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Excerpt  
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*Part I*

Overview

# 1 Introduction

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## Goals and scope of this book

The “fire-flame” pottery shown on the cover of this book represents the apogee of a truly remarkable artistic tradition. It was made by a Middle Jomon potter who lived on the Japanese archipelago more than 4,000 years ago. The tradition of Jomon pottery production goes back much further in time, to approximately 16,500 years ago (13,780 uncalibrated bp). It makes the Jomon people the first in the world to have mastered the technology of transforming pliable clay into hard and durable containers.

“Jomon” is the name of a prehistoric culture and period that flourished on the Japanese archipelago for more than 10,000 years. The Jomon period follows the Palaeolithic period, and precedes the agricultural Yayoi period. Unlike most prehistoric pottery-using peoples, the people of the Jomon period are thought to have been mainly hunter-gatherer-fishers.

Artistic sophistication of pottery is only one aspect of this complex hunter-gatherer culture. From many excavations, we know that some Jomon settlements were enormous, as large as modern baseball stadiums: in fact, one such settlement was discovered in northern Japan in the process of building a baseball stadium (fig. 1.1; see also chapter 4). Jomon people also engaged in extensive trade networks that included artifacts of obsidian and jade. These findings are extraordinary for early prehistoric hunter-gatherer cultures, and they provide invaluable information for our understanding of the development of cultural complexity in human history.

This book is about the life and culture of the Jomon people, including food, houses, burials, art, and crafts. Its publication is especially timely, given the large number of recent excavations. Over the past several decades, tens of thousands of Jomon sites have been excavated with systematic financial support from various levels of government. The results of these excavations are commonly available in the form of published reports. Many of these rescue excavations are also quite large in scale,



Figure 1.1 Excavation of the Early and Middle Jomon Sannai Maruyama site, Aomori Prefecture (from Aomori-ken Kyoiku-cho Bunka-ka 1996b: ii; permission for reproduction obtained from Aomori-ken Kyoiku-cho Bunka-ka)

and often cover an area of tens of thousands of square meters. Because these excavations are salvage projects, they are often conducted under restricted research strategies; typically, time and funding constraints are major problems. Nevertheless, the advantages of having this enormous body of data far exceed the disadvantages of these limitations. It should be noted, for example, that Japan is one of the few countries in the world where regional settlement pattern analyses can be conducted through archival research of published site reports.

Despite these exciting aspects, and despite strong interest in the Jomon culture among Anglo-American archaeologists (i.e., archaeologists in English-speaking countries including the United States, Canada, England, Australia, and New Zealand), relatively little of Jomon archaeology has been introduced to the English-speaking audience. This is

because most of the archaeological literature about the Jomon is written in Japanese.

My goal in this book is to bridge this gap between the academic traditions of Japanese archaeology and Anglo-American archaeology. As a Japanese archaeologist trained first in Japan and then in North America, I believe that studies of the Jomon period can contribute significantly to our understanding of hunter-gatherer behavior and variability in world prehistory. At the same time, I am convinced that active interaction between Japanese and other archaeological traditions is critical to enhance our understanding of the Jomon culture. To achieve this goal, examinations of the conditions, causes, and consequences of the development of the Jomon culture will be presented through analyses of various components of the Jomon culture, including subsistence, settlement, ritual, crafts, and exchange.

Although many of the theoretical and methodological approaches applied to Jomon data in this book have their origins in Anglo-American archaeology, it is not my intention to suggest that these theoretical and methodological approaches are superior to those of Japanese archaeology. Rather, throughout the book I will argue that the adoption of different approaches can reveal different aspects of the Jomon culture. This may then lead to new interpretations of old data, and to the discussion of the advantages and limitations of various approaches adopted by archaeologists from each of the two academic traditions.

The geographic areas covered in this book include the four main islands of the Japanese archipelago (Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu) and smaller islands in the vicinity of these four islands (fig. 1.2). Although the four islands correspond to the principal part of the present territory of Japan, throughout this book I have tried as much as possible to avoid the words “Japan” or “Japanese” when describing the Jomon period. This is because the Jomon period was the time prior to the formation of the ancient Japanese state (for critical discussions on the concepts of “Japan” and “the Japanese,” see, for example, Amino 1997). The relationship between the culture/people of the Jomon period and the contemporary Japanese culture/people will be discussed in the last section of the second chapter. The word “Japan” is retained in the title of this book “Ancient Jomon of Japan” only for the sake of simplicity.

