

Jeju Island in the trade network of the Ancient East China Sea

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Introduction

The historical and cultural developments of Jeju Island seem to have always been determined by its relatively remote location, about one hundred kilometres off the south coast of South Jeolla Province (South Korea). From ancient times on Jeju developed its own cultural characteristics. While the mechanisms of far reaching exchange in ancient East Asia show in elements of South East Asian culture that reached Neolithic Japan via the Ryūkyū Islands chain, or in the important cross-cultural position Tsushima Island was holding throughout prehistoric and historic periods, Jeju Island appears cut off from the main streams of cultural and political progress in East Asia.

It was only in the early Goryeo period (918-1392) that Jeju, or Tamna, as it was known then, officially became a part of the Korean Kingdom. After the Mongol invasion in use as a pasture place for horses, and as a place of exile for disagreeable subjects during the Joseon dynasty, the remoteness of Jeju Island shows even stronger.

The following study searches to question the concept of remoteness and distinctiveness of Jeju culture with a focus on the material from the proto-historic ages in the Korean Straits area. The early centuries AD saw a sudden rush in socio-cultural achievements in the south of the Korean peninsula and in the western Japanese archipelago. The knowledge of wet rice agriculture had already initiated a significant population growth and the associated necessities of rural economic organization as well as new impulses from the Chinese mainland resulted in the advent of small principalities throughout the Korean Straits region. Chinese documentary sources for the first time paid broader attention to the situation of the so-called Han communities in the Korean South and the Wa (Kor. Wae) living on the Japanese islands. Archaeological sources from this period reveal a closely connected cultural sphere in this region, with a lively trade going on across the Korean Straits. Jeju's position within – or beyond – this cultural sphere at the eastern edge of the East China Sea will be in the focus of attention.

The early cultures around the Korean Straits

In earlier studies on the interrelationship between metal age cultures in western Japan and in southern Korea I have characterized the Korean Straits as the "the most important connecting road" within a more or less joint cultural sphere spread throughout the Korean South and the North of Kyūshū (Seyock 2003: 75; 2004: 230-31). While trade and travel across the Korean Straits is from an archaeological perspective detectable even from earlier cultural stages, the period between the late second and first century BC to the third century AD is of special significance. It is at the beginning of this period that the establishment of the Chinese commanderies, first and foremost Lelang, in the Northwest of the Korean peninsula initiated not only a rush in the technological and social development of a civilization that already carried both indigenous and foreign elements. It moreover is due to the presence and the interest of the Middle Kingdom in the 'barbarian' people beyond the borders of Chinese culture that information and news from the peninsula and the archipelago were compiled by historiographers, resulting in a first comprehensive 'handbook' of the so-called Eastern Barbarians in the 3rd century AD, the (Chin.) *Weizhi Dongyi zhuan* 魏志東夷傳.

An analysis of the text, which is composed of information from different time strata, revealed that refugees of late warring states period China, from the North of the Korean peninsula, as well as from the territories of the Chinese commanderies have been relocating in the Korean South, especially in the South East, at various stages in proto-historic times, and apparently in differing ethnic compositions. This development took place over a period of several centuries, and accordingly the 'new' cultures in the Korean South, which are – owing to their material

heritage – moreover clearly detectable from an archaeological perspective, carried elements from different geographic origins, and from various cultural layers and affiliations. Spreading from an early core center in the Korean Southeast westwards and southwards across the Korean Straits and to the North of Kyûshû these *impeti* led to a remarkable cultural sphere characterized by hierarchical structured societies on their way towards a chiefdom stage, with a subsistence based on rice agriculture, maritime resources, metal production, and far distance trade during the centuries between 1BC and 3AD.

