

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Scattered throughout the Korean peninsula are about 100 known sites which contain handmade pottery decorated with parallel incised lines. First described by Japanese archaeologists in the early part of this century, the pottery was thought to resemble Central European ceramics decorated with a multiple toothed tool, and so was designated in Japanese *Kushimemon Doki*, a translation of *Kammkeramik* (comb-pattern pottery). Translated into Korean, the same characters are pronounced *Chulmuntogi*, and sites with such pottery are known collectively in Korea as the *Chulmuntogi Munhwa*, the "comb-pattern pottery culture." Although not descriptive of a majority of the pottery called *Chulmun*, this term will nevertheless be retained here since it has become established in Korea. It is well understood to cover a variety of other decorative techniques as well as possible comb markings on prehistory pottery in Korea.

Other prehistoric handmade pottery is also found in Korea that differs from *Chulmun* chiefly in having no surface treatment other than smoothing. It is called in Korean *Mumuntogi*, "undecorated pottery," often translated into English as "plain coarse ware." Most prehistoric pottery has been placed into one of these two categories, and much ink has been spilled over which is earlier, or whether they represent co-existing ethnic groups and/or ecological adaptations. The debate is still unresolved, since locational strategies for the two kinds of sites differ, making stratified sites rare.

Although this volume will pay some attention to Mumuntogi, its principal interest is in the Chulmun Period, in particular a group of sites on the Han River in central Korea. My project concentrated on an analysis of the Han River sites in the hope that subsistence and settlement strategies of the Chulmun Period could be better understood.

This volume is addressed not only to the professional archeologist but also the interested layman who is uninformed with both archeology and with Korea. Therefore, I have provided in the next three chapters some background information on Korean geography, Korean prehistory, and prehistoric pottery types in East Asia and their relationship to Chulmun. The remaining chapters contain the specific data pertaining to the Chulmun Period and attempt to define the subsistence and settlement subsystems on the basis of these data.

Right now, however, we must first address ourselves to the central issue before us: do Chulmun Period sites represent lifestyles of subsistence or settlement? I will discuss some prevailing interpretations while reserving my own conclusions for the final chapter.

The distribution of Chulmun Period sites is not random. They are found predominantly on the coasts and major rivers, with many more sites on the west coast than on the east coast (Figure 1). The sites tend to cluster, especially along rivers and near river mouths, rather than being evenly distributed along the coasts and rivers.

Because of the coastal and riverine location of these sites, because many of the sites consist of shell mounds, and because net sinkers and/or fishhooks are frequently found in the sites, the subsistence base of the Chulmun Period has traditionally been assumed to have consisted of fish and shellfish. Additional subsistence activities are of course not denied by the traditional