The word “Japan” is also retained when I talk about “eastern Japan” and “western Japan” as regional units. Following the Japanese convention, “eastern Japan” refers to the northeastern half of the Japanese archipelago (Hokkaido, Tohoku, Kanto, Chubu, Hokuriku, and Tokai regions), whereas “western Japan” refers to the southwestern half (Kinki, Chugoku, Shikoku, and Kyushu regions).

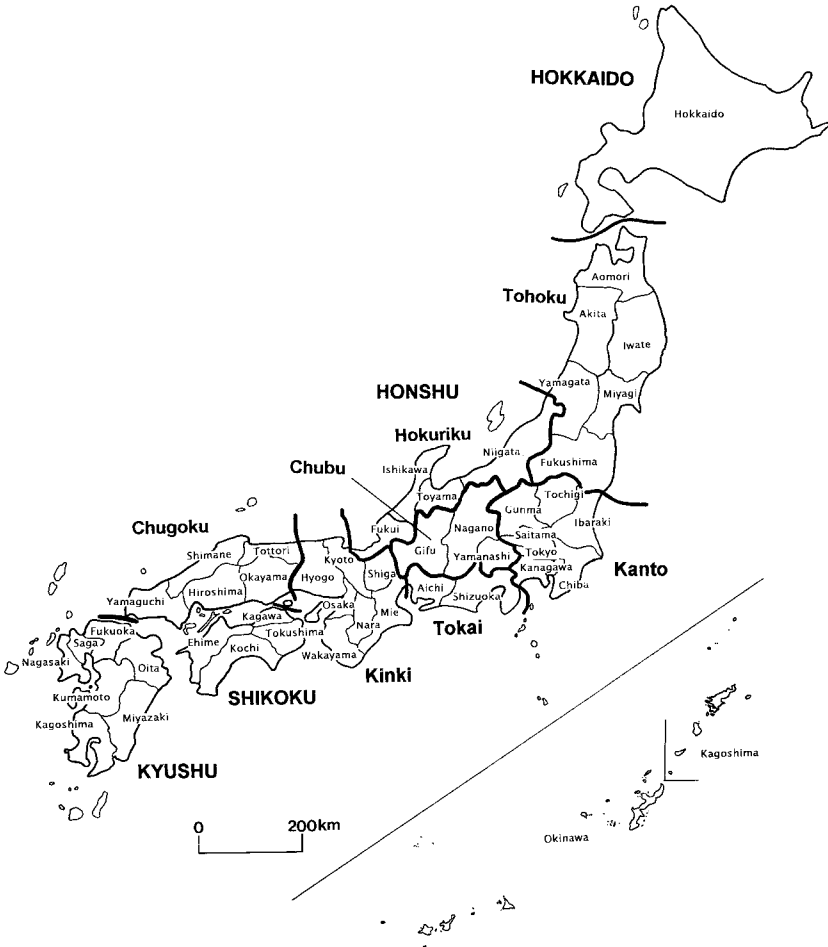


Figure 1.2 Prefectures and regions of Japan

**BOX 1:** *English publications on Jomon archaeology*

Very few English-language publications provide comprehensive coverage of the current status of Jomon studies. While a fair number of books have been published on Japanese archaeology (e.g., Aikens and Higuchi 1982; Aikens and Rhee 1992; Akazawa and Aikens 1986; Barnes 1993; Chard 1974; Groot 1951; Hudson 1999; Kidder 1968; Mizoguchi 2002; Pearson 1992; Pearson et al. 1986a), most of them were written either during or before the 1980s, or have only a limited number of chapters on the Jomon

BOX 1: (*cont.*)

period. One of the few exceptions is Keiji Imamura's (1996) *Prehistoric Japan*. In this book, Imamura does an excellent job of summarizing the recent results of prehistoric Japanese archaeology with an emphasis on Jomon studies (see Habu 1999). However, despite its strengths, the book contains only a limited discussion of the theoretical and methodological implications of Jomon studies in the context of world archaeology.