The Han Chinese tradition

Cultural elements of Han Chinese tradition spread throughout the (Korean) Han and Wa cultural sphere. One of the main complexes concerns horse-and-carriage equipment. Single-axle two-horse carriages were common within Han Chinese elite culture. Bronze fittings and ornaments, like horse bells, umbrella rib points, which were in use for fixing the roof of a carriage, or iron bridles, have been found in various sites of the Samhan or Proto Three Kingdom period¹ in the Korean South, and in sites of the Middle and Late Yayoi period on the Japanese archipelago respectively. A full set of bronze umbrella roof fittings and ornaments, for example, comes from the Nakdong-ri site in the middle Nakdong River plain, as well as from the Kisaka and Tôzaki sites on Tsushima Island in the Korean Straits. Single finds come, for example, from Shimo-gayanoki (Tsushima), Bisan-dong and Daho-ri in the Korean Southeast. Iron bridles are known from the Pyeongni-dong site in Daegu or from Sara-ri, while small bronze bells are spread widely with the exception of the region which is assigned to have been Mahan territory in the Korean Southwest.

A significant find showing both the trade activity between the Chinese commanderies and the Han and Wa areas, and moreover illustrating the esteem for this kind of commodity is the Chinese bronze mirror. Especially early Han mirrors with continuous arc design and mirrors with four buckle and snake design were in great demand in the early phase of the Han and Wa cultures. For the latter phase, the second and early third centuries AD, the late Han period TLV mirror came first. To satisfy the demand for this highly valued status symbol mirror copies of minor size and quality were manufactured on both sides of the Straits, substituting the Chinese prototypes in places where the original commodity could not be purchased. Bronze mirrors were in use as burial goods in elite burials. Regularly one or two mirrors turn up in elite burial excavations, such as in Bisan-dong, Yangdong-ri, Kisaka or Sakuranobaba. In rare cases a multitude of pieces have been found, such as in Eoeun-dong, where most of the pieces are mirror copies, or in Hirabaru and Mikumo, where the deposit of up to 36 bronze mirrors points to the existence of a strong local power, which is moreover noticeable from the *Weizhi Dongyi zhuan* description of the 'small principality' (Jap. *kuni*) of Ito (Seyock 2004: 187-198).

Additional finds from the Chinese cultural sphere are bronze coins. They are important for the dating of archaeological complexes, and widespread at sites in the Korean south and on Kyûshû.

The nomadic heritage

Considering influences that reached the Korean peninsula from origins and time strata even beyond the Chinese commanderies, and that also affected the advent of Proto Three Kingdom culture to a great extent, another cultural tradition has to be emphasized, a tradition, which in

¹ 'Samhan' and 'Proto Three Kingdoms' refer to the same cultural stratum. While both terms emphasize the body of sources – outside historical writings concerned with an otherwise script less culture, thus creating a 'proto-historic' setting –, the term 'Proto Three Kingdoms' points to a strong structural relationship with the advent of the Three Kingdoms in later centuries, whereas 'Samhan culture' relates to the perception that the cultures under discussion reveal an independent cultural layer with distinct structures and far reaching networks and relations that are apt to a specific terminology.

its major parts relates to a former Scythic-Siberian tradition and comprises finds associated with an epi-nomadic heritage. This heritage is closely connected in time to the spread of both Han Chinese tradition and the techniques of iron production, all of which are detectable in the archaeological record from the late second to early first century AD onward.

A main element of this in its origins nomadic tradition shows in animal style bronzes as they are familiar from the Ordos region and from the Karasuk and Tagar cultures in the Siberian steppes. Bronze antenna daggers or their respective pommel ornaments, for example, have been excavated from the Bisan-dong and Jisan-dong sites in Daegu, from the Takamatsunodan and Sakadô sites on Tsushima Island, and from the Kashiwazaki site in the Karatsu plain. Two pieces of bronze pommels ornaments with symmetrical decorations in the shapes of animals – four standing horses and two ducks, or possibly the upper parts of horses, respectively – come from the Yangdong-ri site in the Nakdong delta and the Shigenodan site on Tsushima.