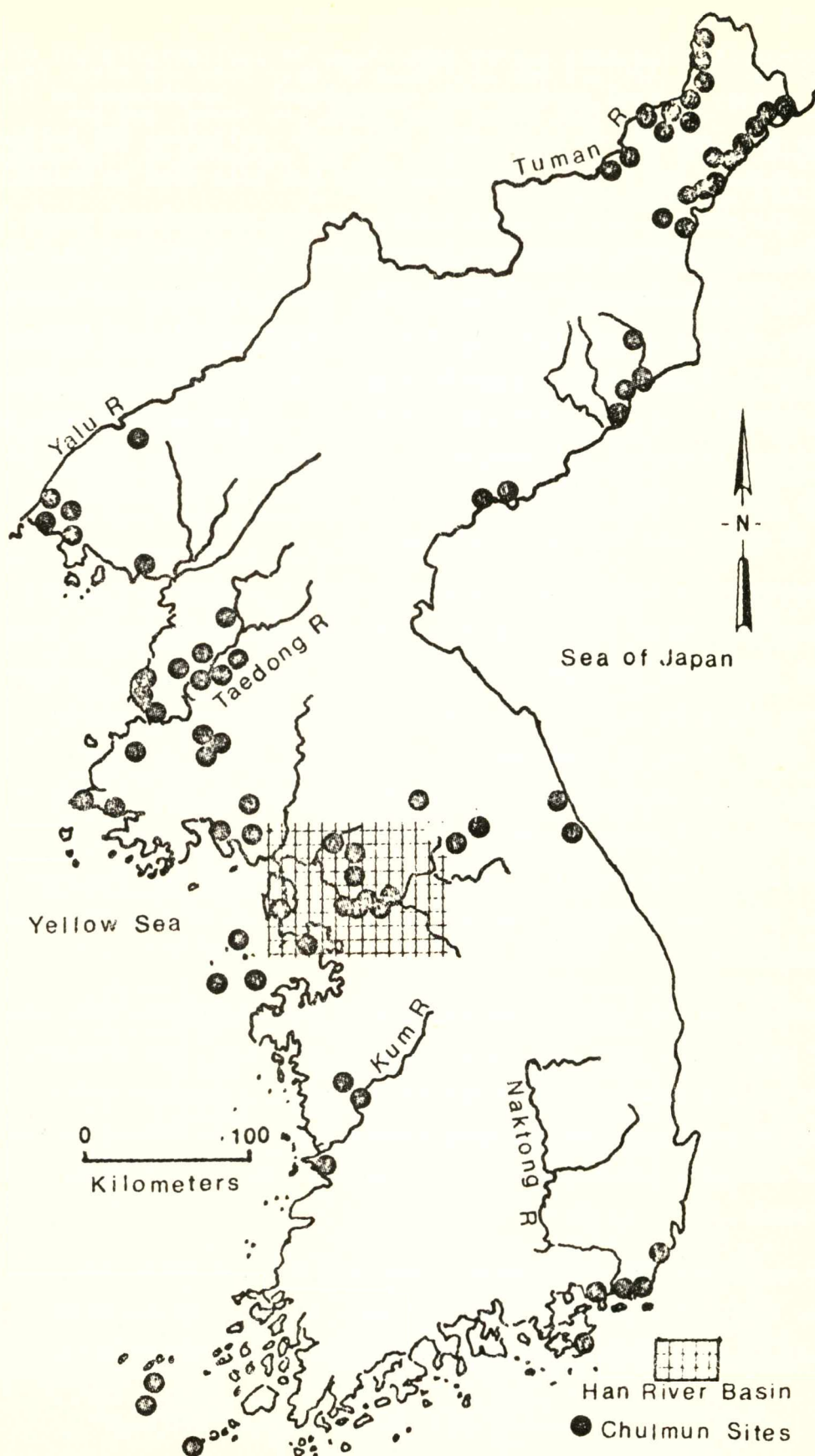


Fig. 1. Distribution of Chulmun Sites in Korea.
Redrawn from Arimitsu 1962.

interpretation. Antlers and artifacts of deer bone are often found in the shell mounds, less often boar tusks are found, and occasionally small slate points appear in the assemblages, indicating that there was also some hunting.

The traditional interpretation of an essentially fishing economy for the Chulmun Period, however, seems inadequate for two reasons. First, it fails to explain the large quantity of pots-herds found in each site. Did the pottery serve as cookware for the fish/shellfish, to store such resources, or for some other subsistence resource? If some other resource was being cooked or stored, then perhaps the large quantity of pottery indicates its equal or even more intensive utilization.

Second, the traditional interpretation explains only partly the distribution of sites. Such a distribution could result from several different settlement systems. For instance, this pattern of sites might be a result of seasonal migrations, with groups using river sites in some seasons and coastal sites in other seasons. Alternatively, the sites might represent the filling of a new niche by fissioning as the population grew, or such a pattern might be a result of depletion of resources and the movement of the same group to another nearby location as new resources were required.

Since the two unexplained aspects of the Chulmun Period, the use of many large pots and the clustering of sites, are probably related to the subsistence resources utilized, a project which focused on understanding the subsistence system was framed in the hope of at least providing tentative answers to some of these questions.

Subsistence and settlement, then, are the two basic subsystems to be considered in this volume. Although it would be possible to subdivide these categories, for our purposes here,

only the alternatives of year-round versus seasonal settlements will be considered. Subsistence alternatives include generalized hunting and gathering, essential dependence on fishing, and utilization of both wild and cultivated resources. The combinations of these subsistence and settlement alternatives produce six possible patterns: (1) seasonal use of the middle Han sites for hunting and gathering, (2) settled hunting and gathering, (3) seasonal use of the sites for fishing, (4) settled fishing, (5) seasonal planting at the sites with return for harvesting, and (6) settled planting.