

The Positioning and Unique Characteristics of Jomon Culture

Jomon Culture's Place in the World

"Jomon" originates from the word "cord" in Japanese, as the pottery from this period was covered in cord patterns. The artistry behind the shapes and patterns of Jomon pottery is widely recognized, and differs from region to region.

The start of the Jomon culture is defined as the time when the pottery came into use and people settled on the land. Today, some of the oldest pottery from the period includes the relics found in Aomori Prefecture's Odai Yamamoto. The results of carbon dating show that this pottery dates back to 13,000BC. The culture is thought to have met its demise around 2,500 years ago when it was replaced with the Yayoi culture which was centered on the cultivation of grain.

If one were to position the Jomon Culture in world history, it would be equivalent to an extremely long period that would span over part of the European Paleolithic Age, the Neolithic Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. The cultural elements of the Jomon Period, such as the use of pottery and polished stoneware and land settlement, are also comparable to the Neolithic Period in Eurasia.



Patterns made from rolling a piece of cord on the clay

	B.C.13,000	B.C.9,000	B.C.5,000	B.C.3,000	B.C.2,000	B.C.1,000	B.C.300	A.D.300	A.D.600	A.D.800	A.D.1,200
Japan	Jomon Period						Yayoi Period	Tumulus Period	Asuka Nara	Heian Period	Kamakura Period
	Paleolithic Age	Incipient period	Earlier period	Early period	Middle period	End period	Last period				
Hokkaido	Jomon Period						Zoku-Jomon culture	Satsumon culture		Ainu culture period	
	Paleolithic Age	Incipient period	Earlier period	Early period	Middle period	End period	Last period	Okhotsk culture	Tobinaitai culture		
Western Europe	Paleolithic Age	Mesolithic Age	Neolithic Age		Bronze Age		Iron Age		The Roman Empire		

The Unique Characteristics of Jomon Culture

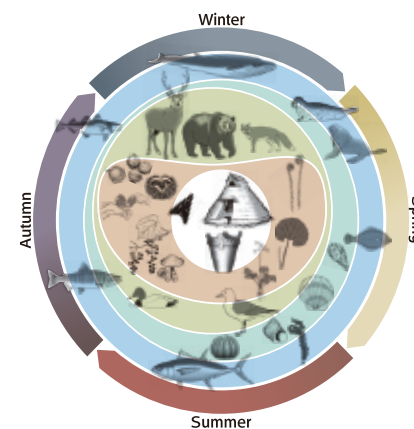
One of the biggest characteristics of Jomon culture is the fact that not only did it span across a long period of time, people were able to "settle on the land while living in harmony with nature for over 10,000 years."

In the Neolithic period of western Eurasia, settlement generally occurred with the beginning of agriculture and farming. While this usually signaled the beginning of deforestation in many cultures, the Jomon culture did not extensively change the natural environment and for a long period people led stable lives based on hunting, gathering and fishing. Over the 10,000 years that the Jomon culture flourished, there were several large-scale changes in climate as well as natural disasters such as volcano eruptions and earthquakes, but the Jomon people adapted to their environment and the Jomon culture's traditions were preserved.

Many cultural traditions unique to the Jomon culture were born out of this relationship with nature. For example, the weaving techniques used to make baskets from plant fiber and the lacquering techniques for harvesting, refining and processing sap from the sumac tree are all highly developed techniques that require a strong knowledge of the characteristics of each plant. In addition to practical tools, earthen figurines "dogu" were fashioned out of clay. These clay figurine are thought to have been used to pray for rebirth and the circle of life and suggest a high level of spirituality.



Deep bowl from the middle of Jomon



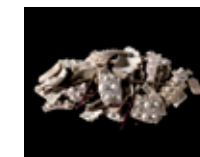
Jomon calendar (with additions made to Tatsuo Kobayashi's original calendar) showing the seasonal hunting-gathering cycle



Chestnuts



Deer



Sea urchin



Whale



Tuna and flounder

Food in the Jomon Period uncovered from the ruins