There are other bronze pommel types with a specific cross shaped base and in parts with millet like decoration as well as additional dagger fittings which appear in the same complexes, and which are widely spread on both sides of the Korean Straits.

Ring pommel iron knives and swords – later in its chronological setting, but linking to the same animal style tradition – also appear in assemblages from the Korean South and the North of Kyûshû, besides others from Nopo-dong in Busan, from Tsushima Island sites (Tôtokoyama), from the Itoshima peninsula (Hirabaru), and from the Fukuoka plain (Tate'iwa).

A common element of the tradition from the Siberian steppes moreover is a hemispherical bronze button decorated with lines arranged in spirals or geometric fields, or similar pieces without any decorations. These bronze buttons are among the earliest complexes classified as belonging to the Proto Three Kingdom culture, such as from Dasong-ri in North Jeolla Province or Ipsil-ri near Gyeongju. Items like these continue through to the late Yayoi complexes from Tsushima Island (Takamatsunodan, Tôzaki), the north Kyûshû plains (Dôzô), and spread even further south to Kumamoto Prefecture (Kuwanizu) and east to central Japan (see Oda and Han 1991: I, 205, 311). A burial find at Eoeun-dong exemplifies how bronze buttons were apparently in use as boot ornaments – at least in this case –, while the boots themselves – as their existence is obvious from the findings – offer additional evidence for a culture carrying the knowledge of horse riding.

Similarly successful in the geographical range of their appearance, but much less frequent than the bronze buttons are bronze belt hooks in the shape of animals, precisely in the shape of horse or tiger. These items as well have a strong linkage to nomadic culture, although the specific kind of shaping seems peculiar for the Korean Southeast (see Kang 2004). Early examples of animal shape belt hooks are known from the Bisan-dong and Eoeun-dong sites in the Daegu area. Later examples have been found at Joyang-dong, Sara-ri and Daeseong-dong, again in the Southeast, while items belonging towards the end of the Han and Wa period show in complexes of Chungcheong Province (Cheongdang-dong, Songdae-ri, Bongmyeong-dong), and moreover in central Japan (Sakakiyama, Asakawabata). Interestingly, the finds from younger assemblages comprise a much higher number of pieces, thus leading either to the assumption that social changes gave rise to a more and more unequal society, or to the perception that the tradition of using animal style belt hooks as prestige objects already was declining, so that only singular groups in geographical peripheries still collected and kept the belt hooks, which were, moreover, then easier to obtain.

There is one more element of Han and Wa culture that possibly belong to the epi-nomadic heritage layer, but the origin of which is rather difficult to detect, as the sites that yielded bird shaped pottery form a cluster quiet different from those showing the above mentioned elements. Bird shaped vessels are a frequent find in complexes assigned to the Three Kingdoms period. They do not show on the Japanese side of the same period, except one example from the North of Kyûshû from a very early Kofun site, which is of the same type as

the pieces from Proto Three Kingdom sites (mainly) in the Korean Southwest. This cultural tradition actually did not cross the Straits.

The peninsula and island traditions

The succession of cultures seldom takes place in leaps, and it very rarely happens that preceding cultures were completely replaced. It is only the distant view of the modern archaeologist on the material heritage in its entirety that permits recognizing differences and similarities and suggesting the existence of a 'culture' in a specific chronological and geographical framework.

Unquestionably, the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands have not been blank at the time Han Chinese and epi-nomadic traditions entered and prospered. The Korean peninsula had a strong Bronze Age tradition, especially in the region of the Geum River, with a set of bronze weapons, or later ritual objects – dagger, halberd and socketed spear –, that developed into one of the major finds also of the Proto Three Kingdoms period and the Middle and Late Yayoi period on the western Japanese archipelago. The *mumun* or undecorated pottery, which is typical for the Bronze Age, can also still be found in Han and Wa sites up to the 3rd century AD. Proto Three Kingdom so-called *wajil* pottery, moreover, turns up at North Kyûshû sites, while Yayoi pottery from a North Kyûshû tradition can be found at the Korean coasts.

