

Life in the Jomon and Epi-Jomon Periods (13,000 BCE–600 CE)

Northern Japan's prehistoric peoples gradually adopted new lifestyles after their initial migration some 30,000 years ago. They shifted from roving in pursuit of large mammals to establishing settlements and engaging in hunting, fishing, and gathering. Culture and society changed as well to suit increasingly settled lifestyles.

Climatic warming fueled this transition, which made food more widely available. Forests grew on what was once tundra, providing a habitat for deer and other game; vegetation diversified to include fruit-bearing trees, such as chestnuts and walnuts; and sea levels rose, creating shallow bays for gathering clams and shore fishing.

People began using earthenware around 13,000 BCE as they gradually settled sites with plentiful food sources. The emergence of pottery marks the beginning of the Jomon period (13,000–300 BCE) and coincides with

the development of settled communities. Early vessels were rudimentary and undecorated, serving a purely utilitarian function, such as cooking. Over time, designs became increasingly elaborate, often patterned with cord-markings (*jomon*). Some of the most ornate examples have been discovered at burial and ceremonial sites, suggesting people performed complex rituals as part of their beliefs concerning the spiritual world.

As settlements increased in size and number, communities engaged in trade and cultural exchange. People used the waterways of Hokkaido to navigate the island, trading furs, accessories, tools, and raw materials, such as obsidian. By the Epi-Jomon period (300 BCE–600 CE), trade networks extended to Honshu, the main island of the Japanese archipelago. There, agrarian societies were developing alongside smelting and metalworking. Through these trade routes, communities in Hokkaido gained access to ironware and metal tools, which enabled them to more efficiently engage in their hunting, gathering, and fishing activities.