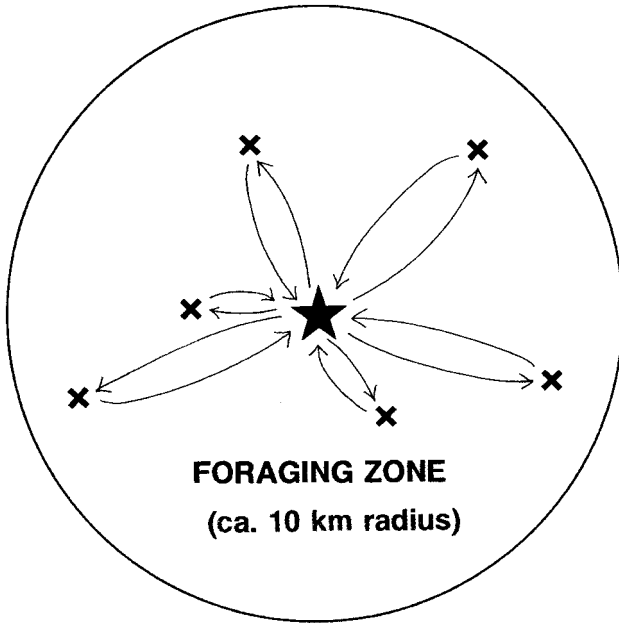
Part of this isolation of Jomon studies in the context of world archaeology comes from the fact that the results of Jomon archaeology are published primarily within Japan and in Japanese. Even before the 1970s, when the amount of available data was relatively small, presenting the results of Jomon archaeology in non-Japanese languages was a difficult task. Today, with an overwhelming number of excavation records published in both academic and popular forms, it seems almost impossible to summarize succinctly the results of Jomon archaeology. At the same time, differences in theoretical and methodological approaches make the active interaction between Japanese and other archaeological traditions difficult (Habu 1989a). On the one hand, many Japanese archaeologists, who have been trained in the tradition of "archaeology as history," feel that Japanese prehistoric cultures, including Jomon, are historically unique. Consequently, they believe that direct comparisons with other prehistoric cultures will provide little help in interpreting Jomon data (e.g., Anazawa 1985). On the other hand, many of the non-Japanese archaeologists who are interested in Jomon archaeology are frustrated by the overemphasis on pottery typologies created by Japanese researchers, as well as by their culture-historical and/or empiricist research orientation. This frustration is particularly noticeable in the writings published by North American and British archaeologists (see, e.g., Barnes and Okita 1999; see also Bleed 1989).

### Theoretical approaches

This book uses two different theoretical perspectives to achieve the goal described above. First, it analyzes hunter-gatherer cultural complexity from the perspective of an ecological model. Second, it recognizes that no archaeological practice is separate from the social contexts in which it is conducted.

*An ecological approach to hunter-gatherer cultural complexity: the collector-forager model*

The first theoretical perspective adopted in this book is derived from ecological anthropology, which can be briefly defined as "the study of cultural behavior in its natural and social environment, in terms of its relationship to this environment" (Jochim 1979: 77–78). Specifically, this book uses the collector-forager model, an ecologically based model developed by Binford (1980; 1982; 1983; 1990). This model posits the existence of a direct relationship between resource distribution, subsistence activities,



★ = RESIDENTIAL BASE  
 x = RESOURCE EXTRACTION LOCATION

Figure 1.3 Characterization of a forager system

and settlement patterns. According to this model, subsistence–settlement systems of hunter-gatherers can be divided into two basic types: (1) forager systems, which are characterized by high residential mobility, and (2) collector systems, which are characterized by relatively low residential mobility.

Figure 1.3 illustrates key characteristics of the forager system. In an environment where resource distribution is homogeneous, hunter-gatherers tend to acquire food and other necessary resources on a day-to-day basis near their residential base. The daily resource acquisition area is called the *foraging zone*. The radius of the foraging zone is about 10 kilometers, or two hours' walk. In this model, it is expected that when foragers exhaust food within the foraging zone, they move their residential base to a new place. Absence of food storage characterizes forager systems. Figure 1.4 illustrates an example of foragers' annual residential moves, using the data of the G/wi San of the Kalahari Desert. In this

