

SPECIAL ISSUE: COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

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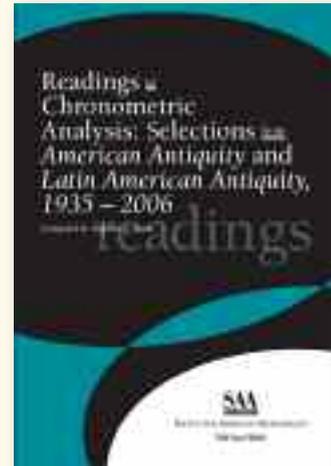
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The site of Prasat Thma Dap, Angkor Period. Located on Phnom Kulen mountain, Siem Reap province, Cambodia (Photo Alison Carter).

# WORKING WITH JAPANESE COLLEAGUES

## EXCAVATION OF A JOMON PIT-DWELLING AND STORAGE PITS AT GOSHIZAWA MATSUMORI

Junko Habu

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Japanese archaeology is an exciting and emerging regional field for several reasons. First, rapid economic growth after the 1960s has resulted in a large number of rescue excavations throughout the country (e.g., Barnes and Okita 1999). Unlike the case in America, all the archaeological sites in Japan are protected by the Law for the Protection and Conservation of Cultural Property. This means that sites on both public and private property need to be excavated prior to any construction projects. Many of these rescue excavations are large in scale, and cover an area of tens of thousands of square meters. Results of these excavations not only enrich our understanding of the Japanese past, but they also provide exciting opportunities to test cutting-edge archaeological theories with a large body of data. This is particularly important given that Japanese archaeologists are quite good in publishing their excavation data. Results of these rescue excavations usually become available within a couple of years in the form of thick, published site reports. Several hundred copies are printed, and they are distributed to major university libraries as well as archaeological centers and prefectural and municipal boards of education. Thus, students of archaeology in Japan can conduct original research by using these published data.

Second, the prehistory and early history of the Japanese archipelago show a highly unique trajectory, which is quite different from many other parts of the world. Specifically, the Japanese prehistoric sequence is characterized by one of the world's earliest pottery traditions. This marked the beginning of the Jomon period (ca. 14,500–500 B.C.), a prehistoric hunter-gatherer culture that lasted for over 10,000 years. Despite the sophistication of their material culture and their interactions with Neolithic agriculturalists in China, the people of the Jomon period subsisted primarily by hunting, gathering, and fishing until the last millennium B.C. (Habu 2004; Imamura 1996; Kobayashi 2005). The Jomon period was followed by the agricultural Yayoi period (ca. 500 B.C.–A.D. 250), the time of a rapid development of social stratification, which eventually led to the rise of the early state during the Kofun period (ca. A.D. 250–800).

Third, sociopolitical contexts of Japanese archaeology provide an interesting case to examine the relationship between archaeology and contemporary society. Interests in archaeology among the Japanese public and media are high. Archaeological discoveries are commonly front-page news and featured in television specials. In addition, many Japanese people strongly feel that archaeology is the study of their own direct ancestors. Under these circumstances, interpretations of archaeological data can easily be used to support or refute particular ideological perspectives, and such interpretations may spread rapidly through the media. Thus, archaeology is not merely the study of the past, and the examination of the relationship between archaeology and contemporary society is a relevant topic for anthropological studies (e.g., Fawcett 1995; Hudson 2003; Mizoguchi 2006).

### Lack of Full-Scale Collaboration between Japan and North America

Despite these exciting aspects, there have been only a few attempts to develop a full-scale international collaborative research projects. This is partially due to the fact that archaeology in Japan is considered to be a subdiscipline of history, not anthropology. Theoretical approaches that are commonly accepted in anthropological archaeology in North America, including gender and feminist archaeology, evolutionary ecology and historical ecology, have received little interest in Japanese archaeology. An emphasis on historical uniqueness by Japanese archaeologists has also led them to believe that each site needs to be excavated as completely as possible. The concept of sampling is not necessarily welcomed, and full-coverage excavations are preferred.

