

## **Hokkaido: Prehistory to the Early Modern Period**

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. Around 13,000 BCE, the use of pottery marked the beginning of the Jomon period (13,000–300 BCE). Early pottery was simple and utilitarian, but over time, more intricate designs appeared.

As settlements developed and became more populous, communities began trading more extensively, using Hokkaido's waterways to exchange furs, tools, and raw materials like obsidian. By the Epi-Jomon period (300 BCE–600 CE), trade networks connected Hokkaido with Japan's main island of Honshu, where agrarian societies were engaged in metalworking. Access to iron tools and other advanced technologies from Honshu allowed Epi-

Jomon communities to enhance their hunting, fishing, and farming techniques.

During the Satsumon period (600–1200 CE), salmon became a valuable trade commodity. Satsumon people adopted iron tools, textiles, and clay cooking stoves from Honshu. They also interacted with the Okhotsk people around the Sea of Okhotsk, Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, and northern Hokkaido. These people specialized in hunting seals, whales, and other marine mammals. Over time, a shared culture emerged, and some scholars believe that the exchange between the Okhotsk and Satsumon peoples played a role in the formation of Ainu culture.