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Hunter-Gatherer Studies in Japan and the North  
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## **Introduction:**

### **Complex Hunter-Gatherer Studies in Japan and the North Pacific Rim**

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#### **TWO DECADES AFTER *AFFLUENT FORAGERS***

In 1981, Shuzo Koyama and David Hurst Thomas [1981a] published an edited volume entitled *Affluent Foragers: Pacific Coasts East and West* in the Senri Ethnological Studies series of the National Museum of Ethnology of Japan. The volume was the proceedings of the Third Annual Taniguchi Symposium held in Japan in 1979, the primary goal of which was to compare the foraging economies of prehistoric Japan and those of California [KOYAMA and THOMAS 1981b: 1]. In the introduction to the volume, Koyama and Thomas noted the diverging paths in the later history of the two foraging societies in Japan and California: the Jomon people of the Japanese Islands adopting the cultivation of paddy rice from Continental Asia in the middle of the first millennium B.C., whereas the native peoples in California remained essentially as hunter-gatherers until the time of the European contact. Starting with the questions of when, how and under what circumstances the transition from foraging to agricultural economies took place, Koyama and Thomas stressed the necessity to develop a general model that explains the mechanisms of the transition from hunter-gatherers to agriculturalists on the basis of case studies from the North Pacific coasts of both Asia and North America. Articles that appeared in the volume included those dealing with hunter-gatherers and early farmers on the Pacific coast and interior of North America and the northwestern Pacific (Philippines and China), as well as with the Jomon people of the Japanese Islands.

The early 1980s was also a period during which various scholars in the field of hunter-gatherer studies began to focus on the presence of “affluent” or “complex” hunter-gatherers both ethnographically and archaeologically. Works by Binford [1980, 1982], Woodburn [1980] and Testart [1982] all contributed significantly to illuminate the common presence of hunter-gatherer groups with a relatively high degree of sedentism, seasonally or spatially intensive subsistence strategies (typically characterized by food storage), and high population density. In particular, Binford’s distinction between residential mobility (movements of residential bases)

and logistical mobility (movements of specially organized task groups to mass-harvest heterogeneously distributed resources), and the resulting distinction of collectors (groups with low residential mobility and high logistical mobility) from foragers (groups with high residential mobility and low logistical mobility) heavily influenced later studies in this research field. The Thomas [1981] article in the *Affluent Foragers* volume is an early application of the model. Finally, the publication of the Price and Brown [1985b] volume entitled *Prehistoric Hunter-Gatherers: The Emergence of Cultural Complexity* not only made the concept of “complex” hunter-gatherers popular, but it also opened the door for the examination of the interrelationship between organizational complexity in subsistence-settlement systems [*sensu* BINFORD 1980] and the development of social inequality among hunter-gatherers. By the mid-1980s, conditions, causes and consequences of the emergence of complex hunter-gatherer societies became topics of considerable debate [see PRICE and BROWN 1985a].

When considering the papers presented at the CHAGS (Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies) Aomori sessions held in October 1998, we were struck by the fact that the majority of the presented papers dealt with the archaeology of complex hunter-gatherers of the North Pacific Rim. These papers share a number of themes in common with articles published in the Koyama and Thomas [1981a] volume, yet the variety of theoretical issues addressed in these papers clearly reflect new research developments over the past two decades. In discussions of post-conference publication plans, we came to the conclusion that a volume with a focus on variability and change in North Pacific Rim hunter-gatherers would have significant value. Thus, many of the papers included in Parts I and II of this volume are revised versions of the papers presented in the first session (Socio-political variations and changes in hunter-gatherers: theoretical perspectives), the third session (Hunter-gatherers in different environments: ecology, history and diversity), and the public symposia held in Aomori in 1998. Additionally, in order to expand the areal coverage within the North Pacific Rim region, articles by Savelle and Wenzel (Chapter 5) and Dillian (Chapter 6) were solicited.

A factor that stimulated our publication plans was that these sessions were held in Aomori, a city where Sannai Maruyama, a large settlement dated to the Early and Middle Jomon period, is located. At the time of the conference, more than 500 pit-dwellings had already been excavated at the site along with a number of various other types of features (see Chapter 9 by Okada). Participants of the conference had active discussions about the function and nature of the site, including the subsistence base, population size, and social organization of the site residents. Because of the potential contribution of the site data for modeling the development and long-term change in complex hunter-gatherer cultures and societies, we devote Part III of this volume to articles relating to the study of Sannai Maruyama.

