

Jōmon Period 15000 years ago - 2800 years ago



- Warming climate and forest expansion
- Cooling again during the Late Jōmon period



Jōmon pottery

Cry figure

- Clothes** Cloth-making with plant fibre, Accessories such as comma-shaped beads
- Foods** Fishing and foraging (of plant-based food), Stewing food using pots, Salt-making
- Housing** Settled life to village community, Pit-house (a house in a hole), Post-built house (a house with wooden posts above ground)
- Tools** Pottery, polished stone tools, fishing tools, bows and arrows and dug-out boats, Dogs for human company, Dogū figurines

3. Forming of Villages

As it became warmer, there was more food found in nature than in the Palaeolithic period. People no longer needed to move about chasing animals and started to settle down.

In order to settle, people had to fell trees and build houses in open spaces. For this, polished tools such as axes, made of hard stone, were needed. People dug holes to build 'pit-houses', and later 'post-built houses' above ground by putting up wooden posts. Several families had to help each other for building, and then they lived together. This is probably how villages formed.



1. Once the Earth Became Warm

The earth started to become warm about 16,000 years ago and people's lifestyle changed dramatically from the Palaeolithic. From this time to the beginning of rice-farming is called the 'Jōmon period'.

When the climate became warmer, deciduous and evergreen forests spread fast. Animals and birds gathered in forests for food. Melting ice made the sea level higher, so that coastlines with fish and shellfish expanded. With the dramatic change in climate, came a wider variety of food.



祈(いのり)や祭りは、生活に深くかかわっていただよ



4. Prayers and Rituals

In villages people prayed to their gods for food. People also practised rituals to give thanks for food after hunting and fishing. People prayed for safety as they were probably frightened of natural disasters such as typhoon storms, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. They also prayed for a baby's safe arrival, and buried the dead near their home.

People made various objects for prayers and rituals. It is thought that clay 'dogū' figurines were used for prayers.

2. Life with Rich Natural Resources

During the Jōmon period, people used polished stone tools, bows and arrows, and fishing tools. Their pottery often, although not always, had cord patterns (jōmon). Deciduous and evergreen forests were rich with akebia, grapevines, berries such as strawberries, mushrooms and mountain weeds, and nut-bearing trees such as oaks, chestnuts and walnuts.

However, some of these are poisonous or inedible in their raw state. This problem was solved by the use of pottery. Heating food in pots can kill bacteria and remove poison, and helps digestion and absorption of nutrients.

The sea level became higher as the temperature rose. Small bays and sandy beaches appeared; and lakes and rivers became wider. The water temperature also rose, and then people could go into the water. They also made fishing tools and dugout boats to catch fish and shellfish.

To hunt agile animals, people used bows and arrows.



5. New Era

There are more Jōmon sites in eastern Japan, but few in western Japan other than Kyūshū. At the end of Jōmon period, the number of Jōmon archaeological sites declined.

As the climate became cooler, life in eastern Japan with a big population may have become harder. More items for prayers and rituals were made during this period as people were probably praying more to the gods.

There were also people who moved to western Japan, so eastern cultures spread to the west.

