

The Satsumon Period

The culture of the Satsumon period (600–1200 CE) was specific to Hokkaido and differed from that of much of the rest of Japan. It was a continuation of the hunter-gatherer culture of the Jomon period (13,000–500 BCE), with additional influences and technology from communities on Honshu to the south. Cooking stoves, ironware, and textiles were gradually introduced. The cold climate did not support rice cultivation, but people grew grains like millet and barley.

Satsumon pottery found in Kushiro has incised patterns made with a wooden spatula. Some pieces of Satsumon pottery have been found with both these incised patterns and the raised decorations typical of pottery from Okhotsk communities to the north. After the fifth century, people from the Eurasian continent settled areas around the Sea of Okhotsk, such as the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin. They are believed to have come from the Amur River basin, on what is now the border of eastern Russia and northern China. They lived in coastal communities, hunting larger marine animals such as whales and seals, and kept dogs and pigs. Contact increased between these northern people and the inhabitants of Hokkaido, as can be seen in the fusion of Satsumon pottery styles and Okhotsk motifs. Some archaeologists believe that this meeting of cultures gave rise to Ainu culture.