

Paleolithic

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The Japanese Paleolithic is currently not being studied in Japanese elementary schools. The Japanese Archaeological Association held a session to discuss the significance of studying the Paleolithic. It was recognized that studying “the origin of mankind” and “diffusion of the human race” is a meaningful opportunity to grasp history beyond the framework of Japanese history.

An outstanding trend of recent studies is to evaluate the Japanese Islands within Asian history. Some scholars examine the Middle Paleolithic in China to search for the origin of Paleolithic culture in the Japanese Islands, and some research the movement of people during the Last Glacial Maximum. The 6th Worldwide SEAA (Society for East Asian Archaeology) Conference, which took place in Ulan Bator last June, held a “research session for the Lower Paleolithic in the Japanese Islands.” Also, sessions related to Japan such as “latest examples of Siberia and Japan” and “obsidian and other stone tool materials” were prepared at the 7th meeting of the Asian Paleolithic Association held in South Korea in November. Japanese data were also used in studies in Asia.

On movement of people in LGM, ANBIRU Masao is advocating a circum-Sea of Japan Paleolithic cultural corridor. In the corridor, flake point culture and Yubetsu style microliths were spread, and within it were obsidian mines such as Shirataki, Shinshu, Koshidake, and Hakutosan. Bidirectional movement of people and artifacts was reviewed. There were many examinations of stone tool culture other than early microliths in Hokkaido, but many conclusions assumed a relationship with the continent rather than Honshu.

Important research results were yielded from southern islands. Human bones, tools made from bivalve, and tusk shell beads were excavated from an approximately 20,000 year old carbonized layer in Sakitari cave site in Nanjo City, Okinawa Prefecture. Also, excavation of freshwater crabs and snails were prominent in the layer, suggesting the possibility of a preference for freshwater animals as a food source.

Study and discussion of stone tools and materials continued to be active. Especially, surveys for obsidian quarries have been conducted aggressively in recent years, and detailed data are being accumulated. In June, the Japanese Paleolithic Research

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Association held a symposium under the theme, “acquisition and consumption of stone material and formation of archaeological sites,” where research examples from Japan and South Korea were presented. Multilateral examination was given to the location of material collection, material size and shape, transition of processing the material, transportation, and frequency of use at locations where materials were transported.

While there is a study trend from global viewpoints, specific studies of regional characteristics were continued by local study groups. Also, there is a drastic decrease of archaeological excavation from large-scale developments; some local governments are considering reformation of buried cultural property organizations. Administration of buried cultural properties is reaching a threshold, and utilization of various excavation results is getting more important. Outreach and education activities such as exhibitions at museums and lectures for the public were conducted actively.