On the Japanese archipelago, the late Jômon and early Yayoi period jar burial grew into a strong tradition that spread on both sides on the Korean Straits and later even developed into the main feature of the elite burials of the Baekje Kingdom in the Korean Southwest.

Another interesting find that may be placed within an early Yayoi tradition is the oracle bone, which actually is mentioned in the *Dongyi zhuan* section concerning the Wo (Jap. Wa) people. Most of the numerous finds of oracle bones come from sites in western Japan, but there are also several finds from the Korean side, again exemplifying how close the cultures around the Korean Straits were in the centuries between the 1st century BC and the 3rd century AD, and how not only commodities reached the opposite coasts, but also entire sets of cultural traditions.

Jeju position in the Han and Wa cultural sphere

After reviewing the different traditions of the early cultures around the Korean Straits, their interrelations, concurrences and local differences, and after emphasizing the impact of the establishment of the Chinese commanderies at the end of the 2nd century BC, the question arises to what extent Jeju Island, the second largest island in the waters between the Korean and Japanese coasts, took part in the development of this vivid and closely connected Han and Wa cultural sphere.

Much can be learned from the early Chinese text, the *Dongyi zhuan*, which provides the cultures discussed here with a historical dimension. The chapters on the Han communities in the Korean South, and especially detailed the chapter on the Wa people on the Japanese islands, contain various information on the geographic position of the specific community, on their subsistence and their social life, on their conflicts, on their trade and diplomatic relations, and so forth.

Jeju as well is mentioned in the *Dongyi* accounts. The last phrases of the Han chapter refer to an island called (Chin.) Zhou-hu, a passage commonly interpreted as being the oldest reference to Jeju Island. Zhou-hu, or Jeju, does from a Chinese point of view not belong to the Samhan, which comprise the three major territorial and/or political units in the south of the peninsula. Jeju is instead located beyond the border of the Han cultures. The Chinese text runs as follows:

"Furthermore there is [the land of] Zhou-hu. It is situated on a large island in the sea west of Mahan. The inhabitants are of small stature. Their language is not like [the language of] Mahan. They all shave their head like the Xianbei. Their clothing is all made of leather. They like to raise cattle and pigs. Their clothing

has upper parts, but no lower parts, almost as if they were naked. Going back and forth by boat they buy and sell within the Han [area]." (*Sanguo zhi, Weizhi Dongyi zhuan, Han-chuan*) (own translation).

According to the Chinese documents the inhabitants of Jeju had no rice agriculture, no proper clothing, and were in language (and stature) different from the rest of the (Kor.) Han. Jeju is moreover not even listed as one of the about 80 Han communities in the *Dongyi* accounts. It is therefore necessary to now include the material heritage of Jeju Island into the discussion and compare the archaeological finds from Jeju sites to the different layers of the Han and Wa cultures in Proto Three Kingdom Korea and Yayoi period Japan.

On Jeju Island the last decade has seen interesting new discoveries of archaeological sites, which may shed new light upon the situation of early cultures. It is first of all the Samyang-dong site that received a lot of attention due to the size of the site and the excavated material. Samyang-dong has been excavated in the years 1997 to 1999 (after trial surveys in 1996-1997) and revealed the largest dwelling site yet found in Korea, and up to that time the only one on Jeju Island (Jeju-si Jeju Daehakgyo Bangmulgwan 2002: 346).² Parts of the site, which is situated at the coast in the east of Jeju city, have been reconstructed for public access. 155 house pits have been fully excavated; another 81 confirmed during the first survey. Most of the pits show circular ground plans with oval pits in the middle holding postholes on either side of it. These peculiar features are also seen at Bronze Age sites in the Honam region, first and foremost at Songgung-ri, a type site of the Bronze Age dating back from around the 5th century BC, thus pointing towards an early connection between Jeju and the peninsula, or – as the house pits rather precisely correspond to the Songgung-ri type – even suggesting an immigration route.