While a number of interesting themes are shared by papers in this volume, we believe that two themes in particular are worth mentioning here. The first is the long-term change in hunter-gatherer cultural and/or social complexity, and the second is variability among hunter-gatherer cultures in relation to their unique environmental and/or historical contexts.

## LONG-TERM CHANGE IN HUNTER-GATHERER CULTURAL AND SOCIAL COMPLEXITY

Interests in so-called “complex hunter-gatherers” over the past two decades have stimulated considerable discussions on the concept of cultural and social complexity. Price and Brown kept their definition quite general, stating that “[c]omplexity refers to that which is composed of interrelated parts”, and that “we follow a general definition of cultural complexity that focuses on increases in societal size, scale and organization [PRICE and Brown 1985a: 7-8; emphasis in original].” Other scholars, on the other hand, have proposed that the concept be defined in a more restricted manner. For example, Arnold suggests that “[c]omplex, as I use it here, distinguishes those societies possessing *social and labor relationships in which leaders have sustained or on-demand control over nonkin labor and social differentiation is hereditary*” [ARNOLD 1996: 78; emphasis in original] (for definitions of complexity in non-hunter-gatherer studies, see also e.g., MCGUIRE [1983]; TAINTER [1996]). While not all scholars agree with Arnold’s perspective, over the past two decades researchers have become increasingly more focused on the issue of social inequality, including the emergence of hereditary social differentiation. The publication of the volume *Foundations of Social Inequality* edited by Price and Feinman [1995] clearly reflects this general shift in research interests. At the same time, in his recent writing, Price [2002: 418] questions whether status differentiation and social inequality can generally be attributed to more complex hunter-gatherers.

Many of the authors in the present volume deal with the issue of cultural and social complexity either directly or indirectly. Ben Fitzhugh (Chapter 2) defines emerging complexity in terms of both social integration and social differentiation. By doing so, he decouples the concept of complexity from that of inequality. He also emphasizes that complexity is not a threshold characteristic but a scalar one. Following this discussion on the concept of complexity, Fitzhugh attempts to delineate the common mechanism of social evolution among many groups on the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America. While the long-term trajectories of Kodiak hunter-gatherers happen to represent a case in which the development of social complexity and that of political hierarchy go hand in hand, this decoupling allows the examination of various aspects of social complexity without necessarily focusing on political hierarchy. This reflects recent trends away from the progressivist model of social evolution (see also FITZHUGH 2002).

Other contributors focus more on the development of organizational complexity in subsistence and settlement than social complexity itself. In examining the emergence of the “collector” socio-economic system, which is characterized by high organizational complexity resulting from high logistical mobility, William Prentiss and James Chatters (Chapter 3) present a model of cultural diversification and subsequent decimation. According to them, the development of collector systems and the subsequent development of fully complex hunter-gatherer societies characterized by social stratification [e.g., MATSON and COUPLAND 1995] may have been a historically contingent event, rather than a result of the greater adaptive efficiency of the collector system. Hiroto Takamiya (Chapter 8) examines changes in residential mobility from the middle Late to Final Jomon on Okinawa Island in the context of population pressure and environmental deterioration. Specifically, he suggests that fewer resources resulted in lower

population levels, but at the same time increased competition for sparse resources. Finally, studies by Yasuhiro Okada (Chapter 9) and Daisei Kodama (Chapter 13) both suggest the importance of collaborative work (construction of monumental structures such as stone circles) for maintaining social networks after the decline of Middle Jomon settlement systems that were characterized by large settlements.

Emerging from the comparison of these chapters is the question of the interrelationship between the degree of social complexity *sensu* Fitzhugh (i.e., the degree of vertical and horizontal social differentiation and the degree of integration of the differentiated parts) and the degree of organizational complexity in subsistence-settlement systems. From the perspective of subsistence and settlement organization, it is evident that what Binford [1980, 1982] defined as collecting systems (systems with various logistical strategies including food storage) are more complex than foraging systems. Whether organizational complexity in subsistence and settlement was a cause or precondition of the development of social complexity, including political hierarchy, is a different matter, however. In this regard, case studies assembled in this volume provide a rich data base to examine the interrelationships between subsistence, settlement and the degree of social complexity (for discussions on long-term changes in hunter-gatherer cultures, see also HABU and FITZHUGH [2002]).