An important characteristic of contemporary Japanese archaeology is an abundance of so-called “administrative” archaeologists. Unlike the CRM work in North America, the majority of rescue excavations in Japan are conducted by officers of national, prefectural, and municipal governments or staff members of prefectural or city archaeological centers. Many of them have BA or MA degrees in archaeology or his-

tory, and are well trained in field methods. By the 1990s, the total number of these “administrative” archaeologists reached over 7,000—over 90 percent of the archaeologists in Japan. Since their job descriptions typically fall in the realm of social education and community services, opportunities for research-oriented activities, let alone international collaborative research, are limited.

The scarcity of international collaboration does not mean that Japanese archaeology has always been isolated from the rest of the world. To begin with, scientific archaeology in Japan was initiated by the American zoologist Edward Morse, who excavated the Omori shell-midden in Tokyo in 1877. Limited but influential interaction with the West, mainly with Europe, continued through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries until it was interrupted by the Second World War. However, research and fieldwork in post-war Japanese archaeology have been dominated by native Japanese perspectives. Influences of North American anthropology and archaeology during the 1950s and 1960s can be seen in the works of such scholars as Sugao Yamanouchi, but it did not become the mainstream. A few dozen Japanese scholars and students have studied in North America over the past several decades, but their contributions comprise only a small portion of the archaeological research conducted in Japan today.

### Attempts to Develop Collaborative Research

I was born in Japan, studied at Keio University in Tokyo, and received a Ph.D. at McGill in Canada. Given this background, I have always been interested in developing collaborative research with participants from both North America and Japan. While differences in the history, methods, and goals between the two academic traditions create certain obstacles, it is clear to me that the two academic traditions can benefit greatly by learning the other’s perspectives (Habu 2004:16–25).

One of my attempts to work with Japanese colleagues took place at the Sannai Maruyama site in Aomori Prefecture. It is the largest Jomon settlement in Japan, and is a National Historic Park. From 1997 to 2006, my students and I visited the site every summer, collected soil samples from the test excavation areas opened by archaeologists from the Preservation Office of the Sannai Maruyama Site (a branch office of the Board of Education of Aomori Prefecture), analyzed macro and micro faunal and floral remains in the soil samples, and examined previous excavation records to understand settlement changes over time. Three of our field seasons, in 2004, 2006, and 2007, were run in conjunction with the Berkeley archaeological field school. The results of this work have been fruitful (e.g., Habu 2004, 2008; Habu and Fawcett 2008; Habu et al. 2003). Since the Sannai Maruyama site is designated as the National Historic Park, however,



Figure 1. Junko Habu taking soil samples at Sannai Maruyama, 2006.

there were a number of restrictions placed on our research, including on the timing of fieldwork and on the selection of soil sampling locations.

During our 2007 field season at Sannai Maruyama, I started making inquiries about the possibility of excavating a new site without such restrictions. The site needed to meet several conditions. First, the date of the site had to be contemporary with Sannai Maruyama (ca. 3900–2300 B.C.) so that it fits into the context of my current research on long-term culture change through the Early to Middle Jomon periods. Second, there should be one or more features (preferably pit-dwellings) from which I could obtain quantitative data, artifacts and macro-floral remains dated to a specific phase. Third, the stratigraphy of the site should be simple enough so that it could be excavated with a group of field school students. Members of the Archaeological Center of Aomori Prefecture helped me identify several potential sites. After some consideration, I chose to work at Goshizawa Matsumori, which is approximately 10 km from Sannai Maruyama. An academic excavation permit was obtained with an assistance of the Board of Education of Aomori City for the summer 2008 field season.