Other features of the dwelling site comprise 28 above ground houses, eight of them apparently storehouses, small storage facilities, a production place for pottery, stone alignments dividing the settlement, drainage facilities, a dumping place (shell midden), dolmen burials in the vicinity, and others more. Important for a reconstruction of the subsistence of the Samyang-dong inhabitants were carbonized grain finds (barley, beans) from several house pits. Rice is also mentioned (Jeju-si Jeju Daehakgyo Bangmulgwan 2001: 106-108; 2002: 346), thus disproving the *Dongyi* accounts.

The house sites, their shapes, and their arrangement around a central square, as well as the general features of the complex recall a typical late Bronze Age village, especially that of the Songgung-ri site (see Nelson 1993: 142-143; Yi Geon-mu 1991: 249) in South Chungcheong Province. Finds from both sites comprise a polished stone dagger, stone arrowheads, spindle whorls, whetstones, grooved stone adzes, and bronze finds.

The bronze finds from Samyang-dong, however, are different from the Songgung-ri specimen, as they not only set the complex in a younger time stratum – that is up to the beginning of the Proto Three Kingdoms period –, they moreover show that there actually are archaeological traces of an interrelationship with the Han and Wa area. Only two small fragments of a bronze dagger have been found at Samyang-dong, but they clearly belong to a slender bronze dagger of the so-called Korean style type, which is – as has been elaborated above – a main find from the Proto Three Kingdom and Middle and Late Yayoi sites. An almost complete specimen has, moreover, been excavated at Jongdal-ri, in the East of Jeju Island (Jeju-si 2002: 77), while a bronze dagger fitting comes from the Sanjihang site in central Jeju.

Direct influences of a Han Chinese or epi-nomadic quality are not detectable at the Samyang-dong site. Up to the present day, there actually is no site on Jeju Island that revealed finds of an epi-nomadic kind, such as animal style belt hooks or bronze buttons. Han Chinese horse-and-carriage utensils are moreover completely missing from the archaeological record,

² The dwelling site of Yongdam-dong was excavated later in the year 1999 (Jeju-si Jeju Daehakgyo Bangmulgwan 2003).

whereas some Chinese bronze coins together with two small mirrors – one being only a fragment – were discovered at the Sanjihang site (Jeju-si 2002: 73-75).

However, one interesting artifact found at Samyang-dong suggests looking into a different geographic direction also. Among the other finds, most of which come from the central parts of the village, the fragment of a jade bracelet with a hexagonal cross section has been found. This specimen meets its counterpart in a find from the Tango Peninsula (Futazuka site) in central Japan, a bracelet made of cobalt blue glass, larger in size, and found in a younger complex, but of the same specific hexagonal shape (see Ôsaka Furitsu Yayoi Bunka Hakubutsukan 2002: 21-22). This piece comes from a Late Yayoi mound burial, which moreover produced a very rich assemblage of burial goods. There are, all in all, only three such bracelet finds known from the Japanese islands, another one from Kyôto Prefecture, and one from Itoshima Peninsula in Fukuoka (see Shirasu 1999: 34-35). It is not quite clear where these bracelets actually have been produced, but at least their owners seem to have shared a common cultural tradition, or satisfied a similar taste

A site from a period a few hundred years later than the Samyang-dong dwelling site may further enlighten the extent of contact between Jeju and the surrounding areas. The mound burial site of Yongdam-dong (Jeju City) was already excavated in 1984 (Gungrip Jeju Bangmulgwan 2001: 82-85). It yielded small sized jar coffins and several burials with stone alignments. Jar coffins, as was elaborated above, are typical burials from the Han and Wa cultural sphere; stone alignments can especially be seen in the Korean Southeast.

Burial goods from Yongdam-dong comprise two iron swords and a dagger, stemless iron arrowheads, socketed iron spearheads and socketed iron adzes. All of these items have their counterparts in the latter or end phase of the Han and Wa culture. Comparable iron swords come from Tsushima Island (Gayanoki). Iron spearheads have also been found there, for example at the Shigenodan site, a rich burial site from the Late Yayoi period.³ A similar find comes from the Tate'iwa site in the north of Kyûshû. Stemless iron arrowheads, such as those discovered at Yongdam-dong, are spread widely throughout the Han and Wa cultural sphere. They are extant in archaeological complexes from the Jinhan (Hwangseong-dong), Byeonhan (Samdong-dong, Nopo-dong), and Mahan (Daegong-ri) areas, from Tsushima Island (Shigenodan), Iki Island (Karakami, Harunotsuji), and from different parts of Kyûshû (see Kitakyûshû Shiritsu Kôko Hakubutsukan 1995). The socketed iron adze from Yongdam-dong, on the other hand, matches a piece found at a site in Hiroshima Prefecture. A Yoshinogari find (Saga Prefecture) comes also very close in shape.

However, the Yongdam-dong site, with its assemblage from the 3rd century AD, most likely the later half of the 3rd century -, just like the 1st century BC Samyang-dong site before, does not show any find belonging to the epi-nomadic or Han Chinese tradition.

Contact and exclusivity off the Korean coast

The archaeological heritage of Jeju Island – up to this stage of research –, comprises for the period under discussion, which means the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD, a remarkably large settlement in Late Bronze age tradition, a burial site with some jar coffins and four burial with stone alignments, which have apparently been furnished with several iron burial goods each, and moreover, a few finds of Han Chinese bronze coins as well as two small bronze mirrors.

The point of departure for this study was to question the concept of remoteness and distinctiveness of the Jeju culture with a focus on the archaeological material. After having compared the Jeju finds to the archaeological record from the Korean peninsula and from the western Japanese archipelago, the general impression actually is that of a peripheral region.

³ The Yongdam-dong site has been said to belong into the 2nd century AD (Gungrip Jeju Bangmulgwan 2001: 82), but comparable finds from Japanese and southeast Korean sites suggest a connection to the 3rd century AD, more likely the latter half of it.

Finds that are rare or even singular on Jeju are abundant and widespread in the southern part of the Korean peninsula and in western Japan. Parts of the archaeological complex typical for the Han and Wa cultural sphere, such as finds from the Chinese Han or the epi-nomadic tradition are sparse or do not even show in Jeju complexes.

However, Jeju was never completely isolated. The historical document informed us about Jeju boats going to and fro the Han coasts. The Jeju people apparently were trading with the Han area, as some elements of Han and Wa culture, which are typical trade objects, namely bronze daggers and iron weapons, are extant in the archaeological record of Jeju Island. Even the – in its origins apparently Japanese – tradition of using jars for burials reached this island, although the Jeju examples are of a rather small size.

The jade bracelet, in this framework, is a singularly exceptional find. Although this find together with the stone alignments separating the Samyang-dong settlement and also the burials of Yongdam-dong suggest a certain kind of hierarchical structuring of an early Jeju society, elite burials or complex settlement structures and workshops comparable to the Proto Three Kingdom sites in the Korean Southeast or to the sites in the Kyûshû plains do apparently not exist on Jeju Island for the time under discussion. Jeju, unlike Tsushima Island in the Korean Straits, was no trade center or connecting area. It therefore seems, for the time being, not appropriate to include Jeju Island into the general concept of a Han and Wa cultural sphere, which I identified for the South of the Korean peninsula and the western Japanese archipelago. Jeju culture instead developed exclusive features, such as specific pottery types, and it may be fruitful for future research to address the early cultures of Jeju Island independently.

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