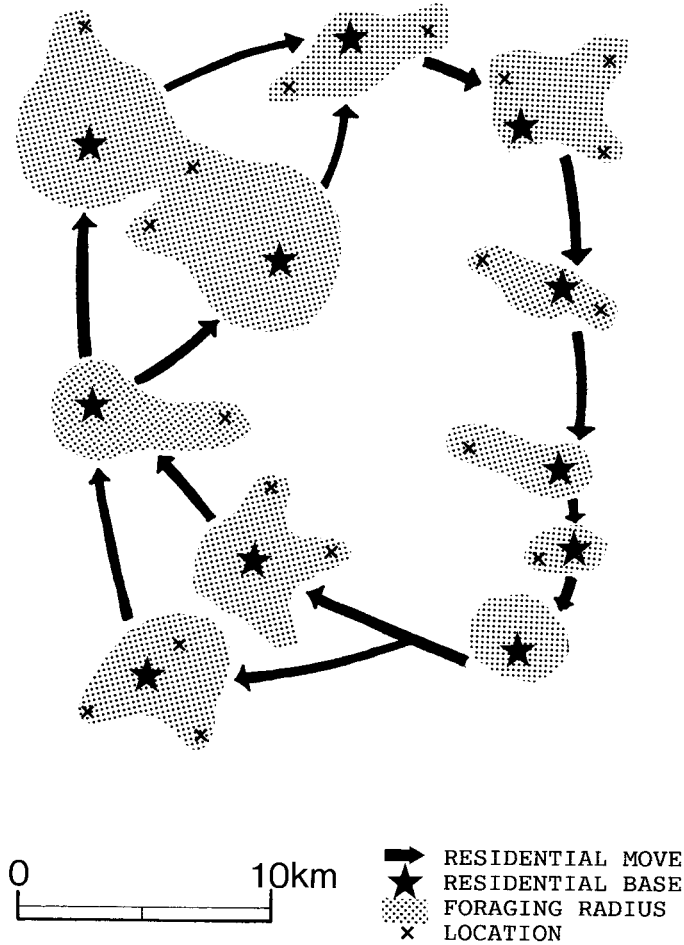


Figure 1.4 Schematic representation of a forager settlement pattern (modified and redrawn from Binford 1980: 6)

example, a total of nine residential moves per year take place. Ethnographic data indicate that foragers move their residential bases anything from five to forty-five times a year (Binford 1980: 7).

Compared to foragers, collectors are more sedentary. Figure 1.5 illustrates key characteristics of a collector system. When the distribution of critical resources is spatially and/or seasonally uneven, hunter-gatherers tend to organize their subsistence activities logistically; i.e., in addition to daily food-gathering activities within the foraging zone, collectors send



