What’s so special about the Jomon?

Naoko Matsumoto
Research Institute for the Dynamics of Civilization, Okayama University
Several aspects of the Jomon that are really interesting and go against the classic picture of hunter-gatherer societies, but are not necessarily appreciated as much as they should be outside of Japan:

1. Elaborate pottery
2. Lack of evidence for warfare
3. Food cultivation
4. Social complexity
The classic picture of hunter-gatherer societies

- Nomadic life
- Simple material culture
- Low population density
- Egalitarian

Jomon
- Sedentary settlements
- Rich, abundant material culture
- High population density
- Transegalitarian
Table 1. Approximate dates (calibrated BP) for the six Jomon sub-periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-periods</th>
<th>Approximate age (cal BP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Jomon</td>
<td>3,220–2,900 (West Japan) –2,385 (East Japan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Jomon</td>
<td>4,490–3,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Jomon</td>
<td>5,415–4,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Jomon</td>
<td>7,050–5,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Jomon</td>
<td>11,345–7,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incipient Jomon</td>
<td>16,000–11,345</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Jomon population estimates by Koyama (1984) for eastern and western Japan (Hokkaido, Okinawa and small islands are excluded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-period</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Early</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Late</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tohoku</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>17,300</td>
<td>96,500</td>
<td>251,800</td>
<td>39,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanto</td>
<td>9700</td>
<td>42,800</td>
<td>95,400</td>
<td>51,600</td>
<td>7700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hokuriku</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>4200</td>
<td>24,600</td>
<td>15,700</td>
<td>5100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chubu mountain</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>25,300</td>
<td>71,900</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>6000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokai</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>13,200</td>
<td>7600</td>
<td>6600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinki</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2800</td>
<td>9000</td>
<td>9500</td>
<td>19,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chugoku</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shikoku</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>2700</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyushu</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>5600</td>
<td>5300</td>
<td>10,100</td>
<td>6300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,100</td>
<td>105,500</td>
<td>261,300</td>
<td>160,300</td>
<td>75,800</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
INCIPIENT AND INITIAL JOMON POTTERY

Matsumoto, Nakazono and Hirakawa in press
Middle Jomon pottery from Chubu region

Maruyama site, Nagano pref.  
Early Jomon

Tanabatake site, Nagano pref.  
Middle Jomon

Nakappara site, Nagano pref.  
Middle Jomon

https://www.city.chino.lg.jp/site/jomon/1866.html
Kubouenotaira site, Nagano Pref.  
Middle Jomon Period.  
Minamiminowa Village Board of Education.

Tonai site, Nagano Pref.  
Middle Jomon Period.  
Idojiri Archaeology Museum

Ceremonial Lamp?  
Anaba site, Nagano Prefecture  
Middle Jomon Period (3400-2400 BC)
Pottery with anthropomorphic decoration. Tsuganegoshomae site, Yamanashi Prefecture. Middle Jomon Period (3400-2400 BC). Hokuto City Board of Education.

https://www.tnm.jp/modules/rblog/index.php/1/2013/08/10/
FIGURINES

Aidanikumahara site, Shiga Prefecture. Incipient Jomon Period (c. 11,000 cal. BC)

Hirohata shell midden, Ibaraki Prefecture. Latter phase of the Late Jomon Period (c. 1300 cal. BC)
Kamikurokoma site, Yamanashi Prefecture
Hight: 25.4cm
Middle Jomon Period
©Tokyo National Museum
Shakado site, Yamanashi pref.  
Middle Jomon Period
Changes in the representation of figurines in Chubu and Kanto areas from the Middle to Final Jomon period.

'super feminine'

Ambiguous & enigmatic
FOOD CULTIVATION
Seiji Nakayama (2015) Domestication of the soybean (Glycine max) and morphological differentiation of seeds in the Jomon period. Jpn. J. Histor. Bot. 23(2)
Matsumoto 2018 Japan: The earliest evidence of complex technology for creating durable coloured goods. Open Archaeology 2018-4

Figure 3. Lacquered strings excavated from Kakinoshima B site, Hokkaido a) Excavated state, b) Lacquered strings on the left shoulder of the buried person, c) Close-up of the excavated state, d) and e) Microphotographs of the section of a lacquered string. Photographs kindly provided by Hakodate City Board of Education (a, b) and Masaharu Nagashima (c, d, e) with permission.
Lacquered combs

Torihama shell midden
Fukui prefecture
Early Jomon (6,090 ± 95calBP)

Karinba site, Hokkaido. Late Jomon (3500-3000 BP)
Reconstruction of a Jomon settlement and surrounding utilized forest (Noshiro 2014)
By the middle of the Jomon period they were being cultivated in eastern Japan, and by the late Jomon period they had spread to western Japan. In eastern Japan, egoma and hiye were also cultivated.
Lack of evidence for warfare

Kamikuroiwa, Ehime prefecture
Initial Jomon

Pelvic bone of a woman pierced by a spatula-shaped bone tool
Human remains excavated from Miyano Shell Mound, Iwate Prefecture (Middle Jomon period)
Adult male

http://www.museum.tohoku.ac.jp/exhibition_info_mini/1998SE/page06.html#anchor4325000
Hobi shell midden,
Aichi pref.
Final Jomon Period
Patterns of violent aggression in the Jomon period
Estimates of the ratio of mortality attributable to violence

- Jomon period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Adults*</th>
<th>ID*</th>
<th>ID/Total</th>
<th>ID/Adults</th>
<th>ID*/Adults*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>932</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2576</strong></td>
<td><strong>1269</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>1051</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.89</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.81</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.81</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initial Jomon: ●
(1) Kamikuroiwa Iwakage site

Middle Jomon: ■
(2) Miyano shell midden
(3) Aoshima shell midden
(4) Takanekido shell midden
(5) Tsubue Funamoto shell midden

Late Jomon: ▲
(6) Kasoriminami shell midden
(7) Fuyukita A shell midden
(8) Shimo Numabe shell midden
(9) Hegi cave

Final Jomon: ◆
(10) Sanganjii shell midden
(11) Ikawazu shell midden
(12) Hobi shell midden
(13) Fukahori site
SOCIAL COMPLEXITY

Feature distribution at the Middle Jomon Nishida site, Iwate prefecture.
Figure 3. The Late Jomon Oyu stone circles, Akita Prefecture (adapted from Akimoto [26] and Kazuno City Board of Education [43]).