#### **PACIFIC RIM HUNTER-GATHERERS IN DIFFERENT REGIONS: ECOLOGY, HISTORY AND DIVERSITY**

Another salient characteristic of many articles included in this volume is their emphasis on variability among hunter-gatherer societies of the North Pacific region. While the issue of variability was also a focal point of the Koyama and Thomas volume, the primary focus at that time was on hunter-gatherer adaptation to different environmental conditions. By contrast, many authors in the present volume emphasize the importance of historical contexts.

For example, in his examination of different types of political and social organization in the coastal regions of Alaska and the Russian Far East, Peter Schweizer (Chapter 4) emphasizes the importance of “cultural logic” in explaining regional variability in socio-political organization (namely, the distinction between what he calls “societies with internal hierarchies” and “societies with limited status positions”). Carolyn Dillian (Chapter 6) also presents a case study in which the emphasis is placed on a unique historical context, in this instance the development and maintenance of territoriality among prehistoric hunter-gatherers of northern California. She sees territoriality as both a spatial concept incorporating resources and defined by boundaries, and as a cognitive construct distinguishing “us” from “them.” James Savelle and George Wenzel (Chapter 5) examine prehistoric Thule Culture social relations in the Eastern Canadian Arctic on the basis of shared cultural origins with North Alaskan Inupiat. Vladimir Pitul’ko (Chapter 7) presents an interesting case study of prehistoric hunter-gatherers on Zhokhov Island in the eastern Siberian Arctic, in which polar bear hunting seems to have played a critical role in their subsistence strategies. This heavy reliance on polar bear is unknown among other prehistoric Arctic hunter-gatherer societies, and it may represent a historically unique case. It should be noted, however, that the site was apparently occupied on a seasonal basis, and thus it may represent a functionally-specific site within an otherwise “generalized”

Arctic hunter-gatherer economy.

Variability in different geographic regions is discussed not only at the macro level but also at the micro level. Brian Chisholm and Junko Habu (Chapter 12) present their results of a carbon and nitrogen isotope analysis of an Early Jomon skeletal sample. Their results suggest that Jomon dietary patterns within the Japanese archipelago may show geographic clines. The results are particularly interesting when considering the role of maritime adaptation in the development of complex hunter-gatherer cultures [see e.g., FITZHUGH n.d.].

The issue of regional variability among hunter-gatherer groups in relation to environmental and/or historical factors is inseparable from the discussion of differences in long-term trajectories among various hunter-gatherer societies in the North Pacific Rim region. As Koyama and Thomas [1981b] noted, the diverging paths between Jomon and the Pacific Coast hunter-gatherer groups of North America provide extremely interesting comparisons for the study of the transition from hunter-gatherer to agrarian societies. Examining this issue from another angle, the question of why the majority of prehistoric groups of the North Pacific Rim (both those in North America and insular groups including Jomon) remained essentially as non-agriculturalists for thousands of years needs to be addressed. Discussion by Yo-Ichiro Sato, Shinsuke Yamanaka and Mitsuko Takahashi (Chapter 10) on the possibility of chestnut tending during the Jomon period suggests that the issue of environmental management needs to be more seriously considered.

## THE CASE OF SANNAI MARUYAMA

Having discussed the two main themes of this volume, several additional comments on articles included in Part III (Jomon Hunter-Gatherers at Sannai Maruyama and Its Vicinity: Prehistoric Hunter-Gatherers in Northeastern Japan) are appropriate. Part III presents several different types of articles. The Okada (Chapter 9) and Kodama (Chapter 13) articles deal with long-term changes in Jomon subsistence, settlement and society. Three articles (Chapter 10 by Sato, Yamanaka and Takahashi, Chapter 11 by Habu, Hall and Ogasawara, and Chapter 12 by Chisholm and Habu) present results of biological and chemical analyses of archaeological remains excavated from Sannai Maruyama and neighboring sites. Finally, Mark Hudson's article (Chapter 14) examines sociopolitical contexts of Sannai Maruyama archaeology in relation to contemporary discussions on Japanese identity. Together, these articles illuminate various aspects of archaeology at Sannai Maruyama and its vicinity.

The Okada and Kodama articles present their interpretations of long-term changes in Jomon society with special reference to the functions of two unique Jomon sites; Sannai Maruyama in the case of Okada, and Komakino in the case of Kodama. Okada, who directed large-scale salvage excavations of the Sannai Maruyama site from 1992 to 1994, and who was the head archaeologist of The Preservation Office of the Sannai Maruyama Site (a branch office of the Cultural Affairs Section of the Agency of Education of Aomori Prefecture) from 1996 to spring 2002, identifies Sannai Maruyama as one of the "core settlements" in the northern Tohoku region. According to his interpretation, the site was occupied by fully sedentary village dwellers for over 1500 years. He also suggests that climatic cooling and a resulting abandonment of large settlements at the end of the Middle Jomon period led to the emergence

of a new type of society in which rituals played a significant role as a mechanism of social integration. Likewise, Kodama, who provides a detailed overview of the Late Jomon Komakino stone circle, presents a model of the social significance of constructing large ceremonial structures during a period of settlement pattern changes from Middle to Late Jomon. Both of these articles are excellent sources of first-hand information, and their views of long-term changes in Jomon society are representative of perspectives of many other scholars working within the tradition of Japanese archaeology. At the same time, exclusively inductive reasoning and the lack of middle range theories that link archaeological data to their inferences will seem very traditional to readers who are accustomed to recent processual and post-processual methods in Anglo-American archaeology.

Regarding the nature and function of the Sannai Maruyama site, Habu [2002, n.d.] has presented a model that is radically different from that of Okada. Her examination of changes in three kinds of archaeological data from Sannai Maruyama (numbers of pit-dwellings, size of pit-dwellings, and lithic assemblage characteristics) suggests significant changes over the 1500 years of site occupation. Based on these analyses, Habu suggests that the Sannai Maruyama site represents a palimpsest of multiple occupations over a long period, each of which was characterized by a different subsistence-settlement system. Specifically, she suggests that the “life-history” of the site can be divided into five different periods. Data from some of these periods show patterns similar to residential bases of collectors who move their residential bases seasonally, while data from other periods suggest the possibility that it served as a special purpose site. There is no clear evidence for full sedentism during any of these periods [see e.g., HABU 2002, n.d.; HABU *et al.* 2001].

In order to examine the validity of the two opposing models, examination of various lines of evidence will be required [HABU *et al.* 2001]. In particular, examination of the regional settlement system of which the site was a component, as well as intra-site spatial analyses, will be indispensable. Needless to say, results of analyses in archaeometry and other archaeological sciences can shed new light on subsistence, settlement and cultural landscapes of Sannai Maruyama residents. In this regard, Chapters 10 (Sato, Yamanaka and Takahashi), 11 (Habu, Hall and Ogasawara) and 12 (Chisholm and Habu) in this volume provide useful information to infer subsistence, diet and production/exchange systems at Sannai Maruyama and its neighboring areas, even though their results are all still preliminary.

Finally, Hudson’s article on the relationship between Jomon archaeology and Japanese national identity illustrates the complex sociopolitical milieu that affects our interpretations of archaeological data. Using the case of Sannai Maruyama as an example, Hudson illustrates how both public discussions and academic discourse on the Jomon people can be influenced by the assumption that they are ancestors of modern Japanese. This is an important point to make, given the fact that the media coverage of Sannai Maruyama had escalated to a level that was described as “Sannai Maruyama fever [HABU and FAWCETT 1999].” As social scientists, archaeologists have a responsibility to determine the limits of the inferences that they make, even though by nature archaeological interpretation is to a certain extent subjective [KOHL and FAWCETT 1995; TRIGGER 1995]. In this regard, the Hudson article provides archaeologists with an opportunity to rethink the implications of their research in the context of contemporary society (for discussions on the sociopolitical contexts that surround the archaeology of Sannai

Maruyama, see also HABU and FAWCETT [1999]).

## SUMMARY

In summary, this volume brings together articles that represent current theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of hunter-gatherers of the North Pacific Rim. Particular emphasis is on archaeological studies of prehistoric hunter-gatherers in this region. Themes shared by these articles center on the issue of the causes of, and conditions underlying, the development and maintenance of complex hunter-gatherer societies, an issue that is becoming increasingly central to our understanding of the wide spectrum of prehistoric and ethnographically documented hunter-gatherers. This volume also provides case studies on hunter-gatherers from various parts of the North Pacific Rim, and these will be useful for comparative studies at the global level. In particular, we believe that providing first hand information on geographic areas that are underrepresented in the English literature is important. Accordingly, a group of articles on the archaeology of the Sannai Maruyama site, a large Jomon settlement dated to the Early and Middle Jomon periods, are included in this volume. While there are differences in theoretical frameworks between different academic traditions in the various papers, we nevertheless hope that this volume will contribute to the integration of recent results of Jomon archaeology into the discussion of hunter-gatherer archaeology in the English anthropological and archaeological literature.

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