### Working in the Field with Japanese Colleagues and Graduate Students

Located on Aomori City land that is leased to the Aomori Horse Riding Club, Goshizawa Matsumori is a residential



Figure 2. Soil sampling of a flask-shaped storage pit at Goshizawa Matsumori, 2008.

site dated to the beginning of the Middle Jomon period (ca. 3000 B.C.). The site, discovered by a member of the Riding Club during construction of a small kitchen garden, consists of at least one Middle Jomon pit-dwelling.

My work at Goshizawa Matsumori is an international collaboration in several different respects. First, a number of collaborators from Japan, North America, and Britain are working on various analyses of excavated materials. These include studies of macro-floral remains, charred wood, pollen, phytoliths, diatoms, and parasite eggs, as well as micromorphology, residue analysis, and radiocarbon dating. Contributions of Japanese collaborators are especially important in the fields in which an extensive collection of comparative specimens from Japan are required. Equally important is the way excavations were conducted in the field. In addition to 12 field school students, our summer 2008 team had six Japanese and five American staff members, who worked for me for either part, or all of the field season. The Japanese and North American staff members brought with them different kinds of expertise. Japanese archaeologists and graduate students displayed considerable skill in distinguishing subtle differences in soil texture, and in mapping. In addition, their knowledge of the local archaeological chronology was indispensable. North American staff members (graduate students and undergraduate research assistants) made good use of their strengths in the theory and method of anthropological archaeology, including deductive reasoning and systematic sampling.

The excavation area of the summer 2008 field season measured a total of 42 m<sup>2</sup>. Our efforts focused on a pit-dwelling and two flask-shaped storage pits, all of which were dated to the Middle Jomon period. One half of each of these features was excavated, and soil samples were collected for flotation

from 25-x-25-x-5-cm units. For most North American participants, identifying the walls of features on the basis of subtle differences in soil texture turned out to be extremely challenging. After some experimentation, most of my students had to admit that the gardening trowel preferred by Japanese excavators is more suitable for this purpose than the Marshalltown trowel. This was because the latter's tip is so sharp that it penetrates the walls. For most Japanese staff members, collecting soil samples by artificial intervals was entirely new. Some of them questioned why soil sampling and flotation were necessary, as flotation and water-screening in Japanese archaeology have largely been restricted to shell-middens and water-logged deposits. Our efforts were rewarded by the recovery of a number of charred seeds and nut shells.

Logistical help and moral support from local archaeologists were key to the success of our 2008 field season. They helped me to obtain the excavation permit, and to negotiate with the land owner and the leaser to make the excavation possible. Although constantly joking about differences in the excavation methods between East and West, many of the local Japanese archaeologists were curious as to what kinds of new information could be obtained from excavations like ours, and how these could contribute to the development of Jomon archaeology. To facilitate active interaction with local archaeologists, we conducted our excavations from Tuesday through Saturday, not Monday through Friday, so that they could visit us on Saturdays when their own excavations were on hold for the weekend.

### Concluding Remarks

In my 1989 article, I predicted that the isolation of Japanese archaeology from world archaeology would not change in the near future (Habu 1989:42). Twenty years have passed, and there are still barriers between Japanese and North American archaeology. The situation might be slowly changing, however. The collapse of the "bubble" economy in Japan in the early 1990s and other economic and social changes have slowed down the pace of rescue excavations in the country. On the positive side, there is now less need to destroy a large number of sites to build new buildings and freeways. On the other hand, this means less funding is available for excavations and fewer new jobs in archaeology. Under these new circumstances, Japanese archaeologists, especially those of younger generations, have begun to explore new directions in their research and field practice. The questions and support we received from Japanese archaeologists this past summer reflected their curiosity and openness to new, non-Japanese approaches. In this regard, working with Japanese colleagues at Goshizawa Matsumori has made me feel more optimistic about future interactions between the two academic traditions.



Figure 3. Excavation of a pit-dwelling (center) and storage pits at Goshizawa Matsumori, 2008 (the scale at the center measures 1 meter).

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