

# Guest Editors' Introduction

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This is the first time that a special issue on gender archaeology has appeared in an archaeological journal in Japan. The papers come from a meeting organised at the Okayama Congress of the Japanese Archaeological Association in October 2019. This session was the first full-fledged session on gender archaeology to be held in Japanese within the Japanese archaeological community. Nevertheless, we do not feel that the position of gender archaeology in Japanese archaeology has been adequately settled. How did this situation arise? And how can this situation be changed?

Stimulated by the feminist and gender archaeology that emerged in the United States in the 1980s and numerous subsequent academic and educational activities throughout the Anglophone world (Conkey and Spector 1984), discussions on gender have been active in Japanese archaeology since the mid-1990s (e.g. Fujimura 1996; Matsumoto 1998; Ikawa-Smith 2002). At the WAC Inter-Congress held in Osaka in 2006 and at the World Archaeological Congress in Kyoto in 2016, there were sessions on gender archaeology, although the language used was English. In Japan, women have been the focus of research on ancient history since the 1930s. In Japanese archaeology, women have been more visible than in Western archaeology, with the abundance of pottery from the Jomon period and the presumption that women were the pottery makers. However, gender archaeology has never been generalised and has been limited to the practice of a few researchers.

The reasons for the slump in gender archaeology in Japan may include the following. First is the radical critical perspective of gender archaeology. Without a critical look at the gender structure in contemporary society, it is impossible to critically examine the basis for the presumption of gender roles in the past. It is not easy for many researchers to question the existing gender structure. Second, there is a specific incompatibility with Japanese archaeology, which is based on culture-historical archaeology. Gender is, of course, not an archaeological material itself but an abstract concept derived from its analysis. In Japanese archaeological research and education, it is encouraged to study the archaeological materials themselves and clarify their historical significance. In such an environment, a critical examination of gender may not be welcomed, which has been embedded as a premise in historical narratives. Nor would it be advisable to dare to choose gender as a topic, which would require the study of the relevant social sciences outside archaeology.

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Nevertheless, gender-archaeological research in Japan has been successful in the following ways: the first has been to raise awareness of the small number of female researchers; the second has been to discuss the history of relations between women and men (including gender stereotypes and criticisms of gender bias); and the third has been to discuss archaeological education on the theme of gender. In addition to these, this century has seen the emergence of LGBT-related queer archaeology (Mitsumoto 2009). A variety of practices of gender archaeology, rooted in the characteristics of materials from the Japanese archipelago, are being developed in response to research in Britain and the United States.

The session that formed the basis of this special issue was organised to improve this situation, if only slightly, and revitalise archaeological research. The primary purpose of this session was to share and reflect on the achievements and challenges of gender archaeology in Japan and East Asia through research with different materials, theories, methodologies, and positions. One of the significant challenges for gender archaeology in Japan has been the lack of disseminating research results in English outside of Japan. The publication of this special issue in an English-language journal is an essential step in this direction. We hope that this special issue will serve as a bridge to future research.

## References

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