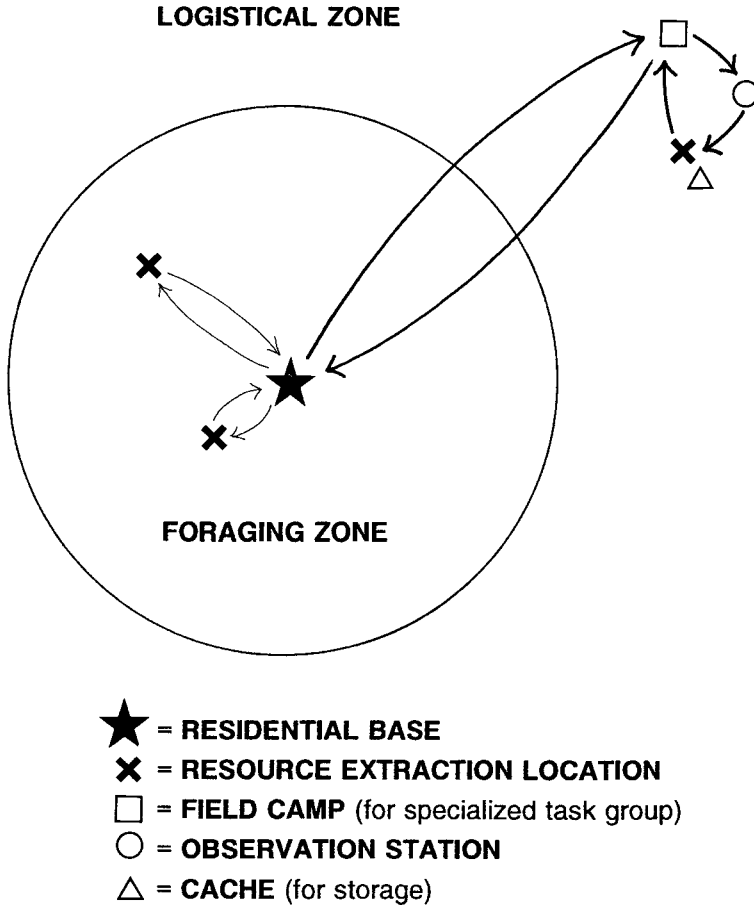


Figure 1.5 Characterization of a collector system

specialized task groups to acquire food resources located outside the foraging zone (called *logistical zone*), and bring them back. Food storage is an important part of collectors' subsistence strategy. Figure 1.6 represents an example of collectors' settlement patterns using the data of the Nunamiut in Alaska. As indicated in the figure, the majority of collectors move their residential bases only a few times a year. In this example, the group forms a large residential base at settlement #1 in the figure, staying there from the fall to the spring. In the early summer, they move the whole village to settlement #2, because #2 is more convenient for

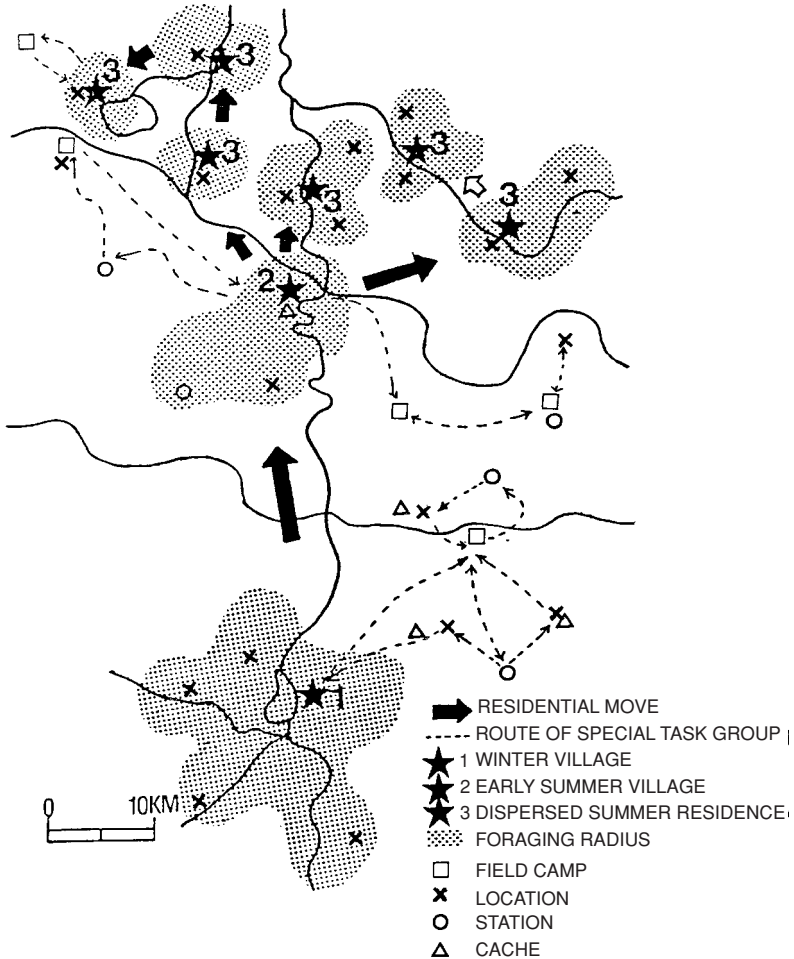


Figure 1.6 Schematic representation of a collector settlement pattern (modified and redrawn from Binford 1980: 11)

summer subsistence activities than #1. In the late summer, the group disperses to smaller residential bases at settlements #3.

According to Binford (1980: 12), forager and collector systems are not polarized types of systems but lie on a continuum from simple to complex. As these systems incorporate relatively more logistical components, the role and importance of residential mobility will change. In other words, when we examine subsistence–settlement systems of the Jomon people, it is unlikely that we will find “pure” collecting or “pure” foraging