as necklaces and small animal figures or human faces. Settled life began in this period, and villages of earth-pit houses dating from this period have been discovered all over the peninsula. People continued to subsist by foraging and hunting, but another major development was the beginning of agricultural cultivation. Archaeological evidence suggests that people were cultivating millet and rice in this period.



Comb-pattern earthenware pot
excavated at Nongpo-dong, North Hamgyeong province. [National Museum of Korea]



Polished stone axes
excavated at Hupo-ri in North Gyeongsang province. [Gyeongju National Museum]



Shell depicting a human face
excavated from a shell midden at Dongsam-dong in Busan. [National Museum of Korea]



The Beginning of the Bronze Age | 2,000 BCE–300 BCE

The earliest signs of the beginning of the Bronze Age were actually the appearance of dolmen tombs and a plain pottery style called *mumun* beginning in the early second millennium BCE. The first evidence of bronze artifacts in Korea can be dated to the thirteenth century BCE, indicating the arrival of bronze wares and later bronze technology from northern China. Ceremonial bronze objects such as mirrors and rattles were also used in the later Bronze Age. During this period, people began to live in larger villages, and it is thought that chiefs began to rule over groups of people in the mid-Bronze Age.



MAJOR BRONZE AGE SITES

Early Bronze Age sites

Present-day major cities



Plain earthenware pot excavated at Songgung-ri, South Chungcheong province. [Buyeo National Museum]



Stone cist burial excavated at Songgung-ri, South Chungcheong province. [National Museum of Korea]



Geompa-style bronze ware discovered in Namseong-ri, South Chungcheong province. 4th–3rd centuries BCE. [National Museum of Korea]

