

2 Emergence of Hokkaido's Original Cultures



The Mystery of the Petroglyphs

In 1886, rock engravings resembling writing and pictures (Petroglyphs) were discovered in Temiya Cave, Otaru. At the time, these petroglyphs were thought to be writing, but in 1950, when some of Japan's most significant petroglyphs were discovered in Fugoppe Cave, Yoichi, it was realized that they were not writing, but pictures. It is thought that the Fugoppe Cave petroglyphs were created in the 1st through 4th centuries by the Zoku-Jomon culture. However, these petroglyphs share no commonalities with their counterparts on the Eurasian continent. It remains a mystery what became of the culture that engraved these images.

Somewhat over 2,000 years ago, the Jomon culture in Hokkaido came to an end, giving rise to unique cultures such as the Zoku-Jomon culture and the Satsumon culture.

The Zoku-Jomon culture spanned the period from somewhat over 2,000 years ago to approximately the 7th century. Around the time this culture began, rice cultivation and metal tools had entered western Japan from continental Asia via the Korean Peninsula, and the Yayoi culture had spread up to Tohoku – the northeastern reaches of Honshu. However, rice cultivation did not cross the Tsugaru Strait to Hokkaido during this timeframe. But, small amounts of iron tools did reach Hokkaido, leading to advancements in techniques such as hunting, fishing, and gathering. The Zoku-Jomon people of Hokkaido would eventually establish active exchange from Hokkaido to Honshu and Sakhalin (Karafuto).

The Satsumon culture developed around the 7th to 8th centuries, under influences of the cultures from Honshu. The cord-marked earthenware and stone tools which had been used by their predecessors were replaced by earthenwares resembling Haji earthenware and iron implements. The people of the Satsumon culture established settlements near estuaries, and in addition to hunting and fishing, they also cultivated grains such as foxtail millet and Japanese millet. This culture continued until about the 12th century. During this period, trade with Honshu flourished, bringing many iron tools to Hokkaido, and ways of life began to change.

In addition to these cultures, as early as the 5th century, people with a culture greatly different from any of Hokkaido's previous cultures arrived from Sakhalin (Karafuto). These people first lived along Hokkaido's Okhotsk sea coast, and would eventually spread as far as the Kuril Islands. Strongly influenced by northeast continental Asian cultures, this culture was known as the Okhotsk culture, and continued until about the 9th century. These people primarily subsisted on fishing and hunting marine mammals such as whales and seals. Through trade with the northeast Asian continent and Honshu, they became known as the "people of the sea".

The Zoku-Jomon culture and Satsumon cultures were strongly connected to Honshu, and the Okhotsk culture was strongly connected to Sakhalin (Karafuto) and the northeast Asian continent. In quite a different manner from Honshu, highly regional cultures developed in Hokkaido under cultural influences from both north and south.



The Prayers of the Okhotsk People

The people of the Okhotsk culture held beliefs towards animals such as bears, whales, seals, and birds. At archaeological sites such as the Moyoro Shell Mound in Abashiri City and the Sakaaura Daini Site in Tokoro, Kitami City, discoveries have included a mound of cranial bones from animals such as bears and deer found within a dwelling, and another mound of bones from marine creatures and birds. Images engraved on clay items, tusks, and bones found at these sites indicate that the bear was of special significance to these people.



Expansion of Exchange and Trade

Decorative items such as ornamental sashes and nephrite gems have been found at Okhotsk culture archaeological sites. These are identical to items found at midstream and downstream locations along the Amur (Heilong) River. Such finds are evidence that the Okhotsk culture had deep connections with regions such as Sakhalin (Karafuto) and the northeast Asian continent. On the other hand, the Satsumon culture was deeply connected to Honshu. Through trade, the Satsumon people obtained a variety of iron implements, and brought Sue and Haji ware to all regions of Hokkaido. In this period, Hokkaido was the center of two major trade routes -- one to the north, and one to the south.