

Evidence of Epi-Jomon Migration and Lifestyle

The Epi-Jomon culture describes the continuing Jomon in northeastern Japan, and follows the end of the Latest Jomon in other areas of Japan. Scholars believe that there was an expansion south from Hokkaido and coincided with the movement north of the Kofun culture. It is now believed that the Epi-Jomon is a culture that originated with the Jomon people who still lived in the area of northern Tohoku and Hokkaido, and contrasted from the roughly contemporary Kofun culture which originated in the Kinai. Whereas the Kofun culture is identified with the proto-historic period of the Yamato Japanese, the Epi-Jomon episode is identified with the non-Japanese population, the ancestors of the Emishi and Ezo. We can speak of this migration as the northern expansion that took place between the third and fifth centuries A.D.. Here I will examine the evidence of this little known but very important migration that set the stage for the eventual clash of cultures that took place in the Tohoku when the Yamato state expanded into the area in the historical period.

The evidence is conclusive that the Epi-Jomon were directly ancestral to the Satsumon culture in Hokkaido, and very strongly related to the Emishi of northern Tohoku. It is based on pottery types, grave types and other physical remains such as stone scrapers. The following is a summary of this evidence divided into four categories: grave type, pottery culture, scrapers, and other physical remains (Kumagai 2004: 22-6).

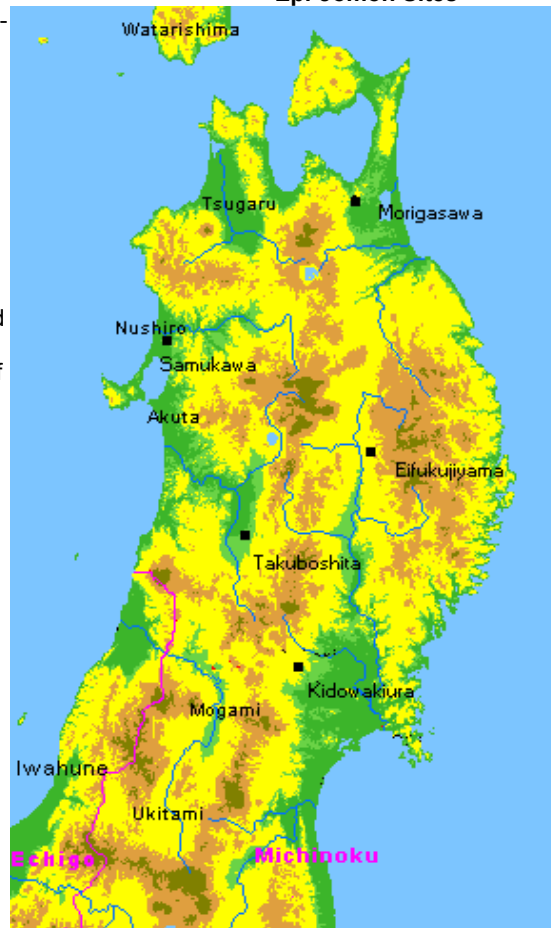
The grave sites of areas associated with Epi-Jomon shows the spread of *dokobo*, a type of grave characterized by a circular hole where bodies were interred. This type of grave is characteristic of Hokkaido and the following sites in the Tohoku: from the third to fourth centuries AD, the Samu-kawa site near Noshiro in Aomori prefecture, and the Eifukuji-yama site near Morioka; from the fifth to sixth centuries AD, the Mori-ga-sawa site in Aomori prefecture, and two sites from Miyagi prefecture, the Kido-waki-ura site and the Takuboshita site. The similarities between these sites suggest that this type of grave spread from north to south and reached its presently known southern extent in northern Miyagi prefecture. The fact that these grave sites are of the same type as found in Hokkaido earlier suggests that they spread from there to northern Tohoku.

The pottery remains associated with the known Epi-Jomon sites are known as *go-hoku (later northern) shikidoki*. These were fairly widespread in use and show evidence of remains of food at the bottom of the pots. Through this it is known that Hokkaido people relied on Salmon for their food, whereas, in the Tohoku, though Salmon remains are found, deer traces and other game are more common. The people of this culture relied on hunting and fishing to a great extent.

Also associated with this is the widespread use of stone scrapers known as *koku-yo-sekisei*. These obsidian scrapers were used to clean animal skins of meat, and were essential in a culture that relied on hunting for food. A large number are found especially in Miyagi prefecture, Myo-date site near Furukawa and at Koshi. These sites are thought to have represented the areas where these scrapers were produced. These were then sent as trade items throughout the Tohoku where these people resided. This also is evidence that these people relied on fur clothing to a great extent, however, they may have also traded for cloth with the Kofun people of the south.

Coinciding with the spread of the *dokobo* and *koku-yo-seki* is the precipitous decline of a type of remains called *tateana ju-kyo*. These are remains of dwellings of a particular type. Why this is the

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case is not understood. However, in areas where these people spread in the northern Tohoku during the third through sixth centuries, these type of dwellings were no longer made. It seems that an earlier group of people may have either moved out of the region or adopted the lifestyle of the Epi-Jomon. They may also have been conquered. This decline also coincides with the decline in agriculture, particularly rice cultivation throughout the northern Tohoku.

Interestingly, the *Shoku Nihongi* may be witness to this when the emissary Sakaibe no Muraji reported to the T'ang Emperor in A.D. 659 that these people lived under trees. Of course this is not correct, but it is now thought that their dwellings must have not been of substantial construction. At least, they have not left a trace that have been found so far. At this time period they did not rely on agriculture, and instead relied on hunting and gathering, so the account is not far off or simply propaganda.

The Epi-Jomon migration represents the early Emishi stage before their widespread contact with the Kofun culture of the Japanese. Their subsequent development towards the adoption of agriculture in the Kitakami basin and Sendai plain, and the use of iron tools and weapons, and the adoption of horse riding is thought to have occurred after the sixth century. However, even after some Emishi were drawn into the trading and political influence of the Yamato and other Japanese, other Emishi still retained their Jomon lifestyle relatively unchanged.

References:

Kumagai, Kimio. *Emishi no Chi to Kodai Kokka* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shoten: 2004).

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