

Hokkaido's Jomon Culture

The Oldest Pottery and Settlements

The oldest pottery found in Hokkaido was excavated from the Taisho No. 3 Site (Obihiro City) in the East and dates back to 12,000BC according to the results of carbon dating. This pottery has a round bottom with a breast-like protrusion, and is decorated not with a rope pattern but with fingernail impressions. The fact that the characteristic shape and patterns resemble those of the pottery found in Honshu shows that there is a possibility that the cultural elements that spread in Hokkaido during the Incipient Jomon period were virtually the same as those of Honshu until they reached eastern Hokkaido. No dwelling remains have been found so far in Hokkaido from this stage in history, but it is well known that pit-dwellings had started to appear in various areas of the archipelago.



The oldest pots in Hokkaido, Taisho Site No. 3 (Obihiro City)

The Formation of Villages and Shell Middens

Approximately 9,000 years ago, as the Younger Dryas cold event ended, villages consisting of pit-dwellings began to appear in various areas. Many pit-dwellings were excavated together from places such as the Yachiyo A Site in the East (Obihiro City) and Nakano B Site in the Southwest (Hakodate City), and it is common knowledge that permanent settlements already existed in this period.

After that, when the increase in temperature reached its peak between 5,000BC and



The remains of a village from 9,000 years ago, Nakano Site B (Hakodate City)



Layers of shells, Kitakogane Shell Midden (Date City)

4,000BC, fishing developed with the rise of the sea level and expansion of the sea area. Villages containing shell middens became more apparent, such as the Higashikushiro Shell Midden (Kushiro City) in the East, and Kitakogane Shell Midden (Date City) and Irie Shell Midden (Toyako Town) in the South. Furthermore, large-scale villages containing large pit-dwellings, such as the Ofune Site (Hakodate City) started to form around 5,500 years ago.



The remains of a large pit dwelling, Ofune Site (Hakodate City)

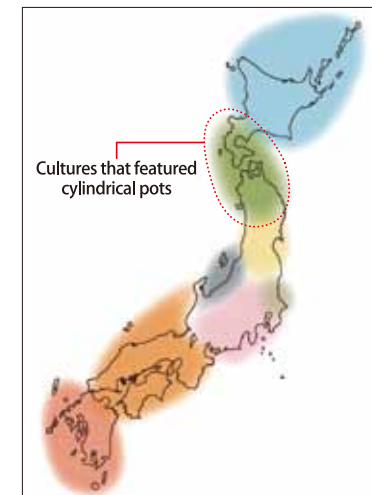
A shell midden is an area containing shells and animal bones that acts as a sort of time capsule reflecting the resources and natural environment of the time. Shell middens also functioned as graveyards, providing a valuable source of information about the Jomon society and spirituality.

The Development of Local Culture

The Jomon Culture expanded around the Japanese archipelago from Hokkaido to Okinawa. However, it was not uniform and branched into seven or eight different cultural spheres, within a certain scope as the shape and decorations used in Jomon pottery.

A closer look at Hokkaido's geography reveals that the Northeast connects with the far northern lands through Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, and the Southwest faces Honshu over the Tsugaru Strait. From this, we can say that Hokkaido acted as the stage on which northern and southern cultures came together.

The differences in vegetation also affected how the Jomon culture developed. The southwest of Hokkaido, with its expanses of deciduous broad-leaved forests, developed around the Tohoku Region (in Honshu) which grew similar plants. The "cylindrical pottery culture" reached Hokkaido 6,000 years ago with the introduction of chestnut cultivation and expanded an enormous 500km north and south of the Tsugaru Strait. Compared to other local cultures that developed in the Jomon Period, this culture was stable and spread over a large area, and is gaining attention as an important example that shows the exchange of values in a particular cultural sphere in the prehistoric age.



The cultural sphere of the Jomon Period