

What is the Jomon? Interdisciplinary perspectives on Neolithic Japan

This presentation will provide a critical and interdisciplinary perspective on the Jōmon, a term used to refer to the archaeological culture found in and around the Japanese archipelago between around 14,500 and 900 BC. In popular culture in contemporary Japan, the Jōmon is usually seen as overlapping with the modern nation. One Japanese archaeologist has even claimed that ‘The area of distribution of Jōmon pottery is the unique territory of the Japanese *Volk* [*minzoku*]’, further explaining that, ‘The area of distribution of Jōmon pottery means that a shared culture and language existed there’. While apparently extreme, such views would probably be accepted by many members of the general public in Japan.

In this panel, we use recent findings from archaeology, archaeogenetics and linguistics to critique the unitary view of the Jōmon. From a genetic perspective, we will use nuclear data for an ancient Miyako Ryukyuan islander (14C dated to 793-601 calibrated BCE) and Neolithic Koreans from multiple archaeological sites (ranging from ca. 3500 to 2000 BC) to show that Jōmon genomes are found in regions without Jōmon pottery. From an archaeological perspective, we will argue that the distribution of Jōmon pottery does *not* represent a shared culture. From a linguistic perspective, we will suggest that when the Jomon-speakers shifted to the proto-Japonic Yayoi language, they left some substratum of their basic languages in the target language. These Jomon languages may have been various languages belonging to the head-marking and polysynthetic Asian North Pacific Coast type. Integrating the different perspectives, our presentation will show that a more flexible concept of the Jōmon is required.