

Paleolithic

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Paleolithic study in recent years has been focusing on formation processes of Late Paleolithic culture in Japan within the context of the spread of modern humans from Africa to Eurasia. A large-scale research project “Cultural History of Paleo Asia” that started in fiscal 2016 is the forefront of such study. Study results have been accumulated across different academic fields such as formation processes of Late Paleolithic culture in different parts of Asia, archaeology, physical anthropology, genetic anthropology, cultural anthropology, mathematical science and so on. Also, the uniqueness of the emergence of stone blade techniques and the appearance of locality in later knife-shaped stone tool culture are being discussed along with a detailed examination of stone tools in Hokkaido and East Japan. This is in order to grasp the formation of Late Paleolithic culture in the Japanese Archipelago within the history of diffusion and settlement of modern humans. The Ryukyu Islands have been an important research field regarding diffusion of modern humans with successive sensational discoveries in recent years, and especially studies on Shiraho-sanetabaru cave site are drawing much attention as it yielded Paleolithic human bones of 19 individuals and a space for funeral rites. Various information on human bones in the Ryukyu Islands such as DNA and forms of funeral rites indicate that they have their origin in the south, and a project to reconstruct sea voyage techniques in the Paleolithic is drawing interest.

In response to the heightened interest on the arrival of primitive and modern humans in the Late Paleolithic, the earlier period, that is, human settlement in the Japanese Archipelago earlier than 40,000 years ago is being questioned.

Excavation research is being conducted in various areas in order to find archaeological sites of the period, and reexamination of academic data is being progressed on Hoshino site in Tochigi City, Tochigi Prefecture, and Gongenyama site in Isesaki City, Gunma Prefecture.

Other than studies on the earlier periods mentioned above, study that focused on regionality of stone tools and behaviors of Paleolithic people was active. There was a featured article on the rise and fall of Kou industry in the Japanese Islands and a symposium was held to compare stone tools in Niigata Prefecture and northern Kanto region. Also, many studies in Hokkaido and Tohoku regions handled changes in stone tools and forms of

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settlement from the former half of Late Paleolithic to Incipient Jomon as well as comparative study on various microlith tools. As for behavioral study, use-mark study on stone tools, the main purpose of which was to reveal functions of stone tools, started to indicate research examples with clear behavioral study in mind. It is significant that such study efforts are being actively published not only in Japanese but in English literature. In addition, there were many studies on pebble tools, with detailed analysis of individual examples and behavioral reconstruction.

Other than the above, there were studies that supplement weakness of past studies with steady works such as surveys on stone material sources and excavation on stone source sites, improving assumptions of stone material sources, petrological analysis on local stone materials; as well as trials on studies with new viewpoints such as population study using radiocarbon dating measurement, three-dimensional measurements of Paleolithic tools, and data science. There were multiple museum exhibitions on the Paleolithic such as Paleolithic stone tools in Ethiopia and Paleolithic culture in Okinawa that drew much attention from visitors.