

Development of Social Complexity and First Generation States in the Korea-Manchuria Region

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Early societies of the Korean peninsula experienced a variety of developmental forms ranging from simple social configurations to state-level organizations, with stark regional variation. Research on the social and political history of the peninsula prior to the tenth century must account for these regional variations, which frustrate attempts to create a general periodization applicable to the entire peninsula. This study advocates an approach that focuses on social development from the simple to the complex, and finally to the state-level organizations, using a variety of analytical indexes and taking into account the strong variability of social structures in different regions of the peninsula. Employing both archaeological and textual data as a basis, a provisional general periodization would first delimit the lithic periods (characterized by uniformity and simple social structures) from the so-called bronze period (in which social complexity begins to appear). The following phase from the third century BC to the third century CE was a period of accelerating social change and of first-generation state formation. Then from the fourth century we see a period of competing first-generation states. With the fall of Silla in 935, subsequent peninsular polities can be understood as regime transitions of nth-generation states, with more sophisticated modes of historiography now providing the mainstream